Placement Prominence and Cultural Influence: Their Roles in Shaping Brand Attitudes and Purchase Intentions in the Chinese Market

Student Name: Qingfang Du
Student Number: 698423

Supervisor: Dr. Petra Tenbült

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Abstract

Influencer marketing, also known as influencer product placement, has gained increasing attention and has been widely researched in the past years with the prevalence of the Internet, the fast process of digitalization, and the evolving nature of social media platforms. Brands are increasingly counting on influencer marketing to reach target consumers and achieve their marketing strategies because consumers are losing patience with traditional advertising channels, such as TV ads and mass media. However, past studies led to inconsistent results regarding the efficacy of the prominence of product placement and influencer marketing. At the same time, while influencer marketing has been widely researched, most of the past research focused on developed Western countries, and the Chinese market drew relatively less attention compared to other countries. Nowadays, there are many foreign influencers posting actively on Chinese social media, and these foreign influencers gain 25.6 thousand euros per month for product placement, making collaboration with foreign influencers a popular trend. However, the efficacy of foreign influencer marketing has never been studied before, plus the inconsistency of the results of influencer marketing. Thus, it is important to investigate how influencer product placement influences consumer behaviors, such as brand attitude and purchase intention.

Our study elaborates on the following question: *to what extent do the level of prominence of the product placement and the cultural background of influencers influence consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention?* To measure the impact of influencer marketing, an experiment was conducted among Chinese social media users. We made 6 videos with different prominence levels of product placement and influencers with different cultural backgrounds, and we presented different videos randomly to different groups. The results suggest that influencer product placement has a positive effect on brand attitude and purchase intention compared to groups without any placement, but the level of prominence does not impact brand attitude and purchase intention. The cultural background of influencers does not significantly impact Chinese consumers' brand attitude or purchase intention. There is no interaction effect between the level of prominence of product placement and the cultural

background of influencers on brand attitude and purchase intention. The findings of our study provide a basis for future research that seeks to elaborate on the effectiveness of influencer marketing in the Chinese market. We advocate future research to further explore the cultural aspect to fill the gaps of research in this area and to keep the findings updated in this fast-paced and constantly evolving world.

KEYWORDS: *Influencer product placement, Prominence, Cultural background of influencer, Brand attitude, Purchase intention*

Preface

With great pleasure and pride, I present to you my master thesis '*Placement Prominence and Cultural Influence: Their Roles in Shaping Brand Attitudes and Purchase Intentions in the Chinese Market*'. As a marketer who has been working for years after graduation, I appreciate this valuable chance to go back to school and start my academic journey again. Even though I have never written any thesis before and there were many challenges over the past few months, I still found this research process incredible and memorable. It unlocked my potential and equipped me with the ability to explore any marketing topics that interest me in the future.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century in China, a Canadian named Mark Rowswell, commonly known by his Chinese stage name "Dashan", which means a big mountain, became the most well-known foreigner in China because of his first debut in Spring Festival Gala, a national TV show watched by 900 million people (Guo, 2011, p.311; Johnson, 2000, p.1). As Dashan got more and more exposure after his first debut, he seemed to gain popularity in China. In 2003, a Chinese company invited him to endorse an English learning machine and produced a TV commercial with Dashan holding the machine and saying he highly recommended this product. The product went viral in China with a gross sale of 550 million yuan (70.45 million euros) in 2004 and 2.5 billion yuan (320.2 million euros) in 2005 (Wu, 2021, para 4). As a mixture of foreign and Chinese culture, this celebrity endorsement advertisement was a great success. The stage name Dashan kept bringing Rowswell more than half a million dollars in annual income by endorsement (Glionna, 2004, para 11). In recent years, many foreign micro-celebrities, also called influencers, have begun to show up on Chinese social media platforms and attracted millions of followers, just like Dashan many years ago (Cao, 2021, para 5-8).

Now, many years have passed, Dashan has disappeared from view, the commercials and products that once went viral have also gone, and the marketing approach has also changed. For marketers, it had become more challenging to reach consumers through traditional advertisements on traditional media channels, so the way of advertising has evolved, and product placement has become one of the most popular ways in various media vehicles, including movies, TV series, video games, and music (Neale & Corkindale, 2022, p. 150).

According to Newell et al. (2006), product placement first appeared in a movie produced by the famous French filmmaker Louis Lumière in May 1896 (p. 579). In the movie, two women were washing loads of laundry by hand and two boxes of Lever Brothers soap were placed in front of them with labels on the boxes. Since that movie, the product placement industry has been officially established (p. 579). After that, product placement started to appear in academic research in the 1980s, and the first investigation of product placement was conducted during that time as well (Harmetz, 1983, para 4-7; Steortz, 1987, p. 2). Many brands or products made great success through movie product placement, and the first and prime example is the product placement of Reese's Pieces in the movie *E.T. the*

Extra-Terrestrial, which boosted sales of Reese's Pieces dramatically after the movie was released in 1982 (Nebenzahl & Secunda, 1993, p. 2; Snyder, 1992, p. 301). Since then, marketers and advertisers started to consider product placement as an essential marketing technique to promote their products by bringing more exposure and familiarity to products (Elliott, 1992, p. 22). For example, John Badham, the director of the film Short Circuit, incorporated Alaska Airlines, Apple computers, Bounty paper towels, and Ore-Ida frozen french fries into his movie, and he stated that: "If we can help each other, and it doesn't intrude on the movie, it's fine." (Reed, 1989, p. 1).

As the cost of TV commercials increased and the audiences switched channels during commercial breaks because they were tired of traditional commercials and would prefer subtle advertising tools, marketing practitioners began to switch from traditional commercials to product placement. As a result, around the 1950s, the prevalence of product placement also penetrated TV programs after movies, with more significant effectiveness of product placement than that of traditional TV commercials (Davtyan & Cunningham, 2017, pp. 160-161; Gamage et al., 2023, p. 1111; Karrh, 1998, p. 34; Liu et al., 2015, p. 300). Russell (2002) also supported this by claiming that as long as product placement is not perceived as persuasive messages, it should work more effectively than traditional commercials because consumers may consider the placement of brands or products as a way producers adopted to strengthen the authenticity of the series or shows (p. 1). For example, in a top-rated comedy named *Friends*, the main characters purchased furniture from Pottery Barn, a furniture retail store, and a series of stories revolved around the purchased products, allowing Pottery Barn products to integrate with the plot naturally throughout the entire episode (Russell, 2002, p. 1). As the range of product placement industry continued expanding, product placement started to exist in other media vehicles besides movies and TV programs, including radio, video games, music, and even social media (Eagle & Dahl, 2015, p. 605).

With the advent and development of social media, influencers, a novel type of celebrity, have become a new way to carry out product placement, demonstrating a positive effect on consumer behaviors. (Khamis et al., 2016, p. 191; Liu et al., 2015, p. 300). Many companies adopt influencer marketing as an effective marketing strategy, which provides lots of opportunities for companies to promote their product and services because influencers can share the product on their social networks without being recognized as a direct advertisement by consumers (Alassani & Göretz, 2019, p. 252). In addition, compared to traditional media

channels, influencers charge less, appealing many marketers consider influencer marketing as another new option in recent years (Du et al., 2023, p. 1315).

Regarding the effectiveness of product placement, the prominence of product placement plays an important role (Chavadi et al., 2019, p. 40; Cowley & Barron, 2008, p. 90). Many researchers held different opinions regarding the definition of prominence. Some believe the visual and audio determine the level of prominence, while others believe the duration, visibility, mentions, and size determine the prominence level (Babin, 1996, p. 23; D'Astous & Séguin, 1999, p. 897; Gupta & Lord, 1998, p. 48; Williams et al., 2011, p. 12). Besides the definition, there has been a contradiction in findings about the effectiveness of the prominence of product placement in past studies. Chavadi et al. (2019) and Matthes et al. (2007) believe that prominent placement works more effectively than subtle placement, but Chan et al. (2016) and Homer (2009) believe that prominent placement has a negative effect on brand attitudes and purchase intentions (p. 40; pp. 473-473; p. 2; p. 21). This conflict in the existing research underscores the complexity of the issue and points to the need for further, more nuanced investigations.

As mentioned at the beginning, the use of foreigners in China can easily create more attention. According to Zhou and Belk (2004), the mix of Western and local elements can be attractive and persuasive because of the *mianzi* (prestige face) culture (p. 72). In fact, Non-Chinese or Western models, products, or settings in advertising can be more effective and convincing to Chinese consumers on "superficial" products (e.g., beauty and fashion) instead of on traditional products or cultural products (e.g., Chinese medicines and foods) (Cohen et al., 2013, p. 148; Zhou & Belk, 2004, p. 72). According to Hung et al. (2007), Chinese consumers can also feel distanced from Western models and identify more strongly with advertisements using Asian models, who can convey local values better (pp. 145-146). Obviously, there have been conflicts about the influence of using foreign cultures in the advertisement, which needs further exploration. This paradox can be understood and explained through the history of the Chinese advertising industry. According to previous studies, advertising in China is mainly dominated by Eastern culture instead of Western culture, where individualism and enjoyment are dominant (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996, p. 27; Yong & Neelankavil, 1997, p. 46). However, other research proved that Western culture and values deeply influenced the Chinese advertising industry (Crow, 1937, pp. 163-175; Tse et al., 1989, pp. 457-459; Wang, 1997, p. 255; Xu, 1990, p. 171; Zhou & Hui, 2003, p. 42). We will discuss more about how Western culture influenced Chinese advertising and Chinese

consumer psychology in the theoretical framework.

By exploring the previous work, we identified a specific problem, and our study aimed to answer the following question: *To what extent do the level of prominence of the product placement and the cultural background of influencers influence consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention?*

To unravel this question, we adopted a quantitative approach, and we conducted an experiment survey among Chinese social media users. The survey consisted of scales developed by Spears and Singh (2004) and Du et al. (2023). The survey was disseminated through Chinese social media WeChat and Red for three weeks to collect sufficient answers. Afterward, data analyses including the Chi-square test, Shapiro-Wilk test, Levene's test, and two-way ANOVA were conducted through SPSS.

1.1 Scientific relevance

As the research about product placement continues, besides movies and TV series, there have been various new vehicles that researchers focused on, especially those that related to the Internet and new technologies, such as video games and social media (Cárdaba et al., 2022, p. 157; Vrontis et al., 2021, p. 617; Wang & Chen, 2019, p. 493; Williams et al., 2011, p.2). Meanwhile, consumers have become more aware of advertising messages, so brands find it difficult to stand out on traditional media and turn to influencer marketing (Arcada, 2017, p.2). In recent years, influencers have appeared in much research toward product placement as a new vehicle for product placement, and the efficacy has been studied and evaluated based on brand attitude and purchase intention (Cárdaba et al., 2022, p. 157; Chen & Yang, 2023, p. 1601; Du et al., 2023, p. 1315; Hsu et al., 2013, p. 69). There are many variables that can affect the efficacy of product placement, and prominence is one of the factors that draw the most attention because of its direct relationship with the persuasive message (Cárdaba et al., 2022, p. 157). However, there were inconsistencies among the past studies. For example, both Chan et al. (2016) and Chavadi et al. (2019) found the level of prominence has a significant effect on either brand attitude or purchase intention; on the other hand, Cárdaba et al. (2022) did not find prominence significantly impacts brand attitude, and Verhellen et al. (2013) did not find prominence significantly impacts purchase intention (p. 16; p. 40; p. 169; p. 296).

