Commentary

How Movies Influence Our Dietary Behaviour?

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ABSTRACT

Movies include a shockingly high number of products – it is almost impossible to have a movie with no brand exposure at all. As entertainment fills a large part of our lives, product placements have invaded our social sphere more than we can imagine. Just as for the tobacco industry, until something is done to reduce and eliminate the images of unhealthy dietary behaviour on film, movies will remain one of the most powerful forces in the world promoting unhealthy sugary diets and serving the industry's financial interests. The unhealthy lifestyle that is portrayed on the screens through extensive consumption of food items especially high in sugars, and how this can influence people's dietary behaviour, is the main concern and discussion for this article. Thus, this article tries to give an overview of the current situation and how exactly it is possible for movies to influence the things we eat. Just as the tobacco industry has had a long history of working to influence Hollywood, the sugar industry will most probably face the same future. And this is not what films should be about.

INTRODUCTION

Entertainment fills a large part of our lives. Every day we listen to music, watch movies or television shows, read newspapers or magazines, go out to nightclubs, lounges and bars, dine at restaurants, participate in sporting events – everything we do has a connection to the entertainment business in some way or another. But while being entertained and enjoying our time, people do not tend to acknowledge to the fullest that there are some parties at play who wish more than merely to entertain. Every piece of entertainment has a financial goal, to maximise profits, in addition to being popular and cited. The necessity for producers of entertainment to break even is a perfect match for today's advertising industry, where agencies are always looking for different approaches to please their clients – product integration.

Product placement is becoming more and more an integral part of advertising in general. The agencies need new innovative ways in order for the brands or products to stand out in today's massive flow of information. As it happens, product placement in movies, television series, talk shows or any other programme showed on the screens, is a great way to combine two industries – entertainment and advertising. According to Donaton (2004), the convergence of entertainment and advertising industries is inevitable as the business models of the two industries are showing severe problems. Donaton explains how these industries need to overcome distrust, divergent agendas and creative conflicts to form mutually beneficial partnerships in the fear of extinction.

Movies include a shockingly high number of products – it is almost impossible to have a movie with no brand exposure

at all. Although there might be only a few official brand names listed on the poster or homepage of the movie, in reality there is a long list of other brands getting their coverage. Presumably people notice that most characters in movies give some references to specific brands to convey a message or signify a lifestyle. It is all about brand-dropping.

According to cultivation theory, the more time people spend watching movies and television in general, the more likely they are to develop the same kind of view of the world that is depicted on the screens. It is as easy as seeing women primarily in domestic roles in the movies, and then based on that, develop the idea that such roles are most appropriate for women.

There have been numerous studies looking at the correlation between tobacco and alcohol exposures on the screens and consumption of the products. Most of the studies conclude that this type of advertising, stealth marketing, has a direct influence on people's choices in their everyday lives. There have also been studies investigating the number of food brands depicted in the movies and the association with obesity and unhealthy dietary habits (Barcus 1980; Conner, Armitage 2002; Gunter *et al.* 2005; Lewis, Hill 1998; Skatrud-Mickelson *et al.* 2011, etc.). Exactly this, the unhealthy lifestyle that is portrayed on the screens through extensive consumption of food items especially high in sugars, and how this can influence people's dietary behaviour, is the main concern and discussion for this article. Thus, this article tries to give an overview of the current situation and how exactly it is possible for movies to influence the things we eat.

As the product placement industry is now a significant part of advertising, then throughout the article I often apply traditional advertising frameworks and concepts to product placement. In this article, I try to take a consumerist point of view in showing how brands, products and lifestyles portrayed in movies influence and sometimes-even control our lives.

PRODUCT PLACEMENT

The term "product placement", or "brand placement", describes the integration of a product, or a brand, into the broadcast media, and usually in exchange for money. In simple words – if a company wants its brand to show up in a movie or television series, the company pays the producer agreed-upon sum of money (or gives other non-monetary benefits such as the products themselves to be more exact) in return for the product placement. Karrh (1998) estimated that 90 per cent or even more of the product placements are done on a barter basis, where the product or service is simply traded for exposure in the movie or program. According to Stacy Jones, Founder and CEO of Hollywood Branded, the current situation offers and even thrives on no-fee and barter trade opportunities, but the overall trend for paid placements are becoming more formalized, with more corporations – and their ad agencies – embracing storyline integration within content (Sauer 2013). Terms "product placement" and "brand placement" are more or less interchangeable as the overall aim of the company is to get publicity and raise brand-awareness – it usually does not matter whether it is through a certain product or the brand itself.

