



Product Placement in Mechatronics Movie to Promote Places, Culture, and National Heritage

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Abstract. Through product placement, animated content can serve as a window into different cultures, traditions, landmarks, and customs. By featuring authentic elements within the narrative, such as iconic architecture, traditional costumes, or renowned landmarks, animated films, create immersive experiences that generate interest in real-world destinations. This marketing tactic might enhance tourism and local economies. Audiences may be encouraged to visit a place or culture in an animated film. Tourism, income, and cultural interaction may rise. This study analysed the product placement in Mechatronics Movie using the Schaf-ermeyer method, with a definition of mise-en-scène that emphasized culture and national heritage. In conclusion, the mise-en-scène in Mechatronics Movie show-cases unique cultural elements in promoting Malaysia. Animation helps preserve and celebrate our global history by stimulating awareness and understanding of various cultural identities.

Keywords: Mechatronics Movie, Animation, Product Placement

1 Introduction

The world's leading brands always spend money to display their logos and advertise their products. Marketing includes advertising as a component. While marketing is the overall strategy for communicating with consumers about your brand, advertising is typically a form of paid communication designed to generate sales. Advertising can be temporary for a special promotion or ongoing, but it typically requires an investment. The advertisement (ads) is displayed on all types of media, from print ads, television ads, billboards, social media, YouTube sponsored ads, and Facebook ads to the smallest web banner. This continuous advertising never stops.

2 Product Placement

Product placement is a marketing strategy that involves the strategic placement of a product within a film or television series in a subtle manner, with the intention of avoid-ing overt advertising [1]. After achieving widespread recognition and establishing a

strong brand identity, companies may leverage product placement as an additional avenue for advertising. This involves strategically placing their products within various media formats to increase brand visibility and consumer awareness. According to [2], product placement involves a consortium of advertisers who create compelling content by integrating their products into various forms of media such as movies, TV shows, commercials, theatre plays, video games, and even schoolbooks, with the aim of promoting sales.

On an international scale, there are an increasing number of product placement strategies in modern dramas on television. Many businesses use product placement strategies to increase brand awareness and develop new markets by exposing their brand image in popular dramas. One of the most common definitions of product placement is a paid product message intended to influence audiences through the planned and unobtrusive introduction of a branded product into a film or television program [3]. The utilization of product placement strategies is gaining significance in communication campaigns, as well as in TV shows and film adaptations. Numerous instances could be referred to substantiate this assertion. During the 2019 broadcasting of the *Maharaja Lawak* TV reality show in Malaysia, a box of Scotts brand tissues was conspicuously placed on the jury's table. The 2016 cinematic production of *Batman vs. Superman* features the incidental appearance of a Turkish Airlines aircraft in the background of the movie's plot. Several products are slated to make an appearance in the film. Some examples of brands that have been associated with popular fictional characters include Warby Parker, which is the eyewear brand worn by Clark Kent, Gillette, which produces razors, and Chrysler, the vehicle driven by Bruce Wayne. Additionally, the Gucci handbag is a fashion accessory carried by Diana. The entire process is carefully orchestrated by a group of advertising experts.

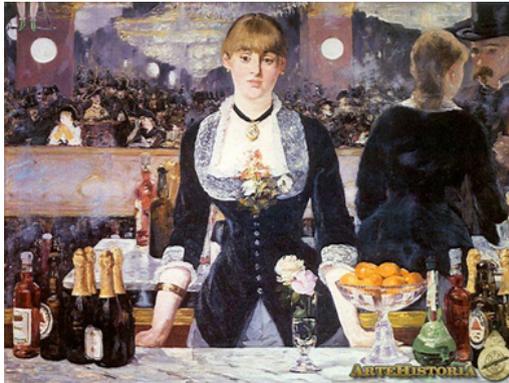


Fig. 1. Un Bar Aux Folies-bergere (1882) Oil on Canvas, 96 cm x 130 cm

This product placement is often associated with movies and television. However, it is said to have started long before television technology began. It has existed in theaters and stagings in the United States. The book *Around The World in 80 Days* published in 1873 by Jules Verne has been attributed as an early medium that used product placement in storytelling. Transport companies at the time were said to have tried to lobby

Jules Verne to include their company's name in the book. There is no certainty whether it happened on purpose or paid. Like the painting *Un Bar Aux Folies-bergère* (Figure 1) by Édouard Manet in 1882 which experts see as a painting that exploits product placement. Whether Édouard Manet placed this brand of liquor to make a profit or simply to reveal the state of reality in his paintings cannot be determined.