Regarding the product placement by influencers, a comprehensive framework beyond only using audiovisual to define the prominence level was requested by Verhellen et

al. (2013), so we determined to set up a new study framework that incorporates not only audiovisual but also other essential elements that consist of the placement in our study (p. 299). Verhellen et al. (2013) also pointed out it was a limitation of their research that they only focused on undergraduate students for convenience, and they advocated a broader range of participants for future research (p. 300). Jin and Muqaddam (2019) recommended the inclusion of not only females but also other genders (p. 534). Thus, it is important to carry out another study with a range of participants that includes as much diversity as possible, regardless of their gender, education, age, and occupation. It is also important to continue the study and update the results on different platforms, in various countries, and at different times as the results are not always consistent (Verhellen et al., 2013, pp. 299-300).

Last but not least, in the past years, a large portion of studies on product placement and social media focused on Western countries, so the Chinese market and Chinese consumers received less attention compared to other countries (Vrontis et al., 2021, p. 623). As mentioned in the previous sections, there are many foreign influencers in China who can make 200 thousand yuan (25.6 thousand euros) per month easily by doing various online advertising (Techweb, 2021, para 1). However, there is merely research about the difference in the effect of product placement between local influencers and Western influencers in China. Therefore, conducting further studies within the context of emerging countries is justified, as these regions offer unique economic, social, and cultural dynamics that can provide valuable insights and enhance the generalizability of research findings (Vrontis et al., 2021, p. 635).

1.2 Societal relevance

Practitioners can benefit from our study as product placement by influencers is expanding and there is an increasing number of people spending more time online, especially on social media (Dixon, 2023, para 1-3). First, our study results revealed whether influencer marketing is an effective strategy, providing marketers with updated insights when they are planning the marketing strategy. Second, many marketers choose subtle placement when working with influencers in the Chinese market because they believe subtle placement can boost sales more directly (Xueqiu, 2024, para. 6-13). Our study brings insights into the ways marketers decide to work with influencers, especially regarding the level of prominence of product placement. Lastly, whether adopting influencers with Western backgrounds like Dashan will still be as effective as twenty years ago is an unsolved puzzle. Should marketers

continue collaborating with Western influencers or should they choose local influencers instead? Taking everything into account, it is important for companies to understand whether product placement by influencers has effects on brand attitudes and purchase intentions and how the level of prominence of the product placement by influencers and the cultural background differences of influencers impact the effectiveness of product placement.

1.3 Chapter outline

We first introduce the relevant background information and give an overview of our study in the introduction chapter. Next, the theoretical framework chapter delves into the review of existing literature on the concepts from our research question, such as product placement, prominence, influencers, and Western culture, and how these ultimately influence consumer brand attitude and purchase intention. The methodology chapter justifies the adoption of the quantitative approach and explains the sampling strategy, measurement scales, operationalization, and the design and collection procedure of the pre-test and main experiment. The following chapter presents the results of the Chi-square test, Shapiro-Wilk test, Levene's test, and two-way ANOVA. Last but not least, the last chapter contains a comprehensive discussion and conclusion of our study, reflecting theoretical and societal relevance and implications, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter delves into the fundamental concepts pertinent to our study, drawing on scholarly literature to reinforce these ideas. It presents an in-depth examination of various themes such as advertising, product placement, and the cultural background of influencers on brand perception and purchasing behavior. Additionally, we propose several hypotheses and introduce a theoretical model designed to address our research question. Essentially, this chapter establishes the foundational concepts of our investigation, offering a comprehensive framework for comprehending the entirety of the research.

2.1 Product placement

Product placement was first introduced decades ago, and since then, numerous scholars have extensively explored this concept in previous research (Balasubramanian, 1994, p. 31; Gupta & Gould, 1997, p. 37; Gupta et al., 2000, p. 41; Nebenzahl & Secunda, 1993, p. 2; Russell & Belch, 2005, p. 73). To better understand product placement within our study, it is important to understand the history of product placement and the various definitions provided by different scholars.

According to Steortz (1987), product placement was first defined as the integration of products with recognizable brands into the scene or the storyline of a movie, and it was widely accepted and essential to business because it provided funding or even a one-stop shop to movie studios, who often faced the budget problem, so that the props were provided for the entire movie sets (p. 2). Later on, as more researchers explored product placement, many scholars attempted to expand and refine the definition of product placement.

In the research by Balasubramanian (1994), product placement was defined as paid product messages that were designed to influence movie or television audiences by inserting products into movies or television programs designedly and inconspicuously (p. 31). Gupta and Gould (1997) stressed that product placement features something in return when combining the brand into movies, including money or promotion (p. 37). Researchers from two to three decades ago have proven product placement as a promotional practice that plays an important role in advertising (Balasubramanian 1994, p. 31; Friedman, 1986, p. 193; Nebenzahl & Secunda, 1993, p. 2; Gupta et al., 2000, p. 41; Gupta & Gould, 1997, p. 37).

As an effective marketing tool that combines the product or the brand into the content, product placement gets more attention from marketers and corporations (Russell & Belch, 2005, p. 73). After the prevalence of product placement in movies and TV series,

product placement also became widely used in other media channels such as music, novels, video games, and even Broadway shows (Karrh, 1998, p. 33). Much previous research studied the presence of product placement in various media vehicles: Coca Cola and Adidas began to show up in video games; Burger Kind created a series of games for 18-34 years old males, a group that used to be difficult for traditional Burger Kind marketing channels to reach; an agency claimed to have 100 product placement deals by video games; Maserati was featured in a famous Hollywood story novel; the brand names appeared 500 percent more in popular novels than in the past (Friedman, 1985, p. 932; Karrh, 1998, p. 33; Snyder, 1992, p. 308; Williams et al., 2011, p. 11). During that period, the definition of product placement expanded as more researchers explored various media vehicles. According to Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012), product placement brings brands or products exposure to potential consumers by presenting brands or products in a natural setting through mass media (p. 28).

Later on, as more and more media and programs became available, product placement was widely used in mobile phones and new media, which became common with the development of the Internet where many people spend more time instead of watching TV and movies, so the media vehicles that carry product placement continued expanding (Bryce, 2023, para 5&22; Stephen & Coote, 2005, p. 28).

Thus, the old definition of product placement, which confined the scope of media vehicles within movies or TV series in the past, no longer pertains, and we need a new definition that can cover a wider range of media outlets. Russell and Belch (2005) and Liu et al. (2015) redefined product placement as the combination or the inclusion of brands or products in entertainment vehicles or programs with certain purposes, allowing the coverage of different media vehicles and keeping the essence of the word placement (p. 74; p. 300). Since this study aims to focus on product placement by influencers, we will use this definition.

2.2 Product placement by influencer on social media: influencer marketing

With the advent of the internet and mobile phones, a novel media vehicle appears: social media. Different from mass media, social media, also known as consumer-generated media, is composed of information and content that are created by users who aim to educate each other about different subjects, including products, brands, personalities, and issues, through different formats such as social networking web sites (e.g., Facebook, Instagram), blogs (e.g., Twitter), and content sharing web sites (e.g. Youtube) (Aichner & Jacob, 2015, p.

257; Blackshaw, 2004, p. 2; Liu et al., 2015, p. 301). Alassani and Göretz (2019) pointed out that social media not only connects people with others but also allows users to create and share information, enabling companies to communicate with their potential consumers and promote their products and services (pp. 251-252). Although social media has been widely adopted as an effective marketing tool, with the increase in number, variety, and availability of social media, it has gotten harder for marketers to get the word out to consumers; as a result, product placement is adopted by practitioners because of its cost-effective price and effectiveness (Liu et al., 2015, p. 300). According to PQ Media (2022), in 2021, the global product placement on digital media has the fastest growth compared to any other channels, up to 16.3% (p. 26).

There have been many "ordinary" people who gained popularity and fame thanks to the emergence of social media (Khamis et al., 2016, p. 198). Influencers, also known as micro-celebrities, represent individuals who are competent in gathering and attracting a substantial amount of followers by establishing a distinct identity on social media platforms (Khamis et al., 2016, p. 191; Marwick, 2013, p. 1; Xu & Pratt, 2018, p. 958). Influencers have a high level of parasocial interaction with their followers due to high approachability through different platforms and a high level of credibility due to their amateurish identity, rendering influencers with such power to enhance brand attitude and boost brand awareness that marketers are now relying on to promote their products and events (Amos et al., 2008, p. 209; Gerhards, 2017, p. 517; Jin, 2018, p. 155). Regardless of their social status, with influence among a certain group of people, influencers can convey advertising messages to potential consumers through recommendations and significantly influence consumers' shopping behavior and purchase decisions (Alassani & Göretz, 2019, p. 252; Hsu et al., 2013, p. 70).

As the number of social media platforms continued increasing, influencer marketing became an essential part of marketing strategies to convey the message to consumers (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014, p. 592). The concept of influencer marketing was first proposed by Brown and Hayes (2008) as "an approach that identifies and targets influencers in a market" (p. 10), and through cooperating with certain influencers to guarantee the effectiveness of advertisements, marketers' goals such as increasing brand awareness, influencing purchase intention, and generating revenues, can be achieved by reaching potential consumers through product placement by influencers (Alassani & Göretz, 2019, p. 252-253; Chen & Yang, 2023, p. 1602).

2.3 Types of product placement and the level of prominence

The types of product placement have been widely researched in the past decades as one of the important factors that influence the efficacy of product placement because each type can be grouped into different prominence levels, which can significantly affect the effectiveness of product placement (Brennan & Babin, 2004, p. 194; Chan et al., 2016, p. 7; Law & Braun, 2000, p. 1068).

Some researchers refer to the types of product placement as the attributes of product placement, and these terms are often used interchangeably in many research; however, indicator words for prominence level such as implicit, subtle, explicit, and prominent were always used to describe and differentiate those types or attributes in the research (Auty & Lewis, 2004, p. 699; Babin, 1996, p. 47; D'Astous & Chartier, 2000, p. 32; Russell, 2002, p. 2). Thus, in our research, we will use the term types of product placement to describe different attributes of the product placement and the term level of prominence, which includes prominent and subtle, throughout this paper to maintain consistency.

As the forms and vehicles of product placement evolved, there were many inconsistencies among the definition and classification of the level of prominence among different types of product placement, such as visual and audio cues, the size of the product or logo, the position on the screen, how the product is integrated into the story, the frequency of mentioning the product, and the length of time the product appeared on the screen (Cowley & Barron, 2008, p. 90; Linden, 2015, p. 14). When product placement first appeared, the effectiveness of product placement was a primary concern for many researchers, and prominence, as one of the key variables that influence effectiveness, was also extensively investigated; however, scholars expressed varied opinions on how to categorize the type of product placement (Babin, 1996, p. 23; D'Astous & Séguin, 1999, p. 897; Gupta & Lord, 1998, p. 48; Williams et al., 2011, p. 12).

