



When Brands Lead the Scene: A Longitudinal Analysis of Product Placement in the Transformers Movies Franchise

Quando as Marcas Lideram a Cena: Uma Análise Longitudinal da Inserção de Produtos nos Filmes da Franquia Transformers

Caroline Luise Zluhan¹

Luiz Felipe Godinho²

Martin de La Martinière Petroll³

Fernanda Bueno Cardoso Scussel⁴

Abstract

Transmedia narratives became an entertainment experience in which visual elements, characters, and objects create an imaginary world, conquering large audiences in a sequence of movies. From toy lines to Hollywood blockbusters, the Transformers movies franchise has turned into an opportunity for brands to reach consumers in a world where technological devices have changed how they absorb advertisements. In this context, we propose a longitudinal analysis of brand placements in the five movies launched under the Transformers label from 2007 to 2017. A 65-hours passive observation of the movies' content identified several insertions, most frequent brands, and most frequent product categories in each film, classifying data according to placement type, prominence, congruency, and product category criteria. A longitudinal analysis of the five films revealed that brand placement constitutes an effective strategy once its use showed to be consistent over the years. Congruency was the most relevant factor in brand communication and the movies over time, helping consumers familiarize themselves with brands, associate brands to the story, and enhance brand recall. This analysis indicates a successful integration of brand and film components, resulting in adequate placement insertions, promoting benefits for companies, brands, and the cinematographic industry.

Keywords: product placement, brand placement, transformers, movie industry.

Resumo

As narrativas transmídia tornaram-se uma experiência de entretenimento em que elementos visuais, personagens e objetos criam um mundo imaginário, conquistando grandes públicos em uma sequência de filmes. Da linha de brinquedos ao blockbuster de Hollywood, a franquia de filmes Transformers se transformou em uma oportunidade para as marcas atingirem os consumidores em um mundo onde os dispositivos tecnológicos mudaram a forma como absorvem os anúncios. Nesse contexto, propomos uma análise longitudinal das colocações de marca nos cinco filmes lançados sob o rótulo Transformers de 2007 a 2017. Uma observação passiva de 65 horas do conteúdo dos filmes identificou várias inserções, marcas mais frequentes e categoria de produto mais frequente em cada filme, classificando os dados de acordo com o tipo de colocação, proeminência, congruência e critérios de categoria de produto. Uma análise longitudinal dos cinco filmes revelou que o posicionamento da marca constitui uma estratégia eficaz, uma vez que seu uso se mostrou consistente ao longo dos anos. A congruência foi o fator mais importante na comunicação da marca e nos filmes ao longo do tempo, ajudando os consumidores a se familiarizarem com as marcas, associar as marcas à história e aumentar a lembrança da marca. Essa análise indica uma integração bem-sucedida dos componentes marca e filme, resultando em inserções de posicionamento adequadas, promovendo benefícios para empresas, marcas e indústria cinematográfica.

Palavras-chave: product placement, brand placement, transformers, indústria cinematográfica.

1 Bachelor's degree in Business – Federal University of Santa Catarina.

2 Bachelor's degree in Business – Federal University of Santa Catarina.

3 Professor at the Graduate Program in Business – Federal University of Santa Catarina.

4 PhD in Business – Federal University of Santa Catarina.

1. INTRODUCTION

The multiplicity of channels that deliver messages from organizations to consumers has increased, shaping how consumers think about products and brands and influence their decisions (Saladino, 2008). In this context, brand recognition became a critical aspect pursued by the global market companies, putting advertising on the top of their agenda (Krake, 2005). Nevertheless, as competition increases, traditional advertising needs to be reinvented (Chan, Lowe, & Petrovici, 2016). There is an alternative method to reach consumers' attention and form an emotional attachment to products and brands. This reality brought products and brand placement, a former additional and straightforward way to market products in TV shows, into a critical marketing strategy (Saladino, 2008).