Product placement has been defined as "a paid product message aimed at influencing movie or TV audiences via the planned and unobtrusive entry of a branded product into the movie or TV programme" (Balasubramanian 1994). Maynard and Scala (2006) described product placement as a strategic marketing tactic, a process through which an advertiser pays to place a product in a movie. They called product placement an alternative route for traditional overt advertising. Karrh (1998: 33) defined product placement as a paid inclusion of branded products or brand identifiers, through audio and visual means, within mass media programming. My favourite definition of the term comes from Snyder (1992: 302) by whose words product placement is a matter of "placing" a product or a brand in one or more scenes of a film, in one

form or another, in return for payment.

Product placement is not necessarily limited to movies or TV – commercial insertions of a product can also easily be found in songs, novels and video games. The wider term for these kinds of product placements is called "branded entertainment".

In the end, it does not really matter exactly how you define the term itself, but product placement has grown significantly over the last 30 years. Already in 1985 and 1986, Friedman found a substantial increase in the incidence of brand names within best-selling novels and popular songs since World War II, and all of the mentions were unpaid. Placements as a paid and strategic marketing tool did not receive greater attention from marketers and movie producers before the placement success in *E.T.* in 1982. According to Karrh (1998), Hersey claimed a 65 per cent increase in sales of Reese's Pieces following the film's release.

Although the wider usage of product placements started after Reese's Pieces, the practice itself was not new. Already in the 1930s, MGM Studios kept an office for soliciting placements (Rothenberg 1991), but it was not until the 1990s when the industry started to take off. The practice of product placement and integration is only now just entering its heyday after more than 80 years of quiet existence and build up (Sauer 2013). Product placement is well on its way to becoming "a core part of most corporations' marketing strategies". What was once an efficient way for lowering film and television production costs is now frequently used as the basis for multimillion-dollar integrated promotional campaigns (Karrh *et al.* 2003). Some of the largest deals up to date are Spielberg's *Minority Report* in 2002 with 25 million dollars, Lee Tamahori's *Die Another Day* in 2002 with 55 million dollars, and Marc Forster's *Quantum of Solace* in 2008 with 60 million dollars (Goodwin 2008; Harlow 2011) paid for different products to be shown on the screens. The last James Bond movie in 2012 by Sam Mendes, *Skyfall*, saw the main character swapping his trademark martini for a sip

of a Heineken beer in a 15-year partnership deal between the 007 franchise and the brewer (Schultz 2012). The overall product placement budget for the latest Bond movie, according to Harlow (2011), was around 45 million dollars. But that is just one side of the coin. As Anderson Cooper's 007 profile on 60 Minutes reported, companies do not pay to be placed in a Bond film but agree to spend millions marketing the movies. Heineken, 007's beer of choice in *Skyfall*, spent $75 million on a worldwide ad campaign. (Cooper 2012)

How does this system work – how do those 45 million dollars find their way to a specific movie? There can be different ways, but in general the industry involves two groups of professionals – placement agents and producers (of the movie or the program or the media in general). And then there are middlemen between the marketers and producers who try to bring the two together, typically working on a retainer basis. The major movie studios tend to have their own departments who handle product placement opportunities and work directly with the agencies, depending on the size of the deal and whether some of the brands have limited their agreements through only one agency. Advertising agencies and public relations firms may also become involved in negotiations for their clients (Pardun, McKee 2000). For example Hollywood Branded arranged for BlackBerry's role in the 2012 hit *Zero Dark Thirty*; Propaganda GEM was the product placement firm behind the original *Iron Man*–Audi partnership and BMW's efforts in *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol* (Sauer 2013).

As more and more power seems to go into the hands of producers and marketers in deciding which brands will be placed and how the scenes should look, the directors and the artistic crew have less and less of a word in the whole process. This is not necessarily true for all of the productions out there, but according to a study in India, where product placement is pervasive, there can be tensions between the artistic goals of the director and the commercial goals of the brands (Barn 2009). Maybe

these tensions stand out in India more than they do elsewhere because of cultural reasons, otherwise they should be clear in Hollywood where there are more product placements than there are in Bollywood. According to one study, there was a significantly higher number of product placements in Hollywood, that were integrated into the movies, verbally referred to by the characters, appropriate to the movie scenes, and contained implied endorsements by the actors, than product placements in Bollywood movies (Gokhale 2010).

Before continuing with the future of product placement, I would like to take a look at one of the main reasons why product placement has become such a popular instrument to advertise brands. The main and foremost crucial reason is the wider popularity and usage of videocassette recorders and other similar control devices (Arnold 2006; Lehu 2007). The recorders have enabled the consumers to avoid the classical 30-second commercials altogether, which means that advertisers started to look for new ways to get their products and brands into the minds of consumers. According to some statistics, product placement saw an outstanding increase of 84% in television shows in 2005 alone (Mitchell 2005). Not surprisingly, a study by Arnold (2006) found that the family viewing hour, 8pm to 9pm, is filled with product placements that include a variety of different types of products and brands that would not be a part of the viewing experience otherwise. Now as branded entertainment is becoming more and more popular, we have also seen many books and articles written on the history of product placement during the last decade (Newell *et al.* 2006; Lehu 2007; Segrave 2004). The history is one thing, but what about the future?