Babin (1996) found a difference in efficacy between prominent and subtle placement, and he concluded that visual, verbal, and time duration are key factors that can manifest the level of prominence of product placement (pp. 47-48). The author advocated further investigation into types of placement and the level of prominence (p. 47). To investigate further, Gupta and Gould (1997) classified product placement into two dimensions, including the type of product placement and the level of prominence (p. 2). According to Gupta and Gould (1997), prominence is "the extent to which the product placement possesses characteristics designed to make it a central focus of audience attention"

(p. 49). Based on their research, each type of product placement, including sense stimulus (e.g., audio, visual, and audio-visual), size of the product or the brand, position, and time duration, can be further divided into either prominent or subtle placement (p. 49). Sense stimulus includes three types, including visual only, audio only, and combined audio-visual, and these categories stand for scenarios that implied only visual brand identifier without any sound, brand-related message in audio without presenting the product on the screen, and the combination of both (p.48). Karrh (1998) stressed that product placement can be presented visually but complemented with dialogue or background audio based on the different functions of different media vehicles (p. 33).

Based on the previous research, D'Astous and Séguin (1999) further the level of prominence into three different levels: implicit, integrated explicit, and non-integrated explicit (p. 897). Placement with only clear visibility of products or brands but without clear demonstration can be considered implicit product placement; placement with clear demonstration can be grouped as explicit product placement (D'Astous & Séguin, 1999, p. 898). Subtle placement only contains visual images of the product or brand, while prominent placement incorporates both visual and audio references (Homer, 2009, p. 23). Williams et al. (2011) pointed out that visual and audio are crucial factors that impact the effectiveness of product placement (p. 12). In more recent research, Cárdaba et al. (2022) define the types of product placement into size, visibility, exposure time, and frequency of mentioning and exposing the brand or the product (p. 159).

Table 2.1 illustrates more previous research that considered the types of product placement and explained how they were defined as prominent or subtle. In our research, we adopted several factors that were applicable to our videos, such as different types of product placement, and we divided them into prominent and subtle groups. The measurements will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

Table 2.1 Types of product placement and the level of prominence

Author(s) (year)	Type of product placement	Attributes of level of prominence		Page
		Prominent	Subtle	
Gupta and Gould (1997)	Visual and audio	Combined audio-visual	Visual only or audio only	p. 49
	Size	Highly visible size	Small	p. 49
	Position	Main focus	Background	p. 49
	Time duration	High time exposure	Low time exposure	p. 49
Karrh (1998)	Visual and audio	Visual complemented with audio	Visual only	p. 41
D'Astous and Séguin (1999)	Demonstration	With clear demonstration	Without clear demonstration	p. 898
Law and Braun (2000)	Visual and audio	Audiovisual	Visual or audio	p. 1065
Roehm et al. (2003)	Mentions	Mentioned several times with presenting the product	Mention the product once	p. 26
Cowley and Barron (2008)	Plot connection	Connected to the plot	Not connected to the plot	p. 92
	Mentions	More than once or were on the screen more than five seconds	Only once or were on the screen less than five seconds	p. 92
	Visual and audio	Visual	Audio or audiovisual	p. 92
Homer (2009)	Visual and audio	Visual along with audio	Visual only	p. 23
Williams et al. (2011)	Visual and audio	Combined audio-visual	Visual only or audio only	p.12
Cárdaba et al. (2022)	Size	Large size	Small	p. 162
	Visibility	Brand name visible	No brand name	p. 162
	Frequency or duration	Appear more occasional or longer	Only once	p. 162

2.4 Brand Attitude

Many researchers in the field of marketing and advertising consider attitude crucial because it not only helps to predict consumer behavior such as brand choice and brand consideration but also determines how consumers evaluate the brand (Schivinski & Dąbrowski, 2014, p. 195; Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 53). Marketers should consider the brand attitude as a communication effect and try to enhance that in consumers' minds (Rossiter, 2014, p. 533).

Attitude can be "general evaluations people hold in regard to themselves, other people, objects and issues" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 4). Mitchell and Olson (1981) defined brand attitude as a person's internal evaluation of the brand (p. 318). Based on previous research, Spears and Singh (2004) proposed that brand attitude can be the degree of support or opposition to a brand (p. 55). Rossiter (2014) correlated brand attitude closely with consumer emotions and stated that brand attitude, the consumers' overall attitude, and evaluation of the brand, can also be influenced by freestanding emotions connected to the brand (p. 537). Drawing upon the previous research, Schivinski and Dąbrowski (2014)

conclude that brand attitude is consumers' perception, evaluation, and favor or disfavor of a brand (p. 195).

Brand attitude can be influenced by many factors, and marketing content is one of them. The advertisement of the brand leaves an impression in consumers' minds no matter whether they are interested in the brand or not, and when they are asked to assess the brand, they will make an evaluation based on their brand-related memories (Hastak & Olson, 1989, p. 446). Cowley and Barron (2008) proved that theory by explaining how brand attitude is constructed in two different ways. Under a subtle exposure, even though consumers may not clearly remember seeing the brand placement, implicit memory of the brand is enhanced and they will have a more positive attitude toward the brand; under a prominent placement, consumers can have a clear memory of the brand, reinforcing a positive attitude toward the brand as well (p. 90).

Our experiment will adopt brand attitude as our measurement to test the efficiency of the product placement as brand attitude is an effective measurement to evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing strategy (Mitchell & Olson, 1981, p. 320).

2.5 Purchase Intention

While some believe that attitude and intention are closely related or even the same at some level, the two terms are different and play different roles in the marketing research field (Bagozzi, 1981, p. 610; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 289). To better understand purchase intention, we decided to break down the components of this term and define each one first. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), behavioral intention is a person's intention to perform behaviors, and it can be influenced by subjective feelings, attitudes, and norms (p. 289). Bagozzi (1981) affirmed and further defined intention as "the subjective probability that one will perform a given behavior" (p. 609). Drawing upon the previous research, Spears and Singh (2004) define purchase intention as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" (p. 56).

Younus et al. (2015) stressed that purchase intention is the preference of consumers to purchase the product or service after evaluation and that the process of the formation of purchase intention is very important, and many factors, especially endorsement and placement, can affect the intention (p. 9). It was found decades ago that product placement in film can positively influence purchase intention (Karrh, 1998, p. 42). Many brands, including Dairy Queen, Blizzard, and Cosmopolitan martinis, adopt product placement to boost sales by

increasing consumer purchase intention (Williams et al., 2011, p. 8).

Since the process of making a decision is a long process that is hard to predict accurately, intention can indicate the extent consumers are willing to perform a certain behavior (Peña-García et al., 2020, p. 2). As a reliable predictor of consumers' buying decisions, purchase intention helps to reveal the reasons why consumers decide to purchase a specific product (Mirabi et al., 2015, p. 268). Thus, our research adopted the definition of purchase intention from Spears and Singh (2004) and proposed purchase intention as a key factor to further investigate.

2.6 The relation between prominence level, brand attitude, and purchase intention

There are many factors to measure the effectiveness of the product placement used by previous research, including brand recall, recognition, and brand affiliation (Dardis et al., 2015, p. 313; Nelson, 2002, p. 80). However, for marketers, the ultimate point of product placement is to sell the product, and these items may never turn into purchase decisions (Matthes et al., 2007, p. 477). As a result, there are many new studies exploring brand attitude. Some recent research revealed that prominent placement has a positive effect on brand attitude; some other research stated that subtle placement has a positive effect on brand attitude (Homer, 2009, p. 23; Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007, p. 470). Even though there is constant debate about the effectiveness of prominent and subtle product placement, congruent prominent placement is more natural and can be more persuasive (Russell, 2002, p. 1). Thus, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H1a: Prominent placement will have a more positive effect on brand attitude than subtle placement and no placement.
H1b: Subtle placement will have a more positive effect on brand attitude than no placement.

Besides brand attitude, Hong and Magnusen (2017) highlighted the importance of focusing on purchase intention in product placement research (p. 42). Some scholars argued that prominent placement has a positive effect on purchase intention; others held the opposite conclusion (Chan et al., 2016, p. 16; Chavadi et al., p. 40; 2019; Cowley & Barron, 2008, p. 90; Homer, 2009, p. 23). Product placement is constantly evolving, so it is important to test how would consumers respond to different levels of placement in recent years, and we propose the following hypotheses:

H2a: Prominent placement will have a more positive effect on purchase intention than subtle placement and no placement.

H2b: Subtle placement will have a more positive effect on purchase intention than no placement.

2.7 Chinese advertising history overview

   To better understand what role Western culture plays in Chinese advertisements, it is important to first review the history of the Chinese advertising industry where both culture and policy facilitated the appearance of development of this industry. In the research on the history of the Chinese advertising industry by Wang (1997), advertising first appeared in China in the 1920s, followed by a temporary disappearance from China because of War and Revolution, and it returned and developed in China in the 1970s when the market-oriented economy was implemented and China decided to reopen the gate to the West. During the 1920s, both the trade direction and civilization influence switched from Chinese-dominant to Western-dominant as modern media vehicles, such as newspapers and billboards, and advertising agencies, such as Carl Crow Inc, Millington Ltd, China Commercial Advertising Agency, and Consolidated National Advertising Co, were introduced to China by Western. These foreign agencies mainly focused on introducing the Chinese market foreign brands and products, which were often recognized with the word *yang*, a Chinese word meaning 'foreign', to differentiate from domestic products (pp. 242-247). According to Carl Crow, who owned a large advertising agency back then in Shanghai, it was difficult to introduce foreign medicine and foods into the Chinese market to change consumers' dietary and medication habits; however, foreign consumer goods such as cosmetics and fashion clothes were successfully introduced to Chinese marketing, and Chinese began to wear clothes made with foreign fabrics and machines (Crow, 1937, pp. 163-175; Xu, 1990, p. 171).

   According to Wang (1997), after the 1970s, due to the open-door policy, foreign goods flood into the Chinese market with intense advertisement on diverse media channels with the help of new advertising agencies that are well-known today: Young and Rubicam, McCann-Erickson, Ogilvy and Mather and Leo Burnett (pp. 250-254). Their initiative was to offer service to international companies who had already started their business in China, but as the Chinese market grew larger and became more lucrative, it also became one of their major concerns to introduce new foreign products, including cosmetics, household

appliances, electronic products, food, and financial services to the Chinese market (Zhou & Hui, 2003, p. 36; Wang, 1997, p. 255). As the modern Chinese advertising industry was first introduced and developed by Western to promote foreign products and services, it was inevitable that some elements or cultural aspects within the advertisement were Western style (Wang, 1997, p. 257).

2.8 Differences between Eastern and Western culture

It is widely researched and approved that China and Western countries have completely different cultures, for example, collectivism over individualism, traditional over modern lifestyle, and utilitarianism over hedonism (Nicholson & Stepina, 1998, p. 34; Zhang & Shavitt, 2003, p. 24).

Utilitarian appeals, which gratify our fundamental physiological needs such as food and clothing, appeared in Chinese mainland advertisements back in 1979 as a symbol of Eastern traditional values by stressing the promises of a better life; while hedonistic appeals, which bring people fun, pleasure, and gratification, appeared in advertisements in Hong Kong as a symbol of Western modern values by stressing American lifestyles (Tse et al., 1989, pp. 457-459). Later on, Western values became increasingly popular and began to appear in Chinese advertising incorporated with traditional values (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996, pp.1-3).