Placement is known as the paid inclusion of brands, products, or any brand kind identification in mass media through visual or audio ways (Karrh, 1998). This marketing strategy helps generate positive associations with a brand or a product, influencing attitudes towards a brand or a company (Cowley & Barron, 2008). In other words, it is an attempt to influence the audience using the brand name or logo, package, or any trademark that communicates the brand in movies and television programming (Homer, 2009). The literature recognizes its dissemination in American series (Muzellec, Kanitz, & Lynn, 2013; Russell, 2002), videogames (Herrewijn & Poels, 2013), talk shows, music, books, and movies (Andriasova, 2006). This strategy's impact on consumers will vary, considering the level of sophistication of the placement, the familiarity of the audience with ad campaigns, and the longevity in making purchase decisions (Saladino, 2008).

Since Hollywood movies' expansion into non-U.S. markets, product placement in films became a global phenomenon (Sung, Choi, & de Gregorio, 2008; Eisend, 2009). Product placement is considered one of the most important segments in the advertising industry, with growing perspectives (Matthes & Naderer, 2016). This scenario is, related to the decrease in advertising viewing caused by a shift on audience preference for streaming and the lack of advertising on it (Chen & Wang, 2016). Similarly, Redondo and Bernal (2016) explained that it is a phenomenon in development since the audience is migrating to websites where it is possible to stream or download movies without commercials.

Historically, movies have been a relevant tool of modern communication, becoming part of the American popular culture since the 19th century (Gomery, 1992). In this context, brand and product placement in movies help to connect the narratives to products and objects, reproducing reality concretely and authentically (Newell, Salmon, & Chang, 2006). In 1982, a contract between the movie *E.T.* and the company Hershey's set a remarkable placement: the candy Reese's Pieces was used as a way to attract the alien to the main character's home (Bouton & Yustas, 2012). As a result, Reese's Pieces sales increased 65% after the movie launch.

In recent years, transmedia narratives have turned a relevant object of study, focusing on the strategic aspects of their creation and the purpose of creating an entertainment experience (Fast & Örnebring, 2017). In this type of movie, visual elements, characters and objects are put together to create imaginary worlds and world-building stories for the fictional world to remain familiar to the audience (Wolf, 2012). According to Fast and Örnebring (2017), the Transformers movies franchise is an example of the contemporary paradigm of transmedia entertainment. In the 1980s, the robot figure toys that could transform into vehicles, a Japanese creation whose rights were bought by an American company, received the name Transformers. From a toy line, the Transformers became a comic book series, a cartoon, and, years later, a blockbuster.

In 2007, in Hasbro's collaborative work – the toy company, Paramount Pictures, and DreamWork studios, the movie Transformers were launched, produced, and directed by Steven Spielberg and Michael Bay (Fast & Örnebring, 2017). The Hollywood success became a movie franchise, composed of five movies to date: Transformers (2007), Transformers – the revenge of the fallen (2009), Transformers – Dark of the moon (2011), Transformers – age of extinction (2014), and Transformers – the last knight (2017). With a vast audience range, the Transformers movies franchise expanded, fostering many products such as toys, electronic games, comics, and cartoons. This scenario raised a few questions: what brands and products are part of the Transformers movies? How do they relate to the scenes and the stories? What is the role of brand and product placement in the Transformers movies franchise?

Following this, this article's main purpose is a longitudinal analysis of product and brand placement content present in the Transformers movies franchise. Our first step was to identify the placements inserted in the films, classifying data according to placement type, prominence, congruency, frequency, and product category criteria. Lastly, we analyzed the integration between brand and film components in the Transformers movies franchise.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Advances in technology have given more opportunities to the audience to decide their level of exposure to commercial advertising, which has changed consumer behavior and, consequently, transforms the way organizations reach consumers (Chen & Wang, 2016). In this context, placement configures a hybrid message: it is a paid advertising inserted in mass media programming, but it is not identified as a persuasion effort (Balasubramanian, 1994).

