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How reading in a foreign vs. native language moderates the impact of repetition-induced brand placement prominence on placement responses

Abstract

The present research investigates how brand placement prominence in a fictional text (i.e., a short-story) affects placement responses and brand attitude, and whether text language moderates these relationships. A 2 (Placement repetition: 2, 11) x 2 (Language: native, foreign) between-subjects design was employed, while placement prominence, persuasion knowledge, critical processing, and brand attitude were measured. It was expected that higher placement prominence will enhance brand attitude, despite a concurrent increase in persuasion knowledge activation, in both languages. However, by eliciting a more systematic processing style, reading in a foreign (vs. native) language was hypothesized to exert an indirect negative impact on brand attitude via critical processing of the prominent placements. The results provide support for most (but not all) of our hypotheses. As expected, higher (vs. lower) placement frequency increased perceived prominence, which in turn directly enhanced brand attitude. Further, although placement prominence was positively related to conceptual persuasion knowledge in both languages, it only triggered critical processing of the placements in the foreign language. Yet, contrary to predictions, critical processing did not affect brand evaluation in either language group.

Keywords

Brand placement, written narrative, persuasion knowledge, processing style, foreign language, brand attitude

In the age of iPhone7, Facebook, Snapchat, and Pokémon Go – when our lives seem to run on digital devices and our existence materializes through social media – *reading books* may strike some as an archaic, if not an obsolete, activity. And yet, although many worry that reading is on the decline (e.g., PEW, 2014), recent survey data from the US shows that 27% of respondents aged 15-20 selected reading as their favorite spare time activity, second only to listening to music (37%), and thus topping other media such as TV (23%), social media (17%), and online games (16%; Nielsen, 2015). Moreover, data from the publishing industry shows that the book market is thriving. The number of books with ISBNs registered in the Bowker Books In Print® database in the US has grown between 2008 and 2013 with 292% for print and 1770% for e-books (Bowker, 2014).

In this context, it is not surprising that marketers turn towards books¹ as a promising promotion platform. Specifically, *brand placement*– the integration of branded products in editorial content – which is most common in TV and film productions, but also features in computer games and music videos, has started gaining ground in the book world. In fact, recent years have seen numerous examples of authors weaving brand names in their narratives in return for cash or free publicity (see Alter, 2014a; Fitzhugh, 2000; Flood, 2014; Jacobs, 2012; Orden, 2011). For instance, the jewelry designer Bulgari commissioned Fay Weldon’s novel *The Bulgari Connection* (2001), Ford sponsored Carole Matthew’s novel *The Sweetest Taboo* (2004), Sweet’N’Low invested heavily in Hillary Carlip’s e-book *Find Me I’m Yours* (2014), and

¹ We use the words “books”, “fiction”, and “written (or fictional) narrative” interchangeably in the text. In our experiment, we specifically used a short-story by an acclaimed British author.

bestselling author William Boyd's short-story *The Vanishing Game* (2015) pays homage to his sponsor Land Rover.

Academic research on reader responses to brand placement in written text has also started accumulating, demonstrating effects on brand awareness (Brennan, 2008; Brennan and McCalman, 2011), as well as brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Avramova et al., 2017a, 2017b; Bhatnagar and Wan 2011; Olson and Lanseng, 2012; Storm and Stoller, 2015). Some key determinants of consumer responses to brand placements in written text identified in this body of work are brand familiarity, number of brand name mentions, level of a placement's connection to the story plot, degree of reader-character similarity, and level of narrative transportation.

One fundamental characteristic much past work across media has focused on is *placement prominence*, that is the degree to which a placed brand is attention-grabbing or noticeable (Cowley and Barron, 2008; Gupta and Lord, 1998). Past studies using audiovisual media show that highly prominent placements may activate viewers' *persuasion knowledge* (Friestad and Wright, 1994), that is theories and beliefs people develop over time regarding the motives and tactics of persuasion, as well as ways to cope with persuasion attempts. Persuasion knowledge has in turn been argued to elicit more *critical processing* of the placements (e.g., Boerman et al., 2012, 2014). Surprisingly, however, no research to date has tested whether prominence within *written* narrative activates persuasion knowledge or critical processing. Furthermore, although it has often been argued (e.g., Russell, 2002; Van Reijmersdal, 2009) and sometimes found (Boerman et al., 2012, 2014) that persuasion knowledge activation has a detrimental impact on brand attitude, some studies using both audiovisual (Matthes and Naderer, 2016) and print materials (Storm and Stoller, 2015) have failed to find evidence for such a link. In fact, the

mechanisms underlying the documented placement effects in text have never been directly examined.

Furthermore, studies on brand placement in written narrative to date have only explored placement effects using texts in participants' *native language*. Thus, it is not clear whether brand placement exerts the same impact on consumers reading in a *foreign language*. This gap in current knowledge is remarkable in light of the increasing internationalization of the book market: Sales of English-language e-books in non-English-speaking countries (as well as foreign-language e-books in English-speaking countries) have grown dramatically over the last years (Digital Book World, 2013; McIlroy, 2015; Ralph, 2015). For instance, recent estimates indicate that English-language exports represent 10% of all books sold in the Netherlands (Johnson and Cox, 2016), while readers in Sweden and Denmark are now more likely to read an English-language book in original than translated in their mother tongue (Craighill, 2015). In addition to the fact that about 750 million people worldwide speak English as a second language, other factors, such as the rising education levels in large emerging markets (e.g., the BRIC countries), the growing penetration rate of e-reading devices, and an expanding digital distribution network also contribute to an increasing demand for English-language titles (e.g., McNeill, 2014; PEW, 2014).

These market dynamics raise an important question for companies interested in using brand placement in fiction as a marketing tool, namely whether our knowledge on placement effectiveness is transferable to an international setting, where a large number of readers could be exposed to (unfamiliar) brands through reading in a *foreign language* (i.e., a non-native language that is usually learned in a classroom setting, and in which people are typically less proficient;

Keysar, Hayakawa, and An, 2012; Pavlenko, 2012). The current research represents the first attempt to address this question by investigating how placement prominence influences reader responses to a brand placed in a foreign, as compared to a native, language fictional text. On the one hand, we build on previous work showing that high (vs. low) placement frequency in written narratives (presented in the native language) enhances brand evaluations (Storm and Stoller, 2015), as well as on research suggesting that these effects are contingent on readers' processing style (Avramova et al., 2017a, 2017b). On the other hand, we draw on evidence that reading in a foreign language influences information-processing style, as well as reasoning and judgment (e.g., Costa et al., 2014a; Costa et al., 2014b; Keysar et al., 2012). Integrating these findings, we propose that language may affect responses to brand placements in text. To empirically investigate this idea, the present experiment presents participants with a short-story, manipulates brand name repetition and text language, and measures perceived prominence, persuasion knowledge, critical processing, and brand attitude. It is thus the first study to 1) directly test the full sequence of (potential) causal relationships between these constructs in the context of a fictional narrative, and 2) test whether reading in a foreign vs. native language moderates any of these (direct or indirect) effects.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The present research tests the novel prediction that repetition-induced placement prominence in written text will lead to more positive brand evaluations when readers are exposed to placements in their native, as compared to a foreign, language. In essence, we formulate a moderated mediation hypothesis: Whereas increasing placement prominence will have a direct positive impact on brand attitude (regardless of conceptual persuasion knowledge activation) in the native

language, in line with previous findings in the context of written text (Storm and Stoller, 2015), higher prominence (and the ensuing persuasion knowledge) will be more likely to trigger critical processing of the placement and thereby lead to more negative evaluations in the foreign language. Figure 1 presents our conceptual model. In the following paragraphs, we review the relevant literature and formulate specific hypotheses for each of these relationships.