According to Zhang and Shavitt (2003), Chinese consumers were more willing to purchase foreign brands despite higher prices to improve their image and bring a modern vibe to their lives (p. 24). Zhou and Hui (2003) also indicated that modernity, prestige, and Western lifestyles are associated with foreign products, especially those from the West, preferred by the Chinese market and providing symbolic values to Chinese consumers (p. 36-37). In addition, product quality is another reason why foreign products were preferred as they were perceived with higher quality compared to domestic products (Liu et al., 2013, p. 35; Zhou & Hui, 2003, p. 37). This phenomenon can be understood better by exploring consumer psychology in developing countries. For consumers in developing countries, Western products and services are preferred not only because of their quality but also because of their symbolic value which enables consumers with enhanced status and social distinctions (Batra et al., 2000, p. 85).

To satisfy consumers' needs for Western values, Coca-Cola used English in advertisements even though most target consumers don't speak English (Zhou & Hui, 2003, p. 42). According to Liu et al. (2013), some Chinese companies even gave exotic names to

their brands and products, which were domestically produced and had no relation with the Western at all. For example, Chinese clothing brands adopted foreign-sounded names such as Youngor, Jodoll, Rouse, and so on; real estate projects in major Chinese cities were named Victoria Harbor, Yosemite, California Gardens, and so on (Li, 2008, p. 1142). Haier, a brand that originated and developed in China, used a boy with blonde hair and blue eyes as a representative of the West in the Haier twin's logo (Omar & Williams, 2006, p. 273). The use of Western elements in Chinese advertisements, including words, figures, and backgrounds, brings consumers a sense of prestige, modernity, and high quality, and this technique is widely adopted in the Chinese advertising industry (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996, pp. 1-3; Cohen et al., 2013, p.148).

2.9 The relation between the culture of influencers, brand attitude, and purchase intention

With the rise of social media as a major form of communication, a new category of celebrities, social media influencers, became popular (Khamis et al., 2016, p. 191). Influencers are people who have become skilled at showcasing themselves on social media and creating a special identity to get many followers who like their personal style (Marwick, 2013, p.1). Marketers rely on influencers to help increase brand recognition, improve people's opinions of the brand, and spread the word about new products or upcoming events (Holmes, 2013, para 3-7).

In our study, we will not only focus on influencers but also focus on the cultural background of influencers. Zhou and Belk (2004) noted that advertisers mix Western and international features into local brand ads to make the ads more convincing due to the *mianzi* (prestige face) culture among Chinese consumers (p. 72). However, there are not many studies that have looked closely at how influencers with different cultural backgrounds will affect brand attitude and purchase intention. To fill the research gap, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H3a: The culture of influencers has an effect on brand attitude.
H3b: The Western influencer will have a more positive effect on brand attitude than the Chinese influencer.
H4a: The culture of influencers has an effect on purchase intention.
H4b: The Western influencer will have a more positive effect on purchase intention than the

Chinese influencer.

2.10 The interaction effect of prominence level and the cultural background of influencers on brand attitude and purchase intention

   As mentioned above, we proposed that prominent placement would have a positive effect on both brand attitude and purchase intention, and the mix of Western culture in advertising would also have a positive effect on both brand attitude and purchase intention. However, the research focused on both the prominence of product placement and the culture of influencers at the same time is very limited. To address the lack of research, we suggest the following hypotheses:

H5: The effect of Western influencers on brand attitude is even greater when the product placement is prominent than when the product placement is subtle.
H6: The effect of Western influencers on purchase intention is even greater when the product placement is prominent than when the product placement is subtle.

3. Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology used in our study. First, we discuss the choice of method, explaining why specific research techniques were selected with the rationale behind the chosen research strategy. Following this, the pre-test section explains the testing procedures before the main experiment. Then, the sample section explains the demographics and criteria for participant selection. Next, we discuss operationalization and measurement, describing how variables were defined and measured. Finally, the experiment procedure section provides how the main experiment was carried out to ensure that the study can be replicated and that the procedures are transparent.

3.1 Choice of method

As this research will focus on how the prominence level of product placement and the culture of influencers influence consumer brand attitude and purchase intention, a quantitative method was adopted to answer the research question. Quantitative analysis, featuring numerical data, enables a more objective examination and empowers researchers to apply statistical methodologies for data analysis, reducing susceptibility to personal biases and subjective interpretations (Nardi, 2005, p. 98). In the application of quantitative research techniques, researchers typically establish an anticipated pattern and subsequently assess its presence or absence through testing (Punch, 1998, p. 49). In the previous section, we proposed several hypotheses. Quantitative research methodologies allow for the simultaneous testing of hypotheses and the examination of relationships between variables (Gelo et al., 2008, p. 272).

In our research, we focused on the level of prominence, which was manipulated. This manipulation allowed us to examine whether the level of prominence, serving as the independent variable, has any influence on brand attitude and purchase intention. Meanwhile, we tested whether the other independent variable, the cultural background of influencers (e.g., Chinese and Western influencers) had any effect on brand attitude and purchase intention. This research contained a 3 (prominence: prominent vs. subtle vs. control) x 2 (nationality: Chinese vs. Western) between-subjects design with brand attitude and purchase intention as measures (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Experimental design independent variables

IV	Prominent placement	Subtle placement	No placement
Chinese influencer	Condition 1: Prominent placement with Chinese influencer	Condition 2: Subtle placement with Chinese influencer	Condition 3: No placement with Chinese influencer
Western influencer	Condition 4: Prominent placement with Western influencer	Condition 5: Subtle placement with Western influencer	Condition 6: No placement with Western influencer

We adopted an experimental survey, which enabled us to test differences among participants assigned to different groups with different conditions and also allowed us to explore causal relationships between the aforementioned variables (Babbie, 2020, pp. 228-230). The experimental survey questionnaire (see Appendix A) was designed and distributed through Qualtrics, a platform that can assign participants to different groups randomly. Through the implementation of random assignment, which allows each participant to have an equal and impartial opportunity to be assigned to any condition, we reinforce the validity of our study by reducing systematic disparities and isolating the impact of the experimental variable (White & McBurney, 2012, p. 171).

As stated in the introduction section, Western culture is more effective on superficial products, so the product we presented in our video was a toothpaste, which is an FMCG product instead of traditional Chinese snacks or other traditional products. We made this decision through a pre-test, which will be elaborated in section 3.3. We conducted a paired samples T-test to make sure the group means were significantly different (Sawyer, 2009, p. 29).

In addition, as mentioned in the hypotheses, our study aimed to test differences among six groups with different levels of prominence and influencers from different cultural backgrounds in terms of brand attitude and purchase intention. To achieve that, we first ran a reliability test to evaluate the internal consistency of the scales for both brand attitude and purchase intention (Babbie, 2020, pp. 148-149). A Chi-square test was also conducted to examine whether there was a significant relationship between the level of prominence and placement identification (Babbie, 2020, p. 473). After that, the two-way ANOVA tests were conducted, which allowed the examination of more than two variables (Babbie, 2020, p. 484). However, the data needs to be normally distributed for the ANOVA test, so we checked whether there were violations of assumptions, including normality and homogeneity, by

conducting Shapiro-Wilk tests and Levene's tests, before conducting the ANOVA (Pallant. 2010, p. 286; Sawyer, 2009, p. 27-29).

Before designing the experiment, we needed to decide on the choice of product in the video, so we conducted a pre-test to determine the sample product in our main experiment.

3.2 Pre-test

In the previous research, the combination of consumer products, such as FMCG products and household appliances, and Western culture were more acceptable to the Chinese market than cultural and traditional products such as medicine and foods (Zhou & Belk, 2004, p. 72; Zhou & Hui, 2003, p. 36; Wang, 1997, p. 255). However, there are a lot of products that fall in the consumer product category, so in order to find the most suitable product for our experiment, we first carried out a pre-test to assess which product is more relevant to our participants, Chinese consumers. As our research focused on Chinese consumers who have access to social media regardless of their gender and age, FMCG products are more suitable because people purchase and use them more frequently than household appliances.

To find out the most relevant products that participants purchase and use most frequently, we picked up six FMCG products including toothpaste, coffee pods, hand cream, mouthwash, skincare products, and cosmetics. There were several standards that we used when choosing the categories. First, for each category, we chose a product that is commonly designed for all gender groups, so products such as shampoo or face wash were excluded because it was hard to find a shampoo with gender-neutral packaging as it is usually either for females or males. Also, we needed to make sure the logo or the brand name was visible on the product. Within a limited time, we managed to find a suitable sample product for each category mentioned above, so we adopted those six categories in our pre-test and were ready to proceed to the main experiment design with the suitable product right after getting the results. The questionnaire was designed in English. Since WeChat offers a website translation function for free and the questions are simple, we adopted WeChat translation for the pre-test after checking the quality of the translation in Chinese, which was clear and accurate.

A seven-point scale (0 = not at all to 6 = all the time) developed by Babin (1996) was adopted to test how often participants purchase and use the six products (p. 41). Participants needed to evaluate two questions for each product, "How often do you purchase the following products/ How often do you use the following product" (see Appendix A).

Products with the highest outcomes would be adopted for our main experiment. The questionnaire was disseminated through WeChat by private message and social feeds, and there were 45 Chinese participants who finished the pre-test survey to answer how often they purchase and use several different products. The results of the pre-test will be presented in section 4.1. The result showed that toothpaste is the most commonly purchased and used product among all the products we offered in the pre-test. The purchase and usage of toothpaste are both significantly higher than the lowest one. Thus, we adopted an Italian toothpaste as the promotional product in our experiment because the logo is largely imprinted on the product so the brand can be easily identified by participants. Next, we proceeded to our main experiment.

3.3 Sampling strategy

For our main experiment, the participants were aged 18 or above, so there was no ethical issue regarding junior participants. The target population of this study is Chinese social media users, without any particular age or gender restrictions. As a result, this experiment was distributed and collected through the Internet because the target participants of our experiment were consumers from China, so it was easier to reach the target group through the Internet. Besides, the prevalence of the Internet allows access to ordinary people with user-friendly software that simplifies the designing, collecting, and analyzing process of the experiment (Alessi & Martin, 2010, p. 122). Since our experiment contained videos, it was better to conduct the experiment through the Internet with a user-friendly environment that allowed us to play videos. In addition, our study focused on influencers, so the Internet occupied the central role naturally, conducting the experiment through the Internet allowed ruling out participants who didn't have access to the Internet and social media platforms. The Internet-based survey allows researchers to conduct the survey fast, cheaply, and efficiently as the Internet allows for convenience and snowball sampling (Baltar & Brunet, 2012, p. 58).

Our experiment adopted the combination of convenience and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling, a type of non-probability sampling method that does not involve random selection, allows researchers to select participants from selected units conveniently (Andrade, 2020, p. 86). According to Etikan, Musa, et al. (2016), it is helpful with a large population and useful when researchers do not have enough time and resources (p. 1). Convenience sampling is suitable for surveys where participants meet certain requirements, for example, being available at a certain time, located in a certain region, easily accessed, and

willing to participate in the study (p. 2). Since our experiment only expected participants who are from the Chinese market and have access to the Internet and social media, convenience sampling is suitable for our experiment. Snowball sampling, as one of the most commonly used methods in the study, is a non-selective sampling technique and enables researchers to recruit participants conveniently (Leighton et al., 2021, p. 38; Parke et al., 2019, p. 3). Starting with a number of initial contacts who are qualified to participate in the study, researchers then ask participants to share the survey with people who are from their social cycle and are suitable and willing to join the study (Dusek et al., 2015, p. 281; Parke et al., 2019, p. 3). Over the past few decades, there has been a steady decline in the response rates to academic surveys, especially in quantitative research due to the geographical limitation and the time limitation of traditional snowball sampling; however, social media platforms empower the snowball sampling method, facilitating the data collection process and enhancing the efficacy of snowball sampling (Baltar & Brunet, 2012, pp. 58-61; Dusek et al., 2015, p. 279). In our research participant recruitment process, we used snowball sampling due to its cost and time efficiency advantages, facilitating the recruitment of participants at minimal expense. Thus, we conducted an online experiment targeting Internet users in China and enhanced the efficiency of our snowball sample by kindly requesting participants to distribute the survey link via social media to others who are suitable to participate in the survey. However, snowball sampling can cause bias because the questionnaire can be shared with someone who has similar characteristics (e.g., age, education, and gender) as the initial respondents; thus, it is important to guarantee the diversity of the first distribution as much as possible (Etikan, Alkassim, et al., 2016, p. 6). To achieve this, the first wave consists of people with different backgrounds, from students to employers, from male to female, and from various age groups.