The future of product placements on TV and in the movies will most probably see a shift in the whole industry: television programs can become so interactive that the time lag between brand exposure and purchase opportunity could basically be non-existent (Karrh *et al.* 2003). We already now see television sets connected to the internet – it will not take long before you can

purchase anything you see on TV straight away by entering a virtual store without standing up from the couch and just pressing a button on your remote. Better yet – in the future you will most probably do not even have to push any buttons as all the systems can be controlled by voice commands.

Nowadays, there have been companies developing technologies to add product placement digitally, meaning that the integrations are done in postproduction – on the one hand, this enables brands to target only specific markets that they are interested, and on the other hand, this enables producers to offer product placement deals to companies that are more easily identifiable by the target market audiences. A company called MirriAd has already arranged about 70 major brands into this kind of premium content (Castillo 2012a). Another new venture out there on the market matches product opportunities with record labels – producers received an estimated 20 million dollars from brands for music video appearances (Castillo 2012b).

The list of similar ways companies are trying to make money and/or sell products through the so-called hidden advertising is almost endless. Why hidden? For one thing, quite many people most probably even do not notice the brands consciously in the movies; secondly, the companies paying for product placements do not have to reveal their identity, and thus, these kinds of hybrid messages enable the brands to control the message content, in addition to disguising the commercial origins and appearing believable (Lai-man, Wai-yee 2008). The study by Lai-man and Wai-yee found that explicit and integrated product placements were more effective and influential on people's responses than implicit and non-integrated ones. In other words – people tend to think more favourably of the brands that are integrated more into the story and perhaps used directly by the main character rather than brands that are used as props in the background. The background, implicit placements might be perceived as less favourable and/or ethical because of the

possible effects on our sub consciousness, and therefore more difficult to spot right away as targeted advertising. At the same time, another study found that the consumers' affective behaviour was not influenced by the fact that the principal actor was using the branded product (Van der Waldt *et al.* 2008).

In either way, for the end consumer, for the movie audience, it is always best to be aware of the products being placed in the movies – then everybody can make their own decision regarding the placement: some people may find it irritating, whereas some people see it as an everyday thing.

Product placement is a good tool, but it cannot be overused. Today's youth recognize product placement more easily and understand the corporation's greedy aims in doing so – thus, in the end, the consumption of that particular product might even fall (Lehu 2007). While some products, on the other hand, just seem to fit perfectly in a given movie in order to bring out specific characteristics of the main character or perhaps pass over a certain feeling about the atmosphere.

It is quite easy to construct a character yourself by applying some of the brands or products that are typical for certain kind of people. In other words – stereotyping. Let us say the main character in a movie is a successful, married with two children, well-travelled investment banker. From this description, one can already start to imagine what kind of things enhance the feel of the character: estate house in a descent neighbourhood, two cars in the parking lot and one of them is a SUV, the character would go to certain types of restaurants and lounges, read certain types of magazines, etc. All in all – the character would most probably consume those kinds of products that fit the image, and this boils down to those companies and brands in having the necessary image. In making the character's life seem real, products necessarily come into play.

And who said that branded entertainment is restricted to brands as commercial items? We could just as easily look at placements not for products, but places. Imagine what would be the effects on tourism in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, after it held a prime location in the next James Bond movie? Estonian Film Commission is actively working on promoting the country as a shooting location (similarly Film Office Latvija in Latvia and Vilnius Film Office in Lithuania), but it is not an easy task. As for Estonia, one of the first and most well-known examples is most probably Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* in 1979 which was partly shot in Tallinn. During Soviet times, Tallinn was used as a "western" location for Soviet films such as *Sherlock Holmes,* and *Hamlet*. (Estonian Film Commission 2013) But none of them was set up as a branded placement of a location, obviously. The closest thing to real branding of a country has been Maureen and James Tusty's documentary *The Singing Revolution* in 2006, and more recently perhaps Robbie Williams' concert in Tallinn which was broadcasted live to cinemas across the world (Tambur 2013).

On a larger scale, one recent example of a location placement is the online broadcast of Chinese mini-series *Heartbeat Love* that has gained wide coverage and popularity in social networks while being wholly funded by the Australian Tourism Commission (Sauer 2012). The story kicks off in Australia, which has undoubtedly helped to pitch the joys of visiting Down Under to young Chinese consumers.