Placement frequency and placement prominence

Placement *frequency* (i.e., the number of times a brand name is shown or mentioned) has been proposed to contribute to a brand's relative prominence (e.g., Avramova et al., 2017a; Dens et al., 2012; Homer, 2009; Matthes et al., 2007). However, the evidence has mostly been indirect in that it is based on brand recall and/or brand attitude measures instead of on prominence measures. Moreover, some of the findings raise doubts as to whether frequency is equivalent to prominence. For instance, increasing the number of brand placements in a TV program decreased brand attitude if the placements were prominently placed (i.e., audiovisual), but not when they were subtly placed (i.e., visual; Homer 2009). Furthermore, high (vs. low) placement frequency has been found to improve the brand attitude of viewers with high program involvement and low persuasion knowledge, although those readers demonstrated the poorest levels of brand recall (Matthes et al., 2007). These findings indicate that placement repetition per se may not necessarily lead to higher *perceived* prominence, leaving open the question of whether prominence drives the observed (positive or negative) effects.

In the context of written narrative, the role of placement frequency is even more central than in audiovisual media, as varying the number of times a brand is mentioned within a text seems to be

the most direct (and arguably, easiest) way of manipulating brand prominence in a print medium, and it is common across literary genres. A content-analysis of American bestsellers from the postwar era (1946-1975) showed, for instance, that Coca Cola was mentioned 59 times across 18 novels, followed by Cadillac, Ford, and Buick with 21 to 57 occurrences in 13 to 16 different books. Surprisingly, however, research on the *effects* of placement frequency in text on brand responses is still quite scarce, with only two empirical papers on the subject. In the studies of Storm and Stoller (2015), higher brand name repetition was consistently associated with higher purchase intentions. The work of Avramova et al. (2017a) showed that the impact of repetition on brand attitude was moderated by the degree to which readers are transported into the story, as well as by individual differences in need for cognition. Importantly, also in these studies, the role of placement prominence in the observed effects was not directly tested. Therefore, the first goal of the present study is to empirically establish whether increasing the number of brand mentions in a fictional text leads to a corresponding increase in *perceived* brand prominence. Based on the literature reviewed above, we expect that encountering more (vs. fewer) references to a brand in a text is likely to increase the chance that the brand name is noticed and processed, and as a result also perceived as more prominent. This reasoning gives rise to the following hypothesis:

H1: Higher (vs. lower) placement frequency will be associated with higher perceived placement prominence.

Placement prominence, persuasion knowledge, and brand attitude

The second, more central objective of the present experiment is to investigate the downstream effects of repetition-induced prominence on placement processing and brand evaluation, and to

test whether language plays a moderating role at any stage of the underlying process. Past evidence on the attitudinal impact of placement prominence has been mixed. On the one hand, a number of studies using TV programs (Matthes et al., 2007; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2007), song lyrics (Van Vaerenbergh et al., 2011), and written narratives (e.g., Avramova et al., 2017a; Storm and Stoller, 2015) have found that increasing placement frequency, which arguably increases brand prominence, may (at least under some circumstances) exert a *positive* effect on brand evaluation. The dominant explanation for this pattern (e.g., Matthes et al., 2007; Storm and Stoller, 2015; Van Vaerenbergh et al., 2011) relates to the notion of increased *fluency*: The relative ease experienced while processing repeated stimuli enhances their subsequent evaluation – a mechanism thought to (partly) explain mere exposure effects (Alter and Oppenheimer, 2009; Lee and Labroo, 2004; Reber, Winkielman, and Schwarz, 1998).

On the other hand, some work using film and TV programs has shown that prominent (i.e., audiovisual and/or more frequent) placements may decrease brand evaluations relative to more subtle (i.e., visual and/or less frequent) placements (e.g., Cowley and Baron, 2008; Dens et al., 2012; Homer, 2009; Russell, 2002). These authors have argued that exposure to prominent placements makes consumers more easily recognize (or infer) that brands have been inserted with a commercial motive. That is, by activating *persuasion knowledge* (Campbell and Kirmani, 2000; Friestad and Wright, 1994), prominent (vs. subtle) placements supposedly trigger thoughts about tactic inappropriateness and counterarguing, ultimately leading to more negative brand evaluations (e.g., Russell, 2002; Van Reijmersdal, 2009). Surprisingly, however, the full causal sequence underlying this hypothesis has not yet been tested directly (see also Wei, Fischer, and Main, 2008). Instead, the claim that persuasion knowledge drives the effects of (modality- or

repetition-based) prominence on attitudinal outcomes has been mainly based on indirect evidence, for instance by using persuasion knowledge as a moderator (but not as a mediator; e.g., Cowley and Baron, 2008; Matthes et al., 2007; Matthes et al., 2011), or by simply assuming it underlies the observed (negative) effects (e.g., Dens et al., 2012; Homer, 2009; Russell, 2002). In addition, even studies that did investigate its effect conceptualized, operationalized, and measured persuasion knowledge in various ways, creating some confusion as to what this construct actually represents (see Ham et al., 2015).

Drawing on recent research on disclosures in TV programs (Boerman et al., 2012, 2014), we currently propose that one way to reconcile the conflicting findings with regard to the impact of placement prominence on brand evaluation is to decompose the broader construct of persuasion knowledge into two separate (albeit related) components, namely *conceptual persuasion knowledge* and *critical processing*, and investigate the individual impact of these components on brand attitude. Moreover, we develop hypotheses regarding the moderating effects of language on these relationships.

Conceptual persuasion knowledge and critical processing

In the present work, we try to disentangle the activation of persuasion knowledge, which refers to the cognitive process of distinguishing editorial from commercial content (i.e., recognition of advertising) – henceforth *conceptual persuasion knowledge* – from any further cognitive, affective, or behavioral response (e.g., critical processing, irritation, counterarguing) that may, or may not, emerge as a consequence of persuasion knowledge activation (see Boerman et al., 2014; John 1999; Rozendaal et al., 2011). We propose that higher placement prominence in a written

narrative will increase conceptual persuasion knowledge. Recent research in other media provides indirect support for this idea. Specifically, it has been demonstrated that the presence (vs. absence) of a sponsorship disclosure at the start of a TV program, which represents one way of enhancing the salience of the placed brand, makes viewers more likely to recognize the sponsored content as advertising (Boerman et al., 2012, 2014). Similarly, Matthes and Naderer (2016) found that exposure to a placement disclosure before a music video featuring visual placements is associated with higher awareness that brands have been intentionally inserted in the video. Moreover, this latter study also manipulated the number of times the branded product was shown on screen and found that higher (vs. lower) placement frequency also led to stronger persuasion knowledge activation, regardless of exposure to the disclosure. Building on these findings, we predict that increasing placement prominence in a fictional text (by means of brand name repetition) will similarly increase the chance that readers recognize brand names in the story as a form of advertising (i.e., conceptual persuasion knowledge activation). Hence, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H2: Increasing perceived placement prominence will lead to higher conceptual persuasion knowledge.