Regarding its definition, placement is a term that encompasses the intentional inclusion of a brand, a product, or any information that identifies a company in entertainment vehicles (Russel & Belch, 2005). The placement strategy's main goal is to influence consumer behavior, especially in terms of brand awareness, attitudes, and buying decisions (Newell et al., 2006; Cowley & Barron, 2008).

In this sense, placement has several advantages over traditional advertising: it is cheaper than commercials. It highlights the brand once it does not compete with other brands for consumers' attention (Andriasova, 2006). Besides that, the audience cannot avoid this kind of exposure since it is part of the program content (Brasel & Gips, 2008; Cowley & Barron, 2008). Lastly, the brands are inserted in the movie enabling an easier catch of consumers' attention (Kim, Pasadeos, & Barban, 2001; Van Reijmersdal, Neijens, & Smit, 2005) and providing brands an opportunity of creating positive associations in consumers' minds (Karrh, 1998; Van Reijmersdal, Neijens, & Smit, 2007).

According to Khalbous et al. (2013), the existing literature on placement is composed of three major areas. The first covers studies focused on building theoretical frameworks and classification for placement techniques based on the communication modes. The second research tradition regards the analysis of the content in audio or visual productions. Finally, the third stream encompasses studies about placement effectiveness regarding consumer attitudes, brand recognition, and memorization.

As a communication strategy, placement is characterized in its creative dimensions, which means communication context, prominence, and congruency (Russel, 2002; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Khalbous et al., 2013).

Communication context regards the way the message is delivered to the audience. Visual placement concerns brands' visual appearance on the screen (Gupta & Lord, 1998). According to Russel (1998), visual placement encompasses two brand positioning; the first is the creative mode, where the product or the brand is exposed in the back of the screen, as an outdoor in an external scene. The second one occurs in the movie set, when products and brands are used in the movie, as food brands in a kitchen, as an example. Audio or verbal placement regards a mention to the brand during a dialogue (Gupta & Lord, 1998).

Gupta and Lord (1998) also consider the audiovisual placement when both come together in a scene. Similarly, Russel (2002) explains the plot placement, a dimension related to the movie storyline. In this case, the product or the brand is a part of the story. It helps create a character personality, consisting of an increase in character's character's personality, consisting of visual and verbal dimensions interaction. It is relevant to notice that this dimension has different levels. When the product is mentioned only for a short period, it is a -intensity plot placement. Still, it is a high-intensity plot placement when it is intrinsic to the story or a character.

Next, Gupta and Lord (1998) affirm that placement can be analyzed based on its **prominence**, the extension in which placement becomes the focus of the audience's attention. Regarding prominence, it is measured by the size of the product or brand logo, how central it is on the screen, the interaction with the story, how many times it was mentioned, or how long it was on screen. On this matter, placement can be prominent or subtle. When the placement is subtle, it does not demand a great effort to integrate the placement to the scene, and its costs are lower than prominent placements (Gupta & Lord, 1998). Nevertheless, products and brands that use prominent places have shown to be remembered more easily than subtle placements (Cowley & Barron, 2008).

Russel (2002) was the one to affirm that the higher the association between placement and the television media in which it appears, the higher the affective response on consumers' minds. This is called **congruency**. Fleck and Quester (2007) defend that placement strategy must be in line with the context of the program/movie. The congruency between placement and the program is their level similarity (Zanjani, Diamond, & Chan, 2011). According to them, products exposed have a higher recall rate when connected to the moment of their exposure.

In this sense, congruency is context-dependent. It is essential to consider emotional congruency: the entertainment content needs to be in line with organizational strategy, once audience response may vary if it is a sad or a happy story (Batra & Stayman, 1990). In Petroll and Prado (2014) words, congruency is a fit between the context of the program, the brand or the product, and the emotions and attitudes involved in this interaction.

2.1. Placement and the movie industry

The placement strategy in movies has become a meaningful method for companies and brands to build and develop, creating positive associations with a worldwide audience (Sargent et al., 2001). In this sense, placement has proved to be a lucrative choice, promoting sales and integrating international marketing plans for several organizations.