In order to effectively distribute the online experimental questionnaire, our study utilized WeChat, the most widely used social media platform in China, and Red, one of the most popular social media platforms commonly used by influencers. At first, the questionnaire link was posted and sent by the researcher on social feeds and by private message to invite people to participate and disseminate the survey on WeChat. Unfortunately, the response rate was low, so we adopted Red as another vehicle to distribute our questionnaire, and we approached participants in two ways. First, we sent our experiment link through private message to Red users and asked them to fill in the questionnaire and pass it to others who were qualified for the experiment. Second, there were some Red users looking for

participants to fill in their surveys by publishing posts and leaving comments under others' posts, so we reached out to those users and exchanged questionnaires to get more data. With the combination of different social media channels, the response rate increased and we finally collected enough responses successfully. According to Janssen and Verboord (2024), 30 respondents per experimental group is essential to ensure valid results (p. 13). Our study contains a 3 (level of prominence: prominent vs. subtle vs. control) x 2 (culture: Eastern vs. Western) between-subject design. In our specific case, this implies a minimum requirement of 180 participants. The total amount of participants who finished the survey was $N = 255$, so the minimum requirement was achieved.

The questionnaire was created using Qualtrics, which contained a randomization function that is essential in our survey and was mobile-friendly, enabling participants to fill in the questionnaire easily through their phones. The questionnaire was open for three weeks to make sure every participant had enough time to finish the survey. The questionnaire is available in Chinese language only, ruling out those who were not Chinese but got the link by accident. The English version of the questionnaire is available in Appendix B. The translation took two steps. We first designed it in English, and it was translated by automated translation from Qualtrics. Then, we checked the translation and edited the translation manually to avoid unclear or misleading translation.

3.4 Experiment procedure

Participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire which would take approximately 5 minutes along with the survey link. After clicking the survey link, participants joined the introduction and consent section first and were asked to click "agree" if they were willing to participate in the survey and to evaluate a video from an influencer; otherwise, they could hit "disagree" and reach to the end of the survey directly. They can only proceed to the experiment if they choose "agree".

Following the first section, participants were asked to watch a video from an influencer carefully. Since we had six different videos, we randomized the six videos in Qualtrics with equal chances to be presented, and every participant was only able to see one video out of the six, including prominent product placement with Chinese influencer, subtle product placement with Chinese influencer, no product placement with Chinese influencer, prominent product placement with Western influencer, subtle product placement with Western influencer, and no product placement with Western influencer. The only different

part received by each participant was the video section, besides that, every question remained the same.

After watching the video, participants were asked to evaluate their overall feelings about the brand and the product so brand attitude and purchase intention were measured. We set this before control questions and manipulation checks to make sure participants would not realize what we were investigating, thus affecting their answers (McCambridge et al., 2012, p.1). Then, we included manipulation checks and control questions to check whether participants identified the nationality of the influencer correctly and whether they watched the whole video carefully. After that, demographic information was collected, including gender, age, level of education, and occupation. In the end, we revealed the true purpose of this experiment, clarified the randomization of the six videos, kindly asked participants not to discuss this with other participants, and gave our contact information for any further questions. Every question throughout the whole survey was mandatory to make sure essential data were collected for our study.

3.5 Operationalization and Measurements

3.5.1 Level of prominence

In our study, the level of prominence contains prominent and subtle, and each of them incorporated a mix of different types of product placement. Since our experiment is presented by video, both visual and sound will impact the level of prominence perceived by audiences, so visual and audio are one of the types of product placement we adopted to manipulate the level of prominent in our study: the prominent placement includes both visual and audio support while the subtle placement contains only visual support (see Table 2.1). Besides that, we also manipulated the prominence level of other types of product placement including size, position, visibility, and time duration (see Table 2.1).

Babin (1996) pointed out the importance of a control group in the product placement experimental design to better assess the impact of product placement on the result (p. 38). Thus, we adopted a control group without product placement to better assess the experiment result.

For prominent product placement, we produced a video presenting the brand logo and the product to the camera visually with a verbal introduction of the product by the

influencer; we placed the product at the center of the frame; we exposed the product longer than the subtle placement; we exhibited the brand clearly as much as possible. For subtle product placement, we produced a video only presenting the product in the video without mentioning the brand and the product verbally by the influencer; we shortened the exposure time of the product; we placed the product in the background setting instead of the center of the frame; we masked part of the brand so it was less visible. For the control video, we didn't mention or present the brand at all and presented only the back of the product with a hand covering the product so it is almost invisible. Appendix B demonstrates the difference between different videos.

3.5.2 Western culture

In our study, we adopted the nationality of the influencers as our manipulation to test whether Western culture would affect the efficacy of the product placement. In the first three videos, participants saw a Chinese influencer; in the other three videos, participants saw a Western influencer. Since participants were Chinese and may not understand English, both influencers spoke Chinese in the video but with different accents. The Chinese influencer spoke Chinese as a normal Chinese while the Western influencer spoke Chinese with a Western accent as another way to stress the cultural difference between influencers because without a Western accent, participants may identify the Western influencer as a Chinese influencer who was born in China with a Western look. Besides the appearance and the accent of influencers, everything else, including the script, the plot, and the flow, remained exactly the same. Appendix B demonstrates the difference between different videos.

3.5.3 Brand attitude

In order to measure the brand attitude, participants were tasked with rating their attitude towards the brand in the video presented to them. The measurement of brand attitude was adopted from the research by Spears and Singh (2004) (p. 60). The original scale in their study was a seven-point scale, but we used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Participants in our study will need to evaluate their overall feelings about the brand described in the video they just saw. There are five items being measured, which are "unappealing/appealing", "bad/good", "unpleasant/pleasant", "unfavourable/favourable" and "unlikeable/likeable".

3.5.4 Purchase intention

The purchase intentions were measured on the scale developed by Du et al. (2023). Based on their research, a four-item Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was adopted to measure participants' purchase intention toward the product placed in the video (p. 1320). There are four items being measured, which are "after watching the video, I am interested in buying the product that was mentioned in the video/ I expect to buy the product similar to the influencer in her video/ I'd like to buy the product similar to the influencer in her video/ I plan to buy the product similar to the influencer in her video". Participants in our study will need to evaluate their overall feelings about the product in the video they just saw.

3.5.5 Manipulation check and control questions

After asking the above questions, we included several control questions to make sure that participants watched the video thoroughly and carefully, followed by a manipulation check to make sure that participants identified the cultural background of the influencer correctly. Participants were asked to evaluate questions "I watched the video until the end/ I paid close attention to the video/ I had the product/brand presented in the video in mind while answering the questions" (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), and answer what nationality the influencer in the video is (Chinese or Western countries). Those who did not watch the entire video or did not watch the video carefully were ruled out during the cleaning process. In addition, those who falsely identified the nationality of the influencer were also ruled out before the data analysis. Also, we adopted additional manipulation check questions to measure participants' sense of product placement in the video, making sure the perception of product placement is different in different videos. In the manipulation check, we asked whether they thought the video contained product placement, and in case participants didn't understand the term, we explained the definition of product placement: the combination or the inclusion of brands or products in videos with certain purposes.

We put the manipulation check after the survey questions because we did not want participants to be notified about our experiment's purpose before answering survey questions, thus influencing their choices.

3.5.6 Demographics

Participants were also requested to provide demographic information. We placed demographic questions at the end of the survey to prevent participants from losing interest in the experiment and to ease the fatigue of participants by filling in easier questions (Hughes et al., 2016, p. 139).

The first question was about gender, with the options 'male', 'female', or 'other/prefer not to say'. After that, participants were asked to provide their ages through an open question by filling in the age number and selecting their education levels: (1) high school or below, (2) bachelor's degree, (3) master's degree, and (4) PhD. At the end, the occupation question was asked: (1) student, (2) employed, and (3) other.

3.5.7 Research ethics

This research design met the guidelines by Janssen and Verboord (2024) and there was no ethical issue within the design (p. 4). First, we informed the participants about the researcher's identity – Erasmus student – at the introduction of the questionnaire. There is no potential physical, psychological, or reputational harm to participants. Only adult participants will be recruited during the research, and they will receive complete information about the study before doing the survey. Participants will be able to leave the study at any time, and their personal data will be kept confidential in a secure environment.

4. Results

The theoretical framework and methodology outlined in the preceding chapters set the groundwork for this section, which focuses on presenting the results. This chapter exhibits the results of the pre-test and the main experiment.

4.1 Pre-test results

In total, 45 participants answered the questionnaire, including 19 males (42.2%) and 26 females (57.8%). The mean age of the participants was 29.36 ($SD = 8.25$) with a range from 20 to 54 years. All of the participants were from China (100%).

For the pre-test, participants were asked to rate their purchase frequency and use frequency toward six FMCG products, including toothpaste, coffee pods, hand cream, mouthwash, skincare products, and cosmetics.

A Paired Samples T-test showed that the purchase frequency of toothpaste ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.22$) is significantly higher ($p < .001$) than that of coffee pods ($M = 1.64$, $SD = 1.48$), which had the lowest purchase frequency. Meanwhile, the paired samples T-test also showed that the use frequency of toothpaste ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.25$) is also significantly higher ($p < .001$) than that of coffee pods ($M = 2.09$, $SD = 2.02$), which also had the lowest use frequency. Further results are illustrated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Pre-test survey items results

Items	Frequency	Mean	Standard deviation	N	Minimum	Maximum
Toothpaste	Purchase frequency	3.47	1.22	45	1	6
	Use frequency	5.38	1.25	45	1	6
Coffee pods	Purchase frequency	1.64	1.48	45	0	5
	Use frequency	2.09	2.02	45	0	6
Hand cream	Purchase frequency	1.73	1.27	45	0	6
	Use frequency	2.53	1.67	45	0	6
Mouthwash	Purchase frequency	2.02	1.41	45	0	5
	Use frequency	2.91	1.92	45	0	6
Skincare products	Purchase frequency	3.04	1.64	45	0	6
	Use frequency	4.31	1.99	45	0	6
Cosmetics	Purchase frequency	2.53	1.94	45	0	6
	Use frequency	3.04	2.00	45	0	6

The aim of this pre-test is to determine the item that is most appropriate for our experiment, based on high purchase frequency and high use frequency among our target participants. We aim to enhance the validity and reliability of the outcome of our experiment

by ensuring the chosen product is commonly purchased and used by our participants. According to the result, toothpaste is the most suitable product with the highest purchase frequency and the highest use frequency. Therefore, we decided to adopt toothpaste in our main experiment, leveraging its relevance and familiarity to achieve more accurate and meaningful insights.