2.1 Lifestyle Marketing

Lifestyle marketing is a technique that embodies products with emotional or aspirational ideals to “sell the lifestyle” [4]. Instead of showing just the products or services, this type of marketing shows the functionality, appeal, and charm of the product. A lifestyle that consumers have long associated with this product. Traditionally lifestyle marketing is being used by brands that are already well-established.

Nike does not need their logo on its international television commercials. Very minimal if any. They project the joy and leisure of playing sports. That's enough. The Nike Freestyle football commercial featuring Brazilian Ronaldo is a good example. This one-minute commercial first aired in 2003, shows the football star juggling a ball with an animated ‘stickman’. There was no close-up of the Nike logo in any part of the commercial. However, through lifestyle marketing techniques, Nike has associated playfulness with its products. Consumers believe they will be better and happier at sports by wearing Nike products – not because of the quality, technology, comfort, or beauty, but because of the cool, fun but sporty image that has been aligned with Nike.

In its 2022 *Never Settle, Never Done* commercial, Nike showcases speed, technical ability, and sheer quality in women’s football. This music video-like commercial combines footage of professional footballers, upcoming stars, grassroots talents, dance, and simply today’s girls. Directed by Valentin Petit this commercial is a fast-cut piece that doesn’t focus on the logo, rather it sends a message that women’s football is strong and booming.

2.2 Local Advertisement

Petronas, Malaysia's national oil and gas company, has embraced the practice of producing commercials that coincide with the country's significant celebrations, such as Merdeka, Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Chinese New Year, and Deepavali. This series of TV commercials, which adopts lifestyle marketing techniques, was initiated in the late 1990s under the direction of the late Yasmin Ahmad. What sets these commercials apart is their departure from traditional corporate branding practices. They forgo the use of corporate colors, logos, or gas station imagery, and instead focus on conveying messages that are unrelated to oil, gasoline, or their applications.

Rundingan is a Petronas’ Chinese New Year 2023 commercial. This 6 minutes Internet commercial is a story that emphasizes family values, the importance of preserving heritage, and the value of negotiation. Rather than emphasizing its core products, Petronas uses these commercials as a platform to promote national unity and cultural diversity among Malaysia's major ethnic groups. The advertisements serve as powerful vehicles to showcase the shared values, traditions, and aspirations that bind the nation

together. By featuring narratives that resonate with people from various backgrounds, Petronas successfully creates a sense of inclusivity and belonging.

Through this approach, Petronas establishes a strong emotional connection with its audience. Consumers who use Petronas oil or engage with the company in any way are likely to feel a sense of pride and contribution to the nation. By associating themselves with Petronas, they perceive themselves as active participants in fostering national harmony and celebrating the richness of Malaysia's cultural tapestry.

3 Product Placement in Animation

The public will interpret 'animation' whether it is a TV series, film, or digital game as a cartoon, animal character, and 'for children'. Children have no purchasing power. So logically, there is no point if product placement is made in an animated film. However, this perception is not entirely accurate and overlooks several crucial factors. While it is true that animation is often associated with cartoons and animal characters, it is a misconception to assume that animated content is solely for children. The appeal of animation extends far beyond the younger demographic, and it has a significant impact on audiences of all ages.

Firstly, it is important to recognize that animation has evolved over the years and has expanded its reach into various genres and themes. Animated films and TV series now cover a wide range of storytelling styles, encompassing everything from fantasy and science fiction to drama and comedy. These diverse narratives can resonate with different age groups, including teenagers, young adults, and even older audiences. Moreover, animation has a unique ability to convey complex and thought-provoking messages through visually captivating storytelling techniques. It can tackle profound subjects, explore intricate emotions, and address social issues in a manner that is accessible and engaging for viewers of all ages. Animation's versatility allows it to transcend conventional boundaries and connect with audiences on a deeper, more personal level.

Additionally, it is essential to consider the influence of animation as a cultural and artistic medium. Animated films and TV series often receive critical acclaim and accolades from prestigious awards ceremonies, demonstrating their significance as works of art. They have the power to captivate audiences with stunning visuals, intricate animation techniques, and masterful storytelling, attracting viewers who appreciate the craftsmanship and creativity involved. Furthermore, the impact of animated content extends beyond the cinema or television screen. The rise of digital platforms and streaming services has allowed for broader accessibility and exposure to animated content. This has led to a thriving fan base and online communities dedicated to discussing, analyzing, and supporting animated works. These communities comprise individuals of different age groups who are passionate about animation and actively engage with related merchandise and products.