Importantly, we contend that identifying commercial content may be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for applying persuasion knowledge to resist a perceived persuasion attempt. Put differently, conceptual persuasion knowledge is not inherently harmful to brand evaluation, nor is it an insurmountable obstacle to attitude change. In line with this view, the positive impact of brand name repetition in Storm and Stoller's (2015) studies emerged even when participants had read an anti-product placement article, warning them that product placement endangers

consumers' freedom of choice. Thus, even when people are aware of the biasing impact of placements (and thus recognize the source of fluency), they may lack the motivation and/or ability to correct for it, resulting in no, or insufficient, adjustment of their brand responses (e.g., Epley and Gilovich, 2004; Wegener and Petty, 1995, 1997). Consistent with this, it has been demonstrated that explicit placement disclosures preceding music videos and radio shows may sometimes fail to affect (e.g., Matthes and Naderer, 2016) or even improve (Wei et al., 2008) brand evaluations, respectively. Finally, support for the idea that persuasion knowledge need not be detrimental comes from evidence from both marketing and psychology that – instead of inhibiting mere exposure effects – recognition of previously presented stimuli (which supposedly activates persuasion knowledge) actually enhances evaluation (e.g., Newell and Shanks, 2007; Stafford and Grimes, 2012; Wang and Chang, 2004; Yagi, Ikoma, and Kikuchi, 2009). For instance, Stafford and Grimes (2012) demonstrated that both correctly and incorrectly recognized brand logos were evaluated more positively than unrecognized logos, in line with proposals that stimulus recognition aids in reducing the uncertainty associated with unfamiliar stimuli (Lee, 1994; Sawyer, 1981).

Taken together, the findings reviewed above imply that conceptual persuasion knowledge activation may not in itself be a reliable predictor of evaluative brand outcomes. This seems to be particularly relevant in the context of fiction, where brand references are probably even less suspicious (i.e., less strongly associated with manipulative intent) than in mainstream audiovisual media (see e.g., Friedman, 1985), so cognitive defenses may not be as well developed and may not always be employed. Thus, we expect that conceptual persuasion knowledge will not affect brand evaluation and that increasing placement prominence will exert a positive impact on brand

attitude (that is not mediated by conceptual persuasion knowledge). Based on this rationale, we formulate the following hypothesis with regard to the effect of prominence on brand attitude:

H3: Increased perceived placement prominence will have a positive direct effect on brand attitude.

Nevertheless, it is still possible that under certain circumstances conceptual persuasion knowledge *indirectly* affects brand evaluation by triggering *critical processing* – the second component in our conceptualization of persuasion knowledge (see also Boerman et al., 2012, 2014). That is, increasing placement prominence may activate conceptual persuasion knowledge, which may in turn prompt readers to deliberate on the (manipulative) motives behind the brand placements, resulting in stronger criticism of the marketing tactic, and ultimately, to lower brand evaluations. Importantly, such a process would require deeper elaboration. Put differently, critical processing is unlikely to ensue if readers only engage in shallow processing of the placements.

Support for this view comes from several sources. First, evidence shows that counterarguing is an active cognitive process that requires “cognitive work” (Wyer, 1974; see also Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Pfau, Tusing, Koerner, et al., 1997). Consistent with this, applying persuasion knowledge in evaluating a message or a persuasion agent is apparently not automatic, but is instead contingent on the ulterior motive being highly accessible, as well as on sufficient cognitive capacity (e.g., Buijzen et al., 2010; Campbell, 1995; Campbell and Kirmani, 2000). Furthermore, studies that measured both conceptual persuasion knowledge and critical processing in response to a sponsorship disclosure in a TV program established that the duration and timing of the disclosure are key: Only when disclosures were sufficiently long (6 vs. 3 sec.) and were

presented before (vs. after) the program, thus providing viewers with an opportunity to process their implications, did they elicit distrust and skepticism (Boerman et al., 2012; 2014). These findings suggest that prominence may not in itself elicit a negative reaction; rather, deeper elaboration of the prominent placement may be necessary to trigger critical processing.

The idea that level of elaboration could moderate the effects of placement prominence on brand evaluations is also consistent with prior work on placements in written narratives. Specifically, increasing brand name repetition in a fictional text has been shown to negatively affect brand attitudes of readers who are lowly (vs. highly) immersed in the story and who score relatively high (vs. low) on need for cognition (Avramova et al., 2017a). Given prior evidence that high need for cognition is associated with the tendency to engage in more careful and effortful information processing (see e.g., Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, and Jarvis, 1996; Petty, Briñol, Loersch, and McCaslin, 2009, for reviews), these findings support our proposal that the direction and magnitude of prominence-driven effects is determined by how the placements are processed.

In sum, the present research posits that placement prominence will enhance brand evaluation directly when elaboration is relatively low (despite concurrent conceptual knowledge activation), while it will trigger critical processing (via conceptual persuasion knowledge) and thus decrease brand evaluation when elaboration is relatively high. If processing differences underlie the impact of prominence-induced conceptual persuasion knowledge on critical processing and, ultimately, on brand evaluation, as we currently suggest, factors that alter processing style should moderate the effect of prominence on brand attitude. In the current work, we test the novel hypothesis that *text language* is one such factor. Specifically, we argue that increasing placement prominence in

a text that one reads in a foreign, as compared to one's native, language will result in more negative brand attitudes through eliciting more critical processing of the placements.

The moderating role of text language

Our proposal is inspired by previous work on the “foreign-language effect” (Keysar et al., 2012) – the finding that using a foreign language reduces decision-making biases. Specifically, in a series of experiments Keysar et al. (2012) showed that the typical asymmetry in risk preferences (i.e., people being more risk averse in the domain of gains and more risk seeking in the domain of losses, Kahneman and Tversky, 1979), as well as loss aversion (i.e., people anticipating that the negative impact of a potential loss will outweigh the positive impact of a potential gain, Kahneman and Tversky, 1979) were mitigated when participants made decisions in a foreign language (while the classic patterns emerged in the native language conditions; see also Costa et al. 2014a). Keysar et al. (2012) attributed these effects to the reduced emotionality and the adoption of a more systematic processing style when using a foreign language. That is, in line with evidence for weaker emotional responses to stimuli presented in a foreign language (e.g., swear and taboo words, Dewaele, 2004; advertising slogans, Puntoni, de Langhe, and van Osselaer, 2009), Keysar et al. (2012) argued that making decisions in a foreign language relies to a greater extent on analytical (vs. intuitive or affective) processes. Moreover, due to being less automatic and more effortful, using a foreign language supposedly reduces processing fluency (e.g., Costa et al. 2014b; Segalowitz 2010), which has been shown to induce a more systematic processing style (Alter, Oppenheimer, Epley, and Eyre, 2007; Koch and Forgas, 2012; Rand, Greene, and Nowak, 2012).

Applied to the present context, these findings suggest that readers will adopt a more systematic processing style when reading the narrative text in a foreign, as compared to their native, language. As a result, they will also process the placements integrated in the foreign-language text more carefully. Critically, we do not expect language to affect the strength of conceptual persuasion knowledge activation, as higher prominence is likely to increase conceptual persuasion knowledge in both languages (H2). However, we predict that language will determine what readers *do* with this knowledge. Specifically, we contend that people reading in a foreign (vs. native) language will be more likely to take the extra step to consider tactic inappropriateness and generate counterarguments. Based on this reasoning, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H4: Language will moderate the impact of conceptual persuasion knowledge on critical processing, such that conceptual persuasion knowledge will be associated with more critical processing of the placements in the foreign than in the native language.

Finally, unlike conceptual persuasion knowledge, which could in itself leave brand evaluations unaffected, critical processing is likely to be detrimental to brand attitude (Boerman et al., 2012, 2014). In other words, stronger criticism of the placement will be associated with more negative brand attitude. We formally express this prediction in our last hypothesis:

H5: Critical processing will be negatively related to brand attitude.

Since we predict critical processing to only ensue in the foreign (but not in the native) language, we essentially propose a moderated mediation model of the effect of placement prominence on brand attitude. That is, in the native language increasing prominence will only have a direct positive effect on brand attitude, whereas in the foreign language prominence will exert both a

direct positive effect and an indirect negative effect through (sequentially) conceptual persuasion knowledge and critical processing (competitive mediation; Zhao, Lynch, and Chen, 2010).