But how influential exactly are the placements? Product placement has been found to be quite effective in terms of engaging the viewers: research confirms that product placement can have greater impact with program audiences than is typically found with comparable advertising exposures (Karrh *et al.* 2003). But unfortunately, there is not a good measurement tool developed yet to see how successful certain product placements have been. But as soon as there will be a way to effectively measure the benefits and outcomes of product placements, we can be sure to see an even larger increase in the whole industry. Because it is not just the increase in sales numbers that show how well the placement

turned out; the best product placements, as with any other advertising campaign, are successful if they manage to change the consumers' attitudes towards the brand even or slightly better than they were before. The purchase does not have to happen tomorrow or the following week; it may as well happen next year as long as it happens.

Will Rogers has said, "Advertising is the art of convincing people to spend money they do not have for something they do not need" (Tibballs 2004: 16). From advertising psychology's point of view, it is basically all about hyping the product or brand so that the consumer believes that he or she really needs it and cannot live without it – whether it is based on emotional needs or wanting to be part of a social group, it all boils down to psychology. Today's global consumerism world has been conquered by brands and "brands". These can be products, celebrities, influential organisations or well-known regular events. Simply hearing the name of it will have an influence on average Joe's behaviour and choices, and these choices are not driven by practical attributes of the brand, but rather dependent on the brand image's psychological value (Bachmann 2009). It depends on what kind of feelings the consumer has towards the brand and whether the consumers recognise their own identity and view on life through the brand's quality and values.

REGULATION
OF PRODUCT PLACEMENT

Blurring the distinction between television shows or movies and advertisements makes it harder for people to recognise when marketers are targeting them. Concerns about the increased number of advertisements on the screen and the usage of more subtle forms of advertising, including product placement, have led to calls for tighter regulations governing televised advertising. This development can be regarded as useful and necessary to protect the ones who are more vulnerable to advertising influences, especially children. Organisations like the Food Standards Agency in Britain are very concerned about

the quantity of advertising that feature sugary or fatty foods because these might affect children's dietary habits (Gunter *et al.* 2005). Here we have to take note that a large number of the organisations still believe that all fatty foods are equally bad for your health and do not even make the distinction between saturated fatty acids and trans fatty acids.

According to a study by Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity (2009), the least healthy products such as cereals are being advertised to children most aggressively. The industry, just as the tobacco industry, has set up a number of initiatives in an effort to ensure responsible advertising to children, such as the Council of Better Business Bureau's Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative established in 2006 as voluntary self-regulation program. But, just as with the tobacco industry that will be discussed further on, self-regulatory approach does not go far enough to limit the excessive advertising in today's media. Researchers at Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity found that cereals marketed directly to children have 85% more sugar, 65% less fibre, and 60% more sodium than cereals marketed for adult consumption. In spite of the industry pledges to reduce unhealthy marketing to children, the large companies with market dominance still continue to target children with their least healthy and most addictive products. The study also concludes that six out of the ten worst cereals in terms of content were from one producer, which also happened to advertise to children more than any other cereal company. To put this all into perspective, cereal companies spend almost 156 million dollars a year on advertising to children alone. (Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity 2009)

Although the tobacco industry has repeatedly denied active involvement in the entertainment business, previously secret tobacco industry documents made available in the USA show that the industry has had a long and deep relationship with Hollywood (Mekemson, Glantz 2002). The relationship between the two industries is

almost endless: placing tobacco products in movies and on television, encouraging celebrities to use the products and endorse them, advertising in entertainment oriented magazines, designing advertising campaigns to reflect Hollywood's glamour, and sponsoring entertainment oriented events – all these are examples of cigarette companies sponsoring the entertainment industry. Whether or not a financial exchange in terms of money takes place between the industries, the result is the same: cigarettes are being marketed to a global audience through films.

Mekemson and Glantz (2002) have studied the history of tobacco industry disputes that resulted in the 1989 Congressional Hearings in United States, which did not actually resolve anything. The response from the tobacco industry was similar to that in the past when other advertising practices became controversial and increased the likelihood of regulation: promise to not do it again. The cigarette companies declared the problem solved by modifying their voluntary Cigarette Advertising and Promotion Code. In 1990, the companies added: "No payment shall be made by any cigarette manufacturer or any agent thereof for the placement of any cigarettes, cigarette packages, or cigarette advertisements as a prop in any movie produced for viewing by the general public." (Mekemson, Glantz 2002: i87) Yet, the so-called voluntary ban did not disturb the companies to provide free products, signs and other props without making any payments. In 1998, the Cigar Association of America amended its placement policy, parroting the cigarette industry: "A cigar manufacturer should not subsidize the use of cigars in movies or television productions through paid or donated cigar placements or otherwise." (Mekemson, Glantz 2002: i88)

Thanks to all of the actions taken, the tobacco industry is now one of the most highly regulated industries for marketers. Some or all forms of tobacco advertising are banned in many countries, including Estonia, but that still does not keep moviemakers from inserting tobacco usage into their films.

