



# **In-Film Product Placement: Lessons from Starbucks**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to understand the growing usage of product placement or in-film placements by well known brands as a part of its Integrated Marketing Communication Strategy. The study is undertaken with special reference to the leading coffee chain Starbucks in Hollywood movies. A content analysis of 41 Hollywood movies between 1997 and 2017 was conducted and product placement of Starbucks within them was studied. The genre of the film and the execution style adopted for product placement were documented. This paper provides implications for marketing communication managers to understand the relation between the type of product, genre and the style of execution. The study is also of value for movie producers looking for sponsorships by leading brands in the form of product placements.

**Keywords** –*Hollywood, In-film placements, Integrated Marketing Communication, product placement, Starbucks*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Starbucks Coffee Company is an American coffee company and coffeehouse chain, founded in 1971, in Seattle, by three student partners, Jerry Baldwin, Zev Siegel and Gordon Bowker. In 1987, the firm was bought by Howard Schultz, he named it Starbucks Corporation. Howard Schultz was the CEO of the company until April 2017 while Kevin Johnson replaced him.

The firm takes its name from the eponym novel character's "Moby Dick" of Herman Melville, the chief mate called "Starbuck". Its logo represents a twin-tailed mermaid symbolizing lust.

Starbucks is considered the main representative of "second wave coffee", initially distinguishing itself from other coffee-serving venues in the US by taste, quality, and customer experience while popularizing darkly roasted coffee.

Starbucks locations serve hot and cold drinks (whole-bean coffee, micro ground instant coffee known as, espresso, café latte, full- and loose-leaf teas including Teavana tea products, Evolution Fresh juices, Frappuccino beverages, La Boulange pastries, and snacks including items such as chips and crackers), some offerings are seasonal and/or specific to the locality of the store. Starbucks decided to diversify its offers to



attract the maximum of consumers, respecting their consumption habits and beliefs. Moreover, Starbucks-brand coffee, ice cream and bottled cold coffee drinks are also sold at grocery stores.

Otherwise, Starbucks gives to the customers the desire to buy a product with added value especially gustative but also from self-expression. The customer pays the product but also its prestige related to its high quality and its expensive price.

Initially based in the United States, the firm grew its business abroad rapidly. Between 1987 and 2007. The company opened an average of two new locations daily. At the end of the 1990's, the firm first expanded in Japan, in Tokyo.

Then in the 2000's, Starbucks developed in European countries such as United Kingdom, France and Spain. Nowadays the company operates around 27,000 locations worldwide in 75 countries, with more than 13,000 stores in United States.

In 2017, Starbucks got a turnover of 21.3 billion USD and its net total is around 2,1 billion USD.

Starbucks targets people who are sensitive to high quality products and thanks to their high purchasing power, they can afford these premium products. They are searching for personalized consumption which enables them to see themselves in the products bought and give them importance. Moreover, their main motivations are oriented to pleasure and self-expression.

Therefore, Starbucks major target is relatively young (between 15 and 40 years old), urban and from a wealthier middle social.

Starbucks is known across the world for the quality of its products and its strong ethical values, the company gets a high renown and an excellent brand image.

Moreover, Starbucks is close to its customers, the brand claims to be the third place after home and work. The ambition is to make every store a privileged and comfortable place where the consumers could have an enjoyable moment. Every store is the same, because in that way, anywhere the customer goes, he will find a familiar place. Moreover, the design of the store is well thought: warm colours, comfortable armchairs, free wi-fi... everything is reunited to create a welcoming and friendly atmosphere which will enable the customers to live a pleasant experience, as they were at home.

Likewise, the proximity with its customers is also found in Starbucks marketing strategies. The brand does not have any committed stance in the traditional medias, Starbucks rarely use advertisement poster, TV or radio advertisement spots. But, the company communicates only through digital media, this enabled the firm to be



distinguished from its competitors. Starbucks holds a considerable fan community on the main social networks such as Facebook (for that matter, it is the brand with the most fans), Twitter and Instagram.

Furthermore, the company knows well how to promote its brand and products without spending a lot of money. The Starbucks promotion is more or less a free promotion because the consumers are actually making it, sometimes without even knowing. It remains to be word a mouth, celebrities photographed by paparazzies and fans, or even random people posting their Starbucks cups on social networks because it became a real fashion phenomenon to drink Starbucks beverages. Thus, Starbucks is very popular and present everywhere...