In sum, the present study tests a series of hypotheses regarding the effects of repetition-induced placement prominence in written narratives. First, we expect that high (vs. low) placement frequency will increase perceived prominence (H1), and higher prominence will lead to stronger conceptual persuasion knowledge activation (H2) in *both* the native and the foreign language. Furthermore, since conceptual persuasion knowledge is unlikely to affect brand attitude, we posit that increasing placement prominence will have a direct positive impact on brand attitude (H3). However, language will play a moderating role at the next step of the process, namely reading in a foreign, as compared to the native, language will be associated with more critical processing following conceptual persuasion knowledge activation (H4). Critical processing will in turn decrease brand attitude (H5).

METHOD

Study design and experimental manipulations

We conducted an experiment, in which we systematically manipulated *brand name repetition* (i.e., the number of times the target brand is mentioned in the text) and *language* (i.e., whether participants read the text in their *native* (Dutch) or in a *foreign* language (English)). This resulted in a 2 (repetition: 2, 11) x 2 (language: native, foreign) full-factorial between-subjects design.

We borrowed the stimulus materials from a prior study on the impact of placement repetition in fiction on brand attitudes (Avramova et al., 2017a). Specifically, Avramova et al. (2017a) used

the full text of the short-story *Checkmate* (1988) by bestselling British author Jeffrey Archer with only slight adaptations for the purposes of the present study. Since the characters in the original story were depicted as drinking alcohol, a branded alcoholic beverage could be easily integrated. An unfamiliar vodka brand (*Posolskaya*[®]) was mentioned either 2 or 11 times in the text (henceforth “low” and “high” repetition, respectively; see Avramova et al., 2017a). We chose an unfamiliar brand, since previous work suggests that placement effects are more likely to emerge (and are stronger) for unfamiliar than for familiar brands (e.g., Avramova et al., 2017a; Storm and Stoller, 2015). We used a Russian brand name, as vodka is widely associated with Russia (being a traditional Russian drink, with many Russian brands on the market). In addition, it was deemed important that the brand name was not strongly associated with either of the two target languages (Dutch or English) or with the countries where they are spoken (e.g., country-of-origin effects), as this could have produced asymmetries in the salience of the placed brand across language conditions. In other words, we selected a brand that is likely to stand out to the same extent in both the Dutch and the English text. Finally, the specific levels of repetition (2 and 11) were chosen based on earlier work, where the vodka brand appeared 2, 6, or 11 times in the text. The findings showed that, although the effect of repetition on brand attitude followed a linear pattern, the 6-repetition condition did not significantly differ from the 2- and 11-repetition conditions (Avramova et al., 2017a). Hence, we opted to only test the impact of the lower and higher repetition levels in the current study.

The original text (in English) was translated into Dutch (2,545 words) by a professional translator. The author of the story was not disclosed to participants, but its title was included. It recounts the events from an evening of a chess club captain (the narrator), who meets an

attractive woman at the club and then takes her to his place for a drink and a game of chess, the story ending with an unexpected twist. Since they drink the entire evening, the vodka brand could be inserted repeatedly without drastically changing the plot (see Avramova et al., 2017a for more details). In the low-repetition condition, the brand was mentioned once in the beginning (after about 680 words), and once in the end (after about 2,200 words). In the high-repetition condition, nine more placements were added, resulting in about two brand mentions per page. Archer's original story also referred to two automobile brands, which were related to the plot of the story, hence we kept these brands in the text (in all conditions) to stay close to the original, and to reduce the salience of the target brand (see Avramova et al., 2017a).

Participants and procedure

One hundred and eighteen respondents took part in the experiment. They were recruited through convenience sampling, as we collected the data together with master students, who were working on the project to fulfil a course requirement. Twenty-two respondents indicated that their mother tongue is not Dutch (11 other languages were listed). Although these respondents managed to fill in the survey in Dutch, it was deemed important for the purposes of the current study that our sample only included participants whose mother tongue was Dutch (see Costa et al., 2014). Thus, these twenty-two respondents were removed from the data. The remaining sample ($n = 96$) was predominantly female (62.5%) and age ranged from 18 to 32 ($M_{\text{age}} = 21.95$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.29$).

Participants were emailed with an invitation to fill in an online survey (programmed in Qualtrics®). The research was briefly introduced as 'a series of separate, unrelated studies, including "a study on literature" and a "consumer behavior study" (which were administered in

this order). Upon clicking the survey link, participants were automatically and randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. Each “study” featured a different title, introduction, task instructions, and layout in order to reduce the chance that respondents will (immediately) see the link between the manipulation and the dependent measures. Participants were asked to read the story and answer the questions at their own pace. They were assured of their anonymity, yet they were offered to enter a sweepstake to win one of 3 bookstore vouchers (each worth 20 euro) or one of 3 double cinema tickets (of similar value), if they were willing to leave their email address (all but 2 respondents provided an email address). The average time it took participants to fill in the questionnaire (automatically recorded in Qualtrics®) was about 18 minutes. It did not differ across language conditions, nor was it affected by the self-reported level of language proficiency (all p 's > .69).

Measures

Before reading the story, respondents completed the demographic questions, indicated their native tongue, and rated their level of proficiency in English (the foreign language) on a 7-point bipolar scale (*almost no knowledge /as good as my mother tongue*; e.g., Costa et al., 2014b; Keysar et al., 2012). Ratings ranged between 2 and 7, $M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.15$. Adopting the approach from past work on the foreign language effect, this proficiency score was used as a covariate in all analyses.

Readers were asked several questions about their perceptions of the story immediately after reading the text. These served as filler items, boosting the impression that the first “study” is independent and unrelated to the second “study”. Our main dependent variable, *brand attitude*,

was measured with four 7-point bipolar scales (*negative/positive, unattractive/attractive, don't like/like, low/high quality*; $M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.33$; Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$; see e.g., Boerman et al., 2012; Dens et al., 2012). To further mask the connection between the dependent measures (collected within an ostensibly unrelated survey of consumer opinions of different vodka brands) and the preceding short-story, we also measured attitudes towards three filler brands – one other unfamiliar brand (Sibirskaya®) and two familiar brands (Absolut® and Smirnoff®) using the same scales (the target unfamiliar brand was always rated second). Readers also rated their *familiarity* with the target brand on a 7-point scale (*not at all familiar/very familiar*, $M = 1.34$, $SD = .99$). We used this measure to confirm that the brand was indeed unfamiliar for participants in our sample.

Perceived prominence was measured with three items (Posolskaya attracted attention in the story; Posolskaya was prominently present in the story; I had the feeling that Posolskaya came up frequently in the story; $M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.62$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$) on a 7-point Likert scale (I fully disagree/fully agree). *Conceptual persuasion knowledge* was measured with one item (I think that references to the brand Posolskaya in the story is a form of advertising; $M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.56$; Boerman et al., 2012, 2014; van Reijmersdal, Neijens, and Smit, 2005). *Critical processing* was measured with two items (While reading the story, I criticized the references to the brand Posolskaya; While reading the story, I was skeptical towards the references of the brand Posolskaya; $M = 3.27$, $SD = 1.67$, $r = .83$; Boerman et al., 2014; Moyer-Guse and Nabi, 2010). Participants indicated their agreement with these statements on 7-point Likert scales.