But looking at the product placement regulation overall, then there is no international regulation for product placements just as there is not any for advertising. According to a report by Wegener (2008), a non-profit organisation Commercial Alert has been lobbying Federal Communications Commission in the United States to establish more stringent disclosure guidelines for movies and television programmes. The idea is that every time there is a product placement on television then there would be a "pop-up" notification to disclose the presence of product placement. The same kind of support has been asked from the Federal Trade Commission, arguing that the failure to clearly identify and disclose product placement arrangements is misleading and damaging to viewers.

The United States' law does not currently prohibit product placements in broadcast or motion picture industries, however undisclosed commercial messages in broadcasting have been regulated already since 1927 (Wegener 2008). On the other hand, product placements are indeed governed in all radio and television broadcasts, where it is usually enough to announce the sponsor at the end of the program in the credits by something similar to "promotional consideration provided by".

Federal Trade Commission has broad jurisdiction over advertising practises regardless of the medium. Unlike the Federal Communications Commission, who has announced that it is going to revisit product placements through a new inquiry, the Federal Trade Commission has affirmatively declined to regulate product placements (Wegener 2008).

Some of the branded entertainment cases have also ended up in courts, but the general ruling has been that due to expressive, artistic, or entertainment content it is a medium for communicating ideas, and as such expression is non-commercial then it is entitled to First Amendment protection. The conclusion that enhanced regulation of product placement would be a breach of free speech has been brought up many times (Lewczak, DiGiovanni 2010).

Product placements in films and international programmes has been allowed on UK television for many years, but starting from 28 February 2011, television programmes made for UK audiences specifically can contain product placements as long as they comply with Ofcom's rules.

Ofcom, the independent regulator and competition authority for the United Kingdom communications industries, set forward first guidance notes for commercial references in television programming in 2011. The Ofcom rules regulate that "broadcasters must maintain independent editorial control over programming" and "broadcasters must ensure that editorial content is distinct from advertising" (Ofcom 2013: 46). In order to ensure this, product placement in UK must be signalled by a universal logo at the beginning of the program, every time the program comes back from a commercial break, and at the end of the program in which the placement appears. The logo rule, however, only applies for programmes produced specifically in channels licensed by Ofcom. This means that all programmes that were originally aired outside of UK do not have to show the logo. In other words – if a US series is shown in UK, then that programme does not need to display the universal logo. (Ofcom 2013)

In China, where product placement is a relatively new marketing concept compared to other countries, the existing advertising laws are too general in nature to control the rapid development and increasing implementation of product placement marketing (Han 2010). After Ofcom in United Kingdom set forward certain rules to product placement, China's broadcast media governing arm State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television has reported that they are considering new regulations for product placement in films and television shows and advertising laws as this kind of practice has "prompted numerous complaints from audiences" (Trachtenberg 2011).

As for Estonia, the law concerning product placements is more or less the same as in the UK – product placement is allowed in feature films in cinemas and on TV, in TV series as well as in sports and entertainment shows. In order to let the viewer know about the product placement, it must be signalled clearly at the beginning of the program, every time the program comes back from a commercial break, and at the end of the program in which the placement appears. The law also stipulates that product placements are forbidden in shows aimed at children, and also that product placements of tobacco products as well as prescription drugs are forbidden.

All in all, the non-profit Commercial Alert has argued that undisclosed or poorly disclosed product placements can, in the long run, encourage obesity, diabetes and alcoholism. Wegener's (2008) report concludes with a remark that further restrictions on product placements are unnecessary as long as quantifiable damages to the viewers can be accounted for.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON HEALTH, MOVIES AND ADVERTISING

Marketing on television showcases less-healthful options, with emerging research suggesting movies promote similar products. Previous research on health and movies has mainly focused on tobacco and alcohol – their depictions in movies and influence on people's habits. There has also been some research done on the role of television and movies on obesity and the increasing number of people impacted by it. Obesity means accumulation of excess fat on the body – excess bodyweight is the sixth most important risk factor contributing to the overall burden of disease worldwide. According to Haslam and James (2005), 1.1 billion adults and 10% of children are now classified as overweight or obese. This means that the consequences of obesity, such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and several cancers, are far more common today than they were couple of decades ago, and it is a leading cause of preventable deaths in the United States, together with tobacco use and high blood pressure (Haslam, James 2005).

