

PRODUCT PLACEMENT AS PUBLIC RELATIONS: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF
PRODUCT PLACEMENT AND PRACTITIONERS' PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF
PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA

By

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To my family, my newborn niece, and my lover-
I love you forever

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of public relations practitioners in product placement and social media. This study not only examines practitioners' experiences, knowledge, ethical thinking and perceptions of product placement in social media setting, but also in any media except social media. Besides, this study also tried to understand how practitioners think of the effectiveness measurements of product placement in any media, including social media.

This study linked the relationship among product placement, social media and public relations in order to bring out the issue of product placement in public relations. Interesting results are revealed in the Finding Chapter. Practitioners who have placement experiences perceived themselves as knowledgeable in placing product/brand. Most practitioners think product placement is an ethical practice. The results also showed that public relations practitioners have positive perceptions of product placement in different viewpoints, and also presented practitioners' recognition of effective measurement of product placement.

Further discussion, research limitation, implications and future research are presented in the Discussion Chapter.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Advances in online communication technologies undoubtedly forces practitioners to seek out alternative ways to attract their audiences' attention and consolidate the brand relations with their audience and clients. "Public relations practitioners, understanding that members of different publics attend to various channels differently, have been receptive to experimentation and change in the choice of medium for message dissemination" (Pardun & McKee, 1999, p.481). Therefore, product placement arises as one of the strategic functions for communication consideration in various media programming. According to a 2006 online PRWeek article, public relations agencies started to "conduct negotiation on unpaid product integration and review it as part of every PR professional services because it involves the same relationship- building skills hat are at the core of public relations" (Iacono, 2006).

Also, as product placement in media has become more common, examining how people process brand messages embedded in media or how practitioners exert product placement to enhance exposure or effectiveness of brands or products has emerged as an important research topic in advertising and information-processing literature (Gupta & Lord, 1998; Russell, 2002; Russell, Norman, & Heckler, 2004; Russell & Stern, 2006; Lee & Faber, 2007) and in public relations literature (Pardun & McKee, 2000, Karrh, McKee & Pardun, 2003). However, as new Web-based communication tools emerge faster than we can imagine, research interest in product placement has begun to expand to other forms of media, such as online videos, computer or online games (Chaney, Lin, & Chaney, 2004; Nelson, 2002; Nelson, Yaros, & Keum, 2006; Nicovich, 2005; Schneider & Cornwell, 2005; Yang et al., 2006), and now even social media.

Eric Kintz wrote on his personal blog in HP Community, "In October 2005, Nike produced a pseudo home digital video of soccer star Ronaldinho, practicing while wearing his new Nike

Gold shoes” (Kintz, 2006). This video clip caught tons of the target young male audience’s attention and was download over 3.5 million times on YouTube. Obviously, Nike exerted product placement strategy embedding in a created video to a video sharing site in order to gain attention from specific members of the publics—and it succeeded. However, video sharing is not the only medium that brings out academic and practitioners’ attention to product placement use in the world of the Internet. Other Web-based social media systems, such as Weblogs (blogs), wiki, social networking, and discussion forums are just as important in communicating with numerous online audiences as well.

According to Paine (2007), “Most PR people envision the blogosphere as yet another new medium to address, a new way to scream more loudly at their stakeholders” (2007, p.3). Yet more and more public relations experts engage in the operation of blogs to discuss or share their personal opinions about varied public relations strategies and topics, such as product placement. For example, Kevin Dugan who has operated a “PR Strategies” blog since 2002 also pointed out the effectiveness of product placement in the entertainment industry (Strategic Public Relations, 2005). Product placement has become an emerging hot topic in the public relations arena.

With the popularity of blogs, their great potential to impact their audiences or to allocate more promotional dollars from clients by means of communication strategies and tools online, it appears that practitioners attempt to increase the use of blogs as they monitor traditional media channels. “The persuasive and informative function is of great relevance as they can obtain opinion leadership with a huge influence over public opinion” (Xifra & Huertas, 2008, p.7). Considering the variety of Web-based social media, social networking sites also provide more opportunities for practitioners to become involved in the play of a more comprehensive understanding of public opinion and image/persuasive management. Porter, Trammell, Chung,

and Kim (2001) also indicate that “as more Internet-based communication tools and outlets emerge and gain popularity, it behooves practitioners to understand how to integrate such tools early on” (p. 92). A recent study on working public relations practitioners concerning their adoption of 18 social tools and their perception of the growth of social media trends in public relations practice also provides statistically significant evidence to support future studies on the role of social media in public relations (Eyrich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008).

However, there is limited literature addressing blog power or Web power in the public relations arena. There is not enough academic research focusing on other social media, such as social networking sites, video sharing or other Web-based social media. Therefore, this study tries to concentrate on PR practitioners’ engagement with all social media use. Moreover, as more practitioners utilize the “hybrid message,” “by which they provide a basis for the commercial sponsor to influence audiences who are unaware of the commercial attempt” (Balasubramanian, 1994, p. 30), in the social media, more concerns on research should be addressed theoretically and statistically in order to explore the phenomenon in the reality of public relations. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the role of public relations practitioners in product placement and social media and the perceived effectiveness of product placement use in social media as public relations.

CHAPTER 2 LITEATURE REVIEW

New Technology and Public Relations

The new technology, such as Internet or other Web-based new media, has turned out to be an irreplaceable fashion media channel. In 1996, Gustafson and Thomsen predicted that public relations practitioners would spend more time online with clients, the media, and customers in the near future; while practitioners would also rely more on database and information services (Porter, Sallot, Cameron & Shamp, 2001). The role of public relations on World Wide Web use (or other new technologies use) has become a popular research focus since the new technology has appeared. Apparently, for public relations practitioners, “new technologies significantly enhance the speed in which they can gather information and conduct evaluation, thereby enhancing issues tracking by monitoring the public opinion environment on the Internet” (Porter, Sallot, Cameron, & Shamp, 2001, p.173).

According to Porter and Sallot’s article (2003), “The World Wide Web can be used to improve research and evaluation, issues management efforts, two-way communication between internal and external environments, and productivity and efficiency, thereby increasing the likelihood of manager role enactment in public relations.”(p.604) Moreover, a 1999 survey result of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) members showed that 99% use the World Wide Web, with 57 % of public relations members using it for surveillance of companies, 49% exploring databases at other sites and 39% using the Internet to monitor government activities (Ryan, 2000). In another 2001 international e-mail survey, 98% of 276 practitioners surveyed agreed that the Internet is having an impact on public relations practice 86% agreed that this impact has been positive and reported going online 5.8 days during an average week and spending between 15 and 19 hours per week online (Wright, 2001). The prediction came true—

public relations practitioners regard the new technology as a critical media tool, and are increasingly interested in becoming involved with more “online” communicating channels.

Platform of Social Media

Definition of Social Media

The definitions of social media vary. Joseph Thornley, CEO of Thornley Fallis has defined social media on his personal blog as “online communications in which individuals shift fluidly and flexibly between the role of audience and author.” In social media, “individuals use social software that enables anyone without knowledge of coding to post, comment on, share or mash up content and to form communities around shared interests.” The other practitioner is trying to define it as “the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers” (Solis, 2007). Roger Harris (2008), an online social manager, concluded that “social media are the suite of technologies that are used by people to share and interact with online content.” However, there is no certain definition in academic circles due to the rapid growth of new technologies.

Both social media and traditional media share the same characteristics of reaching small and large audiences, but in different ways. A television show can reach a small audience or an audience of millions by way of television channel; however, a video click also can reach a few people or millions of people in an online video sharing environment. The distinction of social media from traditional mass media can be classified into four parts: (1) audience reach, so that the global and Internet audience can surf on the Internet without boundary limitation; (2) audience accessibility, so that social media are available to anyone in the online environment; (3) audience usability, so that anyone online can use the means of operation in social media; and (4)

immediate information, so that social media can provide instant information and reduce time lag and delay in response

Types of Social Media in Public Relations

Social media can be classified into four areas by their purpose: (1) communication (e.g. blogs [micro-blogs], social networking, Internet forums, and event sharing sites) (2) collaboration (e.g. wikis, social bookmarking, social news sites, and opinion sites) (3) multimedia (e.g. photo sharing, video sharing, live-casting, and audio and music sharing) and (4) entertainment (e.g. virtual worlds and online gaming). The following statement explains all of these social media.

Communication Purposes

Social networking: Social networking sites emerging as the most popular social media include various functions and purposes, such as video/photo sharing or entertainment tools.

Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) defined Social Networking Sites (SNS) as:

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (p. 211)

But the nature of social networking sites differs site by site. Each site has its own unique relationship connecting function and their nomenclature relies on how it operates. Ellison et al. (2007) write that “networking” emphasizes “relationship initiation, often between strangers; while networking is possible on these sites, it is not the primary practice on many of them, nor is it what differentiates them from other forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC)” (p.211). Social networking sites provide dynamic online services for communication purposes, business networking, or even social event meet up. Examples of the most famous social

networking sites are MySpace and Facebook for communicating and information-sharing purposes; Ryze, XING, and LinkedIn for business communication; and Meetup for social event sharing.

Blogs. Generally, a personal blog is viewed as an online personal journal that provides frequent updated information for the general online public to consume. In fact, the word blogs is defined by its own unique format. According to the online Merriam Webster Dictionary, a blog is defined as “a Web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer.” Another definition provided by the online Princeton University WordNet is: “A shared online journal where people can post diary entries about their personal experiences and hobbies in chronological order.”

However, in terms of public relations blogs, the word can also be classified into five main blogs types by Lee, Hwang, and Lee (2006):

... employee blogs, written by any worker in the company; group blogs, a worker’s blog written by a group of authors or experts, also called a collaborative blog; executive blogs, written by managers; promotional blogs, an impersonal corporate blog seeking to generate buzz about products and events; newsletter blogs, which is also an impersonal and aims to represent the company stance through its information (p.319)

They mostly conduct the mission of disseminating messages and information for building-relationship context.

Collaboration Purposes

Wikis. According to the online Oxford English Dictionary, a wiki is defined as “a page or collection of Web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content, using a simplified markup language.” A wiki is often used to create collaborative Web

sites and strengthen community power on the Internet, and one of the best-known wiki Web sites,

Wiki can be used as a source for obtaining information and knowledge, and also as a method of virtual collaboration, for example, to share dialogue and information among participants in group projects, or to allow learners to engage in learning with each other, using wikis as a collaborative environment to construct their knowledge or to be part of a virtual community of practice” (Boulos, Maramba & Wheeler, 2006, p. 2).

Social bookmarking. Lomas (2005) defined social bookmarking as “addressing a community— or social— approach to identifying and organizing information on the Web” (p. 1) for Internet users to store, organize, search, and manage bookmarks of Web pages with the help of metadata. It involves a practice of saving bookmarks to a public Web site and “tagging” them with keywords. “Social bookmarking users can search for resources by keywords, person or popularity and see the public bookmarks, tags, and classification” (Lomas, 2005, p.1).

Social News Sites. A social news site is a type of social bookmarking Web site dedicated to current news or specific types of news, and allows its users to submit news stories, articles and media (video/photos) and vote on news stories or other links. For instance, the most pioneered community sites are Slashdot and Fark; the most popular site is Digg, which combines the features of Delicious and Slashdot.

Opinion Sites. An opinion site can also be called an Internet forum, or a message board. It is an online discussion site with the combination of a traditional bulletin board and a technological dialup bulletin board system. Opinion site users can build bonds with other users through online dialogue and discussion. Interest groups form together in a certain topic or subject dealt within or around sections in the forum.

Multimedia

Multimedia includes a combination of text, audio, images, animation, video and interactive content forms. Multimedia contains four types of content format photo sharing, such as Flickr; video sharing, such as YouTube; livecasting, such as Ustream or Justin.tv; and audio/music sharing, such as imeem, The Hype Machine, Last.fm, and ccMixer.

Entertainment

Online entertainment is part of social media. “Online gaming is a technology rather than a genre; a mechanism for connecting players together rather than a particular pattern of game play” (Adams & Rollings, 2006, p.670). Many online gaming sites benefit from advertising revenue dollars because of the decreasing profitability of the online gaming market after the dot-com bubble burst in 2001. Virtual worlds, such as Second Life, are computer-based simulated environment intending for their users to inhabit and interact via avatars, which are usually textual, two-dimensional or three-dimensional graphic representations. Users can experience a simulated world based on the real world or some hybrid fantasy world. Communication in the virtual world can be one-way or two-way because it is based on real-world settings.

Trends of Social Media

A recent research reported by Ipsos MORI and commissioned by Marketing Week (Hotwire, 2006) studying Internet users across Europe showed that “blogs are second only to newspaper as a trusted information source, with 24 % of respondents considering blogs to be the most trusted source, well ahead of television advertising (17%) and email marketing (14%).” However, it is not only personal blogs, but also certain expert blogs, such as public relations blogs, that raises more concerns about message dissemination. Blogging as a new social platform can be perceived as “a voice channel to the brand, reinforcing the sense of brand personality, or enhancing the trust among brands” (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007, p. 16). The emergence of

these kinds of opinion sites also fulfill the prediction of public relations practitioners' conducting online communication.

Blogs as a symbol of corporations or independent individuals become a platform for a brand or a channel to attract consumers' attention and convinces them of the message being conveyed. The primary message for practitioners is the need to understand that they share control of the brand with consumers who want and expect to engage with them in a rich online dialogue. Blogs offer the opportunity to connect with an audience that is drifting away from traditional media and represent a new platform image to communicate with the audience.

Users may find blogs more credible because they are independent rather than controlled by corporate; bloggers may discuss issues traditional media shy away from because they might hurt corporations, while blogs also run stories from around the world that were unavailable or ignored by traditional media (Johnson & Kaye, 2004, p. 623).

Therefore, blog users are likely to consider blogs as a highly credible source of information.

However, recent articles (Galloway, 2005; Porter, Trammell, Chung, & Kim, 2007) further reinforce the research regarding the phenomenon of blogging by practitioners rather than other social media in other functions, such as collaboration (Internet forums, message boards, and wikis), multimedia (pictures sharing and video sharing), and entertainment (virtual worlds, and online gaming). Internet forums and message boards, as an online public opinion sites, are practical media channels to demonstrate the certain public's need and interest. In the communication and multimedia function, social media applications, like social networking or video sharing, "strengthen the relationship between publics and organizations, provide variety of communication channels, and administer overall potential impact on global communication and

media consumption for internet users than some traditional media channels” (MacManus, 2008). In the entertainment function, various concerns and communication strategies can be applied and studied in the virtual worlds because it involves both one-way and two-way communication characteristics.

A recent online report that surveyed 17,000 Internet users worldwide in March 2008 also states that 83% of Internet users watch video clips, up from 62% in the last study in June 2007; 78% of Internet users read blogs, up from 66%; 57% of Internet users are now members of a social networking site; RSS consumption is growing rapidly, up from 15% to 39%; and Podcasts are listened up from 48% (MacManus, 2008). At the same time, social networking sites have been featured as a key driver for the growth of social media and provide powerful statistical data as indicated by Universal McCann (2008): 22% of social networking users have installed a widget or applications; 55% have shared photos; 22% have shared their videos; 31% have started a blog; and the world’s biggest social network is MySpace with a 32% weekly reach followed by Facebook with a 23% weekly reach. These data all support the premise that Internet users heavily utilize social media as their main communication tool and practitioners involved in this new technology should also consider spending more time with online media to build a stronger relationship with their clients and consumers.

Social Media Use—Adoption of Social Media Diffusion of Innovation

Mechanism of Diffusion

The classic model of the diffusion of new ideas is innovation. The definition of the diffusion of innovation is “an innovation which is communicated through certain channels over time and among the members of a social system” (Rogers, 1976, p. 5). The innovation is also perceived as an idea, practice, or object that is new for other people or relative unit of adoption. According to Williams, Rice, and Rogers, (1988), “Mass media channels of communication are

usually more effective in creating awareness-knowledge of innovations, whereas interpersonal channels are more effective in forming, and in changing, attitudes toward a new media, and thus indirectly influencing the decision to adopt or reject a new idea” (p.71). Most users or adopters of the innovation evaluate, consider and try it in order to make the decision of utilizing it in the future.

Considering the concept of “over time,” users and adopters need time to adopt the new innovation. According to Williams, Rice, and Rogers (1988), time includes three critical aspects:

1. The innovation-decision process, the mental process through which an individual or other decision-making unit passes from first knowledge of an innovation to forming an attitude toward the innovation, to a decision to adopt or reject, to implementation of the new idea, and to confirmation of this decision.
2. Innovativeness, the degree to which an individual or other unit of adoption is earlier in adopting new ideas than other members of a social system.
3. An innovation’s rate of adoption, the relative speed with which an innovation is adopted by members of a social system.
4. A social system also provides a structure with regularity and predictability of behavior in a system. “A social system is a set of interrelated units (individuals, organizations, families, or nations) that are engaged in joint problem-solving to accomplish a common goal (Williams, Rice & Rogers, 1988, p.72).” Social norms, opinion leaders, change agents, aides (less than fully professional change agents) and consequences are five critical factors in a social system regarding to diffusion system.