In sum, after the demographic questions, the text of the short-story (containing the manipulations), and the (filler) questions about the story (all part of the “study on literature”), the

key dependent measures (all part of the “consumer behavior study”) were administered in the following order: brand attitude, brand familiarity, perceived prominence, conceptual persuasion knowledge, critical processing. We chose to have brand attitude reported first in order to avoid raising respondents’ awareness of and elaboration on the brand placement. That is, once the question of how prominently the brand features in the story is asked, all participants get the information that the brand was indeed placed in the story, also making the placement extra prominent – a factor that supposedly differs across experimental conditions. Similarly, if readers had first been asked if they saw the placements as a form of advertising, they might have tried to subsequently adjust their brand attitude ratings (e.g., report lower attitudes to convey that they are not to be “duped” by marketing tricks, or simply to be consistent). For similar reasons, the same general order of dependent measures has been used in a number of previous studies (e.g., Boerman et al., 2014; Homer, 2009; Matthes et al., 2007).

RESULTS

Missing data from two respondents on some of the measures were imputed using the sample median. We used the self-reported English proficiency scores as a covariate in all analyses. Although it was a significant covariate in some cases, it did not affect any of the main results. Therefore, we do not discuss this variable further. Table 1 contains the correlations between all measured variables.

To test H1, we conducted a 2 (Placement frequency: 2, 11) x 2 (Language: native, foreign) ANOVA on perceived prominence. Only the main effect of placement repetition was significant, $F(1, 92) = 37.36, p < .001, \eta^2 = .29$ (all other F ’s $< 1, p$ ’s $> .5$). As expected, participants exposed

to 11 placements perceived the brand as more prominent ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 1.37$) than those exposed to only 2 placements ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.37$), and this pattern emerged in both language conditions. Thus, H1 was confirmed.

To test H2-H5, we used partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) as implemented in the software tool SmartPLS 3 (Ringle, Wende, and Becker, 2015). PLS is a robust statistical technique for modeling linear relationships between latent constructs using measured variables (i.e., indicators). Notably, PLS allows complex causal networks of relationships to be tested simultaneously, rather than in a piecemeal manner, estimating both direct and indirect effects of multiple independent and dependent variables across multiple groups (Lowry and Gaskin, 2014). Moreover, PLS-SEM can handle relatively small samples better than other statistical techniques, while providing a sensitive test for interactions (see e.g., Hair et al., 2012; Lowry and Gaskin, 2014; Wong, 2013).

We used SmartPLS 3 to model the relationships between placement prominence (exogenous variable), conceptual persuasion knowledge, critical processing, and brand attitude (endogenous variables). Our model only contained reflective indicators. To investigate whether language has a moderating effect on any of the paths, we took advantage of the integrated multi-group analysis feature, which tests if pre-defined data groups (e.g., the two language conditions in the present experiment) differ in their parameter estimates (e.g., path coefficients; see Sarstedt, Henseler, and Ringle, 2011 for more details). In other words, using a parametric significance test, we directly assessed if the path coefficients (for all direct and indirect effects in the model) differ across the two languages.

Following the recommendations in the literature, we first assessed overall model quality using a number of criteria (e.g., Henseler, Hubona, and Ray, 2016; Lowry and Gaskin, 2014; Wong, 2013). Convergent and discriminant validity, as well as (composite) reliability of all reflective constructs was sufficiently high (see Table 2 – 4 for a summary of the results; these are based on the complete sample, collapsed across *language*, the grouping variable, as none of the quality measures differed across the two language conditions, all t 's < 1.3, all p 's > .18). Specifically, the composite reliability coefficient takes into account that indicators have different loadings, and can be interpreted in the same way as Cronbach's α , with reliability coefficients higher than .7 considered satisfactory (see Table 2). Convergent validity is demonstrated by the fact that the average variance extracted (AVE) values are higher than .5, indicating that a latent variable can on average explain more than half of the variance of its indicators (see Table 2). Discriminant validity is assessed using two measures: The loading of each indicator needs to be greater than all of its cross-loadings (see Table 3), and the AVE of each latent variable should be greater than the variable's highest squared correlation with any other latent variable (i.e., Fornell-Lacker criterion, see Table 4; for more details on all these criteria, see e.g. Henseler et al., 2009). Model fit was evaluated using the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR): The value was lower than the proposed cut-off of .08, indicating that model fit is adequate (Henseler et al., 2016; Hu and Bentler, 1999).

After establishing that the measurement model is of sufficient quality, we proceeded with testing our hypotheses by examining the links between the latent variables for each of the two language groups. Figures 2 and 3 and Tables 5 – 8 present the results of the PLS multi-group analysis. The path coefficients indicate a significant positive relationship between perceived placement prominence and conceptual persuasion knowledge for both the native ($b = .436, p = .002$) and the

foreign language conditions ($b = .345, p = .024$), thereby supporting H2. Also as expected, conceptual persuasion knowledge did not influence brand attitude directly in either the native ($b = -.051, p = .729$), or the foreign language ($b = .031, p = .892$). The multi-group analysis also confirmed that language did not moderate either of these relationships (all t 's $< 1, p$'s $> .34$). Next, we tested H3, which pertains to the effects of prominence on brand attitude. In line with our predictions, higher placement prominence exerted a direct positive effect on brand attitude both in the native language ($b = .346, p = .024$) and in the foreign language condition ($b = .497, p < .001$), and the two language groups did not differ ($t = .721, p = .473$). Thus, H3 was supported.

Further, while recognizing the placements as a form of advertising did not trigger critical processing for the native language readers ($b = .202, p = .171$), it was positively and significantly related to critical processing for those reading in a foreign language ($b = .55, p < .001$). The multi-group analysis revealed that the difference between the two groups' path coefficients is marginally significant ($t = 1.942, p = .055$). This pattern suggests that language moderates the impact of conceptual persuasion knowledge on critical processing, providing (marginal) support for H4.

The indirect effect of prominence on critical processing via conceptual persuasion knowledge was not significant for native-language readers ($b = .088, p = .287$). In contrast, in the foreign language conditions the direct path from prominence to critical processing was significant ($b = .391, p = .002$) and the indirect effect was marginally significant ($b = .190, p = .058$), indicating that conceptual persuasion knowledge activation partly mediates the effect of prominence on critical processing in the foreign language. However, the indirect effect (the path from placement

prominence to conceptual PK to critical processing) was not different across the two language groups ($b = .101, p = .429$).

Finally, we tested the effects of critical processing on brand attitude (H5). Contrary to what we expected, this path was not significant in the foreign language condition ($b = -.119, p = .502$), nor in the native language condition ($b = .077, p = .619$). Hence, H5 was not supported. Thus, despite finding the hypothesized increase in critical processing after exposure to the prominent placements in a foreign language, this did not have any negative consequences for brand attitude.

DISCUSSION

The present research aimed to test how repetition-induced placement prominence in written text affects persuasion knowledge, critical processing, and brand attitude, and whether text language moderates these relationships. The results of our experiment provide support for most (but not all) of our predictions. Specifically, we established that higher (vs. lower) placement frequency in a written narrative indeed increases brand prominence, which in turn directly enhances brand attitude (as expected). Further, perceived placement prominence was positively related to conceptual persuasion knowledge in both languages (as predicted), but it only triggered critical processing of the placements in the foreign language (as predicted), although the latter effect was only marginally significant. Yet, critical processing was not detrimental to brand evaluation (contrary to predictions).

The present findings extend previous work and advance our knowledge on brand placement effects in several important ways. First of all, they demonstrate that increasing the number of brand mentions in a fictional text is an efficient way to enhance brand prominence, which in turn

positively affects brand attitudes. This pattern is consistent with some recent work, showing that increasing brand name repetition in short narrative texts improves brand evaluation (Storm and Stoller, 2015; see also Avramova et al., 2017a). Moreover, our study shows that even though higher placement frequency increases the likelihood that readers recognize the placements as a form of advertising, this does not mitigate the positive effect on brand attitude (see also Storm and Stoller, 2015). Notably, the present study shows that this was the case in *both* the native and the foreign language conditions, using a measure (rather than an experimental manipulation) of persuasion knowledge, testing its mediating (rather than moderating) role, and utilizing the full text of a short-story (rather than just paragraph-long excerpts). Thus, contrary to the popular assumption in placement research on audiovisual media (e.g., Homer, 2009; Matthes et al., 2007; Russell, 2002), neither prominence *per se*, nor the ensuing consumers' realization that placements serve a persuasion function is necessarily fatal, or even consequential, for brand evaluation.

