

PRODUCT PLACEMENT WITHIN NATIONAL SOAP OPERAS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to evaluate the current status of product placement within fictional programs in Portugal, especially in soap operas, and to fully understand the commercial and social scope of this phenomenon. In order to carry out this study we selected the soap operas with largest audiences of the private TV channels operating in Portugal, comparing soap operas for an adult audience with those for a young audience. In all the soap operas we found diverse categories for adult and young audiences. Although with some differences, the category of products “clothing” is the main one for both audiences, and in our opinion this is due to its importance for the self image of each of these groups.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to evaluate the current status of product placement within fictional programs in Portugal, especially in soap operas, and to fully understand the commercial and social scope of this phenomenon.

Television producers' needs to be self-funded, the current status of saturation of television advertising, especially during prime-time broadcasting¹ and the indifference of the viewer for traditional advertising models, have led television producers and TV channels to adopt this format increasingly more, thus creating regulation problems due to a regulation void.

Within this framework we tried to ascertain how television producers and TV channels were placing products and brands within the programs, i.e. how this non-traditional way of advertising was being used.

This study is divided in four parts. The first part conceptually frames the object of analysis, showing what product placement is, how it has evolved, and what its impact on the general public is, by resorting to previous research on this issue. The second part shows the adopted method, specially indicating which soap operas and series were analyzed and the decoding grid that was used in the analysis. A third part discloses the results observed in what concerns product placement's use in Portuguese soap operas.

Lastly, a fourth part states the conclusions of this study.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Context

The saturation of advertising in television channels all over the world has led announcers to choose non-traditional forms of communicating their products and brands, one of them being the placement of brands within programs - product placement. This type of advertisement avoids brands to be ignored by the so-called zapping that takes place during commercial breaks of television programs (Elliot, 1992).

In order to maintain and even increase audiences, television companies in Portugal resort to entertainment programs that they know beforehand will have large audiences and guaranteed

¹ Back in 2002 a study by the Advertisement Observatory on commercial breaks during television programs showed that, although the amount of time varied a lot depending on the channel, ads were frequently on the verge of the time permitted by law (art. 32 of Law No. 31-A/98 of July 14th – Television Law), this is, advertisement breaks of approximately 12 minutes in a row for each hour of broadcasting for unconditioned and national coverage channels and 7,5 minutes for the public broadcaster. (One must note that the Service Contract for General Television Granting celebrated between the Portuguese State and RTP, SGPS, S.A. in September 2003, foresees, under No. 1 of clause 13, the broadcast of 6 minutes of commercial advertisement for each hour of broadcasting instead of the 7,5 minutes allowed before).

audiences in open signal channels (verifiable by their shares), as soap operas, rendering them as highly enticing targets for product placement.

When it is well-organized and rehearsed, brand placement within these soap operas decreases the viewer's counter arguments or scepticism regarding advertisement, as s/he is not aware that s/he is being the target of an advertisement message (D'Astous & Chartier 2000). When the product/ brand is perceived as part of the scenery, the viewer becomes more receptive to the brand's messages, and when used in a particular context is more easily retained in our memory and in some cases even leads to changes in attitudes.

Studies that were carried out on this subject show that viewers do not consciously register product placement, although they have the capacity to do so. Zajonc's theory of mere exposure (1968) shows us that the viewer exposed to a brand through product placement becomes familiar with it, which could lead to a later preference for it (Janiszewski, 1993). On the other hand, the mere exposure, without any additional comments, to brands with large notoriety can be enough for them to gain advantages over their competition (Baker, 1999), with the mere exposure decreasing possible risks associated to brands.

Recognition and memory tests have demonstrated that placement has better results than advertising in the traditional format outside programs (Grupta and Lord, 1998). On the other hand, recent papers have demonstrated that well integrated product placement is more persuasive in what concerns attitude changes than its inconsistent use (Russell, 2002). When the placement is badly integrated and perceived by the viewer as excessive it can lead to the rejection of the product or the brand, create dissociation between the brand and the actors and ultimately lead to the rejection of the program itself.

Thus, we could assess that this type of advertisement is the one that makes a better use of mechanisms of influence, guiding the consumer's behaviour without any specific ask.

On the other hand, the recognition and "affective connection" to the actors that support the enactment create in the viewers of transfer of affection from the actor to the products/ brands that ultimately renders them natural consumers of the products/ brands, by mimicking their idols, reducing or even eliminating in certain situations the counter arguments they had created towards traditional advertisement out of scepticism (D'Astous & Chartier 2000).

With these placements, the processing of information is guided in a clearly affective way with the association of bonds and values to them, which is only more effective if the person that is using the product or brand is the lead actor (Strauss, 1999).

