PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN SIT-COM: EVIDENCES FROM EYE TRACKING

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Abstract - Since 1982 when the one of the most successful product placements appeared in ET movie, marketers have kept on adopting this strategy in various media channels. Among those, research studies indicated that product placement in the situation comedy (Sit-com) is the most effectiveness. In the case of Thailand, there are 5 styles of product placement appearing in the Sitcom. This study aims to examine which styles are the most effective in terms of brand awareness and recognition. The 3.18 minute sit-com with motorcycle placement was shown to a total of 30 men, daily motorcycle rider. An eye tracking program was adopted while participants watched the sitcom. Following this, sin depth interviews were conducted with each motorcycle riders. The results show that Honda is a top of mind of the majority participants. Product placement in the sitcom leads to brand recognition but not the brand recall.

Keywords - Brand Awareness, Brand Recognition, Eye Tracking, Product Placement

I. INTRODUCTION

Today consumers exploit various media channels. In the case of Thailand, although the new media, like social media, has been increasingly focused, the largest companies still spend their major budgets on traditional media, TV advertising [1]. Nonetheless, the format of TV commercials (TVC) ought to change for the reason that today's consumers are avoiding TVC. The skipping advertising syndrome is a key challenge for marketers today. Therefore, product placement is applied to aim at reaching out to the consumer's mind [2]

Previous studies found that product placement not only lowered TVC production costs but also increased awareness when compared to the normal TCV, shown during the program break [3,4]. Besides, product placement is found to impact consumer decision making which results in higher sales volumes, particularly in the case of the Situation comedy (Sitcom).

Unfortunately, few studies have been conducted in Thailand on product placement. Accordingly, this study aims to explore the efficiency of the different types of product placement and how it impacts on brand awareness and brand recognition.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Product Placement Definition

According to the literature review product placement is also known as product brand placement, in-program sponsoring, branded entertainment, or product integration [5].

There are various definitions of product placement in academic and trade publications. Ferraro and Avery [6] defined product placement as "the inclusion of brands in movies or television scripts." Other definitions are more likely to be limited in terms of the purpose of product placement, such as "the purposeful incorporation of a brand into an entertainment vehicle" [7].

More in detail, Li [8] summarized that product placement has three dimensions, defined as, text (content), industrialism and commercialism (nature) and audience (purpose).

In terms of the text dimension, product placement is considered as product information (name, function and appearance), branded information (name, logo), brand identity (culture, image), packaging, signage, or a verbal mention inserted into the story content [8]. It reflects the commercial nature of the product placement [9].

In terms of the industrialism and commercialism dimension, product placement is defined as an expansion strategy and a marketing tool for the industry. Turner [10] suggested that, from the perspective of the film industry, product placement reduces the risk to investment by obtaining finance from advertisers before a film is released.

In terms of the audience dimension, product placement is defined as the intent to influence audience behavior. Balasubramanian [9] defined product placement as a hybrid message, which is a paid product message aimed at influencing movie audiences via the planned and unobtrusive inclusion of a branded product in a movie.

B. Types of Product Placement

From a broad perspective, there are three types of product placements: (1) Visual (2) Audio and (3) Both visual and audio [11,12].

The first is the visual presence of a product on screen. Product placement can be purely visual, such as a product shown in the background of a scene. the product may simply be a prop for example a billboard with a brand name in a scene [8].

Furthermore, Zhang [13] stated that visual product placement could be further refined to include two specific methods: close-up product placement and scene product placement.

The close-up product placement is when the product symbolic packaging, i.e, its name or its logo appears in a close-up shot, while scene product placement is when the product appears as part of the scene [13].
The second is the use of audio. In this type of product placement, the brand name may not be mentioned at all in the main dialogue of the story, but it might be mentioned several times in less important dialogue or might be mentioned with emphasis [8]. The brand name is mentioned without audiences seeing the brand.

The third is the visual and audio. In this type, brand appears to audiences with the name mentioned. Gürses and Okan [14] stated that this is the most effective type for brand recognition whereas among the three types visual is the least effective.

In movies, the role of brand placement has increased in recent times. The types of product placement have become more varied than the three initiates that aimed to create more opportunity to get more brand and product exposure during the natural process of narration in the movie. This is because the audience can undertake multiple tasking while watching a TV program, in a home setting, which may affect the level and degree of the attention span of the audience and hence reduce the overall effectiveness of the medium for enhancing brand memory [15].

