

Too obvious or not? The effect of prominence and blogger familiarity on brand attitude towards placed products

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Abstract

In the past years, product placement has developed into a popular advertising and can play a significant role in gaining a competitive advantage. Not only do product placements help brands to break through the commercial clutter but also to deal with consumers who are becoming more skilled at avoiding commercials. Currently, an increasing number of placements take place on blogs. Due to their personal approach, bloggers are considered to be highly persuasive. Important in this process is the existence of parasocial interaction. Bloggers create a more personal relationship with their audience by disclosing information about their private lives.

However, little research has been done on product placement on blogs. Hence, the aim of this research is to study the effectiveness of product placements on blogs, when considering the prominence of the placement and the prior familiarity with the blogger. Drawing on previous studies that were conducted on other media platforms, this study will apply a mixture of current models while aiming to improve and further develop them in the context of blogs. To measure the impact of prominence and familiarity on brand attitude, an experiment was conducted among Dutch women between 15 and 30 years old.

The findings of this study indicated that product placement on blogs have an effect on brand attitude of consumers. When evaluating the effect of both independent variables separately, it appeared that familiarity with the blogger had no significant effect on brand attitude while prominence did have an effect on brand attitude. Yet, the most important finding in this study is the existence of an interaction effect, namely that the effect of prominence is dependent on the familiarity with the blogger. The results of this study can serve as a foundation for future studies that aim to research the effectiveness of product placement on blogs. Managerial implications and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: product placement, blogs, advertising, consumer behaviour, prominence, brand attitude

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1. Introduction

The appearance of products and brands in entertainment vehicles has certainly gained more attention and popularity over the past years (Chan, 2012; de Gregorio & Sung, 2010; Homer, 2009; La Ferle & Edwards, 2006). Apple products seem to have taken over TV series while Heineken is one of the most prominent beer brands in entertainment media. While marketers have been using product placement for over a century already, since the introduction of web 2.0 the sudden opportunities have further increased (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2013; Chiou, Chen, Huang, Huang & Hu, 2008; Verhellen, Dens, & de Pelsmacker, 2013). Moreover, marketers certainly see the potential of interactive new media as they spend an increasing amount of the marketing budget on placements on these platforms (PQ Media, 2012). One of these platforms that are winning ground on the web is blogs (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2013). Although, past research has pointed out the effectiveness of product placement (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Gupta & Lord, 1998; de Gregorio & Sung, 2010; Homer, 2009; Russell, 2002; Van Reijmersdal, Neijens, & Smit, 2007), these are all focused on other media platforms while product placement on blogs is growing.

1.1 Problem background

Over 100 years ago, namely in 1896, the business of product placement made its introduction when the UK soap brand 'Lever Brothers' made its appearance in a French movie (Chan, 2012). Nevertheless, it took up to nearly 80 years until the strategy gained serious ground in the marketing field due to the successful placement of Reese's Pieces candy in the movie E.T, which increased the sales with 60% (Newell, Salmon, & Chang, 2006). This dramatic increase captured the attention of both marketers and academics with regards to product placement (Gupta & Lord, 1998).

The above-mentioned, studies that followed these successful placements pointed out that product placements have more effect on audiences than other comparable advertising exposures (Karrh, McKee, & Pardun, 2003). Currently, consumers are becoming more skilled at avoiding advertisements. For instance, by switching channels or diverting attention to other media during the commercial break. At this moment in time, it is even possible to fast-forward through advertisements. Hence, product placements can help brands to break through the commercial clutter as well as avoiding the above mentioned (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Schweidel, Zhang

Foutz, & Tanner, 2014). Besides that, product placement allows for a more subtle way of displaying the products in comparison to commercials (Gupta & Lord, 1998).

As a consequence, an increasing number of brands want to be integrated in entertainment media in return for money or other promotional consideration (Gupta & Gould, 1997). Due to technological developments, product placement keeps evolving and expanding across media vehicles as brands are now placed movies, television series, books, radio, music, magazines, musicals, video games and online media, like blogs and videos (Chan, 2012; Williams, Petrosky, Hernandez, & Page, 2011). Especially the latter seems to be on the rise as recruitment of popular bloggers for collaborations, sponsorships and endorsements is increasing (Mercanti-Guérin & Lassus, 2013). According to PQ Media (2012), this form of advertising can be of great expense for brands. In 2011, more than 7 billion dollar was spent on brand placement worldwide of which an increasing amount is going to online platforms, which also indicates the growing significance.

In general, the effectiveness of product placement is mostly measured by brand recall (d'Astous & Charier, 2000; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Verhellen et al., 2013). However, multiple scholars argue that other measures like brand attitude and purchase intention are better measures to reveal placement effectiveness (Homer, 2009; Matthes, Schemer, & Wirth, 2007; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2007). The reason why is that advertisements can also have an effect without being recalled while brand attitude explicitly measures the extent to which consumers respond negatively or positively to a particular brand (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). According to previous studies, prominence of placements in traditional media is an essential factor when it comes down to effectiveness (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Verhellen et al., 2013). In short, this entails whether the brand or product is placed in a subtle or prominent way. Even though prominence can help placements to be more effective, it is also argued that it activates the persuasion knowledge of audiences, which in the case of traditional media, means that audiences are becoming more aware of the blurring distinction between the informing and the entertaining aspects of media, for instance product placement when these are more prominent (Karrh et al., 2003), which could negatively impact the perception of the placement (Cowley & Barron, 2008). In comparison with traditional media, blogs are considered as less-commercial media and consumers have an inherently different interaction with bloggers (Hsu, Lin, & Chiang, 2013). Besides, according to a recent study by Mercanti-Guérin and Lassus (2013) it could be argued

that self-disclosure of the blogger has a positive effect on the attitude towards the brand, which could suggest that blog-readers are less likely to resist product placements on blogs compared with traditional media.

All things considered, it could be increasingly beneficial for companies to know whether product placement will be effective in terms of brand attitude in the online context, specifically on blogs, as well and whether prominence influences this effectiveness. Since people spend an increasing amount of their time on social media, this could certainly have potential for practitioners in the field. However, up till now, little research has been conducted on the effectiveness of product placement in an online setting, like blogs (Verhellen et al., 2013).

1.2 Research question

By exploring the background of product placement while drawing on earlier work and views of practitioners, a specific research problem has been identified. While practitioners in the field have already acknowledged the growing importance of product placement on blogs, research on this topic is still very scarce. In order to narrow down the topic, this study will only focus on beauty blogs. This type of blog has become increasingly popular in the past years and currently, beauty bloggers are turning their hobby into a lucrative business with more than hundred thousand followers who see their commercial content (Bearne, 2014). As this type of blog mainly targets at women (Grant, 2013), this study will only include female respondents. Hence, the following research question is proposed:

RQ: What is the effect of prominence and familiarity with bloggers on brand attitude of female consumers towards placed products?

1.3 Sub research questions

1. What is product placement?
2. What is prominence?
3. What is brand attitude?
4. What is the relation between prominence and brand attitude?
5. What are bloggers?
6. What is the relation between familiarity and brand attitude?
7. What is the relation between prominence on blogs and brand attitude?

1.4 Academic Relevance

Despite the fact that the number of studies on product placement has grown in the past two decades, the existing literature on its effectiveness is still relatively scarce (Chan, 2012; La Ferle & Edwards, 2006; Russell & Stern, 2006; Van Reijmersdal, Neijens, & Smit, 2009). Most studies have focused on either product placement in movies (D'Astous & Chartier, 2000; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Karrh, 1994; Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007) or television series (Cowley & Barron, 2008; D'Astous & Seguin, 1999; La Ferle & Edwards, 2006; Russell, 2002; Russell & Stern, 2006). Nevertheless, many scholars have requested more research on this topic due to various reasons (Chan, 2012; Verhellen et al., 2013).

First of all, there exist many inconsistencies in the existing literature on product placement in general (Chan, 2012; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2009). Scholars focus on different media but there is not one consistent way of examining the effects of product placement on these platforms. According to Chan (2012) this is also the case with prominence, as there is not one commonly used measure, which makes it difficult to compare studies concerning the same media vehicle, let alone across media platforms.

Moreover, research on marketing in social media is very limited and among these studies there are only a few that studied product placement on blogs (Chiou et al., 2008; Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Colliander & Erlandsson, 2013; Verhellen et al., 2013), which could be due to the fact that it is a relatively new phenomenon. More specifically, according to a recent study by Verhellen et al. (2013) there are hardly any studies on the effectiveness of product placement in an online context (Verhellen et al., 2013). Yet, researchers certainly do acknowledge the overall influence of bloggers (Hsu et al., 2013; Mercanti-Guérin & Lassus, 2013; Zanette, Brito, & Coutinho, 2013) and therefore, further research on this topic could benefit the overall knowledge on this subject.

Thirdly, one of the few studies, that did research the effectiveness of product placement in user-generated content, compared celebrities with unknown amateurs (Verhellen et al., 2013) and it was found that prominence only made a difference for celebrities. In contrast, other scholars argue that many bloggers have now acquired a position similar to celebrities but still with a personal connection to their audiences (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2013; Mercanti-Guérin & Lassus, 2013). Therefore, it could be argued that using an unknown amateur is not appropriate to measure the

effectiveness of product placement on blogs since bloggers are often familiar to the readers. However, this possible relationship has not yet been studied.

Hence, it is therefore of the utmost importance to investigate the effectiveness of product placement on blogs as it will benefit future research on this subject and can contribute to the creation of a comprehensive framework for studying product placement in an online context.

1.5 Societal relevance

As product placement on blogs is growing, this research will be of great use for practitioners in this field. Currently, literature on product placement is limited and there is hardly any evidence that product placement is really effective in the online context. Furthermore, it is not known whether product placement on blogs function the same way as on mass media platforms. Therefore, research on this topic will provide useful insights into the world of blogging and the potential of product placement in it. Especially when considering that the influence of bloggers is growing (Zanette et al., 2013) and people spend an increasing amount of time on the Internet. Bloggers have thousands of visitors per day (Thornley, 2014), which makes it not unimaginable that product placement on this platform could have a great impact on consumers. In the Netherlands, popular bloggers even get over 100,000 views per video on a daily basis (www.youtube.com/beautygloss).

Hence, knowing whether product placement in these videos could be effective and especially, knowing how products should be placed, could have great benefits for companies. More knowledge on the effectiveness could not only be beneficial for practitioners but also for bloggers as they can use it as commercial strategy. An increasing amount of bloggers does so professionally, meaning that they make money out of their website. In this way, bloggers can also approach companies themselves with possible placement strategies instead of the other way around.