Sargent *et al.* (2001b) viewed the contents of the top 25 US box office films for each year of release, from 1988 to 1997 with 250 films in total, comparing the frequency of cigarette brand appearances in films produced before the voluntary ban on paid product placement by the tobacco industry (1988–1990) with films produced after the ban (1991–1997). Their study found that more than 85% of the films contained tobacco use, whereas the brands appeared in 70 (28%) films. Based on ratings of the films, brand appearances were as common in films suitable for adolescents as they were in films for adults (32 vs. 35%), and were also present in 20% of those rated for children. The study also concluded that prevalence of brand appearance did not change overall in relation to the ban after 1989. On the contrary, many studies have concluded that smoking in films increased throughout the 1990s, despite the ban (Mekemson, Glantz 2002; Stockwell, Glantz 1997). Then again, there are also studies that show a modest decreasing trend in smoking portrayals in 1990s (Mekemson *et al.* 2004). The contradictions between different studies is a result of different approaches and different ways of defining exactly how smoking is measured – number of appearances, number of minutes on screen, etc.

However, in the Sargent *et al.* (2001b) study there was a striking increase in the type of brand appearance depicted, with actor endorsement increasing from 1% of films before to 11% after the ban. In addition, the study revealed that four most highly advertised US cigarette brands accounted for 80% of brand appearances, confirming the advertising motive to this practice.

You would not need a research to tell you that watching films is a favourite activity of adolescents, but the same researches have also concluded that films often depict smoking (Roberts *et al.* 1999; Roberts 2000; Strasburger, Donnerstein 2000). Research has also come to the conclusion that adolescents whose favourite actors smoke in films are more likely to have tried smoking (Distefan *et al.* 1999; Tickle *et al.* 2001).

Going even further, then studies have found strong, direct, and independent links between seeing tobacco use in films and adolescents trying cigarettes – the magnitude of the association suggests that influence from films is as strong as other kinds of social influence, such as smoking by a parent or sibling (Sargent *et al.* 2001a). In other words, adolescents with higher exposure to films that show movie stars having a smoke are significantly more likely to have tried smoking themselves, even when taking into account other factors that are linked to adolescent smoking.

Whereas most of the mentioned studies have been carried out in United States, there are also examples from other places around the world, such as Japan – a study by Ota, Akimaru, Suzuki, and Ono (2008) found that, on average, Japanese movies depict smoking just as much as Hollywood movies, which does not necessarily mean that we can draw all the same conclusions, but is a good indicator that the phenomenon holds true in all the markets. A recent study also found that European adolescents, compared to the United States, have access to considerably more movies in general, and this allows them to see more movies that depict smoking in particular (Hanewinkel *et al.* 2011).

A study by Glantz *et al.* in 2012 reported that there were nearly 1 900 portrayals of smoking and other tobacco usage among the 134 highest-grossing films at the box office in 2011. According to their study, total tobacco portrayal per movie rose 7% from 2010 to 2011, ending 5 years of decline; with a rise of 34% per movie rated G, PG, or PG-13 and 7% per R-rated movie. (Glantz *et al.* 2012)

Overall, most researchers and studies conclude and agree that monitoring, education, and advocacy should continue in order to change the policy and bring tobacco depiction rates down. Continuing on previous researches on health and movies in general, then some studies reveal an association between exposure to alcohol consumption in movies and youth drinking, but the evidence seems to be sparse. One study found that

the association between alcohol exposures on the screens and youth drinking is influenced little by cultural differences between countries and is more specific to movie alcohol depictions (Hanewinkel *et al.* 2012). Another recent study, which was looking at whether college alcohol drinking depicted in films had any impact upon subsequent college student drinking, found that college alcohol drinking exposure had direct effects on drinking and its consequences (Osberg *et al.* 2012). According to the study, the derived belief that drinking is central to college life had the strongest effect.

It is not surprising that alcoholic beverages become increasingly attractive as young consumers move into their teenage years. Based on various studies, it can be concluded that by mid-teens young consumers are demonstrating more complex reasons for liking particular features of an advertisement – the represented values and aspirational lifestyles are important. This leads to indirect ways of being manipulated by the marketers as alcoholic drinks are being associated with specific role models, social situations, and attractive attributes that people hope to emulate and enjoy. Such a kind of advertising, including product placement, carries messages that drinking is a norm in today's world. This is the same world to which young people aspire, influencing their development of self-identity. (Greenberg *et al.* 1986)

The role model factor is certainly worth emphasising as depiction of drinking by attractive, successful, famous, and affluent people create an ambience around drinking that portray alcohol consumption as an appealing activity. This problem-free activity is rarely associated with harmful consequences despite the amount, according to a study by Grube (1993). Grube finds it not surprising then that young impressionable consumers might develop a taste for alcoholic beverages themselves – it certainly predisposes youths to unhealthy drinking behaviours and beliefs.