Dechaburananon et.al. [16] and Dietrich [17] indicated that there are 5 types of product placement.
(1) Short spot: In this type, audience will be exposed to visual and audio prior the start of the movie. The selling point details are addressed to trigger and draw audience attention.
(2) Graphics: Logos, slogans, or images of the product appear at the screen corner.
(3) Product: In this case, products, packages or logos appear either in close up shot or as part of the scene.
(4) Person: Actor/Actress picks up the product as part of daily life usage. This includes the brand logo on the actor/actress' costumes.
(5) Plot: The product placement is tied-in to the form of the story by inclusion in narrative of the script. The actor/actress addresses the product slogan, product instruction or product benefits.

III. METHODOLOGY

The sit-com series "Ha-in-one" which is broadcast through digital TV and YouTube was selected as it utilized all 5 product placement types.

(1) Short spot



(2) Graphic



(3) Product



(4) Person



(5) Plot



With the collaboration of the Artificial Intelligence in Medicine Lab (AIM Lab), Faculty of Engineering, Mahidol university, the eye tracking program was embedded in the sit-com.

Participants in this study was purposive sampling. All of participants were male aged from 27-35 years old as it has been suggested that age has significant impact in brand recognition. Furthermore, previous studies revealed that participants aged below 35 are best suited for their eyesight capability and memorization ability [18].

All 30 participants in this study have had experience in the purchase of motorcycles relevant to their occupations as motorcycle taxis. Their education is below graduate level. None of them has experience of watching this selected sit-com.

In the first step, they were asked to watch the sit-com. Eye calibration was conducted prior to the start of the sit com. In the second step, approximately 30in-depth interviews were conducted using a formal interview guide.

To ensure the validity of the study, the interview guide was sent for evaluation by 3 marketing and advertising experts in both the academic and practical fields. The formal interview guide got CVI= 0.87.

IV. RESULTS

A. Brand Recognition Measurement

The first interview question asked participants how many actors/actresses were in the sit-com. All of the participants provided the correct answer. However, when we further asked about the motorcycle brand name, only 27 out of the 30 provided the correct answer of "Honda".

For those 3 errant participants, when the motorcycle brand names of Yamaha, Kawazaki, Honda, BMW, Ducati, Vespa and Harley Davidson, were provided, they were able to identify the correct answer.

However, when we asked whether they knew the purpose of brand advertising, they all acknowledged that brand wishes to encourage the audience to buy a motorcycle. Among those, 18 out of the 30 clearly mentioned that the sit-com prompted them to buy the "Honda". Brand In the sit-com, a slogan for the product "Honda New Scooby I focused on: Cool, modern, individualism and distinctive own style" was mentioned. When asked to repeat the slogan, 17 out of the 30 participants stated that they could not remember. Besides, 4 of the participants who claimed that they were able to recall the slogan, provided the wrong answer. The rest were able to repeat only a certain part such as "…Honda Scoopy I…" "Modern" "Cool and individualism", etc.

To explore their understanding of product placement, they were asked whether or not they knew what product placement was. Only 1 out of the 30 revealed that he did not know, while the others answered that they knew about product placement, and understood the product placement concept correctly.

B. Attitude Toward Product Placement Types and Purchasing Intention

It was also wished to explore their attitude towards the 5 types of the product placement. The majority preferred product placement style as product, person, graphic, short spot and plot consecutively.

Furthermore, they were asked what the most annoying product placement type was. They answered graphics, plot, person, short spot and product consecutively.

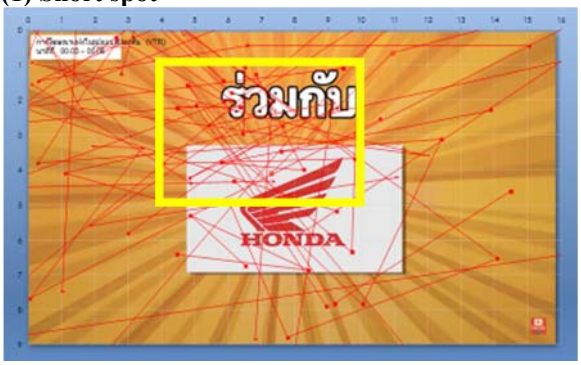
All participants were asked whether watching this sit-com increased their purchasing intention towards the "Honda" brand. The result showed that 21 out of the 30 answered yes while 9 said no for the reason that they already loved the brand. In addition, a few mentioned that although the Honda motorcycle is beautiful in design somehow its engine lacks durability.

On the contrary, those who indicated the purchasing intention on Honda explained that they liked the design, cost effectiveness and fuel savings.

