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## **Sustainable Brand Placement**

A Framework for Communicating Sustainable Brands' Dual Benefits in Movies and TV series

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# **Sustainable Brand Placement: A Framework for Communicating Sustainable Brands' Dual Benefits in Movies and TV series**

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**Abstract:** This thesis focuses on how sustainable brands' dual benefits could be communicated through brand placements in movies and TV series. Although, companies strive to communicate sustainability, barriers such as the attitude-behaviour gap and discursive confusion persist in the consumer society, negatively impacting the potential of sustainable consumption. Brand placement could presumably be used as a solution to overcome these problems, as scholars have found that media in general, and movies and TV shows in particular, could potentially promote sustainable brands. A qualitative multiple extensive case study has been conducted, and in-depth, semi-structured interviews have been applied and comprehended using thematic analysis. The findings show that clarity, naturality, humour and identity association are factors which ought to be considered when communicating sustainable brands dual benefits through brand placement in movies and TV series. Together these aspects build up the Sustainable Brand Placement Model.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Branding, Brand Placement, Sustainable Consumption, Branding.

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## **Introduction**

This thesis focuses on how sustainable brands' dual benefits could be communicated through brand placements in movies and TV series, drawing on a multiple extensive case study. With dual benefits it is referred to that sustainable brands need to offer enhanced environmental improvement and at the same time satisfy consumers' desires (Ottman et al., 2006). Previous research claim that awareness of the contemporary consumption culture's effect on the environment and society continuously increases, however most consumers are not acting in a sustainable way (Carrington et al., 2010). This phenomenon has been discussed by several scholars and introduced as e.g. the "attitude-behaviour" gap (De Pelsmacker et al. 2005; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Markkula and Moisander (2012) relies on earlier research and explain this gap as a consequence of an existing discursive confusion, derived from multiple, clashing statements of sustainable consumption. These have led to consumer puzzlement regarding how to supposedly act sustainably, resulting in the absence of sustainable consumption. The confusion around these discourses could be solved through efficient communication, providing consumers with more varying, consistent and direct options of how to act sustainably (ibid). However, issues with discursive confusion have not risen from the lack of communicating sustainability, but rather from the opposite scenario. The myriad of

differentiating views of what is considered as “sustainable information” has been blamed to veritably threaten consumers’ sense making mechanisms concerning how to actually behave more sustainably (Moisander, 2007; Markkula & Moisander, 2012). Therefore, is it increasingly important to consider how to effectively communicate sustainability (Markkula & Moisander, 2012). More specifically, expressing sustainable brands’ dual benefits, i.e. environmental and individual values, is essential to effectively reach out to consumers (Ottman et al., 2006). Although, how to effectively inform and engage consumers about sustainability is still considered a veritable challenge (Markkula & Moisander, 2012). The absence of theoretical frameworks for how sustainability should effectively be communicated can be seen as a contributing factor to this problem (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). Still, one potential solution for how to effectively communicate benefits of sustainable brands could be found within the media landscape. Carrigan and Attalla (2001) discusses how consumers may become encouraged to choose ethical options if companies sent out more informative media messages. Reisch and Bietz (2011:147), relying on Lichtl (1999) views concerning “ecotainment”, further claim that entertaining media could be particularly effective at reaching sustainability sceptical consumers. Some authors similarly argue that the tendency to avoid marketing messages such as commercials and advertisements, have made alternative and “subtler” methods of promoting brands in media emerge, such as brand placement (e.g. Balasubramanian et al., 2006; D'Astous & Chartier, 2000), which can be defined as the “[...] inclusion of branded products or brand identifiers, through audio and/or visual means, within mass media programming” (Karrh, 1998:33).

What types of media would be relevant for communicating sustainable brands’ dual benefits then? There is a contemporary tendency to watch movies and TV series to a greater and more intensive extent. For example, Netflix Media Center (2017) claim that their streaming service, have revolutionized the manner in which people watch stories, referring to the fact that a growing amount of people “binge-races”, meaning “speeding through an entire season within 24 hours of its release and to be the first to finish” (ibid). Moreover, Park and Berger (2010) argue that when watching a movie, one’s state of mind is already relaxed, and more open towards intents of influence. Jacobs (1996; cited in Karrh 1998:36) further claims that “research shows product placement has a recall 10 times greater than a commercial”. Another advantage with using movies as a means for brand placement could be to make firms better reach out with their products to particular target groups (Wiles & Danielova, 2009). These examples highlight the potentially informative and influential nature of movies and TV series, thereby reinforcing these medias as presumably effective to communicate sustainable brands’ dual benefits.