Interactivity

The traditional diffusion of innovations can be applied to the adoption and use of interactive media. Williams, Rice and Rogers (1988) claimed that “the new communication technologies are distinctive in their degree of interactivity, which may uniquely influence their rate of adoption in organizations” (p. 70). Current social media is one well-known example of interactive online media. A “critical mass” of adopters who started to use the innovation is required in interactive media. In the beginning of the adoption process, the rate of adoption is

expected to be slower than other non-interactive media; however, after that, the rate will increase rapidly.

The Critical Mass in the Adoption of Social Media

A critical mass is defined as “a small segment of the population that chooses to make big contributions to the collective action while the majority do little or nothing” (Olive et al., 1985, p. 522-556) in human social behavior arena. The critical mass of adopters may also be utilized within branding issues in social media to be sufficient for an individual to adopt an innovation. Consider that a new media form in social media, such as social networking or blogs, is introduced on the Internet. Someone (in this study, practitioners) must adopt it first, but the first adopter cannot communicate with any other people until a second individual has adopted. However, if the first adopters think only of their own benefits at the time they adopt, no one would adopt.

This means that if the first practitioners in the social media would think about what may eventually be to their benefit or what may be beneficial for the growth of the Internet, this social media will have potential to become a popular interactive platform on the Internet. Therefore, “until there is a critical mass of adopters, an interactive communication has little advantage for each adopter” (Williams, Rice, & Rogers, 1988, p.74).

Diffusion of Innovations

Rogers (1995) defines the diffusion process as “which is the spread of a new idea from its source of invention or creation to its ultimate users or adopters” (p.13). There are five important steps in processing diffusion of innovations. First of all, the users or adopters become aware of and are exposed to the innovation, but they still lack comprehensive information about this new idea, practice or object. As their interest rises, they become more concerned about this new thing and then start to track additional information about it. This step is also called the interest or

information stage. Thirdly, they apply the innovation to their present and anticipated future situation, and consider the decision of utilizing it or not by self-evaluating. Finally, in the last stage, they make full use of this innovation and the so-called the trial stage, and continue utilizing the innovation fully. According to previous literature, social media, such as blogs, have been utilized by practitioners for a while. It is obvious that practitioners have adopted this innovative technology in their daily practice. In this study, practitioners will be also asked about their experiences using social media and what kind of social media they use for their clients in order to review the current trend of social media being adopted as an interactive innovation.

Product Placement Literature

Definition of Product Placement

Product placement concerns “the cooperative effort of advertisers and creators of entertainment products in which trademarked goods are embedded into popular entertainment products in order to encourage their consumption, overriding entertainment and artistic concerns is becoming a major player in TV” (Schejter, 2004, p. 2) and other media economics. However, not only on TV but also in the pervasive Internet-based world, there are more and more efforts to incorporate commercial activity to attract more people to buy something. Even the video game industry and high-technology companies try hard to participate in the Internet world. It is obvious that product placement or brand placement has been defined in various ways and exerted in dynamic areas.

Karrh (1998) defined product placement as “the paid inclusion of branded products or brand identifiers, through audio and/or visual means, within mass media programming” (p.33). On the other hand, in Russell and Belch’s article (2005), which investigated the manager’s role in the product placement industry, they defined product placement as “the purposeful incorporation of a brand into an entertainment vehicle” (p.74). They broadened the meaning and

purpose of product placement and tried not to restrict it to only common entertainment media, such as television and movies, but expand it to radio shows, songs and music videos, video games, plays and novels. This definition also considers the different modalities in which the brand may be presented and the multiple degrees of brand integration (Russell, 2002). Moreover, product placement also “epitomizes the blurring of the lines between advertising and entertainment and have been characterized as a type of hybrid advertisement” (Russell & Blech, 2005, p. 74).

Russell (1998), in his Tripartite Typology of Product Placements, categorized the placement along three dimensions: visual, auditory, and plot connection. The visual dimension, also called screen placement, refers to the appearance of the brand on the screen; the auditory/visual dimension refers to the brand being mentioned in a dialogue; the plot connection dimension refers to the degree to which the brand is integrated into the plot of the story (Russell, 1998). In general, Russell (2002) indicated that verbal placement was better recalled than visual placement; the plot connection did not influence recognition for auditory placement, but did improve recognition for visual placement.

Balasubramanian’s Hybrid Message Model

According to Balasubramanian (1994), product placement is “a product message that has been paid for and tries to influence film or television audiences through the intention and subtle placement of a branded product into a film or television program” (p.31). He argues that product placement falls into the category of hybrid messages (Sabour, 2004). A hybrid messages is a “paid-based model which provides a basis for the sponsor to control key message aspects, such as its content and format” (Balasubramanian, 1994, p. 30).

The audience may not figure out that they are the commercial influential target. As Balasubramanian writes,

Hybrid messages, with non-commercial characteristics, include all paid attempts to influence audiences for commercial benefit using communications that project a non-commercial character; under these circumstances, audiences are likely to be unaware of the commercial influence attempt and/or to process the content of such communications differently than they process commercial messages” (Balasubramanian, 1994, p.30)

The purpose of hybrid messages is also to attract the audience by the hidden non-commercial character dealt within the content of the message.

Because of its characteristics of overt and covert disguise through different communication channels, the hybrid message may appear believable. Given its special traits, ethical, legal or public questions concerning consumer welfare and education have arisen from the hybrid messages model. For example, hybrid messages can be used to stimulate a debate on how to balance the protection of the legitimate interests of the individual (e.g., a person’s desire to know—if, when, and by whom—he or she is being influenced with regard to a product) with the accommodation of First Amendment rights of commercial sponsors (Balasubramanian, 1994). Moreover, the proliferation of the use of hybrid messages in the 1980s underlies the growing future application in other traditional forms or new forms of marketing communities.

The Role of Public Relations Practitioners in Product Placement

Razafindralambo (2006) noted in his blog that “the reason why PR practitioners resort to product placement is because it’s a subtle way to communicate. It’s less apparent than in advertising because the product is blended with the story.” With the hidden non-commercial characteristic, practitioners can embed various brand or product messages carefully in various media to raise the audience’s attention indirectly. Moreover, product placement was perceived as the concept of creating a “consumption constellation” (Englis & Solomon, 1999) as “symbolic interdependencies of products, brands, or activities come to signify or perform social roles for audience members who use or avoid these products as means of gaining status or avoiding stigmatization” (Karrh, McKee, & Pardun, 2003, p.139). Product placement can be viewed as a

strategic method for practitioners to position the products, brands, or activities that consumers may avoid.

However, there is minimal literature coverage of the practitioners' role in product placement in previous studies. Pardun and McKee (1999) point out that early practitioners' understanding of product placement as a public relations strategy was low, and "little empirical evidence exists as to the actual level of strategic attention paid on the topic by public relations managers although there is a growing interest in understanding product placement as public relations" (p. 483). The role of public relations practitioner in product placement use has increasingly been reinforced, and the importance of product placement use for practitioners has also been addressed since the mid 1990s; however, a concurrent concept of product placement among practitioners has not been set up in order to exert in various new media according to Pardun and McKee's study.

The Entertainment Resources and Marketing Association (ERMA) was established in 1991 to highlight the practice of marketing and establish a code of ethics. Practitioners' concern about the ethics of utilizing product placement emerged in entertainment because of the frequent utilization of product placement in the industry. The ethical issues in current television shows represent the trend of TV producers to manipulate plot lines to accommodate profitable prop products, such as cookies, soft drinks, and sneakers, according to the online Ethics Newline report. That practice inspires the FCC to consider cracking down on product placement in TV shows.