C. Eye tracking

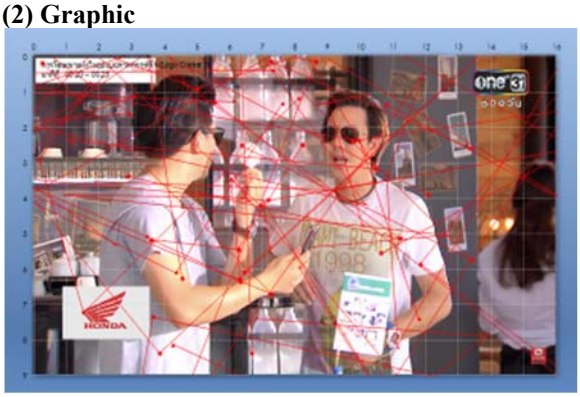
Results from eye tracking are as follows:

(1) Short spot



Eyetracking during the scenec of 0.03-0.06 minutes duration showed which logo shown together with a short spot, that participants in this study mainly focused on the words "in collaboration with"

(2) Graphic



In this scene, the logo appeared in the left lower corner for 0.20-0.23 minute. Two actors talked to each other in the coffee shop on a hipster photo shoot. Eye

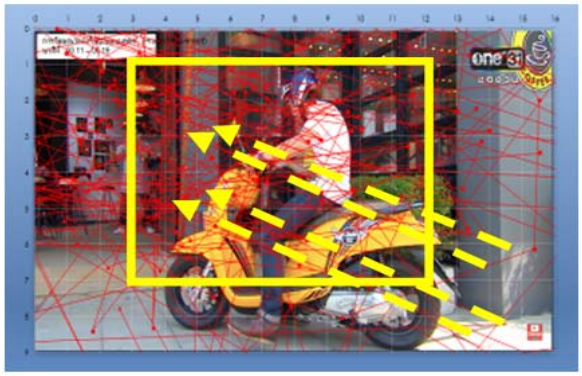
tracking showed scatter focus across the screen., and that the logo in the corner was seen only two times.

(3) Product



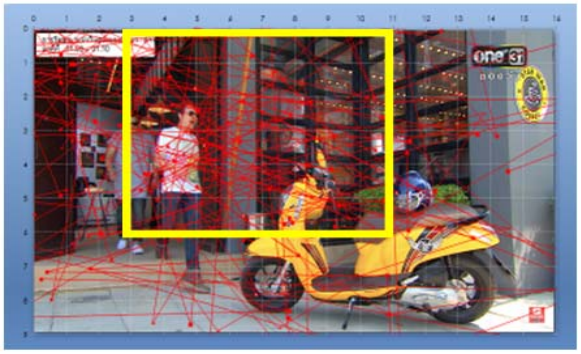
In this scene of between 00.11 – 00.19 minutes, the Honda motorcycle is parked in front of a coffee shop. Two actors are chatting and an actress walks in to join the conversion. Eye tracking showed that the participants mostly focused on the position of the actress walking towards the motorcycle. However, it should be noted that the area in which the actors/actress are standing is centre focused by the participants rather than the motorcycle which is in the lower position.

(4) Person



In this scene of between 01.03 – 01.10 minutes, the actor rides the scoopy I Honda into the scene from the right side and then parks the motorcycle.
Eye tracking results showed the movement of the participants is focused on movement in the same direction as the motorcycle direction.

(5) Plot



In this scene of between 01.03 – 01.10 minutes, the two actors talked about the Honda scoopy I and walked out to the motorcycle that was parked in front of the coffee shop. Eye tracking results showed that participants focused in the same direction in which they were walking.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results showed that product placement in sit com created "Honda" brand recognition for all participants. Moreover, with unaided recall, 27 participants mentioned the Honda name. This showed the effectiveness of Honda as the top recognizable brand. However, from this study, product placement in this set did not lead to product recall as none of the participants could recall the correct brand slogan for the Honda scoopy I.
Among those 5 types of product placement, product and person are the most effective measure by the eye tracking. The graphic logo at the corner is considered as the least effective as further participants also mentioned that it is annoying.
In conclusion, product placement in the sit-com is considered effective in terms of brand recognition but not brand recall.
Eye tracking shows the influence of actor and actress position when they are with the product. Their position and movement direction leads to the eye focus of participants. Therefore, actors/actresses positioned near the product are strongly recommended.
As all participants are familiar with the motorcycle, they understand the purpose of product placement in the purchasing intention towards the Honda brand. However, it should be noted that product placement in the sit-com may not be the only factor impacting on the purchasing intention as all participants in this study are personally involved with and interested in motorcycles with Honda being one of their best liked brands prior to exposure to this sit-com.

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