

# Journal of Promotional Communications

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

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To cite this article: Burkhalter, J. N., Ferguson, N. S., Thornton, C. G., 2025. Perceptions of Brand Placement Ethics and Acceptability: The Influence of Gender and Media Format. *Journal of Promotional Communications*, 11 (1), 82–110.

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## Perceptions of Brand Placement Ethics and Acceptability: The Influence of Gender and Media Format

*Brand placement is a common practice in marketing and entertainment. Investigations of consumer perceptions of the ethics and acceptability of placements have primarily been limited to two media formats: film and video games. The current research extends this body of work by examining consumer perceptions across a wider range of media including film, television, music videos, video games and reality TV. Further, this study investigates gender differences as an important contribution and finds that the acceptability of brand placements is not gender neutral. This research is comprised of two studies, the first designed to extend Gupta and Gould's 1997 study by examining additional media formats and product categories. Using items from a factor analysis, ANOVA results indicate that ethical judgements towards brand placements are influenced by media format, gender and product type. The second study introduces an additional medium, reality television, and through experimental design further explores the impact of media format, product type and gender on perceptions of brand placement acceptability. Findings suggest that placements in films are more accepted compared to other media and they are more accepted when the product placed is not ethically charged. In addition, study 2 revealed additional findings with respect to gender differences, wherein women were found to be less accepting of placements where the audience is children. Moreover, in terms of purchase behaviour, women are likely to search for products featured in films and reality TV and men are more likely to search for those featured in video games. This research provides broader implications for marketing practice suggesting that brand placement decisions should include consideration of the medium and gender demographic.*

**Keywords:** Ethics, Brand placement, Music videos, Films, Video games, Television

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## INTRODUCTION

Brand managers are increasingly promoting products through entertainment outlets such as films, television programs, video games and music videos. From Wrigley's promoting its gum through the music of Chris Brown (Smith and Jargon, 2008) to Chevrolet introducing the Terrain via the television show *Medium* (CBS Interactive, 2009), brand managers, production companies and entertainment producers are working together to reach consumers (Bonilla, 2024).

A common option for these managers is brand placement. Brand placement is designed to influence audiences via the "planned and unobtrusive entry of a branded product" into the story line or message of mass media content ranging from films to music videos (Balasubramanian, 1994). This relatively low cost, impactful practice has been found to encourage search and purchase behaviours by consumers watching film or TV—sometimes in the moment (Hall, 2024; Lepitak, 2024).

Like most forms of marketing communications, brand placement is confronted with questions of ethics and acceptability. Consumer protection groups such as Public Citizen's Commercial Alert as well as professional organizations such as the Writers Guild of America have challenged the use of brand placement without disclosure (Woodson, 2019). Since 1993, scholars such as Nebenzahl and Secunda have investigated consumers' perceptions of the ethics and acceptability of brand placement in films- (Gupta and Gould, 1997) and video games (Nelson et al., 2004) with a consistent focus on brand placement's potential impact on youth (Lassar, 2010). Brand placement literature tends to focus on a limited selection of media types and placement design without significant consideration of audience characteristics (Guo et al., 2019). The current study seeks to extend brand placement literature by considering various audience characteristics and media formats within an emerging research area of brand placement – consumers' ethical concerns regarding the practice (Guo et al., 2019). To our knowledge, only one study investigates the ethics and acceptability of brand placement across media (Schmoll et al., 2006).

Extending our understanding of consumers' perceptions regarding brand placement in different media formats is important for a few reasons. First, consumers reportedly use over one dozen sources of entertainment including music and video games (Hub Entertainment Research, 2024) so extending our understanding of various media is important. Additionally, though brand placement spending in television currently accounts for over three-quarters of all such expenditures, music saw a double-digit increase in spending with other media such as film and video games experiencing increases of over 9% (Navarro, 2024). Finally, technological advancements now allow placements to be added to or replaced within existing media content thereby expanding the outlets that can be used for brand placements (Bradley, 2022; Guo et al., 2019; Poggi, 2014; Stransky, 2011). Understanding how consumers perceive and receive brand placement is important then not just for the creation of new content, but also for understanding the potential impact of retroactive brand placement across media. The evolution of brand placement thus necessitates that scholars expand our scope of study to consider more media formats (Guo et al., 2019).

This paper's aim is to extend our understanding of consumers' ethical concerns regarding brand placement by investigating the influence of medium, product type and consumer characteristics on said perceptions. In order to meet the paper's objective, the remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The subsequent section synthesizes previous research regarding the ethics and acceptability of brand placement by examining the impact that media usage and consumption may have on consumer behaviours as well as the perceived acceptability of brand placements targeting vulnerable audiences in

order to develop our research questions. The literature review is followed by two studies designed to address our slate of research questions. We conclude by discussing our findings and their implications as well as limitations of this paper and opportunities for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Ethics & Acceptability of Brand Placement

Previous research regarding consumers' perceptions of the acceptability of brand placement has found that, in general, consumers are accepting of the practice (Gupta and Gould, 1997; Nebenzahl and Secunda, 1993; Nelson and McLeod, 2005; Schmoll et al., 2006). However, there is evidence that consumers' assessment of brand placement varies across media. For example, Burkhalter et al. (2017, p.145) find that "consumers expect music videos to depict real-life situations and believe that recording artists should be depicting their authentic self and the brands they actually use" – expectations that are not similarly held for media such as video games or television or film outside of the documentary genre. Thus, given the growing importance of other media to the practice of brand placement and evidence that consumers' expectations may vary across media, we pose the following research question: RQ1 *Will consumers' acceptance of brand placement vary by medium?*

Building on work by Gupta and Gould (1997), scholars have often studied brand placement of a single set of thirteen product categories. Our work seeks to extend the product categories considered. Generally, when consumers express disagreement with the marketing practice, it is with respect to the promotion of ethically charged products (e.g., tobacco, firearms and alcohol) via films targeted toward children (Brennan et al., 2004). However, there is a paucity of research examining other media formats. We thus pose the following research question: RQ2 *Will consumers' acceptance of the placement of ethically charged branded products vary across media?*