4.2 Data preparation

This section discusses several preliminary analyses conducted to prepare the data before the main experiment.

4.2.1 Data preparation information

A total of 255 Chinese respondents participated in and finished the survey. We incorporated a manipulation check and control questions to make sure participants correctly identified the cultural background of influencers and watched the whole video carefully, and since it was elaborated on in the previous chapter, we will present the results directly.

Firstly, any participants who failed to identify the nationality of the influencer correctly were excluded, so the sample dropped from $N = 255$ to $N = 232$ as 23 participants either identified the Chinese influencer as a Western influencer or identified the Western influencer as a Chinese influencer.

We also included several questions to make sure participants watched the whole video carefully and thought about the product when answering the questions. We deleted those who scored lower than 4, meaning they did not watch the whole video carefully. We also deleted those who scored lower than 4 from prominent groups or subtle groups, meaning they did not have the product in their mind while answering the questions, so the sample dropped from $N = 232$ to $N = 207$. We kept participants' responses from the control groups because they did not see the product, so it was common that they did not have the product in their minds while answering the questions.

4.2.2 Descriptive results

After cleaning the data, there were $N = 207$ qualified answers for our study, 51.2% of them were male ($N = 106$), 48.3% of them were female ($N = 100$), and .5% preferred not to disclose their gender. ($N = 1$). The mean age of the participants was 28.73 years ($SD = 7.03$),

with an age range spanned from 18 to 55 years. Education levels in participants varied, with $N = 17$ having completed high school or equivalent (8.2%), $N = 107$ holding a bachelor's degree (51.7%), $N = 72$ holding a master's degree (34.8%), and $N = 11$ possessing a PhD degree (5.3%). Table 4.2 offers extra information about the descriptive results of the sample.

Table 4.2 Descriptive results

Gender	Percentage of respondents	Education	Percentage of respondents	Occupation	Percentage of respondents
Male	51.2%	High school or below	8.2%	Students	36.7%
Female	48.3%	Bachelor's degree	51.7%	Working	58.9
I'd rather not to say	0.5%	Master's degree	34.8%	Other	4.3
		PhD degree	5.3%		

4.2.3 Allocation of participants across experimental conditions

The distribution of participants is important as the number may vary after the data cleaning. We conducted a crosstab for two independent variables, level of prominence and culture, to find out the distribution of the cells. Each manipulation group consisted of at least 30 participants, meeting the required criterion. The allocation illustration is presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Allocation of conditions

		Level of prominence			
		Prominent	Subtle	Control	Total
Culture	Chinese	35	37	37	109
	Western	30	31	37	98
Total		65	68	74	207

Both the three levels of prominence and the two cultures were not equally distributed because we ruled out some of the participants as they did not pass manipulation checks, causing the uneven distribution. According to Brick and Kalton (1996), using weighted means to compensate for missing data and unequal sample size can lead to biased results, and therefore should be avoided (pp. 217-218). We adopted advice from previous research to increase the reliability of our analysis. Wallenstein et al. (1980) introduced the unweighted analysis of variance for experiments with unequal sample sizes to avoid the issue arising from unequal sample sizes, which is determining a descriptive measure of the overall treatment

mean across all strains and can cause misleading values (p.6). As a result, instead of reporting the means, we will report the estimated marginal means. Table 4.4 presents the descriptive results, including the brand attitude and purchase intention, for each condition across different groups of independent variables.

Table 4.4 Descriptive results for both independent variables

Dependent Variable: Brand Attitude			
	Mean	**Standard deviation**	**N**
The level of prominence:			
Prominent	3.98[a]	0.76	65
Subtle	3.63[a]	0.68	68
No placement	2.97[b]	0.85	74
Culture:			
Chinese	3.66[a]	0.86	109
Western	3.40[a]	0.87	98
Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention			
	Mean	**Standard deviation**	**N**
The level of prominence:			
Prominent	3.71[a]	0.86	65
Subtle	3.33[a]	0.87	68
No placement	2.55[b]	0.78	74
Culture:			
Chinese	3.26[a]	1.01	109
Western	3.14[a]	0.91	98

Note: All means with different superscripts [ab] differ significantly at p = .01

4.2.4 Reliability test

To evaluate the internal consistency of the scales, we conducted a reliability test as both brand attitude and purchase intention were measured by more than one question, and the Cronbach's Alpha value should be above .7 (Bujang et al., 2018, p. 85; Pallant, 2020, p. 148-149). The brand attitude scale from Spears and Singh (2004) was reliable (α = .97) (p. 60). The purchase intention scale from Du et al. (2023) was also reliable (α = .94) (p. 1320). In our study, the Cronbach's Alpha of brand attitude was α = .88, and the Cronbach's Alpha of purchase intention was α = .92. Thus, the scale demonstrated very strong internal consistency, with no need for the removal of any items.

4.2.5 Manipulation check

To make sure the manipulation of the level of prominence worked, we used a manipulation check to collect the number of participants who thought there was product placement in the video and who did not think there was product placement. A Chi-square test was performed to examine the relation between the level of prominence and placement identification. The relation between these variables was significant, X^2 (2, 207) = 54.30, p < .001. More people believed there was product placement in the prominent condition compared to the subtle condition and control condition, and more people believed there was product placement in the subtle condition compared to the control condition.

As mentioned in section 4.2.1, we want to make sure participants correctly identify the cultural background of influencers, so we also asked participants which nationality they think the influencer is. In total, 23 participants failed to identify correctly and their responses were removed.

4.2.6 Violations of assumptions

Before conducting the ANOVA test, it is crucial to evaluate if certain assumptions are met to ensure the validity and reliability of our studies. The key assumptions include normality and homogeneity (Babbie, 2010, p. 214; Sawyer, 2009, p. 29).

Normality requires that the distribution of residuals be normal with each group, and significant deviations can lead to incorrect conclusions in the ANOVA test (Babbie, 2010, p. 214). For brand attitude, the Shapiro-Wilk test showed a significant departure from normality, $W(207) = .98$, $p = < .001$. For purchase intention, the Shapiro-Wilk test also showed a significant departure from normality, $W(207) = .98$, $p = .003$. We can reject the null hypothesis that there is no statistical difference, and both the data are not normally distributed.

Homogeneity requires equal variance among the groups and is essential for the validity of ANOVA results (Sawyer, 2009, p. 29). If variances are unequal, or heteroscedasticity, the validity and reliability of the result decrease. A Levene's test was conducted to test for homoscedasticity and the test result showed the variance of both brand attitude, F (5, 201) = 3.01, $p = .010$, and purchase intention, F (5, 201) = 3.72, $p = .000$, are not equal.

The test results showed these assumptions are violated, and an alternative strategy is necessary. Pallant (2010) recommended that instead of adopting $p < .050$, adopting $p = .010$

as a more rigorous significant level to evaluate the result of the ANOVA test (p. 286). In addition, as mentioned above, an unweighted means approach was also adopted to increase the validity and reliability of the result. In conclusion, to ensure the validity and reliability of our studies, we adopted $p = .010$ as a significant level instead of $p < .050$ for the following ANOVA with an unweighted means approach.

4.3 Hypotheses results

This section will discuss the results of the 3 (level of prominence: prominent vs. subtle vs. no placement) x 2 (culture: Western vs. Eastern) two-way analysis of variances to investigate whether the independent variables have a significant effect on brand attitude and purchase intention. The results are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Results of the two-way analysis of variance (N = 207)

Dependent Variable: Brand Attitude						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Partial η^2
Prominence	36.49	2	18.24	31.48	<.001	0.24
Culture	3.41	1	3.40	5.88	0.02	0.03
Prominence * Culture	0.03	2	0.01	0.03	0.98	0.00
Error	116.50	201	0.58			
Total	2706.4	207				

Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Partial η^2
Prominence	48.34	2	24.18	34.33	<.001	0.26
Culture	0.71	1	0.71	1.01	0.32	0.01
Prominence * Culture	0.04	2	0.02	0.03	0.97	0.00
Error	141.54	201				
Total	2276.5	207				

4.3.1 Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 postulated that the level of prominence of product placement has an effect on brand attitude. The two-way analysis of variances revealed a significant effect of the level of prominence on brand attitude, $F(2, 201) = 31.48$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .24$. After comparing unweighted means, we found that participants who watched the prominent placement video ($M = 3.98$, $SD = .76$) and participants who watched the subtle placement video ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .68$) have higher brand attitude than participants who watched the

video without placement ($M = 2.97$, $SD = .85$). In the following post-hoc multiple comparisons test, the results showed that there was no significant difference between brand attitude among those who saw the prominent placement and subtle placement ($M_{difference} = .34$, $p = .030$) as we adopted $p = .010$ as a significant level instead of $p < .050$ mentioned in 4.2.6. There was a significant difference between those who watched the prominent placement and no placement ($M_{difference} = 1.00$, $p < .001$) and those who watched the subtle placement and no placement ($M_{difference} = .66$, $p < .001$). More results are presented in Table 4.6.

Therefore, H1a: Prominent placement will have a more positive effect on brand attitude than subtle placement and no placement, is rejected; H1b: Subtle placement will have a more positive effect on brand attitude than no placement, is supported.

Table 4.6 Results of Post Hoc Tests on brand attitude

Level	Mean	Standard Error
Prominent	3.98[a]	0.76
Subtle	3.63[a]	0.68
Control	2.97[b]	0.85

Notes: Based on estimated marginal means
All means with different superscripts ab differ significantly at p = .01

4.3.2 Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 postulated that the level of prominence of product placement has an effect on purchase intention. The two-way analysis of variances revealed a significant effect of the level of prominence on purchase intention, $F(2, 201) = 34.33$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .26$. After comparing unweighted means, we found that participants who watched the prominent placement video ($M = 3.71$, $SD = .86$) and participants who watched the subtle placement video ($M = 3.33$, $SD = .87$) have higher purchase intention than participants who watched the video without placement ($M = 2.55$, $SD = .78$). In the following post-hoc multiple comparisons test, the results showed that there was no significant difference between purchase intention among those who saw the prominent placement and subtle placement ($M_{difference} = .38$, $p = .030$) as we adopted $p = .010$ as a significant level instead of $p < .050$ mentioned in 4.2.6. There was a significant difference between those who watched the prominent placement and no placement ($M_{difference} = 1.16$, $p < .001$) and those who watched the subtle placement and no placement ($M_{difference} = .78$, $p < .001$). More results are presented

in Table 4.7.

Therefore, H2a: Prominent placement will have a more positive effect on purchase intention than subtle placement and no placement, is rejected; H2b: Subtle placement will have a more positive effect on purchase intention than no placement, is supported.

Table 4.7 Results of Post Hoc Tests on purchase intention

Level	Mean	Standard Error
Prominent	3.71^a	0.86
Subtle	3.33^a	0.87
Control	2.55^b	0.78

Notes: Based on estimated marginal means
All means with different superscripts ab differ significantly at p = .01

4.3.3 Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 postulated that the culture of influencers has an effect on brand attitude. The two-way analysis of variances did not reveal a significant effect of the culture of influencers on brand attitude, $F(1, 201) = 5.88$, $p = .020$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, as we adopted $p = .010$ as a significant level instead of $p < .050$ mentioned in 4.2.6. Participants who watched the Western influencer video ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .87$) did not have a higher brand attitude than the Chinese influencer video ($M = 3.66$, $SD = .86$). Therefore, H3a: The culture of influencers has an effect on brand attitude, is rejected; H3b: The Western influencer will have a more positive effect on brand attitude than the Chinese influencer, is also rejected.