As the preferable program for product placement, soap operas have a relevant role amidst audiovisual means. Their sequence of dramas captivates the viewer through a narrative controlled by the producer or distributor (Allen, 1995), thus allowing for an efficiency control of the product placement within its narrative.

The aim of this study is to make an initial exploratory analysis of the products and evaluate their affectivity within Portuguese soap operas, comparing soap operas for young and for adult audiences. Firstly, we set out to understand this phenomenon to later on measure the efficiency of product placement within soap operas.

METHOD

Object of Study

In order to carry out this study we selected the soap operas with largest audiences of Portuguese private TV channels, we defined their schedules and built a grid to decode the product placement within them.

Jura and *Floribella*, broadcasted by TV station SIC, as well as soap operas *Morangos com Açúcar* and *Doce Fugitiva*, broadcasted by TV station TVI, were analyzed under the following terms:

- 4 weeks of analysis, beginning in the week of January 8th, 2007 and ending at February 7th, 2007;
- 12 hours of viewing each week, with the time coinciding with the duration of the soap operas. Thus, soap operas *Jura*, *Floribella* and *Doce Fugitiva* were analyzed 3 hours each during prime time. Soap opera *Morangos com Açúcar* was viewed 3 hours - between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.;
- 12 episodes of each of the soap operas were analyzed after they were numbered and randomly chosen to be viewed. In each soap opera the categories of product placed were identified, based on the works of English et al., 1993, as referred in **Table 1**.

Procedure

Each category was analyzed in terms of being absent, present and present and consumed, in which we considered that the product was consumed if the character spoke of it or was physically connected to it.

We also analyzed the emotional context, by using three grades: positive 1; neutral 0; negative -1, with each repeated situation having positive or negative emotions whose final balance was translated into a scale between -1 and 1.

We identified not only the categories of the products, but the brands associated to those categories with indication of the time each brand appeared in each episode of each of the soap operas to which we added the emotional contexts.

Two independent judges from the researchers were recruited, both with academic and professional expertise in this area, received training on the categories to analyze and then coded the episodes of the soap operas independently. At the end we measured the ratio of agreement between both to identify the consistency and reliability of the analysis.

The results show there was a ratio of agreement of 80,5% and in the emotional evaluations of 81,5% for the categories of the products, thus showing an acceptable level of confidence in the judges' analysis for this study (Kassarjian, 1977).

The data was analyzed using the program Statistic Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) resorting to descriptive analyses and variability between soap operas.

RESULTS

a) Categories of products in soap operas for an adult audience

The categories of products associated to brands are the ones in grid 1.

In the 24 episodes of soap operas for an adult audience we found 924 categories of products, mentioned during 49 minutes and 15 seconds (2955,08 seconds) and concentrated in 15 different categories of products. Of these, 275 of the products were present but were not handled by any character and the remaining 649 were present and were being consumed or used by the soap opera characters.

If we detail our analysis we can note that the category of products with the most exposure was Men and Women Clothing, with 534 presences and during a total of 23 minutes and 58 seconds (1439,06 seconds). 99,9% of the times the characters were using clothing with the brand visible and mainly in a negative emotional context (-0,37) with the presence of many conflicts.

With less expression but relevant we observed the category of food, which appeared 157 times and during 8 minutes and 8 seconds, but only twice as consumed and in a mainly positive emotional context (0,5) associated with some dimensions of pleasure.

We also considered that the category of non-alcoholic beverages appearing 116 times and during 7 minutes and 28 seconds had some relevance. The majority of the times the beverage was shown without being consumed and with the brand highly visible in a mainly negative

emotional context (-1,09) with people arguing or when the characters were in some type of conflict.

We also observed 29 presences of alcoholic beverages during 2 minutes and 13 seconds, the majority of which being consumed with the brand visible in a neutral emotional context (0).

If we balance the emotional contexts in which all the categories of products were present, we verify that there is a negative balance of -5,09, showing that in the majority of the situations adults were in conflict dealing with serious problems amongst themselves.

b) Categories of products in soap operas for a youthful audience

The categories of products associated to brands are the ones in grid 1.

The 24 episodes of soap operas for a youthful audience showed 1596 presences during 1 hour and 24 minutes (5057 seconds) of different categories of products. Of these 259 were just present and 1337 were present and being consumed or used by the soap opera characters, classified in 23 different categories.

When we detailed the main categories of products we verified that we were before a universe of products that are more adequate for a youthful audience, being the main categories clothes, beverages, sport goods and computers.

Analyzing each one of them we concluded that the category of products Men and Women Clothing was present 1121 times during a total of 57 minutes and 43 seconds, 99,0% of the times being used with the brand visible and in a positive emotional context (0,50), connected to situations of joy and pleasure.