Gupta and Gould (1997) found that four attitudinal factors – attitude toward advertising in general, attitude toward product placement, restriction and perceived realism – impact consumer acceptance of brand placement. Since their study was limited to films, we question if the same findings will hold true for other media. We thus ask the following research question: RQ3 *What attitude factors predict acceptability of brand placement by medium?*

While gender differences have been found to exist across a variety of tasks and traits (Koc, 2002), findings are mixed concerning the impact of gender on perceptions of brand placement acceptability. Some studies have found that ethical perceptions of brand placement are gender neutral (Schmoll et al., 2006), some find men to be more accepting of the practice than women (Brennan et al., 2004) and others have found women to be the more accepting gender (de Gregorio and Sung, 2010). With respect to brand placement behaviours, men appear to engage in more brand placement related behaviours (e.g., search, purchase) than women (de Gregorio and Sung, 2010). In light of these inconsistencies regarding attitudes and limited knowledge regarding behaviours, we pose the following three research questions: RQ4 *Will brand placement acceptability vary by gender?* RQ5 *Will consumers' attitudes regarding brand placement vary by gender?* RQ6 *Will consumers' brand placement behaviours vary by gender?*

### Media Usage and Consumption

Audience characteristics may influence the processing of brand placement with scholars identifying a number of possible characteristics for consideration including

gender and connection to the medium (Balasubramanian et al., 2006; Natarajan et al., 2018; Scott and Craig-Lees, 2010).

Research has shown that one's level of exposure to media influences consumption behaviour. Media including magazines, television ads and programs, Internet ads and music videos are influential in the product selection process (Kinley et al., 2010). Specifically, it has been found that one's level of media exposure influences dependency on media where those with greater exposure to and affinity for media become more media dependent (Ruiz Mafé and Sanz Blas, 2008). Consequently, consumption (e.g., purchase) is heightened when media dependency is high.

Studies have shown that frequency of movie watching predicts attitudes toward brand placement (Gupta et al., 2000; Gupta and Gould, 1997; McKechnie and Zhou, 2003), brand placement memory (Natarajan et al., 2018) as well as brand placement behaviours including information seeking, purchase and product usage (de Gregorio and Sung, 2010). In addition, individuals exposed to placements in films or television programs were found to be more likely to choose the placed brands than those who were not exposed to the placements (Law and Braun, 2000; Auty and Lewis, 2004). Based on this we pose the following research questions: RQ7a *Will media usage impact perceptions of brand placement acceptability?* RQ7b *Will this vary across media?*

#### Vulnerable Audiences

According to Hudson, Hudson and Peloza (2008) there has been an increasing amount of advertising spending on children's programming. Research on advertising toward children has followed this growing trend with studies focused on message processing, -- message effectiveness and ethical implications (Auty and Lewis, 2004; Bijmolt et al., 1998; Hudson et al., 2008). A central criticism of marketing to young audiences is that children have underdeveloped persuasion knowledge (Friestad and Wright, 1994; Hudson et al., 2008; Kunkel, 1998; Treise et al., 1994). Essentially, children are less capable of understanding, processing and assessing advertising's persuasive intent, which makes them vulnerable (Kunkel, 1998). Overall, this deficiency has sparked numerous studies on the ethicality of targeting children in advertising (Raju and Lonial, 1989; Moore, 2004).

The covert nature of brand placement engenders even more ambiguity to the ethicality of the issue. Research has also shown that children are more sensitive to these types marketing tactics than adults (Sargent et al., 2005; Law and Braun, 2000). Other research has noted that while brand placement did not greatly impact explicit recall, children's implicit memory and brand choices were influenced (Auty and Lewis, 2004). Furthermore, the inclusion of products in children's programming makes it more difficult for young audiences to recognize it as a promotional tool (Avery and Ferraro, 2000). Given this, the overall perception of placements targeting children is negative. Therefore, the following research question is proposed: RQ8 *Are consumers less accepting of brand placement directed toward children as compared to adults?* Research questions and their associated studies are included in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Questions and Associated Study

Research Question	Study
RQ1: Will consumers' acceptance of brand placement vary by medium?	1, 2
RQ2: Will consumers' acceptance of the placement of ethically charged products vary across media?	1,2

<b>RQ3:</b> What attitude factors predict acceptability of brand placement by medium?	1
<b>RQ4:</b> Will brand placement acceptability vary by gender?	1, 2
<b>RQ5:</b> Will consumers' attitudes regarding brand placement vary by gender?	1, 2
<b>RQ6:</b> Will consumers' brand placement behaviors vary by gender?	2
<b>RQ7a, b:</b> Will media usage impact perceptions of brand placement acceptability? Will this vary across media?	2
<b>RQ8:</b> Are consumers less accepting of brand placement directed toward children as compared to adults?	2

## STUDY 1

The first study was designed to extend Gupta and Gould's 1997 study, examining additional media formats and product categories.

### Participants

For this study, participants were recruited from several classes in a large Southeastern university in the United States. At the time of recruiting, participants were told they were going to help with research designed to test the value of the marketing decisions made by entertainment and business executives. They were given a URL that led them to the online survey instrument. As a result, 270 undergraduates (110 males and 135 females) participated in the study.

### Procedure

After consenting to participate in the study, participants were asked to read a definition of brand placement. Next, they answered a series of questions, adopted from Gupta and Gould (1997) about the ethics of brand placement in films to include video games and music videos. In addition, they were asked about the acceptability of placing various products (e.g., fast food, tobacco, energy drinks) in films, music videos and video games. These products were selected based upon categories investigated by Gupta and Gould (1997), Englis, Solomon and Olofsson (1993), and Burkhalter and Thornton (2014). Additionally, these products allowed a wide range of product categories and in turn a more comprehensive examination of consumer responses to different product types. The media formats (films, video games, music videos, and reality television) were selected to reflect a mix of traditional and modern entertainment channels where brand placements are commonly used. Finally, participants answered some classification questions (e.g., age, gender) before exiting the study.

### Measures

Attitudinal measures for the factor analysis were based on prior literature and theoretical relevance (Gupta and Gould, 1997; Schmoll et al., 2006). Measures were retained if they met the threshold of factor loadings above 0.6 and reliability coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) exceeding 0.6, as per Bearden et al. (1993). Items that did not meet these criteria were excluded from the analysis.