1.6 Chapter Outline

This study will be structured according to well-ordered outline. In the chapter following this introductory section, the theoretical framework will be presented. An overview of the existing literature in the field will be presented, which is structured by the sequence of the seven proposed sub research questions. As such, this framework will serve as

guidance for the rest of the study. The important and central concepts will be discussed and explained in this section. Additionally, the three hypotheses will be presented. In chapter three, the methodology of this study will be discussed. A detailed overview of the chosen research design, sample, operationalization and measurements, stimulus material, procedure and data analysis will be provided. This will function as a foundation for the next chapter as chapter four will reveal the findings of the conducted research. Also, the formulated hypotheses will be tested and answered in this chapter. This will result in the discussion of the results and linking this to the existing literature in chapter five. Based on the findings, practical implications will be provided. Then, the limitations of the study are debated, which will result in suggestions for future research. Lastly, this paper will conclude by answering the main research question in the conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the existing literature on the most important concepts will be discussed and evaluated. This will be structured according to the seven proposed sub research questions. To begin with, the first sub research question will be answered in section 2.1, namely what is product placement? This will give an overview of the overall marketing practice. Before discussing the effect of product placement prominence on brand attitude, the concept of prominence will be reviewed in section 2.2 by answering the second sub question: what is prominence? Then in the next section 2.3 the third sub question is being answered: what is brand attitude? By doing so, the fourth sub question can be answered in section 2.4: what is the relation between prominence and brand attitude? After discussing literature that is more focused on product placement in general, the transition to blogs specifically is made in section 2.5 by first answering the fifth sub question: what are bloggers? In order to go deeper into this concept, the marketing potential of blogs and the role of bloggers as opinion leaders will also be debated in separate sub paragraphs. After this, the relationship between bloggers and their audiences, including the effect on readers' attitudes, will be further explored by answering sub question six in section 2.6: what is the relation between familiarity with a blogger and brand attitude? Lastly the literature and theories related to concepts of prominence, brand attitude and familiarity with the blogger are combined in the last section 2.7 by answering sub question seven: what is the relation between prominence on blogs and brand attitude?

2.1 What is product placement?

To begin with, it is important to discuss the overall concept of product placement in order to position this broad concept in the context of blogs in section 2.5. In today's media environment, product placement has become an almost essential part of the entertainment and can be spotted across a variety of platforms (Williams et al., 2011). Since its introduction almost a century ago, various scholars have aimed to define product placement or even the broader concept of brand placement (Balasubramanian, 1994; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2007; Russell & Belch, 2005). Among these classifications, the most commonly used one is the definition by Balasubramanian (1994), who described product placement as "paid product message aimed at influencing movie (or television) audiences via the planned and unobtrusive entry of a

branded product into a movie (or television program)” (p. 311). But, due to the fact that the practice of product placement keeps evolving, there is no real consensus among scholars about the exact definition in current literature (Chan, 2012). Most of the older definitions do not fully cover the concept when discussing the marketing practice as it exists today, since product placement is no longer limited to movies or television (Balasubramanian, 1994; Gupta & Gould, 1997; d’Astous & Seguin, 1999; d’Astous & Chartier, 2000). Therefore, more recent definitions tend to focus on the broader meaning of product placement without referring to any medium or platform in particular. Consequently, there is no specific definition concerning product placement in blogs. Hence, the definition used in this study when referring to product placement is “the purposeful incorporation of brands into entertainment vehicle” (Russell & Belch, 2005, p. 74). In addition to this, according to Van Reijmersdal et al. (2007) this can be applied to “editorial content” (p. 403) as well. These two definitions seem to be most applicable to blogs, as they are often opinion based while still be entertaining.

Moreover, there are not only multiple ways to define the concept of product placement, but also how to classify it exactly. For instance, Russell (2002) categorized it as screen, script and plot placements. Screen placements involve the brand or product appearing on the screen while products in script placements are verbally mentioned in the dialogue. Lastly, the plot placements concern products or brands integrated in the plot. d’Astous and Seguin (1999) used three entirely different categories. First, implicit placements show the product or brand but without demonstrating the benefits of the product. The next category is the integrated explicit placement, which plays an active role in the entertainment vehicle. In contrast to the previous type, this placement does demonstrate the attributes and benefits of the products. Lastly, the authors discuss non-integrated placements. This type includes formal expression of the sponsorship but without any relation to the content of the entertainment vehicle. Nevertheless, the product placement classification by Gupta and Lord (1998) is also frequently used in literature. The first type, visual-only, involves showing the product or any visual identifier of the brand without any relevant audio-text. The second type is audio-only and focuses on naming the brand without any visual displaying. Lastly, combined audio-visual, as the name already suggests, is the combination of both showing and mentioning the brand.

According to Cowley and Barron (2008), the main objective for incorporating brands or branded products in entertainment content is to generate positive associations

towards the involved brand. For instance, the brand can gain goodwill by associating itself with a popular television show and the likeable characters in it (d'Astous & Seguin, 1999). However, money is also an important driver. In literature, the distinction between paid and unpaid placements is made. In the case of paid placements, money is offered in return for a placement, which is often related to the prominence of the brand, meaning that the more prominent the placement is, the higher the costs are (Chan, 2012). Nevertheless, most of the product placements are done on barter basis, which means that the product is exchanged for exposure in entertainment media (Karrh et al., 2003). But it seems to be the case that the advertising landscape is changing from paid placements to non-paid placements (PQ Media, 2010). Most recent data suggests that 56% of the worldwide value of product placement is in cash-free arrangements (Chang, Newell, & Salmon, 2009).

While the costs of paid placements can sky rocket with prices that range from 10,000 to over 100,000 dollars per placement, product placement has proven to be able to boost sales, which makes it a lucrative business (Williams et al., 2011). An example of this is the brand Ray Ban with the Wayfarer sunglasses. After the Wayfarer model was featured in the movie *Risky Business* (1983), the annual sales increased from 18,000 to 360,000 units (Karniouchina, Uslay, & Erenburg, 2011). Multiple placements followed this successful placement, of which *Top Gun* (1986) was another very fruitful one, and the sales eventually reached 4 million units (Sengrave, 2004).

Placements such as the Wayfarer model in *Top Gun* involve another motivation, namely the opportunity for “implied endorsement” from celebrities. Product placement is more subtle than an explicit celebrity endorsement while viewers would still like to buy the products used by these celebrities (Karrh, 1998). Besides, producers can use product placement as a source of marketing support or cash. For instance, BMW invested 20 million dollar in a launch campaign for which they collaborated with the James Bond franchise (Karrh, 1998). This collaboration involved a prominent placement in the movie *GoldenEye* as well as a placement in the movie's trailer and television advertisements (Karrh et al, 2003). For the movie *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997) the James Bond franchise grossed 100 million dollars even before it was released in cinema, due to brand placement deals (McDonnell & Drennan, 2010). These numbers give an indication of the willingness of brands to invest in product placement while no guarantee of success is given. Moreover, some movies and television show contain an excessive amount of placements (Karniouchina et al., 2011), which can make it difficult

for the brands that are placed in these movies to draw attention of consumers and to earn back the investment. Hence, marketers are seeking new ways to place their products or brand, which have higher chances of being profitable.

2.2 What is prominence?

This section will focus on one of the factors that seem to play an important role in the process of affecting the audience, namely the prominence of the placement. As a result, most studies focus on this specific factor. Gupta and Lord (1998) coined the concept as “the extent to which the product placement possesses characteristics designed to make it a central focus of audience attention” (p. 49). In essence, prominence is how noticeably the product is placed (Verhellen et al., 2013).

However, there exist many inconsistencies among scholars with regards to the classification of prominence (d’Astous & Chartier, 2000; Cowley & Barron, 2008; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Homer, 2009). Originally, Gupta and Lord (1998) defined prominence in terms of size and centrality. A subtle placement according to this research would have a low time of exposure or be placed small in size or in the background among other products. A more elaborate way to categorize placements was used by d’Astous and Chartier (2000), who used the following six dimensions to judge the type of placement: visibility of the product or brand, principal actor is present, mentioning of the brand or product by the actor, usage of the product by the actor, the length and subtlety of the placement. Drawing on previous studies, Cowley and Barron (2008) considered prominent placement to be connected to the plot, either audio or audiovisual and mentioned or shown more than once. The authors defined a subtle placement as visual only, not related to the plot and seen only briefly. A more recent study by Homer (2009) defined prominent placements as visual images combined with a direct verbal reference to the brand or product in the script dialogue. A subtle placement on the other hand involves only visual images.

2.3 What is brand attitude?

As prominence is often measured in relation to brand attitude, this concept should be clearly explained before reviewing literature on the connection between these two concepts in the next paragraph.

In the first place, Petty and Cacioppo (1986) define attitudes in general as “general evaluations people hold in regard to themselves, other people, objects and issues” (p. 4). Moreover, the authors state that these evaluations are based on an array of emotional, behavioral and cognitive experiences with the product, service or brand. As a consequence, the attitudes can affect behavior.

While multiple scholars have defined the concept of brand attitude in literature, this study will use the definition from Spears and Singh (2004). The reason being that these scholars developed a scale to measure brand attitude, which will also be used in this research. The definition from these authors is drawn from other studies, which should be discussed first. Originally, Mitchell and Olson (1981) defined brand attitude as “individual’s internal evaluation of the brand” (p. 318). According to Spears and Singh (2004), this is a right definition as it combines the main characteristics of brand attitude. First, the attitude is centered at an object or brand. Second, the attitude is evaluative in nature, meaning that there is some degree of good or bad attributed to the object or brand. At last, it suggests that the attitude towards the brand is an internal state. In addition to this, Eagly and Chaiken (1973) state that a brand attitude is an enduring state “that endures for at least a short period of time and presumably energizes and directs behavior” (p.7).

All these things considered, Spears and Singh (2004) eventually came up with the following definition “attitude toward the brand is a relatively enduring, unidimensional summary evaluation of the brand that presumably energizes behavior” (p. 55) and this is the definition that will be used in this research when referring to brand attitude.

2.4 What is the relation between prominence and brand attitude?

Now that both prominence of placements and brand attitude have been clarified, this section will discuss the effectiveness of prominence on brand attitude. In the existing literature on the effectiveness of product placement, brand recall and recognition are most frequently used (Chan, 2012). However, it is argued that these measures fail to fully reveal the efficacy of product placement due to two reasons (Chan, 2012). First, several scholars claim that recall does not always transfer into attitude or purchase intention (Matthes et al., 2007; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2007). In addition, Heath (2000) argues that advertisements can function without being recalled. Eventually,

practitioners desire to know how affective a placement is, in order to justify the money spent (Chan, 2012). Hence, it seems to be the case that newer studies shift towards attitude.