According to Pardun and McKee's (2000) exploratory study of the role of the public relations firm exerting product placement, the firms were very knowledgeable about product placement. Strong evidence showed that 59.8% of practitioners reported they were either

extremely knowledgeable or knowledgeable about product placement. Nevertheless, the definition of product placement among practitioners is still inconsistent, which may lead them to the ambiguous practice in new media. At the same time, one question is driven: whether practitioners alter their knowledge on product placement or have different experiences in practicing product placement if they expand placement strategy to social media. Rather than the aspects of knowledge and experiences, perceptions of the practice of product placement have been discussed in several articles (Karrh, 1995 and Karrh, McKee & Pardun, 2003), such as viewers' familiarity to the media, future use, decision making, regulations or restriction. But they all focus on marketing or advertising practitioners in traditional media. Even Pardun and McKee (2000) focus on public relations practitioners in movies but not new media.

This study then will be guided by two research questions focusing on public relations practitioners' utilizing product placement in social media.

Research Question 1: How much knowledge and experience do public relations practitioners have regarding product placement, product placement in social media, and social media?

Research Question 2: How do PR practitioners perceive the practice of product placement, and product placement in social media?

Ethics of Product Placement

In 2007, *Marie Claire's* podcast, "The Masthead with *Marie Claire*" has raised ethical issues concerning the division of advertising and editorial in digital broadcasting. According to American Society of Magazine Editors board member Jacob Weisberg, "Advertising can't include the editors and shouldn't be produced by the editors." He continues

"A magazine's name or logo should not be used in a way that suggests editorial endorsement of an advertiser. The site's sponsorship policies should be clearly noted, either in

text accompanying the article or on a disclosure page, to clarify that the sponsor had no input regarding the content” (Bradshaw, 2007).

This podcast seemed to violate the regulations of magazine publicity. However, *Marie Claire* attempted to avoid the sensitive ethical issue and claimed that “ASME guidelines do not extend to podcasts and Webisodes” (Bradshaw, 2007). This definitely triggered an ethical war constructed around the concept of product placement.

Hackley, Tiwasakul and Preuss (2008) evaluated product placement from an ethical perspective to see if it is a deceptive practice. They summarized all the ethical issues related to product placement at macro and micro levels. At the macro level, product placement raises the concern of sustainability and overconsumption, damage of public manners and moral sensibilities of sustaining negative stereotypes of race, gender, or body types. At the micro level, criticisms in cases of deceit or subterfuge (e.g., misleading food labeling or differential price advertising) are implied about the possible deceptive actions in business practice. Also, this phenomenon can be seen as a force that undermines free speech and political debate in the interests of global business (Hackley, Tiwasakul, & Preuss, 2008).

By evaluating the ethics of product placement in entertainment media, Wenner (2004) argues that product placement is a deceptive practice. It will damage film artists’ rights and integrity in contributing to movies and exacerbate the excess commercialism situation in the entertainment media. In the above cases of ethical issues, placement need more restrictions and regulations in order to protect the publicity and the future creation in the media. Is product placement really a deceptive or ambiguous practice in the public relations arena? At present, there are no articles discussing the ethics issue in the public relations area. However, no research

article concentrates on product placement ethics in the realm of social media. So, this study presents one research question as follows:

Research Question 3: Do PR practitioners think product placement is ethical to use in social media?

Effectiveness of Product Placement

Research studies assessing product placement often consider recall and recognition, and the following product sales and measurements of press coverage of the placement. Practitioners, both in advertising and public relations, started to think more broadly and consider more factors to be pivotal to a product placement's success (Karrh, 1995; Pardun & McKee, 1999).

Practitioners wanted to reveal the brand being used on the channels, and avoid other competing brands that were emerging. They also believed that gaining publicity for the placement itself was the important element for evaluating the effectiveness.

Russell and Blech (2005) found that the role of product placement in companies is generally inconsistent. It could be placed in the public relations department, corporate communications, advertising department, or brand strategy sector. The result showed that product placement in many organizations was still an additional activity, not even part of the integrated marketing plan, and practitioners were working towards developing more functional tools to assess the placement's effectiveness (Russell & Blech, 2005). The most well-known tools are monetary values (sales) and outcomes (recall and association).

In the product placement industry, practitioners have seemed to advocate avoidance of being held accountable for their placement's performances because they believed that their clients appeared satisfied by simply seeing the brand embedded in the program. Some practitioners believe that the limited financial investment does not necessarily warrant much attention being paid to the placement's returns (Russell & Belch, 2005). However, effectiveness

is still a big concern for other practitioners who want to develop reliable and valid measures of product placement to understand the tactics and timely to integrate them in a timely manner into the communication or marketing plan.

Most of the past research studies of product placement attempt to measure the effectiveness, especially effects on brand recall, recognition, and attitudes (Babin & Carder, 1996; Gupta, Balasubramanian, & Klassen, 2000; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Karrh, 1995; Ong & Meri, 1994; Vollmers & Mizerski, 1994). According to a 1998 online article in *Brandweek*,

“Product placement is a tool of the promotion discipline, and is not usually credited with direct selling. Product placement is better suited for increasing brand awareness, enhancing brand image, identifying product with specific brand demographics and lifestyles, demonstrating product uses” (Marshall & Ayers, 1998). When considering the usage target, practitioners can easily distinguish each group, receiving audiences’ information from the companies and achieving more potential commercial opportunities.

When a product placement appears too often, consumers may adapt to its presence and filter it out of their vision. They may also start to ignore the presence of the brand/product, developing ad-blindness, and become so accustomed to the placement that they stop noticing it. The most important concerning disadvantage is audience attitude; the durability of their memories and purchase intention toward brands. Although it may increase the sales, it is still hard to measure the exact effectiveness of product placement. Practitioners cannot only exert product placement to maintain or increase the products’ or brands’ reputations while misrepresenting or misusing the brand; this may also cause a huge issue. Although the promotional dollars as the marketing aspect are not the main focus for public relations practitioners, the brand recall and the persuasive/image management function (recognition) then

play an important function for practitioners emphasizing the effectiveness of product placement, especially in social media.

Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the reason why public relations practitioners utilize product placement in social media, and the effectiveness of product placement, specializing in brand recall, recognition of brand preference, and observed behavior or attitude change in different social media. The investigation of this study was driven by the following question:

Research Question 4: How do PR practitioners perceive the effectiveness measurements of product placement including monetary value, outcomes (recall or recognition), or others?

Research Questions

- RQ1. How much knowledge and experience do public relations practitioners have regarding product placement, product placement in social media, and social media?
- RQ2. How do PR practitioners perceive the practice of product placement, and product placement in social media?
- RQ3. Do PR public relations practitioners think product placement is ethical to use in social media?
- RQ4. How do PR practitioners perceive the effectiveness measurements of product placement including monetary value, outcomes (recall or recognition), or others?

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

According to previous studies (Pardun & McKee, 1999; Karrh, McKee, & Pardun, 2003), product placement has been utilized among public relations practitioners for several years. Studies on social media (Wright & Hinson, 2008; Eryich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008) have also addressed public relations practitioners' utilization of and emphasis on social media. This study examines public relations practitioners' use of product placement in social media and how they perceive the effectiveness of product placement in social media and product placement in other media.

Sample Recruiting and Data Collection

To explore practitioners' perceptions of using product placement in social media and the perceived effectiveness on product placement, this study used a descriptive survey method in an attempt to describe or document current practitioners' attitudes and perceptions. The advantage of using survey research in this study is that it can investigate the present practitioners' conditions in a realistic setting at a reasonable cost expense via email. A nationwide survey of public relations practitioners was conducted. Systematic sampling was used, and a probability sample of 9,000 practitioners was drawn from the national 52 state Chapters roster of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), based in New York, is the largest organization for public relations professionals in the world. The organization has nearly 32,000 professional and student members, organized into more than 100 Chapters, and 19 Professional Interest Sections and Affinity Groups nationwide. The mission of PRSA is to build the public relations profession and professional in advancing the profession, strengthening the Society and establishing global leadership.

The email survey was only sent out once due to the private policy of PRSA. 9,000 emails were sent from March 6th to 13th in 2009. The data were collected from March 6th, 2009 to April 6th, 2009 via an email containing an embedded link to a survey Web site from which data was collected. A pretest was conducted prior the main survey with University of Florida graduate students.

Questionnaire Design and Development

The questionnaire was developed and revised based on previous studies (Pardun & McKee, 1999; Karrh, McKee, & Pardun, 2003; Eryich, Padman, & Sweetser, 2008). The questionnaire consists of seven-point Likert statements, multiple choices questions and open-ended questions mainly focusing on placement categories in social media. Statement scales range from “extremely agree”=7 to “extremely disagree”=1.