Further, our findings speak to past research on the link between recognition of advertising and criticism of the sponsored content. Specifically, Boerman et al. (2012, 2014) found that explicit disclosures presented before a TV program activated conceptual persuasion knowledge, which in turn triggered critical processing. In the present work, however, persuasion knowledge gave rise to criticism only when consumers read the text in a foreign, but not in their native, language. The dissociation between these two measures underscores the importance of treating (affectively neutral) advertising recognition, on the one hand, and (supposedly more negatively-laden) critical processing, on the other, as distinct processes, which need not always be triggered in tandem.

In addition to our processing account, on the basis of which we had predicted the observed difference between the two language conditions, at least two (possibly complementary)

explanations exist for why critical processing did not ensue for those reading in their native language. First, brand name repetition is arguably a much more subtle way of drawing attention to the brand than an explicit disclosure for the presence of sponsored content. That is, being exposed to a (high) number of brand mentions in a text may or may not result in the readers concluding that the brands are inserted intentionally and with a promotional motive. Second, the verbal nature of the placement (words on a page) in the present study is probably also more subtle than the several minutes' long audiovisual presentation of the sponsoring brand employed in Boerman et al.'s work. Thus, in line with our hypotheses, repetition-induced prominence alone is not sufficient to elicit readers' criticism (at baseline, i.e., in the native language); rather, deeper processing of the placements – which is more likely to take place upon exposure to explicit disclosures, as in Boerman et al.'s studies, or when people read in a foreign language, as in ours – seems to be a key prerequisite.

The novel finding that a seemingly irrelevant contextual factor, such as the language of a narrative, may determine how readers process the placements within it highlights the important role of situational variables in brand placement effectiveness. Specifically, in line with recent work on the foreign-language effect (e.g., Costa et al., 2014b; Keysar et al., 2012), our results indicate that people engage in more systematic and effortful processing when they use their foreign (vs. native) language, as they seem to adopt a more critical stance towards the placements as brand prominence increased and conceptual persuasion knowledge activation became stronger.

Interestingly, the present findings, as well as those of earlier work, are not consistent with a competing hypothesis regarding the impact of language. That is, since using a foreign (vs. native) language is more effortful and thus increases cognitive load, one might expect that it also

undermines systematic processing of the placements. If that were true, foreign language readers would be expected to engage in *less* critical processing of the placements as a result of limited cognitive capacity. Yet, in line with earlier work, we observed the opposite pattern, in keeping with the idea that reading in a foreign language elicits more extensive elaboration of the material at hand, including the brand placements. Moreover, the competing prediction would be based on the assumption that the placements (and brand-related information) are a priori less relevant or attention-grabbing for readers than the rest of the text (and hence undergo shallower processing when resources are limited) – which may not always be the case.

By studying a different determinant of processing style, the present findings also extend previous evidence on how individual differences in need for cognition (Avramova et al., 2017b) and field-dependent/independent cognitive style (Matthes et al., 2011) moderate the impact of placement prominence on brand evaluation by showing that text language similarly influences how placements in fiction are processed. Our results also suggest that other context variables that have been shown to affect evaluation through altering processing style, such as consumers' mood states (e.g., positive vs. negative) or the relative fluency of a text (e.g., font size and clarity, story flow and coherence; see e.g., Koch and Forgas, 2012; Oppenheimer, 2008; Schwarz, 2004) could also be consequential for brand placement effects.

Notably, our prediction regarding the effect of critical processing on brand attitude (in the case of the foreign language) was not borne out in the data. However, the lack of such an effect is not a precedent. For instance, Storm and Stoller (2015) demonstrated that reading an article, which alerted participants to the dangers posed by product placement and encouraged them to resist its biasing influence, did not offset the positive impact of placement repetition. Similarly, Matthes

and Naderer (2016) found that placement disclosures preceding music videos (which supposedly elicited critical processing of the sponsored content) did not affect brand attitude. In the same vein, disclosures presented before (vs. after) a TV program or in the beginning (vs. end) of a blog did not mitigate the positive effect of placement exposure (relative to no exposure) on brand attitude (Campbell, Mohr, and Verlegh, 2013). In light of these earlier findings, one explanation of our results could be that consumers are *a-priori* less critical towards placements in books than in audiovisual media, and persuasion knowledge activation and critical processing have different implications in this context. This view is supported by previous proposals that different media could exhibit different placement effects, making direct generalizations from audiovisual to print unwarranted (e.g., Avramova et al., 2017a; Bhatnagar et al., 2004).

We would further speculate that the lack of an effect of critical processing on brand attitude in the foreign language group could also be attributed to the processing style of readers in that condition. Specifically, if they indeed adopted a more systematic processing style (as suggested by prior work, and by the present finding that they engaged in more critical processing), they may have also been more likely to *correct* for a potential “spill-over” effect. That is, even if those readers were skeptical about the placements, they might have been more prone to discount their first (automatic) negative reaction towards the brand and redirect their criticism towards the author of the story, who must have inserted the brand in the text. Drawing such a distinction between different sources of potential bias is likely to be cognitively taxing, as is the process of correction itself (e.g., Campbell and Kirmani, 2000; Gilbert, 1989). Therefore, those who adopt a more effortful and analytic processing style (in this case, those reading in a foreign language) are

more likely to engage in such correction. Future research could more directly test these different accounts.

Managerial and public policy implications

Our research has a number of implications for marketing communication and advertising practitioners, as well as for public policy. From a brand management perspective, our work is consistent with recent findings (Avramova et al., 2017a; Storm and Stoller, 2015) in providing evidence that placing brands in a fictional text might be a promising marketing strategy. Given the high level of saturation of audiovisual media (Alter, 2014a; Chahal, 2015), books might represent a fresh, alternative medium for brand promotion efforts that could also reach a vast number of consumers. Importantly, the main take-home message from the current study is that prominence is *good*, not bad, for brand attitudes (cf. Van Reijmersdal, 2009). Thus, unlike in audiovisual media, where prominence has been argued to be a double-edged sword – enhancing memory, but hurting brand evaluation (e.g., Cowley and Barron, 2008; Dens et al., 2012; Russell, 2002) – increasing prominence through brand name repetition in a fictional text seems to be a safe and effective approach. Moreover, brand name repetition is relatively easy to implement in a print medium, and would not carry (m)any additional costs. Hence, it is not surprising that advertisers invest heavily in book placements. For instance, the president of Cumberland Packing – the company that paid \$1.3 million to author Hilary Carlip for integrating the artificial sweetener brand Sweet’N Low in her e-book *Find Me I’m Yours* (2014) – reportedly said:

“It seemed like a more modern version of product placement on TV. [...] They’re cleverly and carefully having a product written into the story, but doing it in a way that didn’t tarnish the integrity of the piece.” (Flood, 2014)

Interestingly, this quote also reveals the advertiser’s intuition that the integrity of the text *could*, in some cases, be compromised. Although we did not find evidence for this in the present study (i.e., we only documented a positive impact of brand prominence), the possibility remains that other prominence manipulations, or other moderating variables, could result in different effects.