Yet, current studies into the effects of product placement on brand attitude are rather inconclusive. Prominence seems to work as a double-edged sword as some scholars have proven its positive effects (Russell, 2002; Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007) while others claim that prominence can have a negative impact (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Homer, 2009; Matthes et al., 2007). Or even no impact at all (Babin, 1996; van Reijmersdal et al., 2007). These differences in effects can be partly explained by the persuasion knowledge theory. According to this theory, “people develop knowledge about how, why and when a message is intended to influence them, to help them ‘cope’ with persuasive episodes” (Cowley & Barron, 2008, p. 81). As more prominent placed brands often lead to higher recall of the brand, this can also activate the awareness of product placement among audiences (Van Reijmersdal et al., 2007). As a consequence, the audience can realize the commercial aspects, which can create skepticism towards the brand.

For instance, Homer (2009) states that negative attitudes arise when a brand is shown too prominently. The author argues that the increased attention motivated counter-argumentation among viewers. In his study, Homer treated prominence as subtle when visual and prominent when audio accompanied visual. A study by Cowley and Barron (2008) shows similar results but in this case, the researchers linked it to program liking. It appeared that participants who liked the program were more disturbed by prominently placed brands while the brand attitude of participants who were lower in program liking was positively affected.

However, there are also studies that found a positive effect of prominence on brand attitude. For example, Yang and Roskos-Ewoldson (2007) studied the effect of three levels of visual placements and pointed out that more positive attitudes were generated when a character instead of the brand appearing in the background used the product. Besides, Russell (2002) found that congruent placements seem more natural, which makes the placements more persuasive. Hence, the relationship is summarized in the following hypothesis:

H01: The level of prominence has no effect on brand attitude

Ha1: The level of prominence has an effect on brand attitude

2.5 What are blogs?

Now that the practice of product placement is explained along with its connection to prominence and brand attitude, the concept of blogs and bloggers will be discussed in this section. In the following subparagraph, literature on the potential of blogs for marketing purposes will be reviewed. This will continue in the next sub paragraph, wherein the concept of opinion leaders will be discussed, as this is a role bloggers seem to take on. Nowadays, it seems to be the case that everybody wants to be in social media (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2013). Not only do people devote more than one third of their day to the consumption of social media (Lang, 2010) but also the amounts of blogs seem to be ever increasing. While in 2003, only 17% of the Internet users had ever visited a blog (Johnson & Kaye, 2004), ten years later this number has significantly increased. Currently, according to Universal McCann (2010), blog readers account for more than 70 per cent of the Internet users, which indicates the popularity among the general population. In 2011, the total amount of blogs on the Internet worldwide reached 152 million (Royal Pindgom, 2011). According to Del Veccio, Laubacher, Ndou and Passiante (2011) there are two types of blogs: corporate blogs from brands and blogs from individuals or groups. In this study, only independent blogs from individuals or groups will be taken into account as consumers consider information on these blogs as more credible (Jonas, 2010). In this case, Zanette et al. (2013) defined blogs as, “a type of community in which individuals present themselves online” (p. 38). Part of the act of blogging “is to continually post one's own ideas, opinions, Internet links, and other elements on one's own Web site, which is called a "web log"” (Chu & Kamal, 2008, p. 26), also abbreviated to ‘blog’. These blogs can be related to all kinds of topics, like food, beauty, fashion, sports, politics and business (Mendoza, 2010). All blogs and their interconnections are often referred to as the ‘blogosphere’ (Rosenbloom, 2004), which is considered large enough to be “an accurate barometer of consumer opinion” (Universal McCann, 2008, p. 31). Those people in the blogosphere, who create the content for others to consume, are referred to as bloggers and are defined by Chu and Kamal (2008) as “a subset of Internet users who write their own online journals and blogs” (p. 26).

In addition, the most recent phenomenon in the online world is vlogs, of which the term is derived from the word ‘video’ and ‘blog’ (Kalpaklioglu & Toros, 2011). Whereas a part of the producers create the videos for personal use only, there is also a significant quantity that is created for a more professional purpose (Kalpaklioglu &

Toros, 2011). In these video blogs, people give viewers a glimpse of their lives, including products and services that they are using. A good example of this are fashion or beauty hauls, which are videos in which bloggers show their recently bought fashion and beauty products in a video (Keats, 2012) In comparison to written blogs, vlogs are a more expressive medium as it gives a sense of face-to-face communication (Gao, Tian, Huang, & Yang, 2010; Sykes, 2014). Besides, vlogs appear on a regular basis, often daily or weekly (Gao et al., 2010).

2.5.1 Blogging as marketing practice

Now that the concepts of blogs, bloggers and vlogs have been clarified, this part will go deeper into the marketing potential of blogs. As a result of a developing marketing field, social media marketing is also growing rapidly (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). In addition, social media have also become the primary source of information for many consumers (Kim, Bickart, Brunel, & Pai, 2012). Besides, Kalpaklioglu and Toros (2011) argue that along with communication technologies developments in the past years, the role of commercials as information providers has shifted to consumers themselves as information producers for other consumers. Nowadays, consumers have more control over the information they receive and what they decide to do with it (Kerr, Mortimer, Dickinson, & Waller, 2009). One of these ways to provide others with essential information is to blog.

Moreover, Hsu et al. (2013) argue that blogging has developed into one of the most popular channels for recording and discussing not only personal feelings and ideas but also products and brands. In order present themselves online, bloggers use brands, products, symbols and links to other sites to express a certain desired identity (Zanette et al., 2013). Hence, Kalpakliogly and Toros (2011) state that blogs are important in the process of personal or corporate image development as it has the possibility to not only reach but also influence thousands of people. Consequently, blogs have developed into a tool used by both businesses and individuals to share their opinions with the rest of the world (Halvorsen, Hoffmann, Coste-Manière, & Stankeviciute, 2013). Especially when considering that blogs often have an audience interested in specific categories, which makes it also interesting for companies as they can be confident that the message reaches the right niche market (Mendoza, 2010)

As a result, practitioners have become increasingly interested in this type of advertising and are now recruiting bloggers to mention, review, sell or endorse products

on either barter basis or paid sponsorships (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2013; Mercanti-Guérin & Lassus, 2013; Zanette et al., 2013; Zhu & Tan, 2007). According to Zhu and Tan (2007) this form of advertising is embraced by an increasing number of brands, as it is believed to be influential at a fairly low cost when comparing it to traditional forms of advertising. More importantly, the authors argue that product placements on blogs differ from those on other platforms as blog advertising has two preferable characteristics. First, a blog is personal in nature, meaning that the image and credibility of the blogger is linked to the advertisement content (Zhu & Tan, 2007). Second, the advertisement is embedded in the blog content, which disguises its commercial message. Often, these product placements involve some kind of review of the product, including its advantages and disadvantages. In addition to this, Segev, Villar and Fiske (2012) state that blogs are a medium that allow two-way communication, professionals can take on a more active role in shaping the public perceive the brand. Hence, an increasing amount of companies approach bloggers for sponsorships, which most of the time entails writing favourable reviews about its products (Ballantine & Au Yeung, 2015). Moreover, product placements on blogs can be beneficial for both parties as the blogger receives free products, often before the product is available in the shops, which the blogger can use to attract readers and the brand gets free promotion on a blog that is viewed by thousands of people per day (Thornley, 2014).

2.5.2 Bloggers as opinion leaders

Thus, blogs certainly hold marketing potential. This section will further explain the precise role of bloggers in this. While everyone can be a blogger in essence, some are more popular than others. The entire blogosphere exists of a great amount of blogs of which most are unknown and only a few extremely influential (Agarwal, Liu, Tang, & Yu, 2008). This level of influence of the latter is comparable or even higher than those of celebrities (Mendoza, 2010). Consequently, these influential bloggers are considered as opinion leaders or so to say *influentials*, which is defined by Zanette et al. (2013) as “individuals whose opinions and behaviours affect other people’s choices” (p. 36). These influentials often have access to more information than the rest, meaning that they serve as a source of referrals (Zanette et al., 2013). For instance, readers visit these blogs to get information about the newest products because they believe that bloggers are more trustworthy (Hsu et al., 2013). Additionally, these bloggers have the power to influence other customers toward positive or negative attitudes (Kalpaklioglu & Toros,

2011). According to Valente and Pumpuang (2007) this scope of influence can be extended to others' opinions, beliefs, motivations and behaviours. Yet, influentials are often domain-specific, meaning that their expertise and influence is related to a specific area or topic (van der Merwe & van Heerden, 2009).

Moreover, opinion leaders spread their opinions through Word-Of-Mouth, which occurs electronically in the case of bloggers. In literature, eWOM is defined as “positive or negative statements made about a product, company, or media personality that are made widely available via the Internet” (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006, p. 35). Whereas marketers used to turn to celebrities for sponsorship deals, it seems that celebrity endorsements are gradually losing its impact on consumers (Mendoza, 2010). Currently, consumers rely more on friends, family and those who they consider to be like them before making a purchase (Fraser & Dutta, 2010). According to scholars in the field (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2013; Hsu et al., 2013; Li & Du, 2011; Song, Chi, Hino, & Tseng, 2007) this is the new type of electronic Word-Of-Mouth, which is considered to be one of the most effective ways for social influence because it is not directly linked to the business. Furthermore, Colliander and Erlandsson (2013) even refer to eWOM on blogs as celebrity WOM as it seems to be a combination of the expertise of a celebrity with the closeness of a WOM relationship. However, when compared with celebrities, bloggers are closer to their audience due to their personal approach. More specifically, readers get insights into the personal lives of bloggers (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2013). Over time, this can create a sense of friendship and loyalty among readers as visiting these blogs and thus, the interaction with the bloggers, become part of their everyday life (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2013). According to Mercanti-Guérin & Lassus (2013) the connection to the private life is what missing in other advertising and product placement strategies with as a result that bloggers seem to become so influential and persuasive. Yet, this relationship between bloggers and their audience will be further explored in the following section.

2.6 What is the relation between familiarity with a blogger and brand attitude?

While the previous section focused on the role of bloggers as opinion leaders in relation to marketing, this section will go deeper into the influence of bloggers by discussing the relationship between bloggers and their audience and the ways bloggers can persuade them. Due to the growing popularity of bloggers, and their potential with regards to

influence, the relationship between bloggers and audiences receives an increasing amount of attention among scholars and practitioners (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011; Hsu et al., 2013; Mercanti-Guérin & Lassus, 2013; Thorson & Rodgers, 2006). An essential concept that seems to return in almost every discussion on this topic is parasocial interaction. The term parasocial interaction was originally described by Horton and Wohl (1956) as the illusion of a face-to-face relationship with a media personality and is often abbreviated in literature to PSI. Basically, the media figure can range from a celebrity to a fictional character (Giles, 2002).