4.3.4 Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 postulated that the culture of influencers has an effect on purchase intention. The two-way analysis of variances did not reveal a significant effect of the culture of influencers on purchase intention, $F(1, 201) = 1.00$, $p = .320$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$, as we adopted $p = .010$ as a significant level instead of $p < .050$ mentioned in 4.2.6. Participants who watched the Western influencer video ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .91$) did not have higher purchase intention than the Chinese influencer video ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.01$). Therefore, H4a: The culture of influencers has an effect on purchase intention, is rejected; H4b: The Western influencer will have a more positive effect on purchase intention than the Chinese influencer, is also rejected.

4.3.5 Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 postulated that the effect of Western influencers on brand attitude is even greater when the product placement is prominent than when the product placement is subtle.

The two-way analysis of variances did not reveal a significant interaction effect of the level of prominence and the culture of influencers on brand attitude, $F(2, 201) = .03$, $p = .980$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$. Therefore, H5: The effect of Western influencers on brand attitude is even greater when the product placement is prominent than when the product placement is subtle, is rejected.

4.3.6 Hypothesis 6

Hypothesis 6 postulated that the effect of Western influencers on purchase intention is even greater when the product placement is prominent than when the product placement is subtle. The two-way analysis of variances did not reveal a significant interaction effect of the level of prominence and the culture of influencers on purchase intention, $F(2, 201) = 0.03$, $p = .970$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$. Therefore, H6: The effect of Western influencers on purchase intention is even greater when the product placement is prominent than when the product placement is subtle, is rejected.

All the hypotheses are presented in Table 4.8 for a clear view.

Table 4.8 Overview of accepted or rejected hypotheses

Hypothesis	Result
H1a: Prominent placement will have a more positive effect on brand attitude than subtle placement and no placement.	Rejected
H1b: Subtle placement will have a more positive effect on brand attitude than no placement.	Supported
H2a: Prominent placement will have a more positive effect on purchase intention than subtle placement and no placement.	Rejected
H2b: Subtle placement will have a more positive effect on purchase intention than no placement.	Supported
H3a: The culture of influencers has an effect on brand attitude.	Rejected
H3b: The Western influencer will have a more positive effect on brand attitude than the Chinese influencer.	Rejected
H4a: The culture of influencers has an effect on purchase intention.	Rejected
H4b: The Western influencer will have a more positive effect on purchase intention than the Chinese influencer.	Rejected
H5: The effect of Western influencers on brand attitude is even greater when the product placement is prominent than when the product placement is subtle.	Rejected
H6: The effect of Western influencers on purchase intention is even greater when the product placement is prominent than when the product placement is subtle.	Rejected

<center>**5. Findings and Conclusion**</center>

In the findings and conclusion chapter, we evaluate the validity and reliability of our study, interpret the findings of the research, consider the broader theoretical and managerial implications, identify the research limitations, and propose several directions for future research. The theoretical implications section delves into the theoretical implications of our findings, examines how our findings align with or challenge the past research results, and how they contribute to the academic study in our field. In the managerial implications section, we explore how our results can be applied in real-world settings to enhance corporation performance, especially in influencer product placement in the Chinese market. The research limitations section acknowledges the limitations inherent in our experiment design, discussing how these limitations might affect the results. In the directions for future research section, we propose directions for future research to further explore our research field.

5.1 Validity and reliability

It is important to assess the validity and reliability of our study to make sure the results are valid and reliable. To enhance the validity and reliability of our main experiment, we conducted a pre-test, choosing the most suitable product for the main experiment. We adopted a control group in our experiment to help rule out external factors and better assess the impact of product placement on the result (Babin, 1996, p. 38). During the experiment design, we implemented random assignment, so each participant had an equal chance to be assigned to any condition, increasing the validity of our study. In total, our experiment had 207 qualified answers, and each manipulation group from our experiment had at least 30 participants, ensuring the validity of the results (Janssen & Verboord, 2024, p. 13). We conducted a reliability test to make sure the measurement scales, which we adopted from the existing framework and were proven to be reliable in past research, were still reliable in our study. As our study used ANOVA, we checked for violations of assumptions. Even though normality and homogeneity were violated, we adopted several approaches mentioned in 4.2.6 to increase the validity and reliability of our study.

5.2 Theoretical implications

Product placement by influencers has gained major attention and has been widely researched in the past years as influencer marketing became an effective tool to capture consumer's attention (Arcada, 2017, p.2). However, there have been inconsistencies among

the past research, leading to our research which aimed to clarify the effectiveness of product placement by influencers and unravel which factors influence the efficacy of influencer product placement (Cárdaba et al., 2022, p. 157; Chen & Yang, 2023, p. 1601; Du et al., 2023, p. 1315). By exploring the details, our research provides updated elaboration on the impact of influencer marketing given the rapid evolution of social media platforms.

One of the main objectives of this study was to investigate how the level of prominence of product placement influences consumer attitudes toward brands and purchase intention toward the product. The results showed that influencer product placement has effects on both brand attitude and purchase intention. Compared to the control group which did not receive any product placement, both the prominent placement group and the subtle placement group had significantly higher brand attitude and purchase intention. However, differences in brand attitude and purchase intention between prominent and subtle groups were not significant. This result revealed that the level of prominence does not have effects on brand attitude and purchase intention, contradicting results that support either prominent placement has a significant effect or subtle placement has a significant effect (Chan et al., 2016, p. 16; Chavadi et al., 2019, p. 40). In other words, in the context of the Chinese market, the level of prominence of product placement by influencers does not influence consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is the culture of the Chinese consumer market. Cultural dimensions such as collectivism and unique consumer behavior in China may influence the response to prominent and subtle placements (Nicholson & Stepina, 1998, p. 34). In addition, Chinese consumers' high exposure to digital and social media marketing could make them less responsive to different levels of prominence of placement, potentially explaining why there were no significant differences were observed in our study (Thomala, 2023, para. 3).

Another major objective of this study was to investigate how the culture of influencers influences consumer brand attitude and purchase intention. Our research directly examined the impact of influencer culture on their effectiveness for the first time, but the results showcased conflict with previous theories that suggest Western culture would enhance the effectiveness (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996, p. 1; Cohen et al., 2013, p.148). Interestingly, our results found that the cultural background of influencers – whether they were Western or local - did not significantly impact Chinese consumers' brand attitude or purchase intention. Participants who watched videos from Chinese consumers had slightly higher brand attitude and purchase intention compared to those who watched Western influencer videos, but the

differences were not significant. This indicated that cultural factor, which has been often considered a crucial factor in the Chinese market, may not be as important as people thought. Several reasons could explain these unexpected findings. Firstly, much of the previous research on Western cultural influence was conducted decades ago without contemporary studies that can reflect recent shifts. This absence of updated research means that older conclusions may no longer pertain to today's rapidly evolving landscapes. Secondly, past research proposed Western products as synonymous with higher quality and status symbolism (Liu et al., 2013, p. 35; Zhou & Hui, 2003, p. 37). However, the quality of Chinese-manufactured products has improved in the past years, challenging the old stereotypes and altering Chinese consumer perceptions. In addition, many Chinese elements were incorporated into Western luxury brands, signaling a shift in perceptions of value and prestige and making Chinese cultural elements also represent luxury and high status. Nowadays, Chinese consumers have shifted brand attitude and purchase intention away from preference for Western cultural elements to cultural origin instead. Last but not least, recent trends indicate a rising preference for domestic products among Chinese consumers as China's economic development brought national pride among Chinese. The fact that many Chinese corporations started their business abroad in Western countries and became influential in the international marketplace also boosted the shift of perception of Western and local culture (Hendrikse et al., 2021, p. 63).

The results of our study also revealed that there was no significant interaction effect between the level of prominence of product placement and the cultural background of influencers on brand attitude and purchase intention. This finding suggests that the impact of how prominently a product is placed in an influencer video does not vary depending on whether the influencer is from a Western or Chinese cultural background. The two variables operate independently of one another in influencing consumer behavior.

5.3 Societal relevance and managerial implications

Our results provide practical insights for brands seeking to utilize influencer product placement within the Chinese market.

Our study demonstrates a positive impact of product placement through influencers on brand attitude and purchase intention, especially for FMCG brands and products. Marketers should consider influencer marketing as a crucial part of their marketing strategies if they want to enhance brand attitude and consumer purchase decisions. As the level of prominence

does not significantly influence the outcomes, brands can integrate the products with the content based on their needs.

The effectiveness between Chinese and Western influencers is equivalent, so brands can focus more on other elements, for example, content relevance and influencer authenticity instead of the cultural background when selecting influencer partners. Instead of working with Western influencers, collaborating with Chinese influencers can also facilitate deeper cultural acceptance, allowing brands to leverage local influencers' insight into local consumer behavior. As the influence of local culture rises, if foreign brands want to enter the Chinese market, they also need to adapt to this shift by adding Chinese cultural elements into marketing campaigns to resonate with local consumers.

The implication of this research may extend beyond the Chinese market, potentially offering valuable insights to other developing countries that share the same economic pattern or cultural ideology as China. By examining influencer marketing and product placement in the Chinese market, this study provides a framework that can be applied to comparable markets. These countries may experience the same marketing effectiveness, providing international brands that are looking to expand into these regions with relevant findings.

5.4 Research limitations

While our study provided insights into the effectiveness of influencer marketing, there are still limitations that should be pointed out. We will discuss these limitations in detail on how they may influence the results.

First, the use of the non-probability sampling method can be a limitation of our study. Even though convenience sampling is often chosen because of its convenience, our experiment was spread out based on the Internet and all participants were employed through the Internet, causing a bias because the sample was self-selected (Hsu et al., 2013, p. 83).

Another significant limitation of our study is that the videos used were self-produced and not created by actual influencers, which could have affected the quality and authenticity of the content. Influencers may have a unique style and higher quality standards, but our videos may not fully replicate those elements due to the facility and environment limitations. Future research should coordinate with real influencers to produce videos for experiments if possible. Also, the duration of our videos was relatively short, not providing enough time and content for participants to fully absorb the information presented.

Another limitation is distribution bias. A portion of the initial distribution of our

questionnaire was to individuals from the author's social cycle, who appeared as the Chinese influencer in the videos, so some participants were familiar with the Chinese influencer but not familiar with the Western influencer, impacting their perceptions and responses. To mitigate this bias, future research should ensure that participants are equally unfamiliar with all influencers.

5.5 Directions for future research

The findings of our study not only contribute insights into influencer marketing in China but also introduce several feasible directions for future research. There is still much remaining to be explored and understood in influencer marketing and product placement.

Given that the cultural background of influencers has not been extensively studied before, more research in this area should be carried out to further explore the relationship between cultural elements and consumer behaviors. Our findings suggest that the cultural background of influencers does not play a crucial role as previous studies thought, contradicting with existing literature. Future studies should dive deeper into this phenomenon and explore the shift of influence of Western culture in the Chinese market.

In addition, the influencer marketing industry continues evolving at a fast pace, it is important to repeat this research once in a while to record the latest data and trends. Continuous research will help track the shifts in the effectiveness of influencer product placement over time.