Furthermore, we show that prominence has a positive influence both in the native, and in a foreign language context. In light of the growing internationalization of the book market and the steadily increasing sales of English-language books across the globe (e.g., Jones, 2011; McIlroy, 2015; PEW, 2014), it is important for practitioners who consider brand placement in books to know that their marketing efforts will have similar effects for readers at large, regardless of text language. Importantly, we used an unfamiliar brand in this study, since prior work has shown that brand placement effects in text tend to be smaller, or even null, for highly familiar brands (Avramova et al., 2017a; Storm and Stoller, 2015). The fact that even readers who are not familiar with the placed brand (e.g., readers abroad, reading a book in a foreign language) would be positively influenced by the placement is a key advantage of using placements in works of fiction.

From a consumer and public policy perspective, on the other hand, our findings may also raise an alert. It is conceivable that the growing popularity of the practice, combined with evidence for its (covert) influence on readers, would raise concerns among consumer protection groups and

policy-makers. A pressing question is thus whether and how one can cope with, or resist, stealthy marketing techniques, especially in a medium where one may be less likely to expect them.

Although the idea of a placement disclosure in a book may strike some as weird, it would not be surprising if brand placements in books at some point become the subject of the same regulation that has already been implemented with respect to TV programs, for instance in the EU (see e.g., Boerman et al., 2014; Tessitore and Geuens, 2013). Will such a strategy be successful in boosting readers' defenses against unwanted persuasion attempts? The work of Storm and Stoller (2015) – who asked participants in their studies to read an article emphasizing the biasing influence of product placement before they read the target text – suggests that it won't (see also Matthes and Naderer, 2016), as readers may not be able to resist the influence of brand integrations in text. However, an equally fundamental question is whether they want to resist. Future work may thus not only examine ways to counter the effects of brand placement on consumers, but may also explore how they perceive this practice in the first place.

Limitations and future research

A number of limitations of the present investigation will hopefully inspire future work on the topic. First of all, some of the obtained effects were only marginally significant, hence these relationships need to be replicated using a larger sample. With regard to placement repetition, future studies could use both lower (moderate) and higher levels of placement frequency and also test whether the manner of distribution (and level of concentration) of the brand mentions across the text, as well as per page, plays a role. It is certainly necessary to also replicate our findings using different products. Placements for high-involvement products, for instance, may not exhibit the same pattern as the one obtained in this study, using a low-involvement product (vodka) (e.g.,

Cauberghé and De Pelsmacker, 2010). Finally, the results would need to be replicated using different types of text. For example, it could be that brand placements are more acceptable, or less noticeable, in some genres than in others.

As the present experiment was conducted online, participants read the short-story on a digital device (computer, tablet, smartphone), yet we do not know which type of device they used. It is possible that the type of device influences some aspects of reading (e.g., reading speed, concentration, memory). Future work may thus look at whether the type of electronic device matters, as well as whether reading a text on a screen or on paper affects the results. Recent research shows that reading on a screen leads to more shallow processing (indicated by poorer comprehension and memory of information) than reading on paper (e.g., Mangen & Kuiken, 2014; Mangen & van der Weel, 2015). Applied to the present context, this could mean that people in both language conditions may have been processing less deeply overall than they would have, had they read the text on paper. It stands to reason that the effects we obtained would either be replicated (keeping the same relative differences between language conditions) or could even get stronger if the study is conducted on paper (as those in the foreign language conditions would be processing the text even more systematically). To our knowledge, there is so far no research on whether language and type of device interact to affect cognitive processes or other outcomes. Hence, this presents an interesting avenue for future research.

Further, one could argue that the present study's conclusions are limited as a result of only comparing one native (Dutch) and one foreign language (English). The importance of replication notwithstanding, we are not aware of any reason for why the current findings would not emerge using other language combinations. Past work on the language effect has replicated the results

(i.e., patterns consistent with more systematic processing in the foreign than in the native language) using Korean, Spanish, English, and Arabic as a native language, and Japanese, French, Hebrew, Spanish, and English as a foreign language (Costa et al., 2014a; Costa et al. 2014b; Keysar et al., 2012). Thus, the relative difficulty and lower fluency of any foreign (compared to native) language, rather than the specific characteristics or level of difficulty of a particular language, seem to drive these effects.

More importantly, however, future research may want to further examine the moderating influence of language skills. Following the approach used in earlier research (e.g., Costa et al., 2014b; Keysar et al., 2012), we employed a self-report relative measure of language proficiency as a covariate in our analysis. Still, we did not measure proficiency in any objective manner, nor did we ask our participants for how long or in what context (home, school, work) they have been using English as a foreign language. Future studies may include such measures and directly test whether the increased critical processing of the placements, found in the present experiment, is indeed driven by a more systematic and effortful processing style. Strong support for this view would be provided by showing that this effect disappears for readers with native-level knowledge, as they would be expected to experience greater fluency and process the foreign-language text more automatically (and thus, similar to those who read it in the native language; see Costa et al., 2014b).

It must be noted that the present results were obtained using a relatively young participant sample (mean age was 22). This fact does not render the findings less relevant, as recent data show that young people are avid readers (Nielsen, 2015), making written narratives an appropriate (alternative) medium for reaching this particular audience. And yet, it raises the question of

whether age is an explanatory factor and whether the same pattern would hold for consumers in other age groups. That is, even though direct evidence does not yet exist on the moderating role of age for brand placement effects, research provides indirect support for the idea that younger consumers may be more accepting and less critical of brand placements, at least when it comes to those in audiovisual media. For instance, Nelson and McLeod (2005) found that adolescents tend to be strongly aware of brand placements and that brand consciousness had a positive effect on attitudes towards the practice. In line with this, Reijmersdal et al. (2017) showed that while brand placement disclosures before a TV program activated adolescents' persuasion knowledge (i.e., understanding of persuasive intent), they did not decrease persuasion. These authors argued that adolescents are especially sensitive to branded products, which may grant them social status, and as a result they are less likely to engage in critical processing of the placements. Consistent with this, participants in our study, who were relatively young (although not adolescents), may have been less inclined to process the placements critically – which could eventually explain the lack of effects on brand attitude. Still, our findings show that respondents who read the story in a foreign language *were* processing the placements in a more critical manner, suggesting that the pattern we obtained cannot be solely attributed to age. In any case, future studies should replicate the present results using more age-diverse samples.

Further, to complement the quantitative methods used in extant research on brand placement in written text, including the present study, future research could employ qualitative research techniques, such as focus groups and in-depth interviews, or analysis of thought protocols, as these could provide deeper insight into reader responses to brand placements. Although the more subtle influences and implicit processes that underlie placement effects may not be (fully)

accessible through introspection and self-report, such an approach would shed more light on the role of deliberative processes, such as persuasion knowledge activation, critical processing, and counterarguing. For instance, it is essential to study how readers reason about placements they encounter in a narrative text, what specific motives they infer, and whether they eventually direct their criticism towards the author, the publisher, or the advertiser. If the author, rather than the advertiser (brand), is perceived as manipulative, the finding that critical processing of the placement failed to affect brand evaluation is less surprising. Future work may also examine how brand placement in fiction affects responses to the text itself, as well as other texts by the same author or publisher.

A related issue that still needs to be empirically addressed is how authors see the practice of brand placement in books. Specifically, one may wonder if they are apprehensive about public perceptions of literature deteriorating in response to the (apparent) commercialization of the medium. Notably, despite the popular notion that books are (or must be) free of commercial influences due to being a higher form of art, both scholars (e.g., Brown, 2015; Friedman, 1985) and fiction authors (as cited in the press, see e.g., Alter, 2014; Flood, 2014; Jacobs, 2012) have argued that literature, like any other form of art and entertainment (e.g., film or music), has in fact long been subject to such forces. Moreover, Brown (2015) proposed that as a result of various developments (e.g., growing financial pressure, changing management attitudes, the disruptive impact of new technologies), the art field is becoming increasingly receptive to “marketing, branding, logos, slogans, and the once-denigrated denizens of business schools” (p.5). In line with this, a number of authors have expressed their openness to the prospect of

integrating a brand name in their work in return for payment or free publicity. For instance, Matthew Dicks (2010) commented on his blog:

A brand of jelly was predestined to appear in *Unexpectedly, Milo*, and if choice of brand name is arbitrary, why not make some money in the process?"