While this concept is nothing new in media literature, it has been studied most frequently in television context (Auter, 1992; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; Russell & Stern, 2006). To encourage a parasocial relationship with a television personality, a combination of factors is used: consistency of appearance, conversational style, informal face-to-face settings and production techniques (Rubin et al., 1985). Especially the consistency of appearance seems to be of great importance in the process of parasocial interaction (Auter, 1992; Rubin, et al., 1985). Previous studies already pointed out that the time spent interacting is positively correlated with levels of intimacy (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Middlebrook, 1974). As a consequence, Rubin et al. (1985) argue that “viewers who have watched a persona consistently over time may perceive a sense of intimacy evolving from their expectations of increased intimacy in past interpersonal experiences” (p. 156). Auter (1992) adds that with every interaction, the sense of PSI is reinforced which results into strong PSI feelings towards the media personality after frequent encounters. Yet, important to note is that while the media users might feel and behave as in a normal relationship with the media personality, it is still the media personality who controls the message (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012). Interestingly is that according to Rubin (2002), parasocial interaction can impact attitudes and behaviours as it suggests active and involved use of media. More specifically, a study conducted by Russell and Stern (2006) showed that there is a connection between television characters, consumers and brand attitude. The study pointed out that consumers align their attitudes with those of the characters with regards to the placed products. Hence, the character has an effect on the viewers’ attitude towards the placed product.

While parasocial interaction used to be thought of as one-sided, the interactive nature of ICTs enables audiences to disclose their own thoughts in response (Sanderson, 2008). In the case of blogs, this is enabled through the comment functions whereby blog

visitors watch the blogger interact with other visitors (Colliander & Dahlèn, 2011). When compared to more traditional media personalities, bloggers often provide their followers with multiple opportunities to interact, specifically on additional social media channels (van Loosen, 2014). More importantly, these interactions often take place on a daily basis and in a highly personal way when compared to other media personalities. Hence, Colliander and Dahlèn (2011) argue that blogs create higher PSI feelings than any other media.

The above mentioned, multiple scholars have studied the effect of this sense of relationship (Hsu et al., 2013; Mercanti-Guérin & Lassus, 2013). To begin with, it is suggested that mediated communications that resemble interpersonal communication can increase the persuasiveness and credibility of a message (Beninger, 1987). For instance, through these numerous encounters with a certain blogger, a reader creates a sense of trust, which then has an influential effect on the readers' attitudes (Hsu et al., 2013). In fact, Li and Du (2011) claim that blogs are more persuasive when there is a bond between the blogger and the blog reader. Besides, a recent study by Mercanti-Guérin and Lassus (2013) has pointed out that there is a strong link between the attitude towards the blog and the attitude towards the brand. The authors further state that blog readers prefer personal disclosure on a blog, which constitutes a commercial strategy for bloggers as this will not only positively impact the attitude towards the blog but also the attitude towards the features brands. Besides, blogs are believed to create greater levels of PSI, which makes its publicity effectiveness greater than other mediums (Colliander & Dahlèn, 2011). Thus, it appears to be the case that familiarity with a blogger influences the attitude towards a brand displayed on the blog. Following, this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H02: Familiarity with a blogger has no effect on brand attitude

Ha2: Familiarity with a blogger has an effect on brand attitude

2.7 What is the relation between prominence and brand attitude on blogs

Now that all concepts and possible relations have been explored, this section will explore the possible relationship between prominence, product placement on blogs and brand attitude by discussing related literature. As mentioned before, one of the disadvantages of prominence is the activation of persuasion knowledge. Drawing on

previous studies it could be argued that if readers like a certain blog or blogger, they are more disturbed by prominent placements, which then works adversely on their brand attitude (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Homer, 2009). But, it is important to note that these studies focused on product placement in entertainment vehicles other than blogs.

Therefore, it could be the case that these findings are not applicable to blogs. More specifically, Darke and Ritchie (2007) state that using bloggers is a way to avoid the activation of persuasion knowledge, which is indeed in contrast with the previously mentioned findings. Particularly important is the identification with a blogger, which has a positive impact on brand attitude (van Loosen, 2014). When readers identify with the blogger, they tend to take on the same attitudes and behaviour as the blogger as they desire to be alike (Kelmans, 1961).

While there research on prominence of product placement in relation to blogs is very limited, a similar study by Colliander and Erlandsson (2013) looked into the effect of sponsorship revelation, which could be more or less comparable to highly prominent placements but for sponsorship revelations the persuasive intent is even more explicit, and its relation to parasocial interaction. In contrast to expectations, brand attitude was not affected after sponsorship revelations, which suggests that consumers do not seem to overtly resist product placements on blogs. Likewise, the findings by Lu, Chang and Chang (2014) confirm this, as consumers do not have a negative attitude towards sponsored recommendation posts. In fact, bloggers were believed to like the brand more after the blog post (Colliander & Erlandsson, 2013). Furthermore, Colliander and Erlandsson (2013) argue that readers seem to assume that the blogger truly likes the brand or product that they praise, even when the post is visibly sponsored. Furthermore, Haugtvedt, Machleit, and Yalch (2005) add that sponsorships work especially well when the sponsor fits the content.

H03: The effect of the level of prominence on brand attitude is not dependent on the familiarity of the blogger.

Ha3: The effect of prominence of the product placement on brand attitude is dependent on the familiarity of the blogger.

3. Methodology

After having reviewed prior studies on product placement, this chapter will discuss the methodology of this research. To begin with, in the first section the choice of research methods, namely an experiment, is motivated. Then in the next section, the sample and the used sampling methods are presented. In the third section, the discussion of the measurements takes place. In this part, the dependent variable brand attitude and independent variables prominence and familiarity are operationalized. This continues in the fourth section wherein the stimulus material is presented. Fifth, is the discussion of the procedure of the experiment. Lastly, the type of data analysis is explained and motivated.

3.1 Choice of method

As the main objective of this study is to measure the possible relationship between product placement prominence and brand attitude, the decision for quantitative methods was made. Quantitative research methods often take on a deductive approach, meaning that the researcher moves from a theoretical basis that suggests an expected pattern to testing whether this pattern actually occurs (Babbie, 2007). In the previous section, the theoretical framework contributed to the proposal of three theoretically expected hypotheses. Additionally, Punch (2003) states that quantitative methods allow testing these hypotheses as well as researching the relationship between variables instead of merely describing the variables (Punch, 2003). Moreover, quantitative methods permit generalization and prediction (Zhou & Sloan, 2009). Hence, the preference is given to quantitative methods over qualitative methods as this seems to be the most appropriate research method for the proposed research question.

More specifically, an experiment was chosen over other quantitative methods as this type of method allows “to control every possible variable and measure only the effects of the independent variable being studied” (Zhou & Sloan, 2009, p. 161). As a consequence, one can make inferences about the relationship and be confident about it as other possible causes were controlled (Zhou & Sloan, 2009). According to Babbie (2007), experiments, at the most basic level, “involve (1) taking action and (2) observing the consequences of that action” (p. 245). In this research, the action relates to the prominence of product placement, as this will be manipulated. This manipulation allows observing the consequences, thus, if differences in prominence levels have any

effect on brand attitude when also considering the familiarity with the blogger. Besides, experiments have been widely used among researchers in the field of product placement (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Homer, 2009; Russell, 2002; Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007).

Moreover, the research design of experiments can be divided up into a within-subjects or between-subjects design. The design of the experiment will be a between-subjects design, which involves separate samples and “makes a comparison between two groups of individuals” (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2013, p. 280). In this type of experimental design, all subjects are exposed to only a single treatment (Greenwald, 1976). In case of a within-subjects design, all subjects would have received all treatments (Punch, 2013). The former was decided to be most appropriate for this research admitting that it is more time-consuming and difficult since more participants are needed. According to Gravetter and Forzano (2012) one of the key advantages of a between-subjects design is that possible treatment effects are easier to discover. Besides, Kantowitz, Roediger, & Elmes (2014) state that a disadvantage of the within-subjects design is that subjects have considerable higher chances of figuring out the purpose of the study when receiving all the treatments. As the participants were required to watch a video with product placement, watching three videos with three different levels would be too evident. In short, this study involves a 3 (prominence: prominent vs. subtle vs. no placement) x 2 (familiarity: yes vs. no) between subjects design.

Hence, for the experimental groups the independent variable will be manipulated while the control group will not receive any manipulation (Punch, 2013). Due to this, the groups can be compared on the measurement of the dependent variable. The aim is to “attribute dependent variable differences between the groups to independent variable differences between the groups” (Punch, 2013, p. 210). If the only difference between the groups lies in the treatment the groups received, it can be argued that this is caused by the independent variable. Therefore, according to Kantowitz et al. (2014), it is of utter importance in a between-subjects design that the groups are more or less the same with regards to demographics like age. Otherwise the variances in results might be due to the differences between the groups, which could decrease the validity. Therefore, the subjects will be randomly assigned to the groups (Babbie, 2007). Randomization takes place when “each subject has an equal and independent chance of being assigned to every condition” (McBurney & White, 2009, p. 201). According to Punch (2013), this

will ensure validity, as it will increase the chances that the subjects do not differ in any systematic way. As a result, subject-related variables confounding with the experimental variable are controlled in this way (McBurney & White, 2009).

3.2 Sample

Before discussing the sampling methods, the description of the target population should be clear. For this study, the sample involves participants that are Dutch women between the age of 15 and 30 years old. This decision was made driven by the choice of stimulus material in this study as the experiment involves a Dutch female beauty blogger. To begin with, according to Grant (2013), beautyblogs are most frequently visited by women between approximately 15 to 30 years old. Additionally, the online marketing agency AdFactor states that these women are often highly educated (Fox, 2014). In addition, as familiarity is one of the two independent variables of this study, men would most likely not be familiar with the blogger as they are simply not the target group of this type of blog. Hence, all men are excluded from the sample. Also, as the blogger speaks Dutch in the videos, it is necessary that all participants understand the language and therefore, all people who do not meet this requirement are also excluded from the experiment. All together, this sample seems to fit the purpose of the study best.