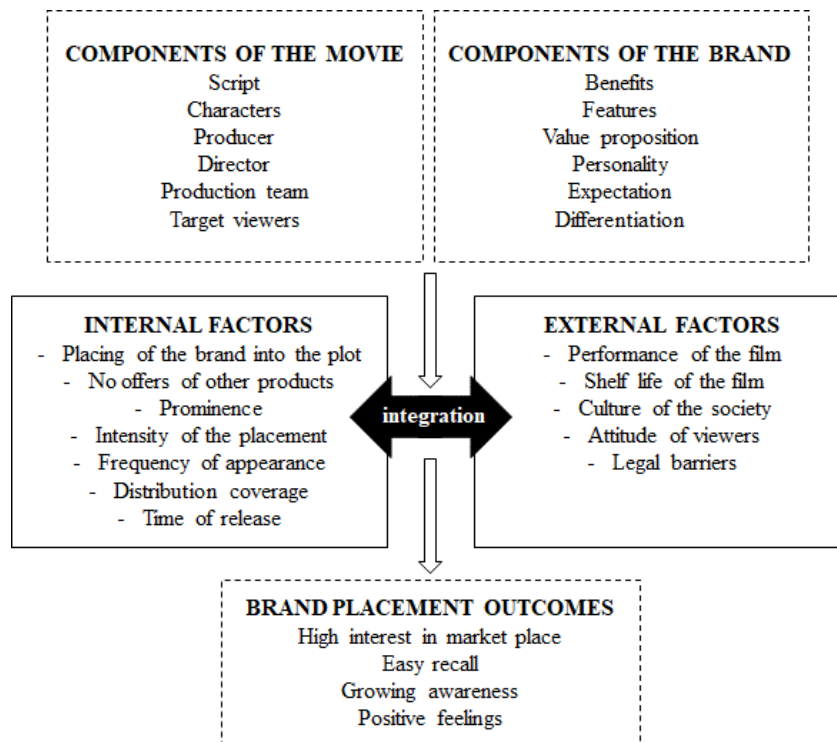
Placement can reinforce brand image, elevate audience interest in a product or brand, activate memories, and develop better attitudes towards a brand, a company, or even a product category (Petroll & Prado, 2014). In this sense, placement engenders a valuable strategy for organizations, but we must notice that placement may have different effects when inserted in different media types. Considering the objectives of this article, from now in, we discuss placement in the movie industry.

According to Balasubramanian, Karhh, and Patwardhan (2006), brands play well defined and integrated roles in movies, once it is used by writers, directors, set designers, and other creative professionals to communicate specific meanings to the audience, to increase verisimilitude to a drama, to set up a period or to build a character personality. Following this lines, the alliance between movie producers and organization through placement has several advantages, such as costs reduction in film set creation and the effective communication with the audience (Russell, 2002; Andriasova, 2006).

We must also consider the benefits from the movie’s reciprocal broadcast and the brand, like campaigns of the movie and the brand that can incorporate the film in its ads (Newell et al., 2006). Lastly, when characters use brands and real products in their routines, the movie seems to be more realistic, the connection with the audience increases, and the consumers tend to associate brand and product use with their reality, imagining the benefits it can promote.

Banerjee (2009) developed a framework to explain brand placement in movies, arguing that a successful placement strategy is found to integrate internal and external factors, and this integration is influenced by elements from the film and the brand. As an outcome of the appropriate integration, the author indicates high interest in the brand in the marketplace, easy brand recall, brand awareness and positive feelings towards a brand. The framework proposed by Banerjee (2009) is illustrated in Figure 1 illustrates the framework.

Figure 1 - Brand and movie placement integration framework



Source: adapted from Banerjee (2009)

According to Banerjee (2009), brand and movie share the responsibility of creating brand placement, once it occurs in the encounter of factors from the film and the brand. This fit is relevant for brand communication, but it is also important for the movie to deliver a more realistic plot. The most important thing to consider is the right fit between the brand and the film to this author.