### Results

To test RQ1 and RQ2, a paired t-test was used to explore any differences in (ethically charged versus neutral) products for each medium. The findings revealed a significant difference in the acceptability of the two valence categories. Thus, ethically

charged products placed in films ( $t=-15.659$ ,  $df = 234$ ,  $p<.001$ ), music videos ( $t=-13.747$ ,  $df=232$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and video games ( $t=-14.919$ ,  $df=225$ ,  $p<.001$ ) were less acceptable than neutral products (See Table 2).

Table 2. Paired Samples Statistics for Ethically charged versus Neutral Products

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Music Videos	Ethically charged	1.9034	233	.73913	.04842
	Neutral	2.5677	233	.49133	.03219
Video Games	Ethically charged	1.7109	226	.72555	.04826
	Neutral	2.4175	226	.54107	.03599
Films	Ethically charged	1.9489	235	.72631	.04738
	Neutral	2.6754	235	.39898	.02603

A repeated measures ANOVA also revealed significant differences in the acceptability of ethically charged products across media (Wilks' Lambda = .856,  $F(2, 221) = 18.562$ ,  $p<.001$ ), where ethically charged products were most acceptable in films (mean = 2.0) and least acceptable in video games (mean = 1.71). A repeated measures test was also conducted to explore acceptability differences of each ethically charged product across media. A comparison of each ethically charged product category across media revealed similar results as the overall categories ( $p<.005$ ). The findings suggest that neutral products, when compared across media, are most acceptable in films and least acceptable in video games (Wilks' Lambda = .678,  $F(2, 235) = 55.815$ ,  $p<.001$ ). The mean scores were 2.65 and 2.44 respectively.

After responses were recoded for consistency in the scale, to test RQ 3, a factor analysis was completed on the 27 attitude items for each medium. For music videos, nine factors were extracted which accounted for 66.4% of the variance. Items loading .6 or above were summed and reliabilities were computed: attitude toward product placement in music videos ( $\alpha=.8$ ), attitude toward the placement of real versus fictitious products ( $\alpha=.755$ ), attitude toward disclosure ( $\alpha=.891$ ), attitude toward the regulation of ethically charged products ( $\alpha=.863$ ), attitude toward advertising in general ( $\alpha=.766$ ), watching of music videos ( $\alpha=.644$ ), and regulation ( $\alpha=.477$ ). Past studies have shown that acceptable reliability scores are between .6 and .7; therefore, 6 factors remained (Bearden, et al., 1993; Gupta and Gould, 1997). A new factor analysis was run using only the items that yielded an acceptable reliability score and explained 73% of the variance (See Table 3).

Table 3. Factor Loadings of the Attitudinal Measures – Music Videos

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Factor 1</b>	<b>Factor 2</b>	<b>Factor 3</b>	<b>Factor 4</b>	<b>Factor 5</b>	<b>Factor 6</b>	<b>Factor 7</b>	<b>Factor 8</b>	<b>Factor 9</b>
I hate watching commercials.	.130	.113	.056	<b>.903</b>	-.054	.051	-.037	.127	.020
I frequently find ways to avoid watching commercials.	.023	.016	.048	<b>.915</b>	-.008	.039	.073	.012	.111
I would consider product placements as “commercials in disguise.”	.141	-.170	-.171	.042	.291	.151	-.019	.552	.189
I hate seeing brand name products in _____ if they are placed for commercial purposes	<b>.734<sup>a</sup></b>	.007	-.014	.091	-.100	.020	.101	.099	-.048
I will not watch (play) a _____ if I know beforehand that brands were placed prominently in the _____ for commercial purposes.	<b>.675</b>	-.050	.092	.103	-.021	.130	.181	.024	-.107
I don’t mind if producers/developers receive money or other compensation from manufacturers for placing their brands in the _____.	<b>.731</b>	.238	.105	-.089	.010	-.107	-.086	.146	-.022



I don't mind if artists or actors receive money or other compensation from manufacturers for placing their brands in the _____.	<b>.659</b>	.186	.254	-.012	-.104	-.071	-.157	.065	.158
People who watch/play _____ should have the option of receiving a full refund if they hated seeing brand name products as props in _____.	.211	.198	.060	.038	.042	.092	<b>.658</b>	.073	-.133
Manufacturers are misleading the audience by disguising brands as props in _____.	.531	.157	.271	.104	.094	.047	.079	-.185	.348
The government should regulate the use of brand name products in _____.	.215	-.072	.165	.066	.246	-.038	<b>.623</b>	-.224	.067
If _____ are making money from product placements, this should be disclosed in the _____ credits.	.107	-.004	<b>.905</b>	.100	.083	-.003	.037	.076	.047
Brands placed in _____ for which the producers receive payment from brand manufacturers should be disclosed in the credits.	.104	-.031	<b>.888</b>	.009	.028	.038	.077	.099	.051

I prefer to see real brands in _____ rather than fake/fictitious brands.	.179	<b>.800</b>	-.081	.051	-.128	.040	.039	-.028	-.038
_____ should use fictitious brands rather than existing brands.	.182	<b>.791</b>	.101	.030	.131	.096	.091	.040	-.007
The placement of brand name products in _____ should be completely banned.	.510	.352	.059	.103	.262	.088	.359	-.077	-.059
I don't mind if brand name products appear in _____.	<b>.670</b>	.301	-.120	.061	.024	.055	.259	-.054	.019
The presence of brand name products in a _____ makes it more realistic.	.426	.418	-.079	.163	.177	.160	.030	-.066	-.119
Use of brand name tobacco, beer, liquor and weapon products should be banned from _____ that children are likely to watch/play.	-.077	.033	.101	-.004	<b>.819</b>	-.106	-.006	.049	-.017
Cigarette product placements in _____ should be banned completely since cigarette ads are banned on television.	-.010	.035	.006	-.051	<b>.854</b>	-.028	.155	.103	.103

_____ should not give too much importance to a particular brand (e.g., showing the same brand very frequently).	.184	.253	.032	.209	.139	-.053	-.077	.322	.512
_____ should contain only those brand name products that are essential to the program's realism	-.146	-.176	-.271	-.076	-.011	.079	.031	-.732	-.071
I don't mind seeing brand name products in _____ as long as they are not unrealistically shown.	-.356	-.341	.183	.062	-.006	.168	-.001	.510	-.125
_____ viewers/users are subconsciously influenced by the brands they see in _____.	-.096	-.178	.081	.035	.028	.020	.000	.026	.799
I hate _____.	.360	.026	.182	.258	.181	.388	-.423	-.078	-.323
I never watch/play _____.	.223	-.044	.174	.316	.213	.420	-.457	-.101	-.267
I am more likely to watch/play _____ during the week.	.058	.161	-.048	.077	-.011	<u>.817</u>	-.091	-.027	.084
I am more likely to watch/play _____ during the weekend.	-.048	.007	.044	-.028	-.170	<u>.796</u>	.146	.128	-.051

<sup>a</sup> The loadings of the items that are used to represent each factor are underlined.