3.2.1 Sampling method

In this paragraph, the used sampling methods will be discussed first. After this, the validity of the sampling methods will be shortly assessed. In research, there are two main types of methods to generate a sample for research. The first type is probability sampling, which is a random sampling method whereby the researcher has no decision in who is invited to participate in the study (de Vaus, 2013). On the contrary, the researcher does have a choice when using a non-probability sampling method, which is the other main sampling method. Non-probability sampling was chosen as, according to Babbie (2007), probability sampling is often neither appropriate nor possible. First, in random sampling “all members of the population have an equal chance of being selected in the sample”, meaning that the researcher needs access to the whole target population (Babbie, 2007, p. 210). Second, probability sampling requires considerable more resources and time, which is interrelated with the first reason mentioned. Often, studies do not have access to these resources, which is also the case for this particular study as it has a relatively limited timeframe and resources. Therefore, the sample in

this study was generated online by using two non-probability methods. Generally speaking, Internet-based research “allows a researcher to reach thousands of people with common characteristics in a short amount of time, despite possibly being separated by great geographic distances” (Wright, 2006, para. 9).

To begin with, purposive sampling was used, which is a non-probability sampling method that is frequently used in experimental research (Hibberts, Johnson, & Hudson, 2012). This sampling method entails that the experimental researcher knows the characteristics of the target population and seeks out subjects that fit these characteristics and are therefore representative for the experiment to include in the sample (Babbie, 2007). This sampling technique is suitable for this study due to multiple reasons. First of all, this study identified a specific target population, namely Dutch women between 15 and 30 years old. According to de Vaus (2013), a sample of participants can be identified via online ‘flow populations’, which can be from social network sites or online communities that fit the characteristics required. Flow populations are samples that are generated from approaching people in a particular location or setting (de Vaus, 2013). The author adds that this is sometimes the most effective way of identifying a specific population. Therefore, these discussion forums were selected based on their popularity and audience. From all three forums, Girlscene focuses on the youngest girls, Ellegirl on young adults and Viva is most popular among adults. Second of all, a segment of the sample was generated on the judgment that they would be familiar with the blogger in the experiment. On these previously mentioned discussion forums, threads exist regarding beauty-blogs. Hence, one can be more confident that these women would have had prior interaction with the blogger and were therefore, purposively selected.

Moreover, the second method selected for this study, namely snowball sampling, was appropriate due to two reasons. First of all, this method was used to attain a bigger sample of women between 15 and 30 in general, not specifically focused on their familiarity with bloggers. The snowball sample technique entails that additional respondents are generated through other participants (Babbie, 2007). Second, the experimental survey was posted on social network sites. According to de Vaus (2013), social media are particularly suited to snowball sampling techniques. Likewise, Bhutta (2012) states, “starting with one or more groups or networks of friends researchers can create snowball samples by participants via links to additional friends or groups” (p. 7). Therefore, subjects were asked to share the link with others on their social network page

or to forward the study to others that fit the characteristics of the target population in the study.

Yet, both sampling methods are prone to self-selection bias, which Eysenbach and Wyatt (2002) explain as the assumption that “people are more likely to respond to questionnaires if they see items which interest them” (p. 3). Some scholars argue that this decreases the external validity (Birnbaum, 2000). However, there are three ways to increase the validity in this case. First of all, Smith and Leigh (1997) argue that student samples, which are frequently used in research, are also biased, as these samples do not represent the population either. Additionally, Internet samples often have a broader age distribution than student samples. For this specific research, the Internet allowed generating a sample that fits the target population more, as the age was set between 15 and 30 years old, which thus exceeded the average students’ age. Second, Eysenbach and Wyatt (2002) suggest that a way to minimize bias, and thus increase the validity, is using a topic that is suitable for the Internet population. As this study is centered on blogs, which are based on the Internet, it is appropriate to conduct the experiment online. At last, self-selection bias can be reduced by randomly assigning participants after the participants agreed to participate, which is also the case in this study (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002)

3.2.2 Sampling size

After the discussion of the target population and the sampling method, this paragraph will justify the required sample for this study. While the specific demographic results of the sample will be discussed in the next chapter, this paragraph will state the final attained sample size for the experiment. According to Christensen (2007), for every condition approximately 30 to 50 participants are needed for every condition. As this study involves a 3 (prominence: prominent vs. subtle vs. no placement) x 2 (familiarity: yes vs. no) between subjects design, a minimum of 180 and a maximum of 300 participants is required.

Moreover, the total amount of people who clicked on the link to participate in the experiment was $N = 428$. After collecting the data, it appeared that 62% actually finished the survey. Hence, the total amount of participants that contributed to the experiment was $N = 268$. Meaning that, according to Christensen’s requirements, the minimum amount of participants was achieved.

3.3 Operationalization and measurements

In order to assess the effect of prominence of product placement and familiarity with the blogger on brand attitude, which is the main objective of this study, this section will discuss the exact operationalization and measurements of the variables. First of all, the operationalization of the dependent variable brand attitude will be discussed.

Additionally, the used scale to measure brand attitude will be presented. Then, in the second paragraph the concept of the first independent variable prominence will be reviewed along with the measurement of this variable. In the next paragraph, the second independent variable ‘familiarity with blogger’ is operationalized. This section ends with a short review of all subject-related variables, namely the demographics.

3.3.1 Brand attitude

The dependent variable in this study is brand attitude. To measure the variable, the participants were asked to rate their attitude towards Andrélon, after watching the stimulus video, on a five-point Likert scale that contained five different items. This brand attitude scale was originally developed by Spears and Singh (2004) and has proved to be highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.97$). Hence, this ensures the validity of the brand attitude measurement. The scale consists of the following five items

“unappealing/appealing”, “bad/good”, “unpleasant/pleasant”, “unfavourable/favourable” and “unlikeable/likeable”.

3.3.2 Prominence

In this study, the first independent variable is prominence. Drawing upon work from important studies on prominence and product placement (Gupta & Lord, 1998; Homer, 2009), three levels could be identified as either prominent, subtle or control. First of all, prominence was demarcated according to a combination of Homer’s (2009) and Gupta and Lord’s (1998) classification. The first level, prominent, can be identified by high visibility in terms of position on the screen, size, often with close-ups and centrality to the action. Also, prominent placements are visually displayed combined with a verbal description. Placements on the second level, subtle, are those smaller in size and with a low time of exposure. Additionally, subtle placements are visually displayed only. The control level did not contain any brand placement.

3.3.3 Familiarity with the blogger

The second independent variable ‘familiarity with the blogger’ was measured by a closed question asking whether the participants knew the blogger. Respondents could

either answer 'yes' or 'no'. For those who recognized the blogger, two additional questions were included. The first question functioned as a manipulation check and will be discussed in paragraph 3.3.5. The second question measured the level of familiarity and participants were asked how often they engaged with content from the particular blogger, of which the answering categories contained 'daily', '2-3 times a week', 'once a week', '2-3 times a week' and 'less than once a month'. The last question regarding the blogger was presented to all subjects again and measured the attitude towards the blogger was measured with three items on a 5-point scale. This scale was taken from Russell and Stern (2006) and contained the items 'bad/good', 'unlikeable/likeable' and 'unfavourable/favourable'.

3.3.5 Manipulation check

Additionally, for the variable familiarity with the blogger, a manipulation check was included, which detected those who could not correctly identify the blogger. This was of importance for the experiment because respondents had to be assigned to the right familiarity condition (yes vs. no). Therefore, all subjects, who were familiar with the blogger, were asked to name the blogger. Not being able to correctly name the blogger, meaning that the previous encounters with the blogger would probably be very low, could manipulate the distribution of subjects to conditions. Hence, this manipulation check is of great importance for the final results of the study.

3.3.6 Demographics

Lastly, participants were asked to answer questions related to their demographics. The decision was made to include these questions at the end of the experiment instead of the beginning as this interests and motivates the participant to finish the survey (Babbie, 2007). First of all, participants were asked to fill out their gender, with the given options 'male' or 'female'. As this study aimed at females only, this question was included as manipulation check. If any males would participate, they could be identified and excluded from the research afterwards. Then, an open question regarding age followed. An open question was preferred over categories, as this would be more precise (Baarda, De Goede & Van Dijk, 2011). Thirdly, participants were required to provide their highest completed education level. The answer categories were adapted to the Dutch educational system: (1) primary school, (2) high school, (3) MBO, (4) HBO, (5) WO bachelor degree, (6) WO master degree and (7) PHD degree. An additional question was asked regarding their current occupation, which provided the participants with three

answering categories: (1) student, (2) part-time employed, (3) full-time employed and (4) unemployed.

3.4 Stimulus material

Now that the operationalization of the variables is clarified, the stimulus material can be described. To assess the possible effect of prominence and familiarity on brand attitude, the study will make use of stimulus material in which the level of prominence was manipulated. For the purpose of this study, a real, instead of fictitious, video was chosen as this enhances external validity (Tessitore & Geuens, 2013). Firstly, the used blogger will be introduced, as this will provide background information of the target audience. Then the actual stimulus material, thus the videos, will be discussed.

3.4.1 The blogger: DisforDazzle

For the videos, the choice was made to select a known Dutch blogger but not the most popular one. As the whole online world consists of many categories in which bloggers seem to be active, the decision was made to focus on beauty- and lifestyleblogs. These types of blogs seem to be most popular among women between 15 and 30 years old. Most of these beauty-related videos and blogposts involve a review of a product or a brand, as the bloggers show how to use the product for instance.

To ensure that there would be a sufficient amount of participants who would not be familiar with the blogger, the decision was made to not select the most popular one. Consequently, the Dutch female blogger Diana Leeftang, who goes by the blogname DisforDazzle, was selected. DisforDazzle owns a blog and a YouTube channel, on which she has more than 188.000 subscribers and has been active since 2011 (www.youtube.com/disfordazzle). To give a sense of popularity, the most popular Dutch beautyblogger Beautygloss has 390.000 subscribers (www.youtube.com/beautygloss). On her blog and her YouTube channel, blogposts and videos related to fashion, beauty and lifestyle can be found. Besides, the blogger has her own account on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Thus, the blogger provides her readers with additional ways to follow her in her daily life.

3.4.2 The videos

After a close consideration of multiple videos on the YouTube channel of DisforDazzle, one video was selected, namely a hair tutorial called ‘Dagelijkse haar routine’, which

can be translated into English as ‘daily hair routine’. This video was selected as it is over a year old and was filmed in a very basic setting. Originally, the video was 6 minutes and 30 seconds long. In the video, the blogger is doing a tutorial while using products from one brand, namely Andrélon. Andrélon is a well-known and established hair care brand in the Netherlands and owned by Unilever for over 70 years already. According to the European Institute For Brand Management, Andrélon was the third indispensable brand in the category ‘personal care’ in 2012 (Eurib, 2012). Except for the blogger and the products, nothing else is shown in the video. As a result, other external factors that might influence the perception of the participants are minimized. Furthermore, there was no disclosure of product placement or sponsorship included. Eventually, three short fragments from the whole video were selected as stimulus material and uploaded to the video-sharing website Vimeo.