Previous scholars within the field of brand placement in movies and TV series have e.g. investigated customer perceptions of brands placements (Delorme & Reid 1999; Russell, 2002; Cowley & Barron, 2008; Russell & Stern, 2006), customers recognition and recall tendencies of brand placements (Park & Berger, 2010; Brennan & Babin, 2004; Ong, 1995) and the effects of brand placement repetition (Homer, 2009). However, there seems to be limited focus within the literature on the potential of brand placement in movies and TV series as a means for communicating sustainable brands’ dual benefits to promote increased sustainable consumption. Thus, even though mass media has been emphasised as having potential to

specifically promote more sustainable products, and placing brands within movies and TV series has been discussed as effective means to promote brands in general, limited attention has been put on combining these two fields. Therefore, the focus on this thesis will be on investigating: How can sustainable brands' dual benefits be communicated through brand placements in movies and TV series?

By more sustainable brands it will throughout this work be referred to products which have some kind of environmental claim, i.e. following the suggested ISO standards or definitions of belonging to either of the following groups: "Type I environmental labelling", "Self-declared environmental claims (Type II environmental labelling)" or "Type III environmental declarations" (International Organization for Standardization [ISO] 2009; 2000; 2006). When green products (e.g. in Ottman et al., 2006) are mentioned, these are to be considered as equal to sustainable brands. In broad terms, when referring to "more sustainable brands" in this work, the focus will be on brands claiming they are somewhat more environmentally friendly options compared to other alternatives on the market, such as organic tomatoes instead of non-organic tomatoes.

The aim of this work will thus be to investigate if and how brand placement of sustainable brands would differ from "conventional" brand placement, and how it could effectively communicate sustainable brands' dual benefits to consumers. In order to fulfil the aim, we draw on a multiple extensive case study, in which several actors have been interviewed using an in-depth, semi-structured interview technique. Arguably, by understanding what would work for more conventional brands, a basis for comprehending how to successfully communicate sustainable brands' dual benefits in movies and TV series could be established. Relying on sustainable branding and brand placement theories, the ambition with this study has been to contribute to these theoretical fields by introducing the framework: *The Sustainable Brand Placement Model*. The model provides new perspectives of how to communicate sustainable brands' dual benefits, i.e. through movies and TV series, as a potential solution for the sustainable discourse confusion. Further, the model contributes to the brand placement literature by offering a more sustainable approach.

The following paragraphs will discuss the theoretical framework of brand placement and sustainable branding, followed by reasoning of the methodological choices made. The findings, intertwined with the theoretical analysis are further presented, discussed and concluded. The conclusions are summarized in a new framework for sustainable brand placement. Last but not least managerial implications, limitations and suggested topics for future research are brought to surface.

# Theoretical Framework

## From Product Placement Towards Brand Placement

According to D'Astous and Chartier (2000:31) product placement is “the inclusion of a product, a brand name or the name of a firm in a movie or in a television program for promotional purposes”. Balasubramanian (1994:31) expand on this definition and similarly claim that “product placement is a paid product message aimed at influencing movie (or television) audiences via the planned and unobtrusive entry of a branded product into a movie (or television program)”. Davtyan and Cunningham (2017) further highlight the notion of product placement as being too narrow as it does not consider placements of services or companies, thereby offering the more inclusive term; brand placement instead. Karrh (1998) additionally interposes that it is more common to emphasise brands and not products in media, thus, the preferred view of brand placement ought to be “[...] the paid inclusion of branded products or brand identifiers, through audio and/or visual means, within mass media programming” (Karrh, 1998:33). This definition will be relied upon in this work, although a choice has been made to focus on placements that are not paid as well, such as borrowed or rented brands appearing in movies or TV shows. Hence, the brand placement definition suggested in this work is the “[...] inclusion of branded products or brand identifiers, through audio and/or visual means, within mass media programming” (Karrh, 1998:33).