Nine factors were extracted for video games, accounting for 65.38% of the variance. These included attitude toward brand placement in video games ( $\alpha=.717$ ), attitude toward the placement of real versus fictitious products ( $\alpha=.720$ ), attitude toward disclosure ( $\alpha=.901$ ), attitude toward advertising in general ( $\alpha=.863$ ), usage of video games ( $\alpha=.775$ ), attitude toward ethically charged products ( $\alpha=.724$ ), realism (.682) and

subliminal ( $\alpha=.283$ ). Other factors were not mentioned or included because they did not meet the loading requirement noted previously. The items that were associated with the accepted factors were retained and used in a new factor analysis, which explained 73.492% of the variance (See Table 4).

Table 4. Factor Loadings of the Attitudinal Measures –Video Games

<b>Variables</b>	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8	Factor 9
I hate seeing brand name products in _____ if they are placed for commercial purposes.	.621	.163	-.154	.020	.164	-.112	-.062	-.019	.241
I will not watch (play) a _____ if I know beforehand that brands were placed prominently in the _____ for commercial purposes.	.720	-.001	-.084	-.048	.039	-.110	.071	-.029	-.039
I don't mind if producers/ developers receive money or other compensation from manufacturers for placing their brands in the _____.	.515	.350	.237	-.259	-.341	-.124	.120	.142	.214
I don't mind if artists or actors receive money or other compensation	.422	.268	.362	-.168	-.367	-.121	.102	.106	.165

from manufacturers for placing their brands in the _____.									
People who watch/play _____ should have the option of receiving a full refund if they hated seeing brand name products as props in _____.	.540	.087	.155	.192	.041	.185	-.157	.026	-.218
Manufacturers are misleading the audience by disguising brands as props in _____.	.501	.085	.333	.073	-.023	-.082	.127	-.114	.095
The government should regulate the use of brand name products in _____.	.256	.017	.109	.188	.067	.263	.023	.517	.091
If _____ are making money from product placements, this should be disclosed in the _____ credits.	.003	-.111	.907	.048	.019	.020	.004	-.110	-.039

Brands placed in ____ for which the producers receive payment from brand manufacturers should be disclosed in the credits.	-.017	-.022	.921	.003	.050	.037	.009	-.060	.043
I prefer to see real brands in ____ rather than fake/fictitious brands.	.152	.772	-.099	.053	.087	-.130	.023	-.032	-.092
____ should use fictitious brands rather than existing brands.	.151	.784	.106	.039	.030	.006	-.006	-.098	-.038
The placement of brand name products in ____ should be completely banned.	.520	.367	.010	.219	-.164	.310	-.112	.244	-.011
I don't mind if brand name products appear in ____.	.637	.259	-.036	.038	-.006	.086	-.058	.009	-.096
The presence of brand name products in a ____ makes it more realistic.	.147	.655	-.134	.110	.017	.186	.123	.096	.006
Use of brand name tobacco, beer, liquor	-.061	-.040	.046	-.120	.007	.787	.138	-.054	.015

and weapon products should be banned from _____ that children are likely to watch/play.									
Cigarette product placements in _____ should be banned completely since cigarette ads are banned on television.	-.012	.042	-.027	-.077	.035	.878	-.015	.011	.084
_____ should not give too much importance to a particular brand (e.g., showing the same brand very frequently).	.022	.272	.146	.208	-.049	.044	-.187	-.527	.270
I hate watching commercials.	.088	.109	-.001	.871	-.088	-.130	.024	-.107	.075
I frequently find ways to avoid watching commercials.	.025	.030	.043	.887	.002	-.073	.113	-.025	.059
_____ should contain only those brand name products that are	-.223	.077	-.213	-.121	.044	-.122	-.018	.682	.034

essential to the program's realism.									
I don't mind seeing brand name products in _____ as long as they are not unrealistically shown.	-.185	-.478	.019	.135	-.065	.089	.004	-.459	.065
_____ viewers/users are subconsciously influenced by the brands they see in _____.	-.117	-.134	.043	.114	.007	-.049	-.028	.159	.761
I would consider product placements as "commercials in disguise."	.141	-.014	-.010	.014	-.017	.214	.048	-.261	.655
I hate _____.	-.013	.107	-.040	.084	.007	.058	.879	.138	.012
I never watch/play _____.	-.013	.000	.087	.045	.054	.065	.906	-.061	-.004
I am more likely to watch/play _____ during the week.	.001	.128	.039	-.015	.876	-.015	-.001	.024	-.016
I am more likely to watch/play _____	.088	.025	.038	-.092	.857	.035	.083	.121	.034



during the weekend.									
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As with the other media, nine factors were extracted accounting for 67.494% of the variance for films. Items loading .6 or above were summed and reliabilities were computed resulting in the following: attitude toward brand placement in films ( $\alpha=.844$ ), attitude toward disclosure ( $\alpha=.898$ ), attitude toward advertising in general ( $\alpha=.863$ ), attitude toward movie watching ( $\alpha=.781$ ), attitude toward ethically charged product ( $\alpha=.695$ ), movie watching on the weekdays (.837) and subliminal (.755). The remaining items that yielded acceptable reliability scores were retained and used to run another factor analysis, which explained 69.330% of the variance (See Table 5).