In fragment 1, product placement is manipulated in a prominent way and involves a sort of review of the product. The video was quite short, namely 34 seconds. First of all, the blogger explicitly mentions the brand and talks about the product. Moreover, the blogger uses the product as well. Hence, viewers immediately see the effect of the product. Lastly, the video also includes a 4-second close-up of the product, whereby the product is centrally placed in the screen.

In fragment 2, the used product placement is more subtle. The video is a little bit shorter than the previous video, namely 32 seconds long. The blogger does not mention the name of the brand and no close-up was included. The blogger does use the product and the product is visible while doing so. Additionally, the blogger does not talk about the product while using it, but music is played. However, the product only appeared for for a very short period of time (3 seconds).

The third and last fragment did not contain any stimulus material as this served as the control condition. This video is also 32 seconds long. The blogger talks about how she always prepares her hair before styling it without specifying anything. No brands or products are shown either.

3.5 Procedure

In the previous paragraphs, the content of the experiment has been discussed. Now, in this section, the procedure of the experiment will be explained, which will allow replication for other studies. To begin with, the experiment was conducted on the

Internet and participants could participate in their own setting. This decision was made due to two reasons. First, the experiment involved videos, which made it more difficult to conduct the experiment in real-life, due to the available resources. Second, an Internet-based experiment is more convenient for the participants, which makes it more timesaving and it allows a greater reach. According to Hogg (2003), Internet-based experiments are more convenient because a respondent can participate in an online experimental survey whenever the respondent feels it is convenient instead of being interrupted at an inconvenient time with the survey at a specific location.

Thus, to generate respondents, the survey was open for respondents to take part for two weeks. It was posted on three online discussion forums with a short introduction to the research without specifying anything that could reveal the objective of the study. On the first forum, EllegirlTalk, a new thread was created in the sub discussion forum 'Centraal Station', as this was by far the most active sub forum. Also, the link was posted in an already existing thread called 'Beautyblogtopic'. On the second forum Viva a thread was created in the sub discussion 'Mode en Beauty', which was the most active sub forum. On the last forum, Girlscene, a thread was created in 'Beauty, Health & Hair', 'Lifestyle' and 'Onzin', the three most active subforums. On all three forums, a reminder was posted in the created thread for three times in the two weeks. Additionally, the link was posted on Facebook on the first day and with a reminder two times after. Besides that, 10 respondents shared the post with the link on Facebook.

After the participants were approached and clicked on the link, they were redirected to the actual survey on Qualtrics. Due to the between-subjects design there was not one survey identical for every group, but three different versions. As Qualtrics allows randomization of blocks, every subject was assigned to one of the three surveys. Every participant had to read the consent form wherein the purpose was briefly stated before starting with the actual experiment. Then, a short video that was uploaded on Vimeo appeared. The video was the only aspect that differed among the surveys. Every participant had an equal chance to be assigned to each of the three videos, thus either with a prominent placement, a subtle placement or no placement at all. To prevent that participants would re-watch the video, they continued to a new page on which the brand attitude towards Andreon was measured. Again, on the next page, the familiarity with the blogger was measured. If so, two more specific questions concerning the blogger appeared. If not, participants continued straight to the last question about the blogger. In the last section of the experimental survey, participants were required to answer five

questions regarding the demographics. Lastly, subjects were thanked for their participation.

3.6 Data analysis

After the experiment was conducted, the quantitative data could be collected from Qualtrics, which transformed the received results into numerical data (Babbie, 2007). In this study, analysis of variance (abbreviated to ANOVA) was used as type of data analysis because the experiment involves two independent variables with different people in each of the groups. According to Pallant (2013) two-way between-groups ANOVA allows testing whether “there is a significant difference among a number of groups” (p.105). As this study includes two independent variables, namely three levels of prominence and familiarity with the blogger or not, this study eventually has six groups, making an ANOVA the most appropriate type of analysis (Pallant, 2013).

More precisely, a two way ANOVA-test was used to analyze the data as the experiment did not only involve multiple groups but also two independent variables, namely prominence and familiarity with the blogger. According to Pallant (2013), “the advantage of using a two-way design is that we can test the ‘main effect’ for each independent variable and also explore the possibility of an ‘interaction’ effect” (p. 265). The main effect is defined as when “the effect of one independent variable is the same at all levels of another independent variable” (Elmes, Kantowitz, & Roediger III, 2011 p. 444). Yet, main effects are statistically independent from interaction effect (Elmes et al., 2011), meaning that the result of the main effects does not infer anything about possible interaction effects. An interaction effect occurs when the effect of one independent variable on the dependent variable depends on the second independent variable, thus it would allow studying whether the effect of prominence on brand attitude is related to the familiarity with the blogger. If any significant effects are found, additional post-hoc tests will be performed because “these tests systematically compare each of the pairs of groups, and indicate whether there is a significant difference in the means of each” (Pallant, 2010, p. 271).

Hence, a two way ANOVA involves three hypothesis tests (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2013), namely the effect of prominence on brand attitude, the effect of familiarity on brand attitude and lastly, the interaction effect of prominence and blogger familiarity on brand attitude. In short, this type of data analysis helps determining

whether there is a difference in the effect of prominence on brand attitude for people who do know the blogger and those who do not.

4. Results

The previous chapters with the theoretical framework and methodology functioned as the foundation for the accomplishment of this chapter, namely the results. In this chapter, the results from multiple conducted data analyses will be presented. In section 4.1 the descriptive results of the sample will be presented. This first part discusses details about the participants, including age and education level. After the descriptive results, section 4.2 will discuss the data preparation for the two-way ANOVA. Then section 4.3 will first discuss the equality of variances and the mean of every single experimental cell. Then the results of a 3 (prominence: prominent vs. subtle vs. no placement) x 2 (familiarity: yes vs. no) between-subjects ANOVA will be presented by offering first the main effects for familiarity in sub paragraph 4.3.1 and prominence in sub paragraph 4.3.2, and then the possible interaction effect for brand attitude in sub paragraph 4.3.3. Presenting these results will reveal whether the level of prominence and familiarity with the blogger have influence on brand attitude.

4.1 Descriptive results

In total, 249 women participated in this study. Their age ranged from 14 to 41 years, with an average of 22 years ($SD = 3.38$). Additional background information regarding the descriptive results of the sample is provided in table 4.1. Most of the respondents were students (67,5%) and most of the participants completed either their bachelor's degree (28,5%) or their HBO degree (24,9%), meaning that the sample is relatively high educated.

Table 4.1 Socio-demographics of the sample

	Percentage of respondents		Percentage of respondents
Education		Current occupation	
Primary school	2,4%	Student	67,5%
High school	21,7%	Part-time employed	14,5%
MBO degree	5,2%	Full-time employed	15,7%
HBO degree	24,9%	Not employed	2,4%
Bachelor degree	28,5%		
Master degree	16,5%		
PHD degree	0,8%		

4.2 Data preparation

In this section, several analyses prior to the main test will be discussed. These analyses functioned as preparation of the data for the two-way analyses of variances. In sub paragraph 4.2.1 the manipulation checks will be discussed. Then in sub paragraph 4.2.2 the distribution of respondents to the experimental conditions will be presented.

Following is a discussion of the independent variable familiarity with the blogger in sub paragraph 4.2.3. Lastly, the reliability test will be discussed in sub paragraph 4.2.4.

4.2.1 Manipulation check

To begin with, the data for the main data analysis was prepared by conducting two manipulation checks, which would determine if “participants perceived the manipulation as intended” (Mitchell & Jolley, 2012, p. 187). As the set-up of these manipulation checks were already discussed in the methodology chapter, this paragraph will present the results of the manipulation check.

First of all, a more general manipulation check was included for gender. In total, 19 respondents reported they were male and therefore, these respondents were excluded from the study. Initially, the sample had $N = 468$, but the final sample $N = 249$, of which the descriptive results were already reported in the previous section.

Second, a question was included to check the respondents’ familiarity with the blogger. In total, five respondents could not recall the correct name of the blogger. These respondents were excluded from the group that did recognize the blogger.

4.2.2 Familiarity with the blogger

To give some additional background regarding the familiarity with the blogger, this paragraph discusses this variable with more detail. Generally speaking, the respondents were divided into two conditions concerning the familiarity with the blogger but the actual level of familiarity was also measured by one additional question. Of all 170 respondents who were familiar with the blogger, 38,2% reads or watches content of the blogger less than once a month ($N=65$). 22,9% says to engage with the blogger’s content once a month ($N=39$) and 16,5% does so 2-3 times a month ($N=28$). A smaller part of the sample engages on a more regular basis, namely 17,6% once a week ($N=30$), 1,8% 2-3 times a week ($N=3$) and 2,9% on a daily basis ($N=5$).

4.2.3 Distribution of respondents to experimental conditions

Furthermore, it is important to have a clear overview of the distribution of subjects across the experimental conditions. In order to explore the distribution of the cells, a crosstab for the two independent variables ‘prominence’ and ‘familiarity’ was conducted. The results of this test are presented in table 4.2. While the three levels of prominence were equally distributed, the crosstab also revealed that the distribution of the condition familiarity was unequal.

Table 4.2 distribution of conditions

		Familiarity		
		Yes	No	Total
Prominence	Prominent	51	30	81
	Subtle	56	27	83
	Control	56	29	85
Total		163	86	249

According to Christensen (2007), every condition must consist of at least 30 respondents. Two conditions did not meet this requirement, namely the condition subtle x not familiar and condition control x not familiar. Further analysis revealed that this is due to the missing data caused by excluding 19 respondents from the sample due to gender. Of these 19 respondents, only 1 subject recognized the blogger. Hence, the initial dataset included 18 more cases for the not familiar conditions.

While it should be avoided when can, the problem of unequal sample sizes is quite common in experimental research (Keselman, et al., 1998). In statistics literature, deleting observations until all groups have the same amount of respondents is not recommended (Quinn & Keough, 2002). Furthermore, Brick and Kalton (1996) state that, in the case of unbalanced designs, weighted means preferably should not be used as this can cause bias. Drawing on previous research on unbalanced sample designs, several suggestions will be adopted in order to ensure the reliability of the two-way analysis of variance as much as possible.