## The Three Types of Brand Placement

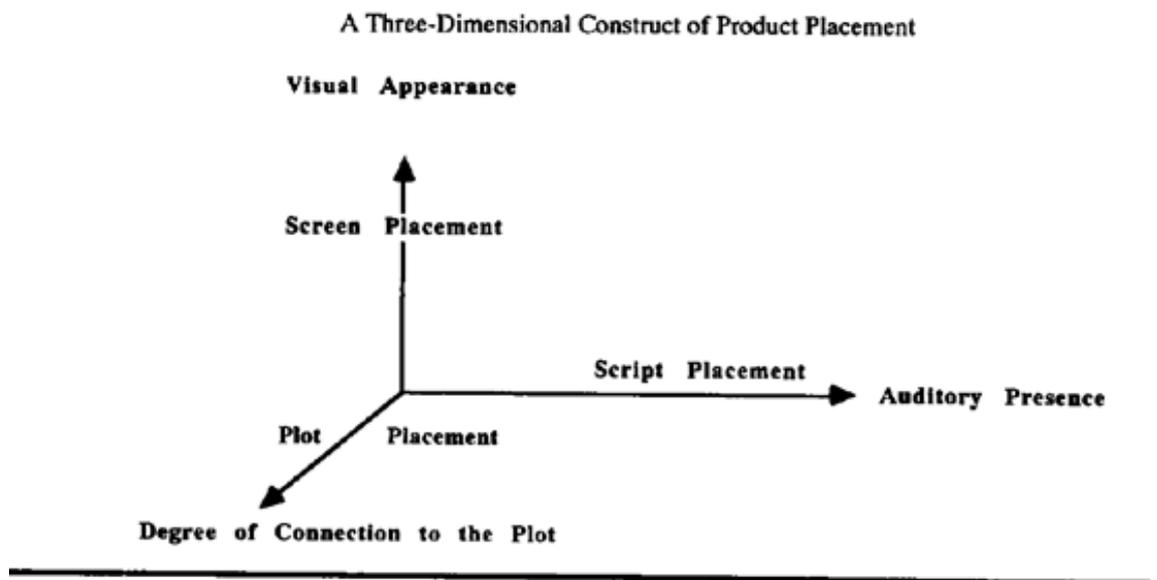


Figure 1 (Russell, 1998:359)

Russell (1998) argues that brand placement can be divided into three major varieties; *Screen Placement*, *Script Placement* and *Degree of Connection to the Plot*, summarized in “A Three-Dimensional Construct of Product Placement” (Figure 1). Screen placements uses visual

aspects of a movie or a series to their advantages, and physically places the brand in the background set. This can be done through so called on-set placements, in which, as the name suggest, brands are placed within the set of a movie, or in a more creative manner, e.g. appearing as a print advertisement in a scene taking place outdoors, in which brands become more hinted to the viewer (ibid). How emphasised the screen placement is may vary. Here are two examples on how; the placement can appear once or several times in a movie, and placements may be filmed using different types of camera techniques, leading to greater or less focus on the actual brand placed (Russell, 1998). Although, there are also verbal aspects of a movie, which can be used for brand placing purposes, such as when brands are rather talked about by movie characters than visually shown (Russell, 1998). The nature of such placements depends on particularities such as in which context the brand is mentioned, how often, as well as how, i.e. in what manner the character is speaking about the brand. These types of placements are called script placements (ibid). The author further mentions that occasionally, the brand focus is more emphasised in the plot, to the extent that it almost takes over the story or shapes the entire identity of a character, whereas in other cases a brand is only briefly mentioned or shown in a movie. This classification of 'to what extent' a brand is shown in a movie is called plot placement and can range from high to low intensity (Russell, 1998:357).

### **The Effectiveness of Different types of Brand Placements**

Previous research has e.g. focused on consumer tendencies to remember brand placements (Park & Berger, 2010; Brennan & Babin, 2004; Ong, 1995). However, Russell (2002) and Law and Braun (2000) interestingly argue that simply recalling a brand from a movie or series might not lead to increased purchase intent or interest in this particular brand. Russell (2002) found that the more a brand seemed inconsistent with the plot, the higher the degree of memorization. Although, in such situations, where the brand stood out in an unusual obvious manner, consumers brand associations would not be favoured. Homer (2009) similarly claim that consumers views concerning a brand reduces if the placement is too outstanding, or evident. Repetition further reinforces this effect. Whereas more "subtle" placements tend to be better accepted, even though they might be repeated. Such placements, adapted to fit the plot and nature of the program should arguably be preferred (ibid).