Table 5. Factor Loadings of the Attitudinal Measures – Films

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8	Factor 9
hatewat-comm	.090	.087	.920	.023	-.085	.125	.007	.032	.007
avoid-watchin	.036	.030	.931	.013	.038	.054	.053	.069	.047
Hate-seeingmov	.647	.186	.094	.011	-.038	.348	.048	-.023	-.205
Willnot-watch-movie	.623	.219	.032	.097	.063	.092	.123	-.049	.117
dontmind-paymovie	.515	.437	.121	.122	.037	.144	-.264	-.290	-.269
dontmind-payarmov	.347	.528	.171	.177	.055	.018	-.306	-.222	-.263
refund-opmovies	.472	.072	.005	.137	.093	.190	-.224	-.222	.485
Misleading-propmovie	.412	.482	.162	.139	.012	.031	-.103	.243	.041
Govregmov	.251	.105	.088	.132	.217	.013	-.098	.005	.684
Actor-paiddisc	.024	.868	.044	-.088	.061	.092	.052	.024	.147
Producer-movdisc	.076	.881	-.032	-.002	.006	.064	.051	.157	.045
Realbrand-prefmovies	.718	-.050	-.021	-.109	-.241	.102	.089	-.069	.139
Preferfict-ibrands-movies	.615	.148	-.066	.066	-.153	.096	.044	.150	.245
Banned-Movies	.751	.128	.085	.151	.142	-.040	-.135	-.115	.155
dontmind-ifappears-mov	.785	.046	.013	.034	.082	.064	-.076	-.015	-.128

Brandmore -realmovie	.786	-.105	.071	-.031	.005	-.159	.097	-.017	.125
Viceprod- banned- mov	-.119	.075	-.027	-.102	.834	.053	.014	-.039	.142
Cigbanned- movies	.085	.008	-.017	.050	.857	.074	-.072	.098	.028
Movies- imporpart- brand	.230	-.016	.151	.065	.116	.655	.060	.131	-.050
mov- realism	-.069	-.227	-.081	.137	-.035	-.746	.152	.162	-.094
movdon- mindsee	-.458	.024	-.077	-.076	-.047	.499	.144	.181	.134
movsubcon	-.184	.208	.102	-.023	.002	-.002	-.064	.755	.019
comer- cialsin- disguies	.140	-.041	.039	-.042	.160	.362	-.176	.479	-.324
movhate	.114	.016	.033	.819	-.003	-.051	.183	-.159	.015
movnev- watch	.028	-.006	.002	.870	-.035	-.037	.004	.090	.123
movwat- week	.056	-.057	.043	.054	.029	-.059	.837	.008	-.108
movwat- weekend	.031	.098	.044	.268	-.161	.076	.577	-.341	.000

Next, nine multiple regressions were run with nine new index variables which included an overall, ethically charged products and neutral products index for each media format (See Table 7). Each variable was regressed with the factors retained from the factor analysis for music videos, video games, and films (See Table 6). The overall model for music videos was significant ( $F(6, 184) = 6.283, p=.000, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .147$ ) with ‘attitudes toward brand placement in music videos,’ attitudes toward ethically charged products,’ and ‘attitudes towards advertising in general’ identified as significant predictors. The individual regressions for the neutral ( $F(6, 191) = 8.043, p=.000, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .181$ ) and ethically charged ( $F(6, 194) = 7.005, p=.000, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .183$ ) product models were also significant and indicated similar significant predictors. As expected, the model suggests that ‘attitudes towards ethically charged products’ is a significant predictor of respondents’ acceptability of ethically charged products. The results of the model also suggest that negative ‘attitudes towards advertising in general’ and ‘attitudes towards brand placement in music videos’ negatively influence the acceptability of neutral products (based on recoding of scores for consistency).

Table 6. Factors for each medium

<b>Music Videos</b>	<b>Video Games</b>	<b>Films*</b>
Attitude toward product placement in music videos	Attitude toward product placement in video games	Attitude toward product placement in films
Attitude toward the placement of real versus fictitious brands	Attitude toward the placement of real versus fictitious brands	

Attitude toward disclosure	Attitude toward disclosure	Attitude toward disclosure
Attitude toward the regulation of ethically charged products	Attitude toward the regulation of ethically charged products	Attitude toward the regulation of ethically charged products
Attitude toward advertising in general	Attitude toward advertising in general	Attitude toward advertising in general
Watching music videos	Usage of video games	Movie watching
	Realism	
	Subliminal	Subliminal
		Movie watching on the weekdays

The regressed overall Index ( $F(7, 187) = 8.064, p = .000, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .209$ ), neutral products Index ( $F(7, 192) = 10.573, p = .000, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .259$ ), and ethically charged products Index models were significant ( $F(7, 196) = 6.948, p = .000; R^2 = .175$ ). The results suggest that respondents' attitudes toward disclosure and ethically charged products and usage of video games are predictors of both the neutral products Index and the overall index. However, the attitude toward ethically charged products factor is the only factor that remained a significant predictor of the ethically charged products Index.

Table 7. Regression of Index of Acceptability on Product Placement Attitudes Across Media Formats

**1. Music Videos**

<b>Attitude</b>	<b>Unstandardised Coefficients Beta</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficients Beta</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Attitude toward product placement in music videos	-1.391	-.289	-4.224	.000
Attitude toward the placement of real versus fictitious brands	.133	.029	.423	.673
Attitude toward disclosure	-.041	-.009	-.129	.897
Attitude toward the regulation of ethically charged products	-1.165	-.252	-3.697	.000
Attitude toward advertising in general	-.730	-.154	-2.252	.026
Watching music videos	-.358	-.079	-1.153	.250

### 2. Video Games

<b>Attitude</b>	<b>Unstandardised Coefficients Beta</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficients Beta</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Attitude toward product placement in video games	-.054	-.009	-.144	.886
Attitude toward the placement of real versus fictitious brands	.182	.031	.482	.631
Attitude toward disclosure	-1.295	-.219	-3.346	.001
Attitude toward advertising in general	-.491	-.083	-1.282	.201
Usage of video games	-1.863	-.321	-4.899	.000
Attitude toward the regulation of ethically charged products	-1.958	-.322	-4.938	.000
Realism	.021	.004	.056	.955