Some authors even seem to be thrilled by the idea. William Boyd, who was commissioned by Land Rover to write a short-story featuring the brand, said in an interview with the New York Times:

“It was a most intriguing job to be asked to do – I would recommend it to any novelist, if they got the chance. [...] Novelists have always written to commission (e.g., Charles Dickens). If I was approached to write a Batman movie I would assume it would have to feature Batman. There’s really no difference in this case.” (Flood, 2014).

Thus, anecdotal evidence suggests that placing brands in works of fiction may be less radical or outrageous than often thought: The expectation that authors would zealously resist brand placement for its potential to taint their reputation, or that readers would indiscriminately despise authors and advertisers for their covert persuasion attempts, is largely speculative and perceptions of all parties involved need to be systematically assessed in future work.

Finally, even though the present research focused on a print medium, an intriguing avenue for further research pertains to exploring the impact of language with regard to brand placement in other media. Besides publishing, the US boasts the largest global share of media and entertainment earnings for film, music, and games, and the demand for, and exposure to, English-language content is ever-growing across the globe (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015). An interesting question is, thus, whether brand placement effects, obtained in prior research using native language materials, would replicate when consumers are exposed to content in a foreign

language. For instance, is the impact of audiovisual (vs. visual) placements in a TV program the same when the program is viewed in the original language (e.g., English) and when it is dubbed in the local language? Would placements in audiobooks have the same impact when these are listened to in a foreign language? What is the effect of hearing the brand name as part of the script of a movie vs. reading it in the subtitles (or both)? On the one hand, if using a foreign language induces a more analytic processing style across the board, one would predict the same effects across different media. On the other hand, it is possible that reading a book in a foreign language is more effortful than watching a film (where visual information could help disambiguate or enhance perception of auditory information), thereby modulating placement effects. Hopefully, the present research will stimulate future inquiries into these and other interesting issues.

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Figure 1. Conceptual model

Note: Dashed arrow corresponds to the prediction that conceptual persuasion knowledge will not affect brand attitude. H4 tests the moderating impact of language on the link between conceptual persuasion knowledge and critical processing.

Figure 2. Path coefficients from the PLS-SEM multi-group analysis: Native language

Note: Path coefficients significant at * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Figure 3. Path coefficients from the PLS-SEM multi-group analysis: Foreign language

Note: Path coefficients significant at * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 1: Correlations between all measured variables

	Placement prominence	Conceptual PK	Critical processing	Ab Posolskaya
Placement prominence	1	.391**	.406**	.349**
Conceptual PK	.391**	1	.481**	.099
Critical processing	.406**	.481**	1	.186
Ab Posolskaya	.349**	.099	.186	1

Notes: PK = persuasion knowledge; Ab = Brand attitude; Posolskaya = target brand (unfamiliar); Sibirskaya = filler brand (unfamiliar); Smirnoff/Absolut **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2: Results summary for the reflective measurement model (reliability and validity)

Latent construct	Indicators	Loadings	Indicator reliability (i.e., loadings²)	Composite reliability	AVE
Placement prominence	prom1	.890	.792	.945	.850
	prom2	.929	.863		
	prom3	.947	.897		
Conceptual PK	PK	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Critical processing	crit1	.958	.912	.956	.917
	crit2	.957	.916		
Brand attitude	Ab1	.945	.893	.967	.878
	Ab2	.963	.927		
	Ab3	.965	.931		
	Ab4	.874	.764		

Note: Prom = prominence. PK = conceptual persuasion knowledge. Crit = Critical processing. Ab = brand attitude. Conceptual PK is a single-item construct.

Table 3: Cross loadings of the measurement items on each latent construct

	Placement prominence	Conceptual PK	Critical processing	Brand attitude (Ab)
prom1	.890	.374	.337	.418
prom2	.929	.368	.408	.248
prom3	.947	.338	.377	.294
PK	.392	1.000	.481	.095
crit1	.402	.465	.958	.151
crit2	.373	.455	.957	.205
Ab1	.307	.062	.130	.945
Ab2	.355	.076	.144	.963
Ab3	.365	.122	.228	.965
Ab4	.275	.093	.192	.874

Note: Prom = prominence. PK = conceptual persuasion knowledge. Crit = Critical processing. Ab = brand attitude. Conceptual PK is a single-item construct.

Table 4: Discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion

(Discriminant validity is established if the square root of the AVE, shown on the diagonal, is higher than the off-diagonal values in the same row and column, representing the correlations between the variables)

	Placement prominence	Conceptual PK	Critical processing	Brand attitude (Ab)
Placement prominence	.922			
Conceptual PK	.392	1.000		
Critical processing	.405	.481	.957	
Brand attitude	.350	.095	.186	.937

Note: PK = persuasion knowledge. Conceptual PK is a single-item construct.

Table 5: Path coefficients, t-values, and significance levels based on the PLS-SEM bootstrapping procedure (multi-group analysis)

	Path coefficient Native language	t-value (p-value) Native language	Path coefficient Foreign language	t-value (p-value) Foreign language
Conceptual PK → brand attitude	-.051	.346 (.729)	.031	.136 (.892)
Conceptual PK → critical processing	.202	1.370 (.171)	.550	5.743 (.000)
Critical processing → brand attitude	.077	.497 (.619)	-.119	.671 (.502)
Placement prominence → brand attitude	.346	2.148 (.032)	.497	3.742 (.000)
Placement prominence → conceptual PK	.436	3.035 (.002)	.345	2.265 (.024)
Placement prominence → critical processing	.203	1.371 (.170)	.391	3.124 (.002)

Note: PK = persuasion knowledge

Table 6: Path coefficient differences (Native – Foreign language), t-values, and significance levels of the parametric test (multi-group analysis)

Path	Path coefficient difference	t-value	p-value
Conceptual PK → brand attitude	.082	.313	.755
Conceptual PK → critical processing	.348	1.942	.055
Critical processing → brand attitude	.196	.844	.401
Placement prominence → brand attitude	.151	.721	.473
Placement prominence → conceptual PK	.092	.443	.659
Placement prominence → critical processing	.188	.966	.337

Note: PK = persuasion knowledge

Table 7: Path coefficients for the *INDIRECT* effects (multi-group analysis)

Path	Indirect effect Native language	t-value (p-value) Native language	Indirect effect Foreign language	t-value (p-value) Foreign language
Placement prominence → conceptual PK → critical processing	.088	1.064(.287)	.190	1.895 (.058)
Placement prominence → conceptual PK → critical processing → brand attitude	.000	.002 (.998)	-.058	.517 (.605)
Conceptual PK → critical processing → brand attitude	.016	.369 (.712)	-.065	.648 (.517)

Table 8: Path coefficients for the *INDIRECT* effect differences (Native – Foreign language), t-values, and significance levels of the parametric test (multi-group analysis)

Path	Path coefficient difference	t-value	p-value
Placement prominence → conceptual PK → critical processing	.101	.795	.429
Placement prominence → conceptual PK → critical processing → brand attitude	.058	.439	.662
Conceptual PK → critical processing → brand attitude	.081	.780	.437

Note: PK = persuasion knowledge.