In terms of the nature of the brand placement, Russell (2002) suggest that placements in which brands were visually seen in the background were equally compelling as verbally placed brands that were emphasised to a larger extent in the plot. Law and Braun (2000) similarly found that brands which were solely shown in the production tended to a lesser extent to be memorized, although it was shown that these to a greater extent affected consumer choice. Yang and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2007) on the other hand, argue such placements are mainly good for achieving higher spectator brand awareness. Additionally, Morton and Friedman (2002) highlight that strategies for brand placement ought to be considered as carefully as other marketing tools in order to make sure that a consistent brand image is communicated. This is important in order to achieve positive brand associations, as brand placements can have both

negative and positive effects on brands (ibid). However, if using brand placement as a separate strategy in itself, it would do fine to simply use more indirect visual placements (Russell, 2002).

### **Movies and TV-Series as Means for Consumer Influence**

Karrh (1998:33) claims that movies, especially, can impact customers' "[...] social judgments [...] made shortly after exposure to a movie". Park and Berger (2010) suggests that when watching a movie, one's state of mind is already relaxed, and more open towards intents of persuasion. The so-called *transportation-imagery model* describes a similar tendency (Green & Brock, 2002) in which it is argued that when watching, listening or reading a story people could become so captivated by it that they feel as if they were drawn-, or transported into the story itself. When being "narratively transported" in this manner, people can become less eager to condemn what they are watching and might thereby be easier to influence (Dal et al., 2004).

Another advantage with using movies as a means for brand placement could be to make firms better reach out with their brands to potential customers and particular target groups (Wiles & Danielova, 2009). For brand placement to be successful, some even claim that the nature of the movie, the audience and the brand must be in accordance with each other (ibid). Different types of movies may further provoke different brand placement reactions. Park and Berger (2010) argue that film genres, such as dramas are especially good at provoking increased brand recognition. Wiles and Danielova (2009) on the other hand claim aspects, such as a film's level of violence in relation to how captivated the movie audience is, affect how the brands placed in that particular movie are received. Karrh (1998) argues that movies with a happier tone influence the audience's social perception in a different manner than aggressive or sad movies. Such "happy" movies often lead to more positive and optimistic views towards governmental issues and future changes (ibid). In Skurka et al.'s (2018) study investigating younger audiences' reactions to informational movies using humour and fear as means to communicate environmental issues, it was found that these means could effectively encourage younger audiences to increased environmental engagement. Relying on the study by Eisend (2009), Skurka et al. (2018) claim that humour could be used as an effective strategy to grasp younger audiences' attention, as relaxed messages on current environmental threats could potentially be more interesting for younger audiences than merely displaying hard facts. Eisend (2009) moreover argue that comical messages in general could lead to positive brand and advertisement perceptions as well as increased purchase intent. On the other hand, if brand placements with too much commercial intent are shown in a movie, the overall movie experience might suffer as the audience could be bothered by such disturbingly influential placements (Russell et al. 2017; cited in Redondo et al. 2018:3). Homer (2009) similarly argue that such placements can negatively affect both consumer perceptions of the brands as well as the credibility of the entire plot.

## **The Role Characters Play**

Characters in TV series can be argued as intentionally created to be similar to us, representing “[...] types of people whom viewers recognize and with whom they become familiar over time” (Russell & Stern, 2006:8). When people grow fond of a particular series, they might start to engage with the characters (Russell & Stern, 2006), and as they form closer relationships with these characters they start to become more influenced by them (Bandura 1976; cited in Russell & Stern, 2006:10). Cohen (2001) further discusses how the concept of “identification” within media incorporates that viewers start to agree with characters perceptions, emotional state of mind and aspirations. Although, it is further suggested that the audience can cease to be persuaded by characters that too obviously promotes certain brands (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Brooke (1995) insist however on the power of storytelling within programs and argues that stories can teach us different social skills, attitudes and provide us with role models in the shape of characters. In consistency with the social learning theory, Bandura (1997; cited in Karrh, 1998:42) moreover suggest that people generally learn from actively or subconsciously mimicking their role models.