### 3. Films

<b>Attitude</b>	<b>Unstandardised Coefficients Beta</b>	<b>Standardised Coefficients Beta</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Attitude toward product placement in films	-1.660	-.338	-4.980	.000
Attitude toward disclosure	.045	.010	.143	.886
Attitude toward advertising in general	-.161	-.034	-.504	.615
Movie watching	-.029	-.006	-.085	.932
Attitude toward the regulation of ethically charged products	-1.413	-.293	-4.317	.000
Movie watching	.105	.022	.326	.745

Similar to the analysis of the other two media, an overall ( $F(6, 182) = 7.029, p = .000$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .166$ ), ethically charged products ( $F(6, 192) = 9.335, p = .000$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .207$ ) and neutral products index ( $F(6, 180) = 6.954, p = .000$ ;  $R^2 = .166$ ) were regressed and produced significant models for films. The results suggest that respondents' attitudes toward brand placement in films and attitude toward ethically charged products were

significant predictors of the overall index for films. Similar predictors were found for the neutral products index, excluding the attitudes toward ethically charged products. The index for ethically charged products was only significantly impacted by respondents' attitudes toward ethically charged products.

To test RQ4, a between by within subject repeated measures ANOVA was used to examine the impact of gender on acceptability of brand placement of different product categories. A significant product main effect was reported earlier across all media, however, this finding is qualified by a significant gender x product interaction for video games ( $F(5.624, 170) = 3.115, p<.005$ ), films ( $F(5.421, 170) = 4.213, p<.001$ ) and music videos ( $F(5.096, 170) = 6.1219, p<.001$ ). The differences between men and women were fairly consistent between films and music videos. As Table 8 indicates, men were typically more accepting of ethically charged products while women were as accepting if not more accepting of the placement of neutral products. Overall, male respondents were more accepting of products placed in video games. In particular, fast food was the only category in which female respondents were slightly more accepting. As observed in the acceptability scores in films and music videos, these differences were most evident in acceptability of ethically charged products. Table 8 identifies the means of each interaction. There was no main effect for gender ( $F(1, 187) = 1.167, p>.05$ ).

Table 8. Product x Medium Acceptability Comparisons

<b>Product</b>	Males Films Mean	Females Films Mean	Males Music Videos Mean	Females Music Videos Mean	Males Video Games Mean	Females Video Games Mean
SUV	2.718	2.853	2.695	2.813	2.613	2.641
Tobacco	2.141	1.899	2.073	1.794	1.975	1.563
Fast food	2.518	2.679	2.305	2.654	2.463	2.466
MP3 player	2.753	2.817	2.646	2.841	2.575	2.592
Hennessey	2.447	2.275	2.305	2.308	2.025	1.796
Marijuana	1.988	1.706	1.988	1.626	1.900	1.456
Luxury car	2.776	2.899	2.634	2.785	2.663	2.631
Expensive jewellery	2.671	2.798	2.610	2.794	2.525	2.398
Condoms	2.376	2.376	2.171	2.187	1.975	1.786
Digital camera	2.753	2.826	2.622	2.804	2.550	2.485
New Era cap	2.529	2.486	2.476	2.514	2.475	2.301
Energy drinks	2.659	2.670	2.585	2.720	2.550	2.437
Cell phone	2.694	2.890	2.634	2.841	2.588	2.583

Overall, findings from Study 1 indicate that impactful attitudinal factors may vary by media type. Further, ethically charged products vary in their level of acceptance depending on the medium. Such products are most accepted in films, followed by music videos, then video games. Finally, there was no main effect for gender with respect to product placement acceptance. However, a significant product x gender interaction was uncovered which is consistent with previous research (e.g., Brennan et al., 2004).

## STUDY 2

The second study was designed to delve further into the possible nuances associated with placement of brands in media. We examine vulnerable audiences specifically as well as an additional medium – reality television.

### Stimuli

Following work by Fullerton et al., (1996) and Hudson, et al., (2008), a series of vignettes were developed to manipulate audience, medium and product type resulting in a 2 (children, adults) x 4 (music videos, reality television show, non-documentary film, video games) x 5 (alcohol, soft drinks, condoms, tobacco, fast food) experimental design. A total of 40 vignettes were generated. To avoid issues of fatigue, it was determined that each participant would randomly see 15 of the 40 vignettes (Fullerton et al., 1996). Since the study was conducted using an online software system, it was programmed to randomly show each vignette an equal number of times.

### Participants

Participants were 405 undergraduates (210 males and 180 females) recruited from universities in the eastern, western and mid-western United States. Again, participants were told their feedback would help test the value of the marketing decisions made by entertainment and business executives. They were given a URL that led them to the online study instrument.

### Procedure

Participants began by completing consent procedures and reading a definition of brand placement. Subjects were then asked about their attitudes toward product placement in each medium using four five-point semantic differential scales: bad/good, negative/positive, acceptable/unacceptable, favourable/unfavourable (de Gregorio and Sung, 2010). Next, each subject was presented with 15 vignettes and asked to rate the acceptability of each using a six-point Likert-type scale. Participants were then asked if they had ever noticed brand placement in music videos, reality television shows, non-documentary films and video games. For any medium in which they had noticed brand placements, their brand placement behaviours were captured (de Gregorio and Sung, 2010). In addition, daily media usage behaviours were captured. Finally, subjects answered demographics questions and exited the study.

### Results

To test RQ1 an independent t-test was conducted. A Cronbach's alpha was first computed for the acceptability measure (1=unacceptable, 6=acceptable) for films, video games, music videos and reality television ( $\alpha = .734$ ). An acceptability index was created and a mean split independent t-test was run on the new variable. Results of the t-test suggest that respondents who found brand placement unacceptable were significantly different from respondents who did not. Additionally, a one-sample t-test found that brand placement across all media was generally acceptable (mean = 4.3246, t value= 3,  $p = .000$ ). Thus, consistent with previous research, respondents were overall accepting of brand placement. Results also suggest that, in general, participants were very accepting of brand placement across media. When comparing by media, participants were most accepting of products placed in films. The analysis also revealed no differences in the acceptance ratings of brand placements in music videos, video games and reality television ( $p = .000$ ).