Considering these factors, it becomes evident that product placement in animated films, TV series, or digital games can indeed be effective and worthwhile. While children may not possess direct purchasing power, they still hold significant influence over

their parents' buying decisions. Older audiences who appreciate animation and follow animated content can also be potential consumers of associated products.

Looking back, the film *Oliver & Company* in 1998 has collaborated by including the Coca-Cola, Sony, and USA Today brand logos. Product placement also occurred in the film *Hotel Transylvania 2* (shown in 2015) with the Sony brand, *The Lorax* (shown in 2012) with the Mazda CX-5, *Despicable Me* (shown in 2010) with the Blu-Ray and Apple brands, and many other animated films. Strategic product placement within animated content can subtly integrate brands and products into the narrative, creating a natural and seamless connection. The perception that animated content is solely for children and lacks value for product placement is an oversimplification.



Fig. 2. A Shot from *Oliver & Company*

4 Local Animation Content with Product Placement

Haiya BidDoa (published in 2012) is an animated series aimed to introduce children to the habit of making prayer (doa). The main characters of the story are a kindergarten-going girl and her same-age male cousin. *Haiya BidDoa* was co-produced with CiC Kindergarten and it is obvious when the clothes of the main characters and their teacher are similar to the clothes of CiC Kindergarten teachers and students.

Promoting a brand to children is often associated with products or services that are age-appropriate, such as toys, games, or educational materials. But what appears in *Supa Strikas* (published in 2009) seems to push the boundaries. *Supa Strikas* is a locally produced animated series adapted from the then-popular comic in South Africa and its neighboring countries. It is a story about a football team and their adventurous journey and games full of surprises. The players of *Supa Strikas* wear jerseys with huge and obvious logos of Caltex, and oil & gas company. Caltex sees this as in line with their *Enjoy the Journey* campaign. It seems irrelevant to be promoting a brand to children, considering that generally they do not have purchasing power nor can influence their parents on oil & gas products. Although never formally acknowledged, the advertising industry understands the importance of introducing its logo and brand to these young children. They are potential customers in years to come.

5 Method

The semiotic method in film criticism [5] focuses on the signs and symbols in the film. In this model, Schafermeyer lists four approaches to be followed - realist, formalist, rhetorical, and mise-en-scene. This study will look into Mechatamato, a 3D animated film produced in Malaysia, and would be using the mise-en-scene approach specifically. Mise-en-scene is described as “the environment of the film which is created by its lighting, sets, costumes, movement, and any other features that comprise the scene as photographed by the camera.”

Creating a 3D animated film requires the creator to build up the environment. Unlike live shot film, where the environments and surroundings are selected from existing places, an animation piece starts off with the director defining everything in the environment. Designers, 3D modelers, and artists will then create everything that is to be included in the film. Nothing on a 3D animated set is thereby accidental. Each and every single piece of prop is well-planned and designed. Even the lighting, intensity of the shadows, and the cast shadows are constructed.

Although certain definition of mise-en-scene includes the actors this study will only look at the environment being designed and built which comprises the buildings, the interiors, and the environment [6].

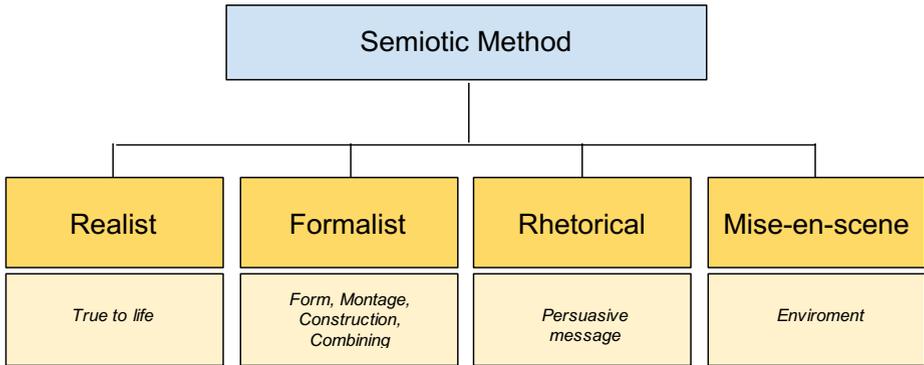


Fig. 3. Breakdown of Schafermeyer Method of Film Critic

6 Analysis of Culture and Heritage through Mise-en-scene

Mechamato Movie, a fully 3D animated movie was released in Malaysia in December 2022, produced by Animonsta. The film is about a boy who unwillingly becomes the master of a robot called MechaBot. The movie is set in the fictional city of Kota Hilir. The name is a combination of an existing Bandar Hilir and Kota Melaka. Animonsta