Russell and Stern (2006) have further looked at how consumers perceive the relationship between brand placements and the characters playing in a TV series and have found that characters sometimes manifest their disagreement or agreement with a particular brand in a production. Such expressions can immensely affect viewer opinions about the particular brand placed, especially if the character emphasises a particular brand as something positive (ibid). It has moreover been found that when the main character interacts with the brand or when it becomes profoundly integrated in the story, positive brand associations could be provoked as viewers may pay more attention to-, and better memorize such brands (Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007). It is further argued that the effectiveness of brand placement increases if the degree of association between the viewer and the character is high, and even more if the person is paired with “positive words such as beauty, honest, smart, rich, and so on” (Russell, 1998:360). Characters can moreover have either a strong or weak connection to the brand placed, which manifests itself in that the brand “plays” a larger or smaller part in the set (Russell, 1998). To exemplify; there is a difference between placing a brand in the background making it integrate to a small extent with the character, or when the brand is used to clearly emphasise the identity or values of a character (Hirschman 1988), i.e. the character/product integration is larger.

## **Consumer Identity Creation, Lifestyle and The Power of Branding**

To be able to fully grasp the concept of brand placement, there is a need to be aware of what a brand is to begin with. Arvidsson (2005) claim that the brand embodies a certain idea of how a particular product is to be used, as well as incorporates a certain way of life which a consumer may tap into by purchasing that particular brand. In other words, branding is not about any specific product qualities, but rather about how one makes use of a brand and what that brand in turn add to the image of oneself (Schmitt, 2000). Indeed, in our contemporary society, brands have become symbols that works as tools for self-actualization, that represent our values and

lifestyles, that shape our identities and facilitates for customers to express their inner selves (Kornberger, 2010). Through the usage of goods, we can explain who we are and how our reality is like (McCracken, 1986). The logic follows that by consuming certain objects, people can tap into cultural meanings and thus manifest their identity and group belonging (Holt 1997). Consumers can thus be seen as utilizing symbols embedded within brands, as these helps shaping their “self-concepts” through communicating identity (Levy, 1964; cited in Kornberger, 2010:191). Like stories, brands can moreover build an understanding of ourselves and tell us about what we personally value (Fog et al. 2010). Brands might thus be seen as assets providing a basis for lifestyle construction (Kornberger, 2010). Giddens (1991) although argues that choosing a particular lifestyle seems to go hand in hand with closing a door to another one, and by consuming certain goods one can thus chose to be associated by certain others pursuing the same particular type of lifestyle. In the end, it all comes down to the fact that humans need to feel a sense of belonging and social recognition. We need to feel that we matter, that we are valued and that we make a difference, where brands as symbols play important parts in achieving this social recognition (Martin & Schouten, 2012).

How to communicate what brands stands for then? Fog et al. (2010) highlight the importance of storytelling as a mean by which organizations can effectively communicate positive aspects of their brands as well as what the organization stands for. Although, in order to be able to do so, the company have to begin by creating clearly defined brand messages, since without such there would be no distinct strategic direction. Another perk with storytelling is that it can be used to shape a unified brand concept, through playing on our emotions, thereby provoking memorable impressions (ibid).

### **Sustainable Branding and the Challenge of Authenticity**

Except from considering the aspects of conventional branding, sustainable branding has to go one step further and offer dual benefits, i.e. sustainable brands need to offer enhanced environmental improvement and at the same time satisfy consumers’ desires (Ottman et al., 2006). Martin and Väistö (2016) similarly argue that to make sustainable brands meaningful for consumers, sustainability has to be integrated in the brand by offering aesthetic and symbolic values to consumers. Neglecting the latter and putting too much emphasis on sustainable product features is “doomed to failure because consumers select products and new innovations that offer benefits they desire” (Ottman et al., 2006:24). This organizational narrow-mindedness can be termed as ‘green marketing myopia’ (Levitt, 1960; cited in Ottman et al., 2006), a common pitfall which can explain why many green products fail (Ottman et al., 2006).