The film's components of the movie are associated with the film creation and producing stages, encompassing the elaboration of the script, characters, producers, and target audience. The brands' components are related to the advantages of the product/brand use. In this sense, the benefits of the products, the most relevant features of the brand, and its value propositions help raise audience reliability and interest. Nevertheless, intangible aspects such as brand personality must be taken into account since it contributes to the assimilation of the brand and the film's characters. A gap between these factors and the movie may send confusing messages to the audience.

The integration is a crucial moment when internal and external factors meet to create a context that takes the audience to an imaginary world while it has to be in contact with reality (Banerjee, 2009). Regarding internal factors, the integration happens when the brand placement is integrated into the plot and products are compatible with the story. It means that the placement is prominent (it is central to the plot). Concerning external factors, there must be a consideration of film performance (a success or a failure) and a wide movie distribution. Besides that, it is paramount to acknowledge the culture of the society in which the movie will be commercialized and the populational entertainment habits.

The convergence of these elements is known to produce a few outcomes: (i) high level of inquiry, which means a growing interest in the brand in the marketplace; (ii) an easier brand recall, especially when compared to other competitive brands; (iii) an increase on consumer awareness, notably for new products and brands, and (iv) positive feelings towards the brand and the brand category.

3. METHOD

Since the purpose of this article is to analyze the placement of branded products in the Transformers movies franchise, qualitative and descriptive research was more suitable once these studies cover what is observed, reported, or registered into words, providing profound descriptions of events or people (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Hence, we decided to perform a case study about the movie franchise Transformers.

Regarding data collection, we resorted to passive observation, which means we observed the study object without influencing it. The movie sample included the five films launched by the Transformers franchise up to 2017, comprising the titles Transformers (2007), Transformers – the revenge of the fallen (2009), Transformers – Dark of the moon (2011), Transformers – age of extinction (2014) and Transformers – the last knight (2017).

The authors watched the movies alone, and the results were compared to guarantee that all the relevant data from the movie sample was gathered appropriately. The observation covered the speech of the movie characters and visual elements. It means that we watched the five movies from Transformers franchise counting when products and brands appeared on screen and when their name was spoken in the dialogues. We created a table of contents to register the identified placements.

This table had the following elements: (i) name of the movie; (ii) name of the brand; (iii) type of placement – the brand with the product, only the brand or a recognizable product; (iv) communication context – visual, audio or audiovisual; (v) prominence (vi) congruency; (vii) interval duration of the insertion; (viii) product category of each brand. Afterward, it was possible to identify how many times brands appeared in the movies and the representativeness of each brand considering each criterion mentioned above. The total time of passive observation was 65 hours, considering the five movies from the Transformers franchise up to 2018.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the five Transformers movies revealed 716 products and brand placements. From this total, 63% showed the brand and the product together; 30% only the brand; and 7% only the product. Most of these placements (93%) appeared visually, contrasting 5% of audio placements and 2% audiovisual placements. Results revealed that 67% of the insertions were prominent against 33% of non-prominent placements regarding prominence. Concerning congruency, we identified 93% of congruent placements and only 7% of incongruent appearances.

The interval time in which the movies were launched allows us to engender a longitudinal analysis. In this sense, Table 1 presents the data obtained from each movie.

Table 1 - Placement characteristics

		Transformers (2007)	Revenge of the fallen (2009)	Dark of the moon (2011)	Age of extinction (2014)	The last knight (2017)
Duration of the movie		136min	143min	146min	157min	147min
Total placement exposure time		21min	19,15min	22,28min	15,15min	16,27min
Number of placement insertions		121	155	203	117	120
Type of placement	<i>brand with product</i>	53%	64%	65%	74%	59%
	<i>only the brand</i>	37%	28%	32%	23%	30%
	<i>recognizable product</i>	10%	8%	3%	3%	11%
Communication context	<i>visual</i>	84%	94%	93%	96%	96%
	<i>audio (verbal)</i>	12%	5%	4%	2%	2%
	<i>audiovisual</i>	4%	1%	3%	2%	2%
Prominence	<i>prominent</i>	67%	75%	72%	51%	62%
	<i>non-prominent</i>	33%	25%	28%	49%	38%
Congruency	<i>congruent</i>	95%	92%	99%	86%	92%
	<i>non-congruent</i>	5%	8%	1%	14%	8%