As one can surmise by now, movie alcohol exposure can be associated with drinking more alcohol. A study by Stoolmiller *et al.* (2012) found that movie alcohol exposure as well as peer drinking, alcohol-branded merchandise, age and rebelliousness are all associated with both alcohol onset and progression to binge drinking in adolescents in the United States. Youngsters who watch films featuring alcohol exposure are twice as likely to start drinking compared to peers who watch comparatively fewer of such movies. The study also concludes the more or less obvious point that limiting media and marketing exposure could help prevent both onset and progression of adolescent alcohol drinking. On a wider scale, however, the study by Stoolmiller *et al.* (2012) cannot be generalised beyond the United States because of the limitations in the design of the research, although similar associations and conclusions are not difficult to come to with the extensive use of alcohol brands in movies.

Understanding advertising to youth should be a public health imperative, especially given the obesity epidemic. According to studies, youth in the USA see more than 3 billion food, beverage and food retail establishment impressions annually (Skatrud-Mickelson *et al.* 2011). Studies note that given the public health crisis of obesity, future research should further investigate these trends, as well as the potential association of these unhealthy exposures in youth.

Gunter, Oates, and Blades (2005) were concerned about advertising aimed at children, and particularly the promotion of food products. It turns out a large proportion of advertisements aimed at children promote food or drinks – half of the advertisements on British television concern food, according to Lewis and Hill (1998). In their analysis, they found that a third of these advertisements were for cereals, a third were for sweets and snacks, and the rest were mostly for ready-made meals and similar convenience foods, all of which are far from being the healthiest choices for children. This kind of advertising is quite one-sided as there is practically no advertising done to promote healthy eating. This is mainly because of the relative wealth of the ad-

vertisers who market the unhealthy food products, whereas those who advocate healthy eating do not have the same resources available to convey their message (Conner, Armitage 2002). Only a few health campaigns could match the size and extent of the marketing that is usual for a product such as a chocolate bar or a cereal. Gunter, Oates, and Blades clearly understand and bring out these results in children being exposed to a large number of advertisements trying to persuade them to choose sweetened drinks and snack foods, while there has been little emphasis put on advertising alternative, more healthy foods (2005).

Strasburger and Wilson (2002) argue that persuasive nature of food advertising might be partly accused in the dramatic increase of the number of children with obesity in the United States. The relationship between advertising and dietary behaviour is not always clear (Lewis, Hill 1998), but there are proven records of a correlation between children's recall of food advertisements and with what they ask for at the supermarket (Galst, White 1976) and with what they eat (Hitchings, Moynihan 1998).

Barcus (1980) did a series of content analyses of American television and found that children's advertising consisted mainly of four product categories: toys, cereals, candies, and fast-food restaurants. The study's sample revealed that food advertisements accounted for 60% of commercials, and of these, 70% were for highly sugared and fatty foods such as cereals, confectionary, cake and cookies. The same conclusions, including a clear bias toward unhealthy food advertisements, have been also derived in later studies (Lewis, Hill 1998).

Just as advertising in general uses different time slots to target different audiences, so does the product placement niche. In terms of advertising, a Saturday morning program on television in the United States is full of mentions and exposures to highly sugared foods, whereas weekday evening programs contain substantially fewer advertisements of that sort, and such weekday evening viewing is even positively correlated to nutritional knowledge (Wiman, Newman 1989).

Following on the trail of better nutritional knowledge, exposure to advertisements for healthy foods, including those with no sugar content, are said to reduce preferences for sugared foods, according to a overview by Scammon and Christopher (1981). They reviewed nine experimental studies of the impact of nutrition messages and one of the conclusions was that exposure to sugared products on screen led to greater consumption of such foods, including a greater preference even for other types of sugared foods despite not being displayed. All in all, most of the experimental research on this subject has, unfortunately, measured short-term or medium-term influences on dietary habits, whereas in order to fully understand the current situation behind the obesity epidemic, long-term effects should also be looked at.

There also happens to be a study by Caroli *et al.* (2004) about the role of television as a tool for preventing childhood obesity, but unfortunately, they did not find anything more conclusive than a speculation that television could be a convenient tool to spread correct information on good nutrition and obesity prevention. It is also true that some researchers have investigated the possibility that any negative effects of advertising can be counteracted by promotional messages for more nutritional foods, like including food advertisements with pro-nutritional messages (Galst 1980). That sounds fair enough, but as we have already argued in the previous sections, money talks, and thus, information on good nutrition and obesity prevention does not reach screens that often, unless health and non-governmental organisations step in.