In order to overcome issues associated with green marketing myopia, and to succeed with sustainable branding efforts, Ottman et al. (2006) suggests firms to consider three principles, notably the “three C’s” (Consumer value positioning, Calibration of consumer knowledge and Credibility of product claims). The first one aims to embody consumer values, i.e. that desired consumer benefits should be incorporated into sustainable brands. Hartmann et al. (2005)

further argues that sustainable branding strategies should include the functional, environmental brand attributes but also highlight the emotional benefits to consumers. Ottman (2011) stresses that consumers mainly act out of self-interest and the reason behind consuming green products is not the altruistic outcomes of 'saving the planet' but rather the individual benefits generated by choosing sustainable over non-sustainable brands. These could be resource and cost efficiency benefits as well as health, safety, symbolic, convenient and status aspects. An example, presented by Martin and Schouten (2012), of an individual benefit derived from choosing sustainable brands is the emerging replacement of fossil fuel cars to environmental hybrids after it became a status symbol among Hollywood celebrities.

Ottman et al. (2006) moreover claim that it is essential to create consumer value by primarily meeting consumers' basic needs and communicating the social benefits, while the environmental aspect should be used as an important plus. The same author further suggests that by presenting how sustainable brands can offer individual value, the acceptance for sustainable brands could increase (ibid). Moreover, green consumption will only take place if it can satisfy consumers desires, offer individual value and cause no inconvenience since "ethical purchasing will take place only if there are no costs to the consumer in terms of higher price, loss of quality or discomfort in shopping" (Niinimäki, 2010:152). Therefore, is it, according to Moisander (2007:405), hard for contemporary consumers to relate to a "radical environmentalist approach" (i.e. to only buy what is vital) as our consumer society is intensely driven by other important aspects, such as convenience. Markkula and Moisander (2012) similarly argue that it might be effective to acknowledge, and highlight certain discursive conflicts existing among consumers in one's communication efforts; such as e.g. the potential conflict between buying sustainable or fashionable brands. Therefore, it is of great importance to educate consumers with one's communication by integrating sustainable aspects of a brand together with desired consumer benefits, following the logic of the second 'C' (Ottman et al., 2006). This could for instance be achieved by presenting attributes of sustainable brands as solutions for consumers' needs.

However, in order for sustainable branding to be successful, Ottman et al. (2006) further stresses that the brand's claims and communication have to be authentic, or credible, as suggested by the third 'C'. Kernis and Goldman (2006) argue that a company could only be considered authentic if their actions are in congruence with their intrinsic values. Ottman et al. (2006) similarly mean that claims made about sustainable brands have to be credible in a way that presents meaningful, specific and qualified aspects. Why is authenticity so important for firms to communicate then? According to Beverland and Farrelly (2010:853) is the "[...] real, true, and genuine (i.e., the authentic)" actually what consumers strive to find. Although, something that makes authenticity problematic for companies is the dilemma related to how to highlight brands as genuinely authentic, while not compromising the commercial objectives of the brand. The issue here being that if appearing to be overblown or commercialized the entire concept of brand trustworthiness might as well fail (Beverland, 2005; Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Hartmann and Ostberg (2013) thus suggests that authenticity need to be expressed in a subtle manner, such as for instance finding ways to emphasize authenticity without specifically expressing it.

How could authenticity be achieved then? It is all about creating a foundation for storytelling which can guide how the brand should be communicated in different areas, whereof it is essential to constantly consider the brand's core values in order to reach consistency and to strengthen the brand (Fog et al., 2010). Last but not least, in order to enhance product credibility and avoid consumer scepticism, third party eco-certifications could also be applied (Hatanaka et al., 2005), i.e. labels provided by governments, independent agencies or organizations who exerts sustainability testing with respected quality standards.