With less expression but still relevant is the category of products Computers, with 99 presences during 6 minutes and 12 seconds, being used 69,0% of the times, mainly in a negative emotional context (0,55) in which young people would be involved in controversial and conflict situations ending up "angry at each other".

In third place was the category of products pertaining to Sport Goods, with a total of 75 presences during 4 minutes and 36 seconds, 75,0% of the times with the brand visible and in a positive emotional context (0,67), connected to situations of joy and fraternization amongst young people.

In fourth place was the category of products Non-Alcoholic Beverages, with a total of 71 presences during 2 minutes and 28 seconds, in the majority of the times shown with the brand visible and only 1% times being consumed, associated to a negative emotional context (-0,10).

Lastly, one must note that the category of products Alcoholic Beverages was present 15 times during 1 minute, always with the brand visible and mainly in positive contexts (1,00) displaying hedonic situations.

If we balance the emotional contexts of all the categories of products present we reach a positive balance of 10,1, thus showing that the majority of situations with young people were joyful and pleasurable.

These are two very different realities, although the category of products Men and Women clothing is dominant for both sets of soap operas. This category of products remits us to a symbolic universe in which clothing is used as an expression of Self, especially in what concerns teenagers, with clothing having an important role in socialization and the development of their self-concept (MacGillirray & Wilson, 1998) and feeling comfortable in the relationships they establish with their significant reference groups. The evaluation that their peers make of their appearance and their actions has a relevant role in the development of their self-concept (Burns, 1979).

Finally we can say that teenagers identify with their peers and develop their self concepts a lot because of the likeness they develop with the types of clothing defined by their sub-cultures (Levin, 1992; Smucker & Creekmore, 1972; Steinberg, 1985). In this context it is noteworthy

that clothing has an important role in adults' lives also, although with less impact, as shown by the more inconsistent presence in adult soap operas.

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the categories of products that were placed within the soap operas produced in Portugal, we can draw conclusions from the results.

The analysis we made led to a division: on one side we put the soap operas directed at an adult audience and on the other side the soap operas directed at a more youthful audience.

In the **first group**, we found categories of products that remit us to a daily life with emphasis on socialization, shown resorting to Portuguese traditional food and non-alcoholic beverages, and especially men and women clothing. Episodes took place mainly in negative emotional contexts, sometimes depressing ones, in which conflicts and problems within different people were permanent.

In the **second group** we found a different reasoning, because the target was a young audience and also because the channels' strategies differ. A positive and joyous context prevailed as characteristic of young people, shown resorting to sports goods with a high concentration on clothing.

A noteworthy aspect to refer is that in this soap opera shows its characters consuming alcoholic beverages.

The high presence of the category of products Men and Women Clothing in both groups is also important to mention, as we concluded that announcers perceived clothing as a type of product that remits the consumer to a symbolic universe as an expression of Self with an important role in socialization, thus choosing to reinforce its presence. On the other hand, it is a type of product in which the brand can easily stand out, without its presence being considered obstructive.

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Table 1

Categories of products	Adults				Youth			
	Present	P Consu	T Total S	Emotion	Present	P Cons	T Total S	Emotion
Alcoholic beverages	5	24	133	0	0	15	60	1
Non alcoholic beverages	100	16	448	-1,09	70	1	148	-0,1
Books	2	2	59,02	0	0	9	19	1
Cars	0	33	160	-2	0	1	4	1
Cosmetics	3	0	12	-1	49	0	103	0,33
Accessories for man and woman, Bags and handbags	1	2	28	0	38	2	106	-1,13
Sports goods	0	3	5	1	19	56	276	0,67
Women and men clothing	2	532	1439,06	-0,37	6	1115	3463	0,5
Shopping Centres	7	5	31	-0,5	0	15	60	0
Internet Services and Telecommunications	0	2	4	1	6	2	16	1
Shoes	0	2	3	1	0	0	0	0
Health equipment	0	3	5	-1	0	0	0	0
Computers	0	6	23	-0,33	31	68	372	-0,55
Food	155	2	488	0,5	0	2	9	0,6
Mobile phones and Telephones	0	17	117	0,4	0	1	12	-1
Magazines	0	0	0	0	0	7	20	2
Musical Instruments	0	0	0	0	7	5	36	0,71
Songs, CDs and MP3s	0	0	0	0	0	7	80	0,6
Household appliances	0	0	0	0	15	0	85	-1
Radio and Television	0	0	0	0	0	12	42	1,6
Art work	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	-0,13
Banks and Financial products	0	0	0	0	1	10	27	1
Health Clinics	0	0	0	0	0	9	61	1
Services and enterprises	0	0	0	0	5	0	30	0
Watches	0	0	0	0	11	0	27	1
Total	275	649	2955,08	-5,09	259	1337	5057	10,1