The brand knew how to put its marks in the movie, series and video clips world. Starbucks understood that it does not need commercial breaks. Also it didn't want to advertise, because they realized most people do not like to watch TV advertisement. They are a waste of time and they are not effective. People know that this is just a commercial break and it is not real. Therefore, most of the people skip advertisement when they appear on the screen. On the other hand, a whole movie can be a play-ground and if the advertisement is placed on one of the movie scenes, it is hard to skip it. Moreover, the audience is 100% attentive and captive because there is no interruption and no distraction. Thus, Starbucks uses product placement to advertise its products in an interesting way and in a way where people cannot skip it. The brand appears in numerous movies. (Table 1)

## **II.LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **History of in Film Placements**

The usage of in film placements is dated in eighteenth century, though the research on it is quite a recent practice. (Newell et al., 2006) The oldest product to be placed in two English films was Sunlight soap of Lever Brothers in the year 1896.

The major reason for the usage of in film placements was cost saving which is now changed to cost sharing between the movie producers and company owning the brand. (Galician and Bourdeau,2004). The product placements are not limited to films but also extend to TV series, Games, Novels, Music Videos (Balasubramanian et al., 2006).

Over time, the product placements have shifted from mere glimpses of products to products shown from multiple time to even been used and spoken about in the film. They have now become a part of overall marketing plan of the movie. Despite of increase in usage of product placement there is no common structure for this method of product promotion. The two primary reasons that can be identified for this are involvement of number of parties such as film producers, advertising agency, placement specialist and brand manager. The other reason could be use of integrated marketing communication (IMC) which is an ever evolving concept. (Rose, 1996). Some more reasons for not having a common structure could be-limited advertising budget,



fragmentation of media, insufficient ways to measure traditional tools of promotion and changing culture. (Kureshi and Sood, 2011).

#### Product Placement in movies

Due to the fragmentation of media, increasing cost and clutter, traditional media was losing its effectiveness and hence something more promising and productive means to promote was required. As a result in film placements/ product placement started emerging as a alternative (d'Astous and Chartier, 2000). Product placement is an embedded way of advertising a product in which brand-name items are visible in the films themselves.

There are seven types of product placement:

- Visual placement: When the brand is prominently visible in the scene, including as a hoarding in the background with explicit focus. It can be the product, service or logo as well.
- Verbal placement: When the actors in the film, main character or otherwise mentions the product, service or corporation, this had a greater effect than visual because people can catch the information without looking.
- Usage placement: When the actor in the film, main character or otherwise, is shown to have a physical contact with the brand in the form of holding, using or touching.
- Verbal plus usage: When the brand is found to satisfy both, 2 and 3, of the above.
- Visual and Verbal: When the brand is found to satisfy both, 1 and 2, of the above.
- Visual and Usage: When the brand is found to satisfy both, 1 and 3, of the above.
- Integration with the plot: When the product was found to be woven seamlessly with the plot of the film

A product placement is effective because brands are viewed by captive people who show good brand recall of products and brands seen in movies. Furthermore, audience want to identify themselves with certain movies and characters, hence "lifestyle" products benefit more from product placements rather than daily-use products. Indeed, when a consumer goes to see a movie, it is usually because of one of its favourite actors is playing. Thereby, the desire of acting as an admired person is natural. This technique allows creating a feeling of belonging to a group or even to a community.

Therefore, when Starbucks products are highlighted in daily situations during film scenes, the viewers and the potential consumers, consciously or not, are influenced consuming Starbucks products.



A product placement enables the brand to create the image it wants about its products. When product placements are used in movies viewers are getting affected. Starbucks chooses a character or a scene that will get its products associated with the image and characteristic it wants to create about its products.

#### Content analysis

Content analysis is a popular research method for studying documents and communication artifacts, which might be in various formats of texts, pictures, audio or video. Content analysis therefore has been widely used to study the product placement in films and television. Literature on in film placement using content analysis is more prominent in connection to Hollywood movies (Troup, 1991; Sapolsky and Kinney, 1994; Nelson et al., 2005; Wiles and Danielova, 2009). There are limited studies that have looked into the in-film placements in Bollywood movies using content analysis (Kriplani, 2006; Gokhale, 2010; Kureshi and Sood, 2011). This content analysis documents and classifies the product placement of Starbucks in 41 Hollywood movies between 1997 and 2017. It identifies the genre of the film and the execution style adopted for product placement of the brand.