## **Method**

### **Extensive Multiple Case Study**

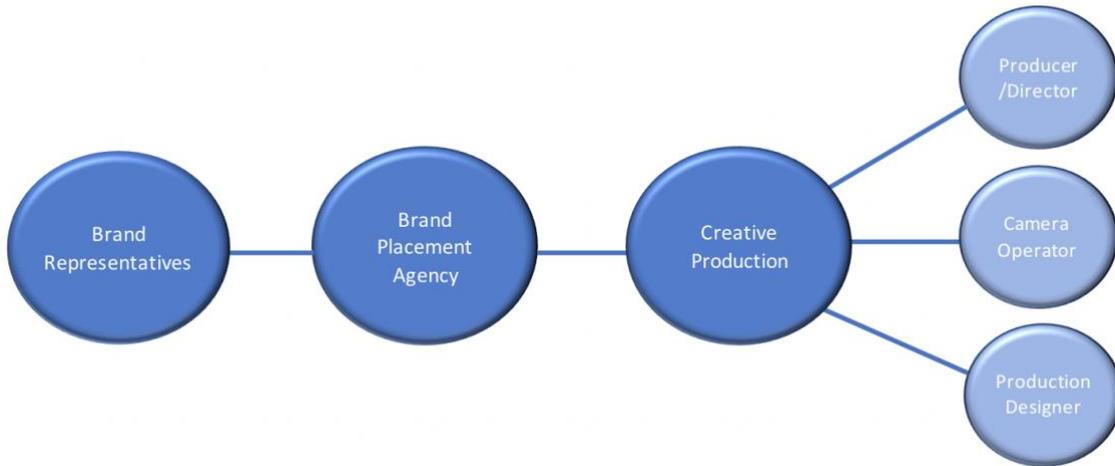
In order to investigate how sustainable brands' dual benefits can be communicated through brand placement, previous research within the field of brand placement and the field of sustainable branding were investigated. As this study is of an explanatory nature, investigating sustainable brand placement, which can be argued to be a contemporary complex phenomenon, made case study research seem as a viable option to use (Yin, 2014). An extensive multiple case study was thus conducted, since insights were gathered from different actors, of different professional backgrounds offering different point of views about this particular phenomenon, and because common patterns among the cases were mapped out (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Due to the nature of this research, an extensive multiple case study moreover seemed as the most relevant method to use, as it could offer more compelling and robust outcomes than a single-case study, although such a study could have had the ability to provide more in-depth analysis of a specific area (Yin, 2014). The study was carried out by studying the perspectives of six different actors', working in the film/TV industry in which brand placement exist, and the cases were thoughtfully selected using a judgement sampling method focusing on key informant samples (Marshall, 1996). Thus, actors with specific expertise and knowledge within the chosen field of interest were chosen. However, the majority of the cases were sampled following a snowball sampling technique since potential cases, who could provide useful information, were found through recommendation by previous subjects (ibid).

The majority of the cases were professionals currently working with brand placement. Although, a more sustainable company representative without any experience within brand placement was additionally chosen. This, in order to understand how they would relate to the potential of communicating sustainability through brand placement (Table 1).

Name	Title of the interviewee	Relation to brand placement	Type of interview
Brand Placement Agency	Owners/Brand placement consultants	Intermediator between a company and the creative production	2 interviews; *1 personal meeting (1 h 15 min) *1 phone interview (35 min)
Company 1	Marketing Director	Have used/are using brand placement to market their brand	1 interview; *Email interview
Company 2	Owner	Can see the potential of using brand placement to increase awareness	1 interview; *Phone interview (20 min)
Film producer	Producer and production manager	Experience of using brand placement to finance a creative production (movie)	1 interview; *Phone interview (1h 10 min)
Production Designer 1	Production designer and art director	In charge of placing brands correctly in a creative production	1 interview; *Email interview
Production Designer 2	Production designer, art director and property manager	Solid experience and in charge of placing brands correctly in a creative production	1 interview; *Phone interview (1h 5 min)

Table 1. The cases in this study

Relying on the interviews, it is argued that brand placement seems to consist of three main actors in cooperation with each other. These are: *the brand representatives*, usually a company aiming to place their brand within a production, *the brand placement agency*, working as consultants and intermediators for successfully helping the brand representatives to place their brand within a production. They additionally work together with the production to find fitting brands to place in TV series or movies. Last but not least *the creative production*, symbolizes a particular TV/movie production in which brands are placed for various reasons. These actors and the relationship between them are demonstrated in Model 1. The creative production is additionally divided into three branches, as highlighted by the Production Designer 2. She discussed the importance of the so called “three legs” within a movie production for creating the overall impression of the movie. The three legs are notably; the producer or director, the photographer and the production designer. They all play a part in making the movie seem trustworthy. The Film Producer further claimed the production designers even have the greatest influence over brand placement overall, as they generally decide which brands are visible in a TV series or movie production. All parts of Model 1 have been used as cases in this study except from the photographer due to a difficulty to obtain contact with such a professional in combination with time boundaries, but also since it was understood that photographers’ level of influence regarding brand placement might be limited.