Questionnaire Introduction

The first part of the questionnaire contains an introduction of product placement and the range of social media. The researcher provided a written explanation regarding the purpose of the study and what the rights of the participant are in an Informed Consent Disclosure agreement. After giving written consent, public relations practitioners were asked to complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was in a four-page format and took between 10 to 15 minutes to complete.

In this part, the definitions of social media and product placement are also given to the participants to ensure they understand the terms. Social Media is defined as online communication tools by which people can share and receive information one-way or two-way in certain technology platforms offered by social media providers. There are four types of social media defined in this study.

- Communication: blogs (micro-blogs), social networking sites, Internet Forum, and event sharing sites.
- Collaboration: wikis, social bookmarking, social news sites, and opinion sites.
- Multimedia: video sharing, photo sharing, live-casting, and audio and music sharing.
- Entertainment: online game, virtual world, and game sharing sites.

Product Placement is also defined as the purposeful incorporation of a branded products or brand identifiers through audio/visual/plot connection means into a mass media.

RQ1. Experience and Knowledge of Product Placement and Social Media

Practitioners were asked about their experiences in using product placement in other media except social media. Their experiences of using social media were also addressed following. Practitioners with experiences of utilizing product placement were asked how knowledgeable they were in placing products or brands. In the second part, practitioners with experiences of conducting product placement were asked how much knowledge and experience they had regarding product placement in social media.

RQ2. Perception of the Practice of Product Placement

All practitioners with or without experiences of conducting product placement were asked to rate the Likert-type statements in their perceptions of product placement, including viewers' familiarity in the media, future use, the effect of single placement, decision making of placement using, restriction, and regulations. They were also asked to answer their perceptions of placing product/brand in social media, including viewer's familiarity in the social media, future placement use in social media, the effect of single placement in social media, decision making of placement using in social media, and placement regulations.

RQ3. Ethical Issues

Practitioners were asked about their perception of ethical issues of using product placement in other media except social media and using product placement in social media.

RQ4. Perceived Effectiveness Measurement of Product Placement in Social Media

All practitioners with or without experiences of using placement were first asked to answer how they perceived the effectiveness of product placement rating eight measures of effectiveness, revised from Karrh, McKee and Pardun's 2003 study on practitioners' views on product placement effectiveness: recall, recognition, brand image, recall with promoting, sales, purchase intention, attitude toward brands, liking of the media. Then practitioners with or without experiences of using placement were asked again to rate the eight items in social media settings.

Demographics

The final section was designed to gather information about respondents' gender, age, ethnicity, position level, salary level, and geographic location for statistical purposes.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

Pretest

A pretest was conducted prior to the main study with 6 students in the College of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of Florida via an email survey link to ensure whether there were any problems with the questionnaire items or survey instructions. Students were randomly selected from the student directory on the college Web site. Participants are all public relations major students at the graduate level major in public relations. Subjects included both males and females ranging in age from 22 to 32. The participants were told that the purpose of the study is to gather information on their thoughts and experiences on product placement and social media, and to identify the survey descriptions. Students were not offered an incentive for participation in the survey. The results show that all participants have conducted social media, but none of them have conducted product placement due to limited working experiences. The survey items were all clear and understandable for public relations students, so there was no change in the instructions and descriptions.

Survey Results

Sample

Of the 9,000 questionnaires submitted, 246 respondents were unreachable due to incorrect email addresses, 10 replied product placement is irrelevant topics to their positions via email, and one declined to participate. Of the 8,743 usable addresses, 201 responses were included in the data analysis. The response rate is 2.23%. The reason that the response rate is not high might be only submitting one time due to the Society's privacy policy.

Demographics

Table 4-1 reveals the result of demographics data. Around Seventy-two percent (72.4%) of the respondents were female; 27.6% of the respondents were male. 72.9% were Caucasian, 6.1% were Hispanic, 4.3% were African American, 4.3% were Asian American, and less than 1 % were Native American. Four respondents indicated a multi-cultural background, and 2 respondents did not report race. The median age range is 35-44 years old.

About one-third percent (29.4%) of the respondents indicated they were in a PR agency, 25.8% were affiliated with non-profit organizations, 20.9% had corporate affiliations, 11.7% had government affiliations, and 12.3 % indicated “other” affiliations. Most respondents were in executive positions (VP, Director, and Head of Department etc.), standing for 38.7%. One-third (31.3%) of the respondents indicated their position as managerial level, 6.1% were entry level, and 3.1% were free-lancers. Other positions represented 3.7 %.

Geographic data showed that 27.2% of respondents were in the southwest area, 24.7% were in the southeast, 19.1% were in the northeast, 8.6% were in the Midwest, and 4.3% indicated “other area.”

Questionnaire Results

RQ1. Knowledge and Experience about Product Placement and Social Media

Product Placement in Any Media except Social Media

More than one-third (38.3%) of the 201 responding practitioners (77 respondents) have ever or currently place a brand/product in any media except social media. Over 70% of these 77 respondents indicated they were extremely knowledgeable or knowledgeable in conducting product placement for their clients (rate 5 to 7). In addition, 23.8% of these respondents placed or currently place a brand/product in a newspaper, 22.6% in magazines, 19.6% in television shows, 6.4 % in movies, and 8.3% in “other media channels” (e.g., travel books used in hotels

and discovery maps, commercials, billboards, signs, events, movie theaters, airports, buses, television news, and trade journals).

Table 4-1 Respondents' demographics data

| Survey Item | | N | % |
|----------------|---|-----|--------|
| Gender | Female | 118 | 72.4 % |
| | Male | 45 | 27.6 % |
| Age | 18-24 | 13 | 8 % |
| | 25-34 | 53 | 32.5 % |
| | 35-44 | 24 | 14.7 % |
| | 45-54 | 41 | 25.2 % |
| | 55-64 | 27 | 16.6 % |
| | over 65 | 5 | 3.1 % |
| Race | Caucasian | 130 | 79.8 % |
| | Black | 7 | 4.3 % |
| | Native American Indian | 1 | 0.6 % |
| | Asian | 7 | 4.3 % |
| | Hispanic | 10 | 6.1 % |
| | Other | 8 | 4.9 % |
| Position Level | Entry Level | 10 | 6.1 % |
| | Experienced Level (Non-Manager) | 28 | 17.2 % |
| | Managerial Level (Managers, Senior/Junior Manager) | 51 | 31.3 % |
| | Executive Level (VP, Director, Head of Department etc.) | 63 | 38.7 % |
| | Free-lancers | 5 | 3.1 % |
| | Other | 6 | 3.7 % |

Placed Product/Service Categories in Any Media

Depending on the seventy-seven respondents' previous or current experiences, multiple product/service categories were displayed in the results, including food (12.5%), beauty equipment (7.2%), sport equipment (3.9%), computers (4.6%), office equipment (3.3%), alcohol (4.6%), children's toys (2.6%), restaurants (10.5%), clothing (7.2%), and tobacco (0.7%). Forty-three percent (42.8%) of the 77 respondents chose "others" (see Table 4-2).

Ten respondents placed in travel related service and medical related service/product distinctively. Seven placed in consumer electronics; six placed in automobile related products and technology distinctively; four placed in home building/décor and non-profit/governmental service distinctively; three placed in education, events, and branding distinctively; two placed in real estate. Nineteen places in other different products/services with only one time stated (mousetraps, retail locations, cooking equipment, industrial products, cards and gift items produced from the artwork of pediatric cancer patients, jewelry, business magazines, crafting, books, pet products, furniture, cleaning products, oil/gas, financial products, business-to-business services, banking, art, sport marketing, public service announcements, human services, expert commentary, Business-to-business services, and Services for individuals with disabilities) (See Table 4-3 for Frequency of Other Items in Any Media except Social Media).

Table 4-2 Placed product/service in any media except social media

| <u>Product Categories</u> | <u>%</u> | <u>N</u> |
|---------------------------|----------|----------|
| Food | 12.5 | 19 |
| Beauty Products | 7.2 | 11 |
| Sporting Equipment | 3.9 | 6 |
| Computers | 4.6 | 7 |
| Office Equipment | 3.3 | 5 |
| Alcohol | 4.6 | 7 |
| Children Toys | 2.6 | 4 |
| Restaurants | 10.5 | 16 |
| Clothing | 7.2 | 11 |
| Tobacco | 0.7 | 1 |
| Others | 42.8 | 65 |

Product Placement in Social Media and Social Media

Over two-thirds (69.1%) of 201 total respondents indicated that they have conducted social media for their clients, and 69.6% perceived themselves being knowledgeable in social media. Leading this media were blogs/micro-blogs, used for clients by 19.6%, followed by social

networking sites (18.3%), video sharing sites (13.3%), wikis (9.0 %), photo sharing sites (8.3%), Internet forums (7.4%), social news sites (7 %), opinion sites (4.6%), social bookmarking sites (4.4%), event sharing sites (4.1%), virtual worlds (1.3%), live-casting sites (1.1%), audio and music sharing sites (0.9%), and online gaming sites (0.7%).