### **III. STARBUCKS IN MOVIES**

Starbucks ad spends are far less as compared to other large retailers or consumer-products. Starbucks runs occasional ads for some of its products. It uses some conventional media newspaper, billboards and signage. It also invests in online and social media promotions. But it strongly believes that word of mouth is the strongest and most effective means of promotion and hence wishes to convert each of its customers into its brand ambassador. Over the last decade it also has chosen in-film placement as one of the key element in its integrated marketing communication mix. Marketing communication experts at Starbucks believe product placement is one of the most effective methods of advertising because it has a viewing audience of nearly 100 percent. Starting from the year 1997 Starbucks products have been visible in American films. Some of them were significantly notable and few were visible appearances in the background. A few notable ones were: Starbucks product placement in the movie "You've got mail" directed by Nora Ephron and released on 1998. Starbucks attempts to popularize the variety of choices it has. A complete and positive description of the Starbucks offers is realised, even some special coffees names are quoted. In addition to that the firm is trying to highlight the fact that both high-ranking businessmen and little shop owners are alike in Starbucks locations. This movie has done a great job of advertising the image Starbucks wants to create about itself. Kathleen and Joe, the two main characters of the movie, met in a Starbucks shop and the time they spent together lead them to fall in love, thereby the viewers are touched and get a pleasant recall of Starbucks brand. Starbucks is seen as an any type meeting place; the viewers are called to go there to maybe get an exceptional meeting and obviously a good coffee.



A Starbucks cup appears in every scene of the movie “Fight Club” directed David Fincher and released on 1999. The movie mainly stars Brad Pitt, Edward Norton, and Helena Bonham Carter. Norton plays the unnamed protagonist, referred to as the narrator, who is discontented with his white-collar job. He forms a "fight club" with soap maker Tyler Durden, played by Brad Pitt, and they are joined by men who also want to fight recreationally. The narrator becomes embroiled in a relationship with Durden and a dissolute woman, Marla Singer, played by Bonham Carter. The director David Fincher explained when he moved to Los Angeles in 1984, it was impossible to find a good cup of coffee, so it was a relief for him when Starbucks first came out. But when the firm became successful, it was too much of a good thing, Starbucks got at least 2 or 3 locations in every block of the city. Thus, David Fincher decided to include in his movie the fact of finding Starbucks almost everywhere even if you do not want or search for it. But he did it with fun and even the firm Starbucks found the idea funny and friendly, so it was ready to poke a little fun at itself. The company did not let the movie use its name on the coffee shop that gets destroyed by the piece of the tragic corporate art, but it was willing to give the movie director the rest of its products. Obviously, there is not a cup in every frame or even scene of the final movie, but the placement of Starbucks is seen throughout Fight Club. In that way, Starbucks is, first, as much as it can, highlighted in the movie, thereby it is a good advertisement. But Starbucks is also showing its funny and original side, the firm is able to laugh about itself, which brings a simple and nice image.

Another relevant example is the movie “The Devil wears Prada” directed by David Frankel and released on 2006. It talks about Andrea as a North-western graduate that goes to New York and work for the most powerful fashion magazine. She worked as a co-assistant for Miranda Priestly, the icy editor-in-chief. In the movie, Andrea had to run to Starbucks every day to get Miranda a cup of coffee. Starbucks choose “The Devil wears Prada” simply because it is associated with many other big brands and this is the image Starbucks wants to create about itself. Another thing is that, Vogue editor Anna Wintour inspired Miranda’s character, and getting her a cup of coffee from Starbucks is a very influential way of advertising.