Together, the five movies add up to 12 hours of filming. From this total, 95 minutes were used on brand and product exposure, totaling 13% of the whole movie franchise destined to placement. Table 1 shows that considering movie time-length, a significant part is used on product and brand exposure. In each movie, at least 10% of screen time was dedicated to placement. Our data shows that the movie Transformers – Dark of the moon, launched in 2011, was the movie with the highest insertion number, compatible with the fact it was the movie with more time used on product and brand placement. Data also reveals that the placement numbers are sustained during the time, once there is no decrease in insertion number or in brand and products exposure time.

A possible explanation for this result is that the product and brand placement in a Transformers movie is efficient; in other words, it does communicate with the brands’ audience, which makes organizations establishing new contracts with the franchise to associate their brands to the movies. This analysis covered the five movies, which means ten years of placement. According to Suzanne-Mayer (2012), a Transformer’s film creates a billionaire industry with investment from several brands in different product categories. In this sense, the author affirms that the partnership between the movies and the brands is what enables a Transformer’s film to have exorbitant revenues.

According to Bree (1996), watching a movie is a highly involving activity that captures an individual’s attention, representing a natural way of communicating with the public and promoting a brand. Besides, successful movies reach large audiences, enhancing brand awareness and creating positive associations with the characters from the movie (Karrh, 1998). It is plausible to say that Transformers movies engender a successful franchise, considering the number of productions in ten years – 2007 to 2017 – and the volume of brands and product placement inserted in the films.

Regarding the type of placement, results indicate the prevalence of the brand and product placement at the same time. The placement that considers only the brand appears next, revealing the power of communicating brands to the consumers. However, we must mention the increased space that recognizable product placement has gained in the latest movie, Transformers – the last knight, from 2017.

Considering the communication context, there is the predominance of visual placements. Audio and audio-visual placements share similar results, confirming the popularity of visual communication. In this sense, literature recognizes that visual placements are the most popular mode and audio and audio-visual modes are difficult to be accommodated in movies since they need to be integrated into the characters’ dialogue (Gupta & Lord, 1998). Cognitive psychology delivers an explanation: visual information is readily reached once consumers easily perceive a visual stimulus, affecting their level of attention (Wedel & Pieters, 2012).

Prominence results demonstrate the superiority of prominent placements. Nevertheless, the number for non-prominent numbers is not low, revealing that both communication ways prove to affect consumers' responses. Once the behavior of these numbers are stable over time – there is no significant increase or decrease.

Gupta and Lord (1998) argument that both prominent and subtle modes are relevant in the incorporation of a product or a brand into a movie. These authors admit that prominent placements present more advantages when the goal is to capture consumers' attention. However, they tend to be more expensive, and they demand a greater integration of the brand/product with the plot. In this sense, a non-prominent placement does not require a plausible basis to be incorporated into the scene once it can be used in the background. On congruency results, most of the placements in the Transformers movies franchise were congruent. Considering the five movies and the period they represent, we can say that this kind of placement creates a stronger communication with the audience, once congruent placement leads the results. Regarding the effect of congruent placement in consumers' minds, Russel (2002) pointed out that congruency between placement and the story told reinforces persuasion. Besides that, the audience can see an incongruent placement as a suspect advertising, capturing their attention in an unfavorable way that may develop in their minds negative associations towards the brand (Petroll & Prado, 2014).

To conclude this part of our analysis, the theory has confirmed that congruent and prominent placements are the ones that bring better results to companies (Russel, 2002). According to this scholar, the audience perceives placements that carry these attributes as more acceptable, and they proved to be more effective in influencing consumers' attitudes.