Around twenty-one percent (21.5%) of 172 respondents (172 valid data of total 201 respondents) have ever conducted product placement in social media and 31.4% of these respondents perceived themselves as knowledgeable in conducting product placement in social media. Most of them (37 people) utilized blogs/micro-blogs and social networking sites to conduct product placement as the follows (See Table 4-4 for social media conducted for product placement): Internet forums, wikis, social news sites, video sharing sites, photo sharing sites, opinion sites, virtual worlds, event sharing sites, social bookmarking sites, and live-casting sites. None of them used audio and music sharing sites, or online gaming sites for product placement.

Table 4-3 Frequency of other items in any media except social media

| Other Items | Frequency |
|------------------------------|-----------|
| Real estate | 2 |
| Consumer electronics | 7 |
| Automobile products/Vehicles | 6 |
| Medical/ Healthcare | 10 |
| Technology | 6 |
| Travel entertainment | 10 |
| Education | 3 |
| Home building/ décor | 4 |
| Other service/product | 1 |
| Events | 3 |
| Non profit/Government | 4 |
| Branding | 3 |

Table 4-4 Social media that public relations practitioners conducted for product placement

| Social Media Types | Percentage | Respondents Number |
|--|------------|--------------------|
| Blogs/ Micro-blogs (e.g. Blogger, Twitter) | 23.7 | 32 |
| Social Networking Sites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace) | 22.2 | 30 |
| Internet Forum (e.g. Phbpp) | 9.6 | 13 |
| Event Sharing Sites (e.g. Eventful) | 1.5 | 2 |
| Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia) | 8.9 | 12 |
| Social Bookmarking Sites (e.g. Delicious) | 1.5 | 2 |
| Social News Sites (e.g. Digg) | 8.9 | 12 |
| Opinion Sites (e.g. Yelp, Trip Advisor) | 4.4 | 6 |
| Video Sharing Sites (e.g. YouTube) | 8.9 | 12 |
| Photo Sharing Sites (e.g. Flickr) | 6.7 | 9 |
| Live-casting Sites (e.g. Justin TV) | 1.5 | 2 |
| Audio and Music Sharing Sites (e.g. imeem) | 0 | 0 |
| Virtual Worlds (e.g. Second Life) | 2.2 | 3 |
| Online Gaming (e.g. World of Warcraft) | 0 | 0 |

Nine percent (9.1%) of respondents who conducted placement in food; 7.3 % placed in beauty products and clothing; 5.5 % placed in computers and restaurants; 3.3 placed in office equipment and children’s toys. Most respondents selected “others” for

placement in social media, the same as in any media except social media. Over 60% of them reported different product/service categories, such as: automotive technologies, grassroots groups, cooking equipment, expert commentary, healthcare, consumer electronics, special events, child sponsorship, campaign videos, blood and tissue donation, awards programs, medical services, education, vehicles, media, B2B services, wireless devices, leisure items, construction, education, public service, religious related, banking, cards & gifts produced from artwork by pediatric cancer patients, entertainment, destination marketing, home decor, crafts, video games, real estate, and organization brand names (See Table 4-5 for Frequency of Other Items in Social Media).

Table 4-5 Frequency of other items in social media

| Other Items | Frequency |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| Technologies | 3 |
| Nonprofit/Government | 4 |
| Medical /Health related | 5 |
| Consumer Electronics | 6 |
| Events | 3 |
| Vehicles | 2 |
| Real Estate | 2 |
| Education | 2 |
| Other service/product | 1 |

RQ2. Perception of Placing Product Placement in Social Media

Product Placement in Social Media

All 201 respondents were asked to respond to a series of Likert-type statements that highlighted their perception of product placement in any media except social media. Of the seven Likert-type statements listed on the seven-point scale with 1 being *extremely disagree* and 7 being *extremely agree*. Sixty-eight percent (68.16%) of total 201

respondents agreed, very agreed or extremely agreed “Product placement can increase the viewers’ familiarity to the media channel, such as movies, TV shows etc.” Over seventy percent of 201 respondents agreed, very agreed or extremely agreed “Product placement is likely to be used more in PR area in the future” (78.11%), “Product placement can lead to better monetary benefits for a client” (77.11%), and “The effect of viewers from a single placement is hard to measure” (77.64%). Most people (63 people) chose “Placement of some types of products should be restricted,” but only sixty-two (62.68%) percent of respondents agreed, very agreed or extremely agreed this statement. Few people placed the agreement on “Decisions about using placement is based more on intuition than on specific data” (56.72%) and “Placement is likely to come under regulations in the future” (40.8%).

All 201 respondents were also asked their perception of product placement in social media, but only 175 valid data presented. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents perceived, “Product placement can increase the online viewers’ familiarity with the social media” as important or extremely important. Over eight-six percent of the 175 respondents agreed “Product placement are likely to be used more in social media for PR practitioners in the future.” Around seventy percent (70.86%) of the 175 respondents agreed, very agreed or extremely agreed “Product placement can lead to better monetary benefits generated from the Internet for a client.” Almost eighty percent (77.14%) reported highly importance on the following: “The effect of online viewers from a single placement is hard to measure.” Nearly half of the 175 respondents agreed, very agreed or extremely agreed “Decisions about using placement in social media are based more on intuition than on specific data,”

“Online placement of some types of products should be restricted in social media,” and “Online placement are likely to come under regulations in social media in the future.”

Few respondents agreed with the following: “Product placement can increase the viewers’ familiarity to the media channel, such as movies, TV shows, etc.” than “Product placement can increase the viewers’ familiarity to social media.” Most respondents agreed that product placement is likely to be used more in PR area in the future, they can lead to better monetary benefits for a client, and the effect on viewers from a single placement is hard to measure. Most respondents reported a score of 7 (extremely important) in “Placement of some types of products should be restricted.” According to Table 4-6, there is no significant difference between product placement in any media except social media and in social media.

RQ3. Ethics Issue

About 70 % of the 201 respondents extremely agreed or agreed that product placement is an ethical practice in the public relations arena, and stated that conducting product placement in social media is an ethical practice.

RQ4. Perceived Effectiveness of Product Placement in Social Media

Effectiveness of Product Placement

Nearly one-third (32.5%) of the respondents have ever or currently measure placement effectiveness in any media. Among these respondents, 88.13% perceived “viewer’s recall” as one of the best means when the brand is included in the media without promoting it. 84.75% reported that “viewers’ recognition of the brand/product” is an effective means to measure placement effectiveness. 79.29% indicated that “viewer’s recall” is one of the best means when the brand is included in the media and is promoted. Only 74.07% of them replied that “Brand can be viewed in the media.” is the best means

to measure. Most respondents (40.68%) recorded the highest score, seven, in the option of “Sales of the brand after presenting in the media.” 83.05% of them perceived it as the best means scoring from 5 to 7. Only nearly two-third (67.25%) of the respondents indicated the effectiveness of viewers’ purchase intention for the brand. 79.32% reported viewers’ attitudes toward the brand as the best means. Viewers’ liking of the media only received 57.63% of support in the eight Likert Statement ranking from 1 (poorest means) to 7 (best means).

Effectiveness of Product Placement in Social Media

Only 17 respondents replied they have measured or currently measure effectiveness of product placement in social media. Ninety percent of these respondents perceived “viewers’ recall without promoting” and “viewers’ recall with promoting” when the brand is included in social media as two of the best means in social media, 84.21% indicated “viewers’ recognition of brand/product” as one of the best means in social media, 83.34% perceived “brand can be viewed in social media” as one of the best means to measure placement effectiveness, 95% of them claimed that “Sales of the brand after presenting in social media.” to be one of the best means, 80% agreed that “viewers’ purchase intention for the brand” is one of the best means, 84.22% agreed that the statement of “viewers’ attitudes toward the brand” is one of the best means, and only 55% agreed with “viewers’ liking of the social media.”