Table 9. Consumers' acceptance by medium

	DF	SS	MS	F	P
Factor	3	99.33	33.11	22.43	0.000
Error	1564	2309.07	1.48		
Total	1567	2408.40			

Table 10. Acceptance Means based on Media Format

Medium	N	Mean
Films	392	4.566
Music Videos	392	4.061
Video Games	392	3.990
Reality TV	392	3.932

First, five new variables were developed based on the five product categories' responses: Tobacco, Condoms, Alcohol, Soft Drinks, and Fast Food. Next, a repeated measures test was employed to detect any significant differences within the participants' responses to the product categories (RQ2) (Wilks' Lamda = .415, F (4, 363) =128.100, p<.001). Respondents found the ethically-charged products to be least acceptable (e.g., Tobacco mean = 2.54), controversial product categories (e.g., Condoms, mean = 3.19) were rated in the middle, and neutral products were considered most acceptable (e.g., Soft drinks mean = 4.32).

The findings of an ANOVA based on gender suggests that general acceptance of placements across media was fairly consistent when comparing males and females except in video games (p=.000) where females were less accepting of brand placement within video games than males.

Gender differences (RQ4) were further examined by contrasting the responses to the specific scenarios (combining medium, product category and target audience). In particular, gender differences were greatest with respect to the acceptability of placements involving children (See Table 11). Only three scenarios involving adults revealed significant differences between the responses of male and females: soft drink x music video x adult; tobacco x music video x adult; and tobacco x video game x adult).

Table 11. Gender differences

	Tobacco*Music Video*Children	Softdrinks *Music Video*Children
Women	1.22	3.48
Men	1.85	4.03

(p<.05)

A repeated measures t-test was used to identify effects of gender on the acceptability of brand placement based on category. While product category x gender interactions could not be statistically analysed (due to the randomization of the scenarios), there seemed to be an impact of gender on acceptability of ethically charged products in comparison to neutral (e.g., soft drinks) or even slightly controversial product categories (i.e., condoms and fast food).

Before reporting any behaviours, respondents were asked if they noticed brand placement in each media format. Respondents could only report brand placement behaviours for the corresponding media format if they reported recognizing brand placement within that media format. According to the data, product placement in films was most frequently noticed by both males and females (See Table 12). However, a significant Chi-square suggests that the detection of brand placement in films does differ by gender ( $p < .05$ ). While music videos and reality television were similarly recalled by both groups, gender differences were distinctly present in the frequency at which brand placement in video games was detected. In particular, the findings of a Chi-square test suggest that males more frequently noticed brand placement in video games ( $p < .01$ , Contingency coefficient = .325).

Table 12. Frequency of Product Placements Noticed by Gender

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
films	Y	197	177	374
	N	13	2	15
realtv	Y	154	143	297
	N	56	37	93
vidgam	Y	139	57	196
	N	71	123	194
musvid	Y	129	123	252
	N	81	53	134

Gender differences in brand placement behaviours were also explored (RQ6). In comparison to males, females were more likely to look for a product in the store following a placement in films ( $p = .046$ ) and reality television ( $p = .047$ ). However, the results also showed that males were more likely to search ( $p = .018$ ), start using ( $p = .035$ ) and want to try ( $p = .003$ ) products placed in video games. There were no differences found with respect to behaviour following placements in a music video. Consumers were neutral regarding their likelihood to engage in consumption behaviours following music video brand placements.

To explore the impact of media usage on brand placement acceptability (RQ7), the acceptability index was regressed using a usage measure as a predictor (usage measure was computed by equally weighting each media score reported by the respondents). The model was significant, indicating that usage has a slight positive influence on brand placement acceptability ( $F(1, 387) = 7.126, p = .008, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .016$ ). Next, four separate acceptability regressions were conducted for each media format with the corresponding usage information reported by respondents as a predictor. The findings suggest that media usage (video games ( $F(1, 388) = 9.446, p = .002, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .021$ ), music videos ( $F(1, 386) = 7.404, p = .007, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .016$ ), and reality television ( $F(1, 386) = 14.435, p = .000, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .034$ )) positively impacts (corresponding media) acceptability. In contrast to findings by Gupta and Gould (1997), movie watching was not a significant predictor of the acceptability of brand placement within films ( $F(1, 388) = .110, p = .741$ ).



Our analysis also revealed significant interaction effects between gender, media type, and product category. For example, male participants were generally more accepting of the placement of ethically charged products, such as alcohol and tobacco, across all media formats (Tables 8 and 11). Conversely, female participants displayed higher levels of acceptability for neutral products such as soft drinks and fast food. These findings align with prior studies (e.g., Brennan et al., 2004) and highlight the nuanced role of gender in shaping consumer perceptions.

These interaction effects further demonstrate that men tend to be more accepting of ethically charged products in video games, while women are more receptive to neutral products in films and reality television. This suggests that gender-based preferences for specific media formats influence the acceptability of various product categories. For instance, Table 13 shows that men are particularly accepting of tobacco and alcohol placements in video games, whereas women show greater acceptance of fast food and soft drinks in family-oriented films.

For the analysis of RQ8, two new variables were constructed: ACCChil, which is the combined responses of each participant to scenarios targeted toward children, and ACCAdult, which included each participants' mean response to scenarios targeted toward adults. The finding revealed that acceptability of the scenarios targeting children was significantly lower than the acceptability of the scenarios targeting adults ( $p=.000$ , Children=2.64, Adult = 4.085).

Table 13. Descriptive Statistics (Acceptability of Targeted Audience by Gender)

<b>Audience</b>	<b>Gender of Respondent</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>N</b>
Children	Male	2.8882	1.05628	210
	Female	2.3458	.77552	180
	Total	2.6379	.97443	390
Adults	Male	4.1909	1.16071	210
	Female	3.9460	1.02948	180
	Total	4.0779	1.10746	390

This relationship is qualified by a significant within-by-between subjects interaction with gender (Wilks' Lambda = .980,  $F(1, 388) = 7.947$ ,  $p < .001$ ), which implies that gender impacts the acceptability of a placement based on its target. As noted earlier, men tend to be more accepting of brand placement than women, irrespective of the audience being targeted (see Table 13).