4.2.4 Reliability test

In this paragraph, the reliability of the used scale of the dependent variable brand attitude will be tested. The independent variable prominence was assigned to respondents and the other independent variable familiarity was categorical and measured with a single question, no reliability test was needed for these variables. Since

brand attitude was measured on a five-item question, a reliability test, in this case the Cronbach's Alpha, can help to estimate the internal consistency of the multi-items scales (Pallant, 2010). According to Nunnally (1978) a minimum level of .7 for the Cronbach's Alpha value is recommended. Originally, the scale developed by Spears and Singh (2004) was considered to be reliable ($\alpha = 0.97$). Conducting the reliability analysis for brand attitude revealed that the Cronbach's Alpha was $\alpha=0.94$. Hence, the scale shows a very strong internal consistency and no items had to be removed from the scale.

4.3 two-way ANOVA

In this section, the main data analysis will be discussed. In order to examine whether the two independent variables have an effect on brand attitude a 3 (prominence: prominent vs. subtle vs. no placement) x 2 (familiarity: yes vs. no) two-way analysis of variance was performed. Before testing the three hypotheses in the following three sub paragraphs, the overall descriptive results of the variables in the ANOVA will be discussed first.

As stated above, this study involves unequal sample sizes, which has consequences for interpreting a two-way analysis of variance. According to Wallenstein, Zucker and Fleiss (1980), it is suggested to compute the unweighted mean of the mean values for a treatment across all strains. The unweighted means calculate the average of the individual group means. Hence, in order to report the means per experimental cell, the estimated marginal means are reported instead of the means in the descriptive table. The descriptive results of the test subjects in both independent variables groups and their reported brand attitude are presented in table 4.3. For the three groups of the independent variable prominence, it was found that the test subjects who had seen the video with the subtle placement had the most positive attitude towards the brand Andreon. For the independent variable familiarity, both groups appear to have more or less the same attitude towards the brand.

Table 4.3 Attitude towards the brand for both independent variables

	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Prominence:			
- Prominent placement	3,50	0,82	81
- Subtle placement	3,54	0,58	83

- no placement Familiarity	3,07	0,69	85
- Familiar	3,39	0,75	163
- Not familiar	3,35	0,73	86

The first step in analysing the two-way ANOVA is testing for assumptions underlying analysis of variance. Therefore, a Levene's test of equality of error variances was conducted to test whether the variability of scores is similar across the different groups (Pallant, 2010). The test revealed that $F(5, 243) = 2,77, p = .019$ and thus, that the variance of the dependent variable brand attitude across the groups is not equal. In this case, the homogeneity of variance is violated. As presented above, this study has an unbalanced design with regards to the sample, which can increase the vulnerability to assumption violations (Pallant, 2010). Hence, Pallant (2010) suggests that in such cases, one should use a more stringent significance level when evaluating the results of the two-way ANOVA. Therefore, $p = .01$ will be used throughout the analysis of the main and interaction effects instead of the initially suggested $p < .05$ in two-way analysis of variance research. Additionally, statistics scholars recommend using Type III sums of squares (SS) when equal variances cannot be assumed. This method is an unweighted means approach and treats data as if it were equal.

4.3.1 Main effect prominence on brand attitude

In this paragraph, the first hypothesis *the level of prominence has an effect on brand attitude*. The two-way analysis of variances did reveal a significant main effect for the variable prominence on brand attitude, $F(2, 243) = 10.70, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.08$, which is presented in table 4.3. This means that there is an observed difference between the brand attitude of women that watched the prominent placement, subtle placement and no placement. In the post-hoc multiple comparisons test that followed, it was found that the difference between the test subjects who had not seen any placement and those who had seen the prominent placement ($M_{\text{difference}} = .465, p < .001$) or had seen the subtle placement ($M_{\text{difference}} = .425, p < .001$) is significant. There was no significant difference between the test subjects who had seen the prominent placement and those who had seen the subtle placement.

As a result, the null-hypothesis is rejected, which led to the acceptance of the following hypothesis **H1**: The level of prominence has an effect on brand attitude. This means that the level of prominence can increase the brand attitude in a positive manner.

Table 4.3 Results of the two-way analysis of variance (N = 249)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η^2
Prominence	10.03	2	5.01	10.70	.000	0,081
Familiarity	0,11	1	0,11	0,24	.625	0,001
Prominence*Familiarity	8.54	2	4.27	9.12	.000	0,070
Error	111.84	243	0,47			
Total	2964.80	249				

4.3.2 Main effect familiarity on brand attitude

While there was a main effect found for the independent variable prominence in paragraph 4.3.1, this paragraph will test the second hypothesis *familiarity with a blogger has an effect on brand attitude* will be tested. The performed two-way analysis of variances revealed that there was no significant main effect for the variable familiarity on brand attitude, $F(1, 243) = 0.24, p = 0.625, \eta^2 = 0.001$. These results can be found in table 4.3 Meaning that there is no discrepancy observed between the brand attitude of respondents that recognized the blogger and those who did not. This result indicates that familiarity with the blogger does not enhance the brand attitude.

As a consequence, the null-hypothesis is accepted, which led to the rejection of **H2**: Familiarity with a blogger has an effect on brand attitude. Meaning that there was no difference found in brand attitude when comparing respondents who were familiar and non-familiar with the blogger.

4.3.3 Interaction effect prominence and familiarity on brand attitude

The last hypothesis *the effect of prominence of the product placement on brand attitude is dependent on the familiarity of the blogger* will be tested in this paragraph. Moreover, the two-way analysis of variances found a significant and medium interaction effect between prominence and familiarity with the blogger, $F(2, 243) = 9.12, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.07$. Thus, this means that the level of prominence affects brand attitude depending on the familiarity with the blogger (familiar or not familiar).

Due to the significant result of the interaction effect, follow-up tests were performed to further explore this relationship. Thus, the differences among prominence

level for those who recognized the blogger and those who did not. As mentioned previously in the beginning of paragraph 4.3, the alpha level was set at .01 due to the violation of assumptions, which requires a more stringent significance level when evaluating the results of the two-way ANOVA (Pallant, 2010).

Thus, the follow-up tests were conducted to explore the possible significant differences among the groups. Cardinal and Raitken (2013) suggest executing pairwise comparisons for interactions by changing the syntax. Hence, following the suggestions of the authors, the comparison for the two independent variables was added in the syntax. Additionally, Cardinal and Raitken (2013) also suggest using the Fisher's LSD procedure, as this is the most powerful post hoc comparison test. Using the LSD test for coincidence interval adjustment is comparable to conducting multiple t-tests at once and thus, more convenient (Levine, 2013). The post hoc consisted of a pairwise comparison test and univariate test for prominence x familiarity with the brand attitude as dependent variable.

As a result of the performed LSD test, it was found that the significant interaction effect was caused by only one condition, namely prominent level. These tests revealed that of those who had seen the video with prominent placement, the attitude towards the brand was significantly more positive for those who recognized the blogger than those who did not ($M_{\text{difference}} = .59, SD = .16, p < .000$). This indicates that a prominent placement increases brand attitude when someone is familiar with a blogger. For the subtle condition, those who did not recognize the blogger reported a more positive brand attitude than those who did ($M_{\text{difference}} = .19, SD = .16, p = .245$), however this difference was not found to be significant. Further detailed information on this analysis can be found appendix C. Hence, the null-hypothesis is rejected and the following hypothesis is accepted **H3**: The effect of prominence of the product placement on brand attitude is dependent on the familiarity with the blogger. Meaning that levels of prominence have a different effect on brand attitude when considering the consumers' prior familiarity with the blogger.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In the past years, product placement has grown out to be a widely used marketing strategy across the globe (Chan, 2012). This type of advertising has expanded among various media types. As a result, many scholars have studied the possible effect of product placement on consumers' behavior (Gupta & Lord, 1998; Homer, 2009; Russell & Stern, 2006). However, studies on the effect in an UGC setting, specifically blogs, which has been become increasingly popular, are hard to find (Verhellen et al., 2013). Hence, the present study aimed to explore a new field in advertising research and contribute to the currently scarce research on product placement in an UGC setting. As a result, the main objective of this research was to explore whether different levels of product placement affect consumers' brand attitude. Therefore, this study investigated the impact of prominence of product placement in blog videos on the brand attitude of those who are familiar with the blogger and those who are not.

First of all, this study found that generally speaking placements have an effect on brand attitude in the positive direction. Up till now, literature on the effectiveness on brand attitude is rather contradicting, meaning that these results are in contrast with outcomes of research by others scholars who claim that placements have no effect on brand attitude at all (Babin, 1996; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2007). Moreover, this study revealed that compared to the control group, consumers who saw the subtle placements generated a more positive brand attitude than those that saw the prominent placement. Yet, the difference between the two familiarity groups was relatively small and not significant. Similar findings resulted from prior studies concerning traditional media, like television shows and movies. For instance, Homer (2009) also found that subtle placements enhanced brand attitude more than prominent placements. More specifically, prominent placements evoked more negative attitudes towards the brand. The results from this study confirm that generally speaking subtle placements are more successful in this process. According to the existing literature on this topic, this could be caused by the activation of persuasion knowledge when seeing a prominent placement (Cowley & Barron, 2008; van Reijmersdal et al., 2007). Yet, while past experimental studies pointed out that this negatively impacts the brand attitude as it interrupts the viewing experience (Cowley & Barron, 2008), this study expected the contrary. These expectations were confirmed by the findings as the results provide further evidence that familiarity with a blogger and levels of prominence are related when it comes down to the impact on brand attitude.

Hence, the results of the conducted experiment seem to confirm that the existence of a parasocial interaction enhances attitudes. This study is the first to directly examine the effectiveness of familiarity with a blogger, thus a parasocial interaction relationship, within the context of product placement on blogs. The findings suggest that women who have engaged with content of the blogger before responded more positive to prominent placements than those who did not know the blogger. Besides, these results are also in contrast with previous findings by Verhellen et al. (2013) and points out that using amateurs is not an appropriate measurement for product placement effectiveness in an UGC setting, which was debated in the academic relevance section in the introduction chapter. Hence, it could be argued that those who have no bond with the blogger are more bothered with prominent placements or at least less sensitive to the opinion of the blogger. Besides, it appeared that prominent placements are even more effective than subtle placements for those who are familiar with the blogger. This is arguable, drawing on a previous study by Russell and Stern (2006), which stated that television characters play a role in influencing the brand attitude of consumers. Results suggest that consumers align their attitudes towards products with the characters' attitudes towards the placed products, and this process is driven by the consumer's attachment to the character (Russell & Stern, 2006).