Compared respondents with experiences in placing product/brand in social media perceptions of effectiveness measurement of product placement in any media except social media (M1) to perceptions of effectiveness measurement of product placement in social media (M2) (see Table 4-7), the statement of “Viewers’ attitude toward the brand” represents a significant result. The result shows that practitioners with experiences in any

media, including social media, perceived that viewers' attitude toward to brand in traditional media is different from that in social media.

Respondents perceived the statement "Sales of the brand after presenting in the media," including social media, as the most effectiveness measurement and rated it over 6 (1=extremely disagree, 4=neutral, 7=extremely agree). On the contrary, respondents perceived the statement of "Viewers' liking of the media," including social media, as the most ineffectiveness measurement and rated it less than 5 (1=extremely disagree, 4=neutral, 7=extremely agree

Table 4-6 Practitioners’ perceptions of product placement

| Practitioners’ Perceptions Survey Items | M1 (N=201) | M2 (N=175) | F | Sig. P<0.05 |
|---|---------------|---------------|-------|----------------|
| Product placement can increase the viewers’ familiarity with the media channel, such as movies, TV shows etc. | 5.05 | 4.98 | 1.082 | .296 |
| Product placement are likely to be used more in PR area in the future. | 5.41 | 5.70 | 1.413 | .010 |
| Product placement can lead to better monetary benefits for a client. | 5.32 | 5.15 | 1.131 | .202 |
| The effect of viewers from a single placement is hard to measure. | 5.54 | 5.3 | 0.869 | .168 |
| Decisions about using placement are based more on intuition than on specific data. | 4.07 | 4.36 | 0.920 | .286 |
| Placement of some types of products should be restricted. | 5.05 | 4.6 | 0.923 | .292 |
| Placement is likely to come under regulations in the future. | 4.73 | 4.53 | 0.880 | .191 |

Note. M1 represents All Practitioners’ Perceptions of Product Placement in Any Media except Social Media, 201 respondents; M2 represents All Practitioners’ Perceptions of Product Placement in Social Media, 175 respondents. 26 respondents had missing data in M2. Practitioners’ Perceptions Survey Items are rated on a 7-point scale, where 1=extremely disagree, 4=neutral, and 7=extremely agree. The initial sample of practitioners’ perceptions was 201.

Table 4-7 Practitioners perceived effectiveness measurement of product placement

| Effectiveness Measurement of Product Placement Survey Items | M1 | M2 | F | Sig. (p< .05) |
|--|-------|------|--------|------------------|
| 'Viewers' recall, without promoting, of the brand's inclusion in the media | 5.579 | 5.65 | 0.945 | 0.451 |
| Viewers can recognize the brand/product | 5.79 | 5.63 | 1.195 | 0.354 |
| Viewers' recall, with promoting, of the brand's inclusion in the media | 5.526 | 5.5 | 0.954 | 0.459 |
| Brand can be viewed in the media | 5.368 | 5.5 | 1.009 | 0.491 |
| Sales of the brand after presenting in the media | 6.316 | 6.35 | 0.686 | 0.287 |
| Viewers' purchase intentions for the brand | 5.421 | 5.4 | 1.3067 | 0.287 |
| Viewers' attitude toward the brand | 5.947 | 5.47 | 3.796 | 0.003* |
| Viewers' liking of the media | 4.684 | 4.55 | 1.615 | 0.157 |

Note. M1 represents Practitioners' Perceived Effectiveness Measurement of Product Placement in Any Media except Social Media, 20 respondents; M2 represents Practitioners' Perceived Effectiveness Measurement of Product Placement in Social Media, 19 respondents. 1 respondent had missing data in M2. Practitioners' Perceptions Survey Items are rated on a 7-point scale, where 1=extremely disagree, 4=neutral, and 7=extremely agree.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Discussion

The main object of this study was to examine utilization of product placement and social media in the public relations industry. The results show that product placement is still not widely used in the public relations area. Some of the respondents stated that it was irrelevant to their current practices and organizations. One respondent commented that:

As a PR practitioner, I rarely engage in ‘product placement’ as a function of what I do. If you meant more product review, that is more in line with PR, but product placement as I know it is more advertising or paid opportunities.

This may provide support of Pardun and McKee’s (2000) assumption that “public relations practitioners are more comfortable with unpaid product publicity tools than are their advertising counterparts.”

Respondents who indicated that they were experienced in product placement perceived themselves as very knowledgeable or knowledgeable in product placement. They conducted varied placement in different product/service categories in multiple media channels. These results provide evidence that product placement in the public relations arena is not recognized as a popular strategy for a client, but practitioners who have ever conducted or currently conduct product placement play an active role in choosing whether to use product placement to enhance a client’s product or service.

This study also investigates the role of social media. The evidence shows that social media has been highlighted in the daily practice for respondents’ clients. Practitioners utilize every type of social media for their clients. Even when product placement is involved, practitioners still expansively integrate clients’ products/services into different social media and perceive themselves as very knowledgeable or knowledgeable in conducting placement in social media.

The results emphasize the importance of social media for public relations practitioners. Evidence shows that the two leading social media are blogs and social networking sites. These two media channels entail more interactivity with their audience and receive higher attention in research and practical applications.

There is less evidence that practitioners have substantially changed their views on measuring placement effectiveness or their methods from other media to social media. One respondent commented that:

As a public relations professional, I do not regularly measure sales or revenue during evaluation because it is not an objective for staff management.

From the results of research question four (RQ4), most respondents rated sales as most effectiveness measurement of product placement. It is interesting that “sales” become a concern for practitioners in this study. Although practitioners do not measure their sales exactly, the evidence shows that practitioners perceived and utilized sales to evaluate the effectiveness of placement in any media, including social media. However, viewers’ liking of the media does not matter to the effectiveness measurement of a placement for practitioners who have experiences in placing media in any media including social media. According to the result, viewers’ attitude toward the brand has a significant result in any media except social media and in social media. This presents that practitioners perceived viewers’ attitude toward the brand in social media as more effective than in other media except social media.

Finally, there is no evidence that practitioners have substantially changed their perceptions of product placement in any media, including social media.

Implications for Public Relations Practitioners in Online Platform

Most articles introduce blogs as one of the most effective and popular communication channels in public relations; however, few studies emphasize and research other social media

which are emerging and grabbing more audiences' attentions from the previous literature. This study reveals that in the reality, public relations practitioners not only focus on blogs, but also on social networking sites, video sharing sites, wikis, photo sharing sites, and internet forums etc. The results of this study can be adopted for different topic studies, such as branding issues, to review public relations practitioners' perceptions, attitudes, ethical thinking, and knowledge/experience in social media. The evidence in this study also reveals that blogs, social networking sites, and video sharing sites are the top three social media. So, in terms of practical implications, this study provides practitioners with the data of popular social media which they could conduct in the future for their clients.

Although product placement has been viewed as a non-PR function strategy or irrelevant tools in most public relations practices among public relations practitioners, the evidence in this study still indicates a good opportunity for practitioners to reconsider this technique. This study asked all practitioners to answer the questions about their perceptions of product placement. From the results, most of the public relations practitioners had positive perceptions toward the future of product placement. They even perceived that product placement can lead to increased better monetary benefits for a client. Therefore, in the reality, there are still many practitioners who perceive this technique as a functional tool for their clients and even apply it in the newest media. Besides, this study linked product placement with social media, which may provide practitioners' with another option of exposing clients' brands/products in a non-traditional medium since most practitioners only conduct placement in media other than social media. Clearly, placement in social media still offers a good chance for practitioners to practice for their clients. According to the results, practitioners perceived viewers' attitude toward a brand would

change in different media. This evidence provides practitioners a different aspect from viewers' point. They should consider utilizing different media channel in placing product/brand.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitations of this study is response rate. This study only presents 201 samples because of the data collecting time was limited and only submitted to practitioners one time due to the private policy of PRSA which do not encourage using the membership data for research purpose. Longitudinal studies can be applied in this study to understand more practitioners' perceptions, knowledge, and experiences in product placement and social media. Open-ended questions regarding effectiveness measurement can be provided in the future to find different or innovative methods in social media. This study addresses the difference in practitioners' perceptions between effectiveness measurement in any media except social media and in social media; other measurement factors do not appear in the study. Future research can also target at certain social media to impel more specific data in conducting product placement. Those in a managerial role had a higher respondent rate in this study. Future studies can also address the managerial role in conduct product placement in the public relations arena. Obviously, more research needs to be done in order to understand the utilization of product placement in social media.