Starbucks also placed its products in the movie “Sex and the city the movie” directed Michael Patrick King by and released on 2008. It is an American romantic comedy film and a sequel to the 1998-2004 comedy series of the same name (itself based on the book of the same name) about four female friends dealing with their lives as women in New York City. Throughout this movie, many different products were placed strategically. There were many famous designers and brands shown because the plot is centered on fashion and labels. Starbucks made a few appearances in this film. The film showed the Starbucks logo on coffee cups the characters are drinking. Also, two scenes take place in a Starbucks location. Moreover, there the baristas are seen in the background wearing green aprons and making coffee. Again, Starbucks chooses “Sex and the city” movie because it is associated with many other big brands and it brings to Starbucks an image of quality and success. Furthermore, the characters of this film are modern, successful and on the latest fashions. Therefore, the viewers would think drinking Starbucks beverages make them as great as the characters depicted.



These four product placement examples are showing Starbucks makes its amazing promotion through different product placement in popular movies, the brand is surfing on actual consummation trends to sensitize and attract the maximum of consumers.

#### **IV.METHODOLOGY**

The cinema of the United States commonly referred as Hollywood, has had a profound effect on the film industry since the early 20th century. It produces over 800 films on an average annually in a single language – English. Being the oldest film industry in the world, it is considered the birthplace of various genres of cinema—such as comedy, drama, action, the musical, romance, horror, science fiction and the war epic.

The focus of this study is on Hollywood films from the year 1997 to 2017 across all genre to find the placement of Starbucks. The placement can be identified in any of the below mentioned form

- the product, service or logo could be observed.
- the product, service or corporation is mentioned; this had a greater effect than visual because people can catch the information without looking.
- an on-screen personality interacts or handles the product; thus, it involves visual and spoken placement.
- A combination of any of the above

The documentation began with the exploratory research about Starbucks's placement in movies and recording details of the genre of the film and the placement execution style.

Each year around 800 films are released in Hollywood so it is difficult to view them all and also the study was done for a period of ten years which makes it difficult to watch all of them. Therefore, the data about Starbucks's placement is collected through secondary sources such as Brandchannel.com which tracks the featured brand appearing in every top Hollywood film. Other source used was brandspotters.com this site allows the audience to tweet the brands they viewed while watching the movie and has a systematic analysis of all the brands placed in a movie and also vice versa brands appearing in various movies. Another interesting source which shows all the clips of movies and TV series in which the brand is spoken about was getyarn.io. This data was used to identify 41 films in which Starbucks brand appeared.

#### **V.ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

The analysis on the data was conducted to find the genre with highest incidence of placements and the most commonly used execution style by Starbucks. It was found that comedy was the most preferred genre for the placement of Starbucks whether it was comedy, romantic comedy or comedy drama (Table 3). The next



preferred genre was found to be crime thriller. The most commonly used execution styles of placements were of two kinds “Visual” and “Verbal”. Yet it is also found that most people have commented and written in blogs or tweeted about the film placements in which Visual as well as verbal plus Usage style of execution was used (Table 2).

It is seen that each year Starbucks has done minimum 1 to maximum 4 product placements in films. Though not much data is available about the cost sharing or sponsorship money given by Starbucks for the product placement, it is evident that in film placement is a part of Starbucks Integrated Marketing communication.

It can be inferred that for the placement of consumable product like Starbucks, one need a lighter mood and characters that can be shown using or talking about the brand which a comedy genre is able to provide. There are less likely chances of Starbucks coffee been consumed by an action movie character and hence action movies are least preferred for product placement. Thus this explains why comedy should be the most popular choice for brand managers of a consumable product.

“Verbal” and “Visual” are the most used execution styles in case of Starbucks which makes the brand appear in the natural setting and also highlights the occasions of consumptions. Many of these movies in their verbal placements have stressed on the sizes of coffee that Starbucks offers for example Verti which is 20 ounces is the largest size of coffee as shown in one of the movies. Another movie highlights the various flavors that Starbucks offers. This also brings an important lesson for the brand managers that not only the brand can be placed but one can actually go to explain what variety it offers. Visual placement on the other hand tries to show the location where one can find Starbucks. Generally the Starbucks café are located in upscale markets to project an upscale image. In many movies they have even highlighted that it is coffee on the go, you can pick up a cup of coffee while rushing to work thus indirectly it talks about the speed of Starbucks delivery time. Movies, in which “Usage” execution style is used also highlights the occasions where one can use a Starbucks café for example to take interview, make presentations, call people over to have fun etc. These executions bring lot of learning’s for a brand managers looking of placement advice.