Afterward, we examined the product categories most frequent in the movies, results demonstrated in Figure 2. In this regard, we have an expected outcome since the movies' stories are built on the segment of cars, as the characters are robots disguised as cars on Earth, which is the case of the Chevrolet Camaro as an example. These results reaffirm the congruency results captured by Table 1, once the movies surpass stories where cars and technologies are part of several battles in an imaginary world.

Figure 2 - Most frequent product categories in Transformers movies franchise

Transformers (2007)	Revenge of the fallen (2009)	Dark of the moon (2011)	Age of extinction (2014)	The last knight (2017)
Automotive	Automotive	Automotive	Automotive	Automotive
Entertainment	Communication	Technology	Technology	Technology
Technology	Technology	Communication	Food and beverage	Fashion apparel
Communication	Fashion apparel	Food and beverage	Communication	Automotive accessories
E-commerce	Entertainment	Retail stores	Automotive accessories	Food and beverage

In the following, we analyzed the brands identified in the movies, as Figure 3 shows. These findings match the results obtained for product category, reinforcing congruency between the placement, the communication strategy, and the type of movie, especially when analyzing the brands announced in the movies over the years.

Figure 3 - Most frequent brands in Transformers movies franchise

Transformers (2007)	Revenge of the fallen (2009)	Dark of the moon (2011)	Age of extinction (2014)	The last knight (2017)
Chevrolet	Chevrolet	Chevrolet	Chevrolet	Chevrolet
GM	LG	Ferrari	Bugatti	Mercedes-Benz
GMC	GMC	Mercedes-Benz	Cadillac	Lamborghini
HP	U-Haul	Lenovo	GMC	Vespa
E-bay	Budweiser	Target	Pagani	Caterpillar

Table 1 has shown that brand placements are prevalent in the Transformers movies franchise – brands are present in most of the placements, alone or with the product. Considering the power of brand over other kinds of placements, we examined the top five brands commercialized in our movie sample, covering insertion number and total exposure time.

Table 2 - Top five brands

Brand	Frequency	
	Number of Insertions	Total Exposure Time (in minutes)
Chevrolet (cars)	168	26,3
Mercedez-Benz (cars)	29	3,52
GMC (cars)	28	3,27
Lenovo (technology)	18	2,4
Ferrari (cars)	15	1,62

The brand Chevrolet is the brand with the highest insertion number in the Transformers movies franchise. Chevrolet is the most frequent brand, considering both the number of insertions and total exposure time, but there is a tremendous difference between this brand and the second top brand, Mercedes-Benz. GMC, a truck division of General Motors, is the third most frequent brand. Considering that Ferrari shows in fifth place of the top five brands, we can affirm that automotive brands are dominant in the Transformers movies franchise. We must highlight that the brand Chevrolet results were expected once the main character of the movie is a car from this brand. This outcome is consistent with the congruency results brought by Table 1.

Subsequently, we analyzed the information obtained about the five Transformers movies under the framework proposed by Banerjee (2009) to understand how the integration between brand and film elements was to understand how the integration between brand and film elements was integrated into the franchise.

According to Banerjee (2009), a film’s components are script, characters, producer, director, production team, and target viewers. Based on the five movies analysis, it is reasonable to say that those elements are delivered by the Transformers franchise, considering the sequence of films produced in ten years – 2007 to 2017, becoming a Hollywood success (Mirrlees, 2017). On the brand side, the movies’ brands showed to be congruent to the story, finding in the films a context to create positive associations in consumers’ minds.