APPENDIX
QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire Introduction

Dear Professional Public Relations Practitioners,

I am a public relations master student in the University of Florida. Under the supervision of Dr. Janis Page, I am currently exploring practitioners' perception on utilizing product placement in the social media. Your response not only means a lot on my research but also on the trend of PR industry.

This survey will only take you 10-15 minutes. Please read each questions carefully and respond thoughtfully and honestly. The information from you will not be released to any person. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. You have the right to withdraw consent for participation at any time without consequence. There are no known risks or immediate benefits to the participants of this study. There is no compensation to you for participating in the study.

If you have any questions about this research protocol, please feel free to contact Ping Wang at 352-328-7440, and the supervisor of this study Dr. Janis Page at 352-392-0491.

Description: You are invited to evaluate public relations practitioners' perception on product placement in social media.

Procedures: First, on the following pages you will first read about the definitions of product placement and social media. Next, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire about product placement and social media.

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

Ping Wang, master student, G035 Weimer Hall, College of Journalism and Communications

UFIRB Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250, 352-392-0433

Ping Wang

Master in Public Relations

College of Journalism and Mass Communications

University of Florida

This part shortly explains the basic definitions of social media and product placement. Please read carefully and answer the following questions regarding these definitions.

Social Media is defined as “online communication tools by which people can share and receive information one-way or two-way in certain technology platforms offered by social media providers.”

There are four types of social media.

1. Communication: blogs (microblogs), social networking sites, Internet Forum, and event sharing sites.

2. Collaboration: wikis, social bookmarking, social news sites, and opinion sites.

3. Multimedia: video sharing, photo sharing, live-casting, and audio and music sharing.

4. Entertainment: online game, virtual world, and game sharing sites.

Product Placement is defined as “the purposeful incorporation of a branded products or brand identifiers through audio/visual/plot connection means into a mass media.”

Questionnaire Context

1) Have you ever placed or do you currently place a brand/product in any media channel except social media?

Yes

No, skip to question 6

2) Do you perceive yourself as knowledgeable in conducting product placement for your client?

(7= "strongly agree" to 1= "strongly disagree")

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

3) What kind of products have you ever placed in any media? (You can choose more than 1 answer.)

Food

Beauty Products

Sporting Equipment

Computers

Office Equipment

Alcohol

Children Toys

Restaurants

Clothing

Coals

Tobacco

Other (Please Specify):

4) In what media channels, have you ever placed or do you currently place a brand/product? (You can choose more than 1 answer.)

Television Shows

Movies

Radio

Magazines

Newspaper

Other (Please Specify):

5) Please rate the following brand characteristics that will lead to effective placement.

(7= "extremely important" to 1= "not at all important")

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The brand/product has a very recognizable package or design.

The brand/product is associated with other supportive promotion and advertising.

The brand/product has unique traits.

The brand/product is well-known.

The brand/product has many strong competitors in the market.

The brand/product is new to market.

The brand/product has been placed in other mass media.

6) Do you agree the following statements about product placement?

(7= "extremely agree" to 1= "extremely disagree")

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Product placement can increase the viewers' familiarity to the media channel, such as movies, TV shows etc.

Product placement is likely to be used more in PR area in the future.
Product placement can lead to better monetary benefits for a client.
The effect of viewers from a single placement is hard to measure.
Decisions about using placement are based more on intuition than on specific data.
Placement of some types of products should be restricted.
Placement is likely to come under regulations in the future.

7) Do you agree product placement is an ethical strategic practice?

(7= "extremely agree" to 1= "extremely disagree")

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

8) Have you ever utilized any social media for your client?

Yes

No, skip to question 11

9) Do you perceive yourself as knowledgeable in social media?

(7= "strongly agree" to 1= "strongly disagree")

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

10) What kind of social media have you ever used for a client? (You can choose more than one answer.)

Blogs/ Micro-blogs (e.g. Blogger, Twitter)

Social Networking Sites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace)

Internet Forum (e.g. Phbpp)

Event Sharing Sites (e.g. Eventful)

Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia)

Social Bookmarking Sites (e.g. Delicious)

Social News Sites (e.g. Digg)

Opinion Sites (e.g. Yelp, Trip Advisor)

Video Sharing Sites (e.g. YouTube)

Photo Sharing Sites (e.g. Flickr)

Live-casting Sites (e.g. Justin TV)

Audio and Music Sharing Sites (e.g. imeem)

Virtual Worlds (e.g. Second Life)

Online Gaming (e.g. World of Warcraft)

11) Have you ever conducted product placement in social media?

Yes

No, skip to question 15

12) Do you perceive yourself as knowledgeable in conducting product placement in

SOCIAL MEDIA?

(7= "strongly agree" to 1= "strongly disagree")

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

13) What kind of products/brand have you ever placed or do you currently place for?

Food

Beauty Products

Sporting Equipment

Computers

Office Equipment

Alcohol

Children Toys

Restaurants

Clothing

Coals

Tobacco

Other (Please Specify):

14) What kind of social media have you ever used for product placement? (You can choose more than one answer.)

Blogs/ Micro-blogs (e.g. Blogger, Twitter)

Social Networking Sites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace)

Internet Forum (e.g. Phbpp)

Event Sharing Sites (e.g. Eventful)

Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia)

Social Bookmarking Sites (e.g. Delicious)

Social News Sites (e.g. Digg)

Opinion Sites (e.g. Yelp, Trip Advisor)

Video Sharing Sites (e.g. YouTube)

Photo Sharing Sites (e.g. Flickr)

Live-casting Sites (e.g. Justin TV)

Audio and Music Sharing Sites (e.g. imeem)

Virtual Worlds (e.g. Second Life)

Online Gaming (e.g. World of Warcraft)

15) Do you agree the following statements about product placement in SOCIAL MEDIA? (7= "extremely agree" to 1= "extremely disagree")

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Product placement can increase the online viewers' familiarity to the social media.

Product placement are likely to be used more in social media for PR practitioners in the future.

Product placement can lead to better monetary benefits generating from the Internet for a client.

The effect of online viewers from a single placement is hard to measure.

Decisions about using placement in social media are based more on intuition than on specific data.

Online placement of some types of products should be restricted in social media.

Online placement is likely to come under regulations in social media in the future.

16) Do you agree product placement conducting in SOCIAL MEDIA is an ethical strategic practice?

(7= "Strongly Agree" to 1= "Strongly Disagree")

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

17) Do you currently measure or have you ever measured placement effectiveness in any media?

Yes

No, skip to question 21

18) What are the best means of measuring placement effectiveness? (7= "best means" to 1= "poorest means")

Viewers' recall, without promoting, of the brand's inclusion in the media

Viewers can recognize the brand/product

Viewers' recall, with promoting, of the brand's inclusion in the media
Brand can be viewed in the media
Sales of the brand after presenting in the media
Viewers' purchase intentions for the brand
Viewers' attitude toward the brand
Viewers' liking of the media

19) Do you currently or have you measured the placement effectiveness in SOCIAL MEDIA?

Yes

No, skip to question 21

20) What are the best means of measuring placement effectiveness in SOCIAL MEDIA?

(7= "best means" to 1= "poorest means")

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Viewers' recall, without promoting, of the brand's inclusion in the media
Viewers can recognize the brand/product
Viewers' recall, with promoting, of the brand's inclusion in the media
Brand can be viewed in the media
Sales of the brand after presenting in the media
Viewers' purchase intentions for the brand
Viewers' attitude toward the brand
Viewers' liking of the media

21) Gender:

Male Female

22) Age Range:

18-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

Over 65

23) Ethnic Background:

Caucasian

Black

Native American Indian

Asian

Hispanic

Other (Please Specify):

24) Current Regional Area:

Northeast

Southeast

Midwest

Northwest

Southwest

Other (Please Specify):

25) Types of Public Relations:

Agency

Corporate
Non-profit
Governmental
Other (Please Specify):
26) Position Level:
Entry Level
Experienced Level (Non-Manager)
Managerial Level (Managers, Senior/Junior Manager)
Executive Level (VP, Director, Head of Department etc.)
Free-lancers
Other (Please Specify):
27) Annual Salary Level:
\$20,000-\$40,000
\$40,001-\$60,000
\$60,001-80,000
\$80,001-100,000
Over 100,000
N/A

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ping Wang was born in Taipei, Taiwan. The second child of three children, she grew up mostly in Taipei, Taiwan, graduating from Taipei Municipal Zhong Shan Girls High School in 2002. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration in 2006. Upon completion of her master program in December, 2009, Ping will keep her interest in social media and public relations, and fulfill her interest in her future career.