Last but not least, while our study focused on FMCG products, the impact of influencer marketing might vary across different product categories. Future researchers should also consider extending the categories to others such as fashion, service, or luxury goods. Thus, a wider understanding of the effectiveness of influencer marketing in different types of products will be gained.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings indicate the importance of product placement by influencers in the Chinese marketing industries. However, the level of prominence and the culture of influencers did not significantly influence the effectiveness of the product placement. By integrating past insights with current data, we found there were still many inconsistencies between our study and past research, revealing the need for further exploration for future research.

Things have changed a lot in the Chinese market over the past decades. The legend of Dashan will still leave an indelible impression on those who remember him because of his huge impact. However, as researchers, we should continually look forward and have the courage to question previous conclusions and perspectives. By updating out-of-date perspectives and breaking past stereotypes with solid data and conclusions, we contribute to the world.

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Appendix A. Pre-test questionnaire

Welcome Dear respondent,

You are invited to fill in a questionnaire.

The questionnaire will take approximately 2 minutes to fill in. Please answer each question carefully and honestly.

During this study, your personal information will be collected. All of the answers will remain anonymous and will only be used for study purposes. Participating this study is completely voluntary. You can stop at any time and would not need to provide any explanation.

Thank you for participating this research.

Page Break

Consent Do you consent to take part in this survey and have your data collected anonymously?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

End of Block: Welcome

Start of Block: Survey

Purchase How often do you purchase the following products? (from 0-Not at all to 6-All the time)

<div align="right">

0   1   2   3   4   5   6

</div>

Toothpaste ()	
Coffee pods ()	
Hand cream ()	
Mouthwash ()	
Skincare products ()	
Cosmetics ()	

Page Break

Usage How often do you use the following product? (from 0-Not at all to 6-All the time)

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

Toothpaste ()

Coffee pods ()

Hand cream ()

Mouthwash ()

Skincare products ()

Cosmetics ()

Age What is your age?

_____

Gender What is your gender?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Prefer not to say (3)

Q11 What is your nationality?

○ Chinese (1)

○ Other (2)

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Thank you

Thank you You have reached the very end of this study. Thank you very much for your participation.

Your answers are very valuable to us. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, its purpose or procedures, or if you have a research-related problem, please feel free to contact the researchers at 698423qd@student.eur.nl. Thank you!

Please don't forget to hit the submit button below.

End of Block: Thank you

Appendix B. Experimental questionnaire

Block: Intro section (1 Question)

BlockRandomizer: 1 - Evenly Present Elements

> **Standard: Group1(Eastern/prominent) (6 Questions)**
> **Standard: Video2(Eastern/subtle) (6 Questions)**
> **Standard: Video3(Eastern/control) (6 Questions)**
> **Standard: Video4(Western/prominent) (6 Questions)**
> **Standard: Video5(Western/subtle) (6 Questions)**
> **Standard: Video6(Western/control) (6 Questions)**

Standard: Demographics (4 Questions)
Standard: Thank you (1 Question)
Block: (0 Questions)

Page Break ————————————————————

Welcome Dear respondent,

Thank you for being interested in this research. You are invited to fill in a questionnaire. In this questionnaire, you will watch a video from an influencer and evaluate the video. The questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes to fill in. Please answer each question carefully and honestly. Thank you for participating this research.

During this study, your personal information will be collected. All of the answers will remain anonymous and will only be used for study purposes. Participating this study is completely voluntary. You can stop at any time and would not need to provide any explanation. Thank you for participating this research.

If you consent to participate this survey and have your data collected anonymously, please press "I agree" to resume.

◯ I agree (1)

◯ I do not agree (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Dear respondent, Thank you for being interested in this research. You are invited to fill in a qu... = I do not agree

End of Block: Intro section

Start of Block: Group1(Eastern/prominent)

Video1EP Please watch the following video carefully before proceeding. This video comes from an influencer sharing her daily life.

Page Break ——

BrandAttitude1EP Please describe your overall feelings about the brand Marvis in the video on the following scale:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	
Unappealing	○	○	○	○	○	Appealing
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	Pleasant
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Unlikable	○	○	○	○	○	Likable

Page Break

PurchaseIntention1EP Please evaluate the product from Marvis. To what extent do you agree to the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
After watching the video, I am interested in buying the product from Marvis (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I expect to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I'd like to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I plan to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (4)	○	○	○	○	○

ManipulationNation1 Where do you think the influencer is from?

○ China (1)

○ Western countries (2)

ManipulationPP1 Do you think there is product placement in the video?

*What is product placement? It's the combination or the inclusion of brands or products in videos with certain purposes.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

ManipulationVideo1 Do you agree with the following statement? There is not right or wrong

answer, so the best answer is your true feeling at the moment.

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)
I watched the video until the end. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I paid close attention to the video. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I had the product/brand presented in the video in mind while answering the questions. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Video2ES Please watch the following video carefully before proceeding. This video comes from an influencer sharing her daily life.

BrandAttitude2ES Please describe your overall feelings about the brand Marvis in the video on the following scale:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	
Unappealing	○	○	○	○	○	Appealing
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	Pleasant
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Unlikable	○	○	○	○	○	Likable

Page Break

PurchaseIntention2ES Please evaluate the product from Marvis. To what extent do you agree to the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
After watching the video, I am interested in buying the product from Marvis (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I expect to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I'd like to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I plan to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (4)	○	○	○	○	○

ManipulationNation2 Where do you think the influencer is from?

○ China (1)

○ Western countries (2)

ManipulationPP2 Do you think there is product placement in the video?

*What is product placement? It's the combination or the inclusion of brands or products in videos with certain purposes.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

ManipulationVideo2 Do you agree with the following statement? There is no right or wrong

answer, so the best answer is your true feeling at the moment.

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)
I watched the video until the end. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I paid close attention to the video. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I had the product/brand presented in the video in mind while answering the questions. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Video3EC Please watch the following video carefully before proceeding. This video comes from an influencer sharing her daily life.

Page Break ———

BrandAttitude3EC Please describe your overall feelings about the brand Marvis on the following scale:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	
Unappealing	○	○	○	○	○	Appealing
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	Pleasant
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Unlikable	○	○	○	○	○	Likable

Page Break

PurchaseIntention3EC Please evaluate the product from Marvis. To what extent do you agree to the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
After watching the video, I am interested in buying the product from Marvis (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I expect to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I'd like to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I plan to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (4)	○	○	○	○	○

ManipulationNation3 Where do you think the influencer is from?

○ China (1)

○ Western countries (2)

ManipulationPP3 Do you think there is product placement in the video?

*What is product placement? It's the combination or the inclusion of brands or products in videos with certain purposes.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

ManipulationVideo3 Do you agree with the following statement? There is no right or wrong

answer, so the best answer is your true feeling at the moment.

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)
I watched the video until the end. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I paid close attention to the video. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I had the product/brand presented in the video in mind while answering the questions. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Video4WP Please watch the following video carefully before proceeding. This video comes from an influencer sharing her daily life.

Page Break

BrandAttitude4WP Please describe your overall feelings about the brand Marvis in the video on the following scale:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	
Unappealing	○	○	○	○	○	Appealing
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	Pleasant
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Unlikable	○	○	○	○	○	Likable

Page Break

PurchaseIntention4WP Please evaluate the product from Marvis. To what extent do you agree to the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
After watching the video, I am interested in buying the product from Marvis (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I expect to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I'd like to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I plan to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (4)	○	○	○	○	○

ManipulationNation4 Where do you think the influencer is from?

○ China (1)

○ Western countries (2)

ManipulationPP4 Do you think there is product placement in the video?

*What is product placement? It's the combination or the inclusion of brands or products in videos with certain purposes.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

ManipulationVideo4 Do you agree with the following statement? There is no right or wrong

answer, so the best answer is your true feeling at the moment.

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)
I watched the video until the end. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I paid close attention to the video. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I had the product/brand presented in the video in mind while answering the questions. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Video5WS Please watch the following video carefully before proceeding. This video comes from an influencer sharing her daily life.

Page Break

BrandAttitude5WS Please describe your overall feelings about the brand Marvis in the video on the following scale:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	
Unappealing	○	○	○	○	○	Appealing
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	Pleasant
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Unlikable	○	○	○	○	○	Likable

Page Break

PurchaseIntention5WS Please evaluate the product from Marvis. To what extent do you agree to the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
After watching the video, I am interested in buying the product from Marvis (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I expect to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I'd like to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I plan to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (4)	○	○	○	○	○

ManipulationNation5 Where do you think the influencer is from?

○ China (1)

○ Western countries (2)

ManipulationPP5 Do you think there is product placement in the video?

*What is product placement? It's the combination or the inclusion of brands or products in videos with certain purposes.

○ Yes (1)

○ NO (2)

ManipulationVideo5 Do you agree with the following statement? There is no right or wrong

answer, so the best answer is your true feeling at the moment.

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)
I watched the video until the end. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I paid close attention to the video. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I had the product/brand presented in the video in mind while answering the questions. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Video6WC Please watch the following video carefully before proceeding. This video comes from an influencer sharing her daily life.

Page Break

BrandAttitude6WC Please describe your overall feelings about the brand Marvis on the following scale:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	
Unappealing	○	○	○	○	○	Appealing
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unpleasant	○	○	○	○	○	Pleasant
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Unlikable	○	○	○	○	○	Likable

Page Break

PurchaseIntention6WC Please evaluate the product from Marvis. To what extent do you agree to the following statements:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
After watching the video, I am interested in buying the product from Marvis (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I expect to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I'd like to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I plan to buy the Marvis product after watching the video (4)	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

ManipulationNation6 Where do you think the influencer is from?

○ China (1)

○ Western countries (2)

ManipulationPP6 Do you think there is product placement in the video?

*What is product placement? It's the combination or the inclusion of brands or products in videos with certain purposes.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

ManipulationVideo6 Do you agree with the following statement? There is no right or wrong

answer, so the best answer is your true feeling at the moment.

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Agree (5)
I watched the video until the end. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I paid close attention to the video. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I had the product/brand presented in the video in mind while answering the questions. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Gender What is your gender?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Other / Prefer not to say (3)

Age What is your age?

_____

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

○ High school or below (1)

○ Bachelor's degree (2)

○ Master's degree (3)

○ PHD degree (4)

Occupation What is your occupation?

○ Students (1)

○ Working (2)

○ Other (3)

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Thank you

Ending You have reached the very end of this study. Thank you very much for your participation. Your answers are very valuable to us.

This study aims to determine to what extent do the prominence of the product placement and the culture influence consumers' brand attitude and purchase intention. There are six different videos with different levels of prominence of product placement and with different influencers from different countries. You get to see one of the videos randomly.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, its purpose or procedures, or if you have a research-related problem, please feel free to contact the researchers at 698423qd@student.eur.nl.

Thank you! Please don't forget to hit the submit button below.👇

Appendix C. Stimulus material

Video 1 – Prominent product placement by the Chinese influencer

Video 2 – Subtle product placement by the Chinese influencer

Video 3 – No product placement by the Chinese influencer

Video 4 – Prominent product placement by the Western influencer

试一下我新买的牙膏   这是一个意大利的牌子🇮🇹

Video 5 – Subtle product placement by the Western influencer

一会要去图书馆学习   没什么时间睡觉

Video 6 – No product placement by the Western influencer

一会要去图书馆学习   每天都要复习