Similar to the tobacco study done by Sargent *et al.* (2001a), there was a study carried through for food and beverage brands by Sutherland *et al.* (2010). The study identified and coded brand placements for foods, beverages, and food retail establishments in the top 20 US box office films for each year from 1996 to 2005 with 200 films in total. The results showed that

69% of the 200 movies contained at least 1 food, beverage or food retail establishment brand being exposed, while movies rated inappropriate for children under 13 and restricted under 17 years of age were significantly more likely to have brand placements. More brand placements were also found in comedies, action adventures and horror films compared to other genres. The study identified candy and salty snacks to be the most prevalent food brands with appearances in 26% and 21% of the movies respectively, while sugar-sweetened beverages appearing in no less than 76% of the movies making them the most prevalent beverage brands. As for fast food – they composed 2/3 of the food retail establishment brand placements. Sutherland *et al.* (2010) conclude that the vast majority of the brand placements were for energy-dense, nutrient-poor products that are unhealthy for children as well as adults.

Yang and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2007) noticed that brands such as Evian, Dr Pepper, Pepsi, Coke, Sprite, M&Ms were well-presented with as long as 10-second exposures in movies like *Legally Blonde, Mission to Mars, Ghostbusters, Miss Congeniality, Liar Liar, Spider Man, Twister, The Client, etc*. Yang and Roskos-Ewoldsen brought out that there are three levels of placements depending on the effectiveness: (1) placements in the background; (2) usage by the main character; (3) integration into the story.

CONCLUSION

Product placements have invaded our social sphere more than we can imagine. Not only do we need to decrease our reliance on refined sugar and a heavy carbohydrate diet, and replace some of the things we have lost, we need to understand that this kind of depiction in films is just another way for big corporations to earn money, and are not part of film theory as such. There is a definite need to overcome hurdles and create business models based on content-commerce partnerships.

Just a couple of hundred years ago most humans hardly ate any refined sugars. Nowadays, it is a significant part of the western industrial diet, contributing up to 18% of our total energy. These refined sugars include sucrose, high fructose corn syrup, glucose, syrups and other sugars. That is a huge problem according to Lustig (2012). The diseases linked to sugar and too much insulin speak for themselves: infertility, liver disease, dementia, cancer.

Each year, Americans spend billions of dollars on dieting, diet foods, diet books, diet pills, and the like. Another 75 billion dollars is spent on treating the diseases associated with obesity. Furthermore, businesses suffer an estimated 20 billion dollars loss in productivity each year from absence due to illness caused by obesity. (Galletta 2012) But how much do the companies of consumer-packaged goods earn?

Just as for tobacco industry, until something is done to reduce and eliminate the images of unhealthy dietary behaviour on film, movies will remain one of the most powerful forces in the world promoting unhealthy sugary diets and serving the industry's financial interests. Although a recent study found an increase in tobacco depiction in 2011 compared to 2010, it would still make sense for other industries, such as alcohol and sugar, to receive similar emphasis on monitoring.

Gunter, Oates, and Blades (2005) conclude that on a social level, advertisements contain representations of different aspects of social reality. Exposure to repeated depictions of social groups and social behaviours on a regular basis can shape people's social perception and social attitudes more than we can probably imagine. If product placement goes as far as to invade all the possible industries, then a minute would not go by without someone trying to sell something. These effects could easily operate on people's perceptions of what is the norm – there are hundreds of examples of men and women classified into doing particular types jobs or using certain products or services, and this kind of stereotyping can go a long way.

Based on the research up to date, authorities can evaluate the commitments by food companies so far, and try to change

the nature of food advertising directed at children as well as adults promised by the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative pledge.

This may be a new idea for people in today's developed world where everybody is looking for simple reasons why we are getting more obese year-by-year and accustomed to blaming everything from a slow metabolism to myopia on genetics – but dietary behaviour is one of the key cornerstones of human health.

If the hypothesis that sugar addiction is just as real as cocaine addiction, then why we are allowing corporations add more and more sugar to our everyday food products, whereas cocaine is condemned all over the world. Sugar is just as addictive as nicotine, people must understand that. By looking into the past, we may just discover how to lead healthier lives. (Lustig 2012)

Everybody can be manipulated by clever marketing. The value of this form of advertising is emphasised frequently in tobacco industry documents relating to product placement. Just as the tobacco industry has had a long history of working to influence Hollywood, the sugar industry will most probably face the same future. And this is not what films should be about.

The power of film to promote social acceptance of certain food products is incredibly strong. This kind of promotion makes the items more desirable, particularly among young people, and as long as this phenomenon continues the sugar industry will follow the steps of the tobacco industry to utilise this medium.

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