Study 2 findings indicate that consumers are accepting of brand placement – especially in films. Gender also has a significant effect on consumer perceptions of product placement, with males being more accepting of the practice in general. Consumers are also likely to research, try or search for a product after seeing it placed in a reality television show, movie or video game and consumers are overall less accepting of product placement activities that target children.

## DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As the practice of brand placement continues to gain momentum with spending expected to surpass \$41 billion by 2026 (Leptiak, 2024), it becomes increasingly important to understand consumers' attitudes toward this practice and the nuances that may be present with respect to various media vehicles and consumer segments.

Consistent with previous research, consumers are typically accepting of brand placement, however, results vary by gender, medium, product type and audience.

Males were found to be more accepting of brand placement, consistent with findings by Brennan et al. (2004). Our findings imply that brand placement acceptability may not be gender neutral and that various product placement execution factors (e.g., medium or product category) may interact with gender-based findings. Since males seem to be more accepting of brand placement across media, managers who identify males as their target audience may be better served by brand placement than those whose primary audience is female.

Both males and females appear to be impacted by the brand placements they have noticed in films, reality television and video games. This is consistent with de Gregorio and Sung's (2010) movie-specific findings. In this study, the gender-media interaction in video games (Cohen's  $d = 0.45$ ) indicates a moderate effect, reinforcing the notion that brand placements in this medium are particularly effective among male audiences. This suggests that marketers aiming to engage male consumers should consider ethically charged brand placements in video games, a medium that appears to align with their preferences. Similarly, the gender-product interaction in films (Cohen's  $d = 0.38$ ) suggests importance of product type when targeting female audiences. Specifically, neutral or family-friendly products appear to resonate more effectively with women in film placements. From a strategic perspective, brands that cater to female audiences—particularly in categories such as household goods, beauty, and wellness—may achieve greater success by integrating their products into films and reality television rather than other media formats.

Interestingly, while previous research (Burkhalter et al., 2017; Ferguson, 2008) has found that consumers are impacted by music video brand placement, the respondents in this study report that they have not engaged in consumption behaviours as a result of music video brand placement. Further, while males are most impacted by video games, females are most impacted by films and reality television shows. This may be due in part to gender-based preferences for each media format, implying a gender by medium interaction.

Additional research may be designed to uncover other consumer behaviours beyond those examined in this study that consumers may engage in as a result of music video brand placement. Our findings indicate that consumers may seek information, try and/or buy products as a result of brand placement in reality television, films and video games. Managers may decide to vary the brand placement medium depending upon their desired outcome (e.g., video games to encourage trial; films to encourage search).

Media format may be an especially significant consideration as brand managers and entertainment executives consider brand placement. Films appear to be the most acceptable medium for brand placement. This is in contrast to findings by Schmoll et al. (2006), which indicate that consumers' approval of brand placement does not vary by medium. It should be noted however, that Schmoll et al. (2006) focused on baby boomers while our work focused on Generation Y. Taken together, this may imply that there is an age by medium interaction at work. Future research should sample consumers ages 18 and over in order to directly test for this interaction. Moreover, an understanding of why brand placements are perceived as more effective in film as opposed to other media is warranted. It is likely easier to integrate film placements into the storyline given their overall length compared to video games or music videos where placements may be viewed as more disruptive to the audience. This calls for qualitative research in this area to uncover motivations behind audience judgements regarding placements across media. Results seem to indicate that whether a medium is passive (providing content without

interaction from the audience) or active may have some influence on the acceptability of the placement. For example, the placement of ethically-charged products were least accepted in video games, the only active medium, in comparison to passive media (films and music videos). With more of today's media requiring active engagement from the audience, particularly social media and virtual reality experiences, future research should examine how active media engagement influences attitudes regarding placements.

Additionally, our findings indicate that different attitudinal factors impact acceptability of brand placement in music videos, video games and films. For example, realism is not a key factor for movie product placement or music video brand placement. However, it is important in the assessment of video game brand placement. Similarly, attitude toward ethically charged products and the perceived subliminal nature of product placement were key factors for both films and video games, but not for music videos. Taken together, these findings imply that consumers have differing expectations, depending upon the medium. Future research may further explore these expectations and how they may impact consumers' responses to brand placement efforts.

Most research examines placement of specific product categories (e.g., Gupta and Gould, 1997) or brand placement in general (e.g., Schmoll et al., 2006). This research considers both. Further, this study considers products beyond the set typically considered in brand placement ethics research including SUVs, luxury cars and condoms. Thus, both practically and theoretically, this study contributes to an understanding of 'new' product categories.

We also found that, irrespective of product type or medium, consumers were less accepting of brand placement that focused on children as opposed to adults. The previous research cited (e.g., Gupta and Gould, 1997; Brennan, et al., 2004) holds that consumers are not accepting of the placement of ethically charged products (e.g., tobacco, firearms and alcohol) where children are concerned. However, our findings extend the current knowledge. We find that whether or not the product is considered to be ethically-charged, consumers are less accepting of brand placement that focuses on children. This is consistent with Hudson et al. (2008) where findings indicate that children's products like fast food and soft drinks are deemed unethical. Thus, it may be that the intended audience is a more important factor than medium or product type when consumers are assessing the acceptability of brand placement. Thus, marketers targeting children may find it more socially acceptable to focus on marketing communications practices such as advertising or sponsorships (Jordan and Schuker, 2010).

Future research may also be conducted which uses actual brand placements as opposed to vignettes. While vignettes are commonly used in ethics research, as Hudson et al. (2008) mention, subtleties of brand placements may be missed with the use of vignettes instead of actual footage. Finally, while gender was found to be a key indicator of how audiences evaluate brand placements, future research may also consider the gender spectrum, moving beyond the binary.

#### Conflict of Interest Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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## Appendix

Sample of Study 2 Vignettes: Category x Media Type x Audience

- A **fast food** company pays to place its product in a **music video** expected to reach **children**.
- A maker of **soft drinks** pays to place its product in a **video game** expected to reach **adults**.
- A maker of **tobacco** pays to place its product in a **movie** expected to reach **children**.
- An **alcohol** company pays to place its product in a **reality TV show** expected to reach **children**.
- A maker of **condoms** pays to place its product in a **music video** expected to reach **adults**.