In conclusion, it can be said that there are ample of opportunities for brand and film studios that can be explore, though there are a few practical challenges too. Hollywood producers and brand managers need to work together to design a seamless integration of the product in the script to gain greater brand acceptance and recognition.

In film placements can result in enhanced brand association than other forms of promotions due to the greater attention levels of the audience, products seen in the natural setting used at the right occasions and less clutter compared to traditional media.



## VII. LIMITATION OF THE RESEARCH

This content analysis is exploratory in nature and pertaining to one brand hence its findings cannot be generalized. Though the trends are analyzed for a period of ten years more insightful results can be obtained by doing a comparative study with another café brand or by collecting quantitative data about the effectiveness of placements from the film audience.

Sr. No.	Name of the movie	Year	Genre	Execution Style
1	The lost world: Jurassic Park	1997	science-fiction adventure	Visual
2	US – Marshall	1998	action crime thriller	verbal plus Usage
3	You've got mail	1998	romantic comedy-drama	verbal plus Usage
4	Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me	1999	action comedy	Visual as well as verbal plus Usage
5	Best in show	2000	comedy	Verbal
6	Miss Congeniality	2000	action comedy	Visual as well as verbal plus Usage
7	Zoolander	2001	comedy	Visual
8	Shrek 2	2004	computer-animated fantasy	Visual
9	The Terminal	2004	comedy-drama film	Visual
10	Idiocracy	2006	science fiction comedy	Verbal and Visual
11	The Devil wears Prada	2006	comedy-drama	Visual and Verbal
12	The Sentinel	2006	crime thriller	Usage
13	Aaah! Zombies!	2007	Comedy	Verbal
14	Ocean Thirteen	2007	Crime	Visual
15	Perfect Stranger	2007	comedy-drama	Visual
16	The Jane Austen Book Club	2007	romantic drama	Verbal



17	Hamlet 2	2008	Comedy	Verbal
18	Sex and the city, the movie	2008	romantic comedy-drama	Usage
19	Couples Retreat	2009	romantic comedy	Verbal
20	I love you, man	2009	romantic comedy	verbal and usage
21	The Proposal	2009	romantic comedy	Visual as well as verbal plus Usage
22	The Bounty Hunter	2010	action comedy	Verbal
23	Iron Man 2	2010	Action	Verbal and Visual
24	Friends with benefits	2011	romantic comedy	Visual
25	Newlyweds	2011	comedy-drama	Verbal
26	The day I saw your heart	2011	comedy	Visual and Verbal
27	The double	2011	comedy thriller	visual
28	A thousand words	2012	comedy-drama	Visual as well as verbal plus Usage
29	Odd Thomas	2013	supernatural mystery thriller	Verbal
30	The Starving Games	2013	comedy	Verbal
31	The World's end	2013	comic science fiction	Verbal
32	Birdman	2014	dark comedy	Visual
33	Rosewater	2014	political drama	Visual
34	Jurassic World	2015	science-fiction adventure film	Visual and Usage
35	The Intern	2015	comedy-drama	Visual as well as verbal plus Usage
36	A hologram for the king	2016	comedy-drama	Visual
37	Bridget Jones's Baby	2016	romantic comedy	Verbal
38	Ghostbusters	2016	comedy	Verbal



39	True memoirs of an international assassin	2016	action comedy	Visual and usage
40	Daddy's Home 2	2017	comedy	Usage
41	T2 Trainspotting	2017	crime comedy drama	Visual

**Table1: List of movies with their year of release, genre and Starbucks product placement execution style (created by author)**

Execution style	frequency	Percentage
Visual	12	29.27%
Verbal	12	29.27%
Usage	3	7.32%
Verbal and Usage	3	7.32%
Visual and Verbal	4	10%
Visual and Usage	2	5%
Visual as well as verbal plus Usage	5	12%

**Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of occurrence of style of execution**

Genre	frequency	Percentage
science fiction	2	5%
crime thriller	7	17%
romantic comedy	7	17%
action comedy	2	5%
comedy	7	17%
computer animated fantasy	1	2%



comedy drama	7	17%
Crime	1	2%
romantic drama	1	2%
Action	1	2%
comedy thriller	1	2%
supernatural mystery thriller	1	2%
science fiction comedy	2	5%
political drama	1	2%

**Table 3: Frequency and Percentage of genre in which placements are made**

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