refers closely to Kota Melaka and throughout the movie, Stadthuys or the red building, the A'Famosa, and the famous Melaka River are clearly visible.

The Stadthuys and A'Famosa are historical buildings erected by the colonial government of the Dutch and Portuguese respectively before the 19th century. Today, they continue to captivate tourists from around the world, serving as prominent landmarks in Melaka. The Stadthuys are depicted in Mechatronics Movie, further cementing its significance in popular culture. The vibrant red building is constructed closely resembling its true characters.

Alongside these historical structures, there is also a Chinese town reminiscent of Jonker Street, featuring a tall red arch and vibrant Chinese lanterns (tanglong) adorning the streets. This attention to detail showcases the filmmakers' commitment to portraying Melaka accurately. While the movie does not overtly promote these locations, it effectively captures the essence of the town, further enhancing its allure. At a glance, the audience familiar with the place can easily recognize that this is Melaka town. The town itself is not a product per se and the movie doesn't hard sell the location their inclusion subtly showcases the allure of Melaka as a tourist destination.



Fig. 4. The Stadthuys-Inspired Building in Mechatronics Movie
(Source: Animonsta Studios' official Twitter)

6.1 The Destar Corporation Building

In addition to the Stadthuys and A'Famosa, the movie also features a unique building called Destar Corp. This architectural marvel draws inspiration from the traditional Malay tanjak or tengkolok headgear, combining classic elements with a futuristic design. The glass panels around the building is being decorated with an Islamic geometric pattern. These patterns are directly inspired by the renowned mosque in Putrajaya, showcasing the filmmakers' attention to detail and commitment to authenticity.

While Destar Corp is a fictional structure created specifically for the movie, its design elements and cultural references pay homage to Malay and Malaysian heritage. The building serves as a visual representation of the nation's multicultural identity and

showcases the harmonious blend of traditional and modern influences. By incorporating elements of Islamic architecture and referencing the distinctive tanjak headgear, the filmmakers successfully infuse the movie with a strong sense of Malay and Malaysian culture.



Fig. 5. The design of Destar Corporation Building
(Source: Animonsta Studios' official Twitter)

7 Conclusion

Mechamato Movie has proven to be accepted in the Asia region. It went on to surprise local fans when its animated series, going by the same title, won the Anime Fan Award at the Tokyo Anime Award Festival (TAAF) 2023 early this year. The government through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Heritage could look into handing out grants to local animation companies for the purpose of promoting Malaysia's local location, culture & heritage. Locally produced animation needs to be taking into account our local culture and heritage. Simplification on the background design of animated shows needs to be rethought. Our traditional Malaysian designs, whether batik, songket, weaving, carvings, and crafts, are highly delicate and intricate. These elements could be included as part of the environment design. The grants should not be limited to financial support. Promotional support, networking, reduced airtime rate, and various networking opportunity could lead to a wider acceptance of local content from the Asia region. Through various government agencies, research, archived pictures, and documentation should be made readily available for local animation companies to jump-start their research.

Through the increased promotion of Malaysian places, culture, and heritage via product placement, there is a strong likelihood that global acceptance of Malaysian products will improve significantly. While such a transformation may take time, spanning a period of around 10 to 15 years, the efforts invested in this endeavour are undeniably worthwhile. By leveraging product placement to showcase Malaysia's unique offerings to the world, the nation has the potential to attain the same level of success

that South Korea has achieved with its K-Pop phenomenon. By identifying the elements that contribute to South Korea's global recognition and employing similar strategies, Malaysia can bridge any gaps that may currently exist. By emphasizing the distinctiveness of Malaysian products and leveraging the power of product placement, the nation can enhance its international appeal and establish a strong presence in the global market. With dedication, strategic planning, and effective execution, Malaysia can successfully position itself as a key player in the global market, fostering widespread acceptance and appreciation of its diverse range of products.

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