

---

**NADIA I. SABOUR** • RESEARCHER • UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

# **Product placement in Finland: A practitioner perspective**

**T**his paper reports on an exploratory study conducted among Finnish professionals in the field of product placement. It contributes to two research areas, namely those pertaining to professionals' perceptions of product placement and product placement activities in the Finnish context, which have not yet been studied abundantly. As a less conventional marketing communications tool product placement is an interesting and topical research subject because consumers are becoming more and more elusive, thus forcing marketers to reassess the ways they communicate with their target audiences.

The main objective of this paper is to evaluate the state and level of development of the Finnish product placement field. This objective is approached by firstly reviewing the context of Finnish placement activities and secondly gauging professionals' views on the practice and interest in the opportunities product placement as a marketing communications tool (or form of collaboration) may have to offer for them. The industry life cycle concept is used to help in the evaluation of the state and level of development of the field. Based on this evalua-

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

tion the paper also touches upon whether product placement could be a communications tool that can act as a supporting element in gaining competitive advantage in the Finnish marketplace.

The empirical data consists of eleven thematically organized semi-structured interviews conducted with fourteen Finnish professionals: three interviews with company representatives, four with communications and advertising agency representatives, and four with media representatives from television and film. Qualitative thematic analysis was used as the method of processing the interview data. The industry life cycle model was used as a conceptual aid to help structure the analysis and discussion. The chosen life cycle stage indicators were used as thematic frames that indicate which issues should be looked at in order to evaluate the state and level of development of the Finnish product placement field.

The study found that the overall attitudes of the Finnish television and film media representatives toward cooperation with companies seem to be relatively approving as they have both financial and artistic aspects to consider. As for companies, they seem to be on the lookout for new ways to communicate with consumers but in the end it is the chosen target group that determines which marketing communications tools are best suited for getting the message across. It also became evident that the

product placement process is more often initiated by the producer than the company side. This passiveness was explained by reasons such as the lack of product placement culture in Finnish companies, their inability to discern the possibilities and potential of product placement as well as their relative conservativeness in terms of marketing communication. It is rather evident that in Finland there is no full-blown, high stakes product placement industry in the American sense of the word with placement agents and organized bodies. The chosen industry life cycle indicators suggest that the Finnish product placement field could be in the early stages of its life cycle. This could possibly be explained by, for instance, the ambiguities related to the Finnish legislation pertaining to product placement and the restricting factors associated with the media vehicles available for product placement in Finland.

Product placement can be an interesting marketing communications tool for companies to consider in Finland if the possible drawbacks are foreseen and kept in check. From a competitive advantage viewpoint, product placement could be a valuable addition to the marketing communications mix but it is more the use of all the different communications tools holistically that is capable of generating competitive advantage rather than any single tool by itself.