It is conceivable to say that the Transformers movies franchise meets the integration criteria proposed by Banerjee (2009). The brands are placed into the plot, which is proved by the level of prominence found in the five movies, as Table 1 demonstrated. The frequency of appearance is another evidence since several brands occupy a reasonable amount of screen time considering the movies’ length, time of release, and highlighting. We must show that the franchise encompasses five movies distributed in ten years, proving the audience engagement. Besides that, it is a movie distributed internationally, which guarantees the distribution coverage, the culture of the society, attitude of viewers, and legal barriers criteria indicated by Barnerjee (2009);

Lastly, there is a need to evaluate brand placement (Barnejee, 2009). As Mirrlees (2017, p. 406) points out, the Transformers movies constitute an American culture product, a “must-see” that brought together spectators in more than 70 countries, launched in languages such as English, Portuguese, Mandarin, Russian and Spanish. To the author, the franchise is an example of a successful American product, selling a positive image of the country’s department of defense, its policies, technology, and practices. Aside from that, our analysis indicates that the Transformers movies franchise configure an excellent example of successful placement if we consider the number of brands that associated their image to the movies and the consistency of these associations over time.

5. CONCLUSION

Product and brand placements become an important and reliable communication strategy to reach consumers crossing borders of their country of origin. In the case of the Transformers movies franchise, our longitudinal analysis of the five films revealed that brand placement constitutes an effective promotional strategy once its use showed to be consistent over the years.

Among the results, congruency showed to be the most important factor in the encounter of brand communication and the movies. We have found a convergence of the most frequent brands and the most frequent categories over time, which helps consumers familiarize themselves with the brands, associate the brands to the story, and enhance brand recall. Our findings also confirm that the Transformers movies franchise is an example of successful integration of brand and film components, resulting in an adequate placement strategy that promotes benefits for companies, brands, and the cinematographic industry.

Regarding managerial implications, placement in movies is an effective communication strategy for reaching a broad audience. Our findings reveal that associating a brand with a movie, better yet, a movie sequence is an opportunity to increase brand awareness and consumer's behavioral intentions. Besides, we believe that engaging with a movie franchise may help brands engage with a movie franchise, which may help brands to engage with a movie franchise and help brands develop and enhance a relationship with its consumers. Besides, for brands expanding their activities overseas, a movie launch configures a favorable circumstance to create brand awareness worldwide. In this context, our findings reveal that the fit between the brand strategy and the movie is the starting point of any managerial decision concerning placement insertions.

As academic contributions, this article is the first step into bringing longitudinal analysis of movies to marketing research. This lucrative industry can be a source of information for scholars since it communicates with large audiences and represents what people like to watch, hear, and how they enjoy being entertained. In this sense, studying movie content may tell marketing researchers and practitioners valuable information about consumer and market behavior.

Besides, this study contributes to the literature development on branding and advertising, especially in non-traditional communication strategies. Considering the evolution of technology, entertainment devices, digital communication, and the competition on an international basis, companies, brands, and advertisers must be aware of the opportunities and limitations brought by this new and uncertain context.

Regarding this article's limitations, in data collection, we did not find any tool that could help us to have an accurate estimative of placement exposure time, which might have generated a margin of error for these results. Another limitation is the subjective analysis of each author. Once we could not watch the movies together.

Concerning future research, we recommend updating this research with future Transformers' releases to investigate the progression or decrease of placements in the films. We suggest investigations about the consumers' point of view regarding their perception of this kind of communication. Lastly, research about the effect of placement on the brands identified in this article regarding strategy formation and brand performance would contribute. Furthermore, this study can be replied to analyze other movie franchises in different film categories, tv series, tv shows, and even Netflix content.

Despite the limitations, the main objective of this research was to demonstrate the relevance of placement as an effective marketing strategy and the importance of the encounter of brand and movie elements in building this strategy. Considering the growing interest of companies and brands in new ways of reaching their consumers in a fast-changing economy, this study proposes relevant insights about the brand presence and brand engagement overtime on consumers' minds. Although our results are more descriptive than conclusive, they are a helpful starting point to future investigations and the advancement of marketing research.

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Contato:

Caroline Luise Zluhan
E-mail: caroluise@hotmail.com

Luiz Felipe Godinho
E-mail: liuzfelipee@hotmail.com

Martin de La Martinière Petroll
E-mail: martin.petroll@ufsc.br

Fernanda Bueno Cardoso Scussel
E-mail: fbcardoso@gmail.com

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