Hence, blogs and vlogs seem to differ from traditional media like television and films. Where these media types seem to activate persuasion knowledge, especially among those viewers who like the program or the character, the opposite seems to be the case with blogs. A possible reason is that often, product placements seem to fit the scene in blogs or vlogs. For instance, as used in this study, beautyblogs are all about brands and products, and how these function. This includes the possible advantages and disadvantages of the product. Previous studies have pointed out that congruent placements, thus those who seem to fit the script or scene, evoke more positive attitudes (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Homer, 2009). Hence, it could be argued that this is often the case for blogs and that the findings are therefore in contrast with those concerning other media types. Additionally, while blogs might have a relatively big intended audience, most visitors are teenagers or adolescents. As explained in this study, for beauty blogs the target age is between approximately 15 and 30 years old.

5.1 Managerial implications

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study suggest that blogs certainly hold potential as platform for product placement strategies. The results of attitude change propose that marketing managers who currently not use blogs as vehicle for their promotional strategies should reexamine their practices as these mechanisms seem to enhance attitudes in a possibly lucrative way. For those managers who already use blogs to place their products or brand, it should be noted that blogs do not seem to function in the same way as other media platforms. Tactics used in movies or television does not seem to apply for online platforms. Whereas prominent placements seem to have undesirable consequences for traditional media, these kinds of placements seem to be most effective on blogs. Hence, current implementation strategies should be adapted when approaching bloggers, and more focus should be given to more prominent placements as these have proven to be more effective.

Besides, product placement practices can be of a great expense for companies while in comparison to movies and television, the costs for product placement on blogs is relatively low. Clearly, blog videos are seen by a considerable smaller amount of consumers. Yet, brands can be more confident that the message reaches the right niche market as blogs often have audiences with specific interests.

Nevertheless, managers should be aware of that there are also certain risks involved. As most product placement deals are done on a barter basis or even cash-free arrangements, one should keep in mind that bloggers can also speak of the product or brand in a negative way. Hence, sending products to bloggers in the hope that bloggers will use it in videos or articles, can also work adversely.

5.2 Research limitations and directions for future research

Although, the findings from this study yield new and additional insights into the effectiveness of product placement in an online context, there are also a couple of limitations that should be kept in mind.

First of all, the videos used as stimulus material were taken from an existing video on YouTube. Considering the popularity of the blogger, it could have been the case that certain participants had prior knowledge of the video. Yet, this was not controlled for in the study. Besides, the videos were relatively short in time. This was done to minimize the effect of external factors on brand attitude. As a result, the introduction and any further explanation were excluded from the video, which could

have caused a sense of vagueness among participants. Consequently, some participants might have perceived the video as too short or unclear, which could have had an impact on their reported brand attitude.

Additionally, the non-probability sampling method appeared to be a limitation for this study. While selective sampling is a common limitation in research, but often chosen due to its convenience with regard to timeframe and resources, it caused a certain bias in this study. After the data collection phase, it became evident that the acquired sample contained a considerable higher amount of participants who were familiar with the blogger than those who did not. The online survey software Qualtrics allowed the randomization of participants per prominence condition. Due to this, the experiment had an unbalanced sample with unequal groups, which decreases the validity of the study. While the prominence levels were more or less equally distributed, the difference between the familiar and not familiar condition was relatively big. Besides, a part of the retrieved subjects for the not familiar condition appeared to be males, hence these responses had to be excluded from the dataset, which caused even bigger differences. Eventually, the familiar condition consisted of twice as much subjects as the not familiar condition.

Lastly, this study did not control for brand familiarity or prior brand attitude. While other experimental studies often use a pre-test to determine the prior brand attitude before exposure to the manipulation (Cowley & Barron; Homer, 2009; Russell, 2002), this study used a control group as measurement of the general attitude towards the brand. Thus, this could have influenced the results.

5.3 Directions for future research

In the light of the results of this study, several recommendations for future research are made. To start with, future research efforts should focus on the creation of stimulus material specifically for research purposes. Preferably with a popular or well-known blogger. In this way, a credible video can be created, which reflects existing videos in similar categories. Also, the influence of external noise can be minimized in this way, which makes it easier to study possible effects of moderating variables.

A related opportunity for future research lies in differentiating between males and females. Currently, this study used a female beauty and lifestyle blogger, which excluded men from the sample. Yet, it would be interesting to use a more general blogger, which allows comparing the effect between males and females.

Other venues for future research lie in the use of different types of blogs and vlogs. Currently, the ‘blogosphere’ keeps developing, which makes it almost impossible to treat all blogs the same. For instance, the phenomenon vlogs, videos wherein bloggers document their daily lives, are becoming increasingly popular. Previous research pointed out that placements that are perceived as natural are more effective (Russell, 2002) while the congruency of product placements in real-life videos could be a point of discussion. Therefore, more research on the effectiveness of product placement in these kinds of videos could provide valuable insights. For example, when are placements considered as congruent or not congruent in the case of blog videos? This could not only provide valuable insights but also contribute to the development of a comprehensive framework of product placement in an online context, as already suggested by Verhellen et al. (2013).

Additionally, future studies could pay more attention to other measurements of effectiveness as this study used brand attitude as measurement of effectiveness. Yet, the impact of different levels of prominence on purchase intention would also be a noteworthy approach. Especially when considering that, for instance, beauty bloggers often incorporate some kind of review on a product. According to these beautybloggers themselves, it happens that products sell out after they have appeared on a blog (www.beautygloss.nl/adverteren). Yet, no scientific research has been conducted on this so far.

Lastly, this study only focused on the familiarity with the blogger with a simple measurement. However, it would also be interesting to research the effect of likeability of the blogger instead of merely familiarity, possibly in relation to prominence as well.

5.4 Conclusion

Up till now, research on product placement in an online context was still very limited. Therefore, this research aimed to require insights into this subject with the following research question *What is the effect of prominence of product placement in videos of familiar and non-familiar bloggers on brand attitude?* Also, this study intended to contribute to the overall framework on this topic, which could also benefit future studies.

Thus, the main objective of this study was to examine whether familiarity with a blogger plays a role in the impact of prominence of product placement on brand

attitude. This research found out that prominence and familiarity are dependent in their impact on brand attitude of female consumers. More specifically, familiarity with a blogger certainly has an influence when it comes down to processing different types of product placement and its effect on brand attitude. Consumers that are familiar with a blogger respond more positively to more prominent placements while consumers that are not familiar with a blogger respond more positively to subtle placements. This suggests that placements on blogs can be more prominent than in other types of media, wherein persuasion knowledge is often activated when placing products more prominent. This is not the case for bloggers as these bloggers disclose personal information, which creates and enhances a strong parasocial relationship, making consumers more lenient towards prominent placements. This is something that is absent with all other media platforms. Also, product placement on blogs differs from those in mass media as it often involves reviews of the product. Hence, this could be the reason for the differences in results when compared to studies on the effectiveness on television and in movies. As blogs costs brands considerable less than other mass media types, product placement on this developing online platform certainly holds potential for marketing practices. Additionally, these interactions and relationships that seem to influence consumer behaviour also make it relevant for further research.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Survey

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in a research about blogging. You can only participate in this study if you speak and understand Dutch as this research involves watching 1 short clip of a Dutch blogger. The survey will take approximately 5 minutes of your time. You may discontinue your participation at all time. If you know someone who would be able and interested in filling out this survey, please forward the survey to them, as all help is needed and appreciated. Thank you for taking part in this research.

With kind regards,

A media and business student at the Erasmus University

For any questions please contact:356765el@student.eur.nl

Disclaimer: All of your answers will be treated with high confidentiality and remain anonymous throughout the entire research.

video P Please watch the following video before proceeding:

Q1 Please rate your attitude towards Andreelon on the following scale:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)
unappealing:appealing (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
bad:good (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
unpleasant:pleasant (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
unfavourable:favourable (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
unlikeable:likeable (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

video S Please watch the video below before proceeding

Q2 Please rate your attitude towards Andreon on the following scale:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)
unappealing:appealing (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
bad:good (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
unpleasant:pleasant (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
unfavourable:favourable (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
unlikeable:likeable (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

video X Please watch the video below before proceeding

Q3 Please rate your attitude towards Andreon in the video on the following scale:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)
unappealing:appealing (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
bad:good (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
unpleasant:pleasant (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
unfavourable:favourable (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
unlikeable:likeable (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q4 Did you recognize the person in the videos?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Answer If Did you recognize the person in the videos? Yes Is Selected

Q5 Please write down his or her (blog)name:

Answer If Did you recognize the person in the videos? Yes Is Selected

Q6 How often do you read or watch content of this blogger?

- Daily (22)
- Once a Week (20)
- 2-3 Times a Week (21)
- 2-3 Times a Month (19)
- Once a Month (18)
- Less than Once a Month (17)

Q7 Please rate your attitude towards the blogger on the following scale:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)
unlikeable:likable (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
bad:good (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
unpleasant:pleasant (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8 Please answer the final general questions below

Q9 What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Q10 What is your age?

Q11 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Primary school (1)
- High school (2)
- MBO (3)
- HBO (4)
- Bachelor's degree (5)
- Master's degree (6)
- PHD degree (7)

Q12 What is your current occupation?

- Student (1)
- Part-time employed (2)
- Full-time employed (3)
- Not employed (4)
- Retired (5)

Q13 What is your nationality?

This is the end of the survey. Thank you for participating in this research. Note: don't forget to press next otherwise your answers will not be recorded

Appendix B. Stimulus material

Video 1 – prominent manipulation



Video 2 – subtle manipulation



Video 3 – control group



Appendix C. SPSS output

Estimates

LSD test: Dependent Variable: Brand attitude

Prominence	Did you recognize the person in the videos?	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
prominent	Yes	3,792	,096	3,603	3,981
	No	3,200	,125	2,954	3,446
subtle	Yes	3,443	,091	3,263	3,623
	No	3,630	,132	3,370	3,889
control	Yes	2,936	,091	2,756	3,116
	No	3,207	,127	2,957	3,457

Pairwise Comparisons

LSD test: Dependent Variable: Brand attitude

Prominence	(I) Did you recognize the person in the videos?	(J) Did you recognize the person in the videos?	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^b	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^b	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
prominent	Yes	No	,592*	,157	,000	,282	,902
	No	Yes	-,592*	,157	,000	-,902	-,282
subtle	Yes	No	-,187	,160	,245	-,503	,129
	No	Yes	,187	,160	,245	-,129	,503
control	Yes	No	-,271	,157	,085	-,580	,037
	No	Yes	,271	,157	,085	-,037	,580

Based on estimated marginal means

*. The mean difference is significant at the

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Least Significant Difference (equivalent to no adjustments).