*Model 1. The three main actors of brand placement in movies and TV series, including the major branches of the creative production*

## **The Gathering of Empirical Data**

### *Interviews*

The major data generating technique in this study consisted of several in-depth, semi-structured interviews since the questions were made up of specific topics including questions and follow-up questions that provided a more general discussion (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The reason for using interviews as the major technique was to gain deep insights from professionals about the different dimensions of brand placement, and about brand placements' ability to communicate sustainability. The nature of the interviews can be described as shorter case study interviews since they lasted between 20-75 minutes (Table 1) and were conducted in a conversation-like manner, although an interview guide was used as guidance (Yin, 2014).

As seen in Table 1, the first interview with the brand placement agency was slightly longer than the rest of the interviews and was conducted face-to-face. At the beginning of the empirical gathering phase it was necessary to have such an extensive interview to gain a more profound overview of brand placement. As an intermediary (Model 1), the brand placement agency could provide a deeper understanding of the field of brand placement. Thus, the questions posed focused on operational facets of working with brand placement, what people are involved in the process, important aspects to consider when placing brands, as well as the potential of sustainable brand placement. The interviews with the brand representatives (i.e. specific company representatives) were of a more convenient nature. These were carried out either by email or shorter phone interviews to gain specific insights concerning how they had placed their brands in movies and TV series, what aspects they had strived to highlight with their brands and how they would potentially use brand placement to emphasize their brand's sustainable qualities. The interviews with the creative production took place using longer phone interviews and an additional shorter email interview. The reason for putting more emphasis on these

interviews were due to that previous interviewees indicated that film producers and production designers could have potentially great influence on the brand placement process. The questions focused on the filmmaking, the importance of the relationship between the characters, the location and the brand within the production, what aspects ought to be considered when placing brands in a creative production, as well as how sustainable brands could potentially be communicated in movies and TV series.

### *Movies/TV series as Physical Artefacts*

<b>Production</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Genre</b>
Flykten till Framtiden	Movie	Drama/Comedy
Solsidan	Movie & TV Series	Comedy
Sofias Änglar	TV Series, Season 9	Lifestyle program
Sune i Grekland	Movie	Comedy/Children's film

*Table 2. Selected Productions Related to the Interviewees*

Some particular movies and TV series (Table 2) were chosen as further information sources because of their connection to our interviewees. Why such additional “physical artefacts” (Yin, 2014) were considered was in order to get an idea of how particular brand placements, brought to surface by the interviewees, would appear on screen, within a production. By observing how brand placements were shown in these movies and series, the understanding of how brand placements could be used differently in various productions was emphasised, and a deeper understanding of the investigated issue at hand could be developed (Yin, 2014). Extractions gathered from these movies and TV series were further used as examples in the result-, and analysis part of this thesis to strengthen particular findings with quotes from the interviewees. Yet, all movies presented in Table 2 were not used as examples in the analysis, as some only provided the researchers of this paper with a deeper understanding of brand placement.

### *Data Analysis and Coding*

Before starting the data analysis and coding, the recorded interviews were transcribed as suggested by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008). The theoretical foundation was held in mind while going through the data, and attention was put mainly on aspects of importance for the research question. Although new aspects of interest were also considered as they revealed themselves in the data. We hence relied on both our theoretical foundation as well as let our data reveal its own logical order, as suggested by Yin (2014) as two possible strategies which may be successfully combined. This manner of proceeding further follows Braun and Clarke (2006) explanations of following a more theoretically directed coding approach.

To determine which information was of relevance, all empirical data was written down and re-arranged in accordance with Yin's (2014:135) suggestion to “play around with the data”. The idea was to find some kind of logical pattern, helpful to better understand (Yin 2014) and decipher the interview data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This step of the process further

made certain imminent and preliminary patterns appear, a step, which have been argued as the starting point for so called thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In terms of analysing and coding the empirical findings, the strategies and theories this work have relied upon are the line-by-line coding as suggested by Glaser (1998; cited in Bryant & Charmaz, 2007: 67-68) and Braun and Clarke (2006:87)'s proposed "Phases of thematic analysis". In order to distinguish patterns, codes and themes from each other throughout the analytical process, colours and colour-maps explaining the differently coloured categorizations were used, in accordance with e.g. Braun and Clarke (2006)'s suggestions. The ambition was to pinpoint themes that could be regarded as independent to the extent that each theme could tell about specific aspects of how sustainable brands' dual benefits could be communicated through brand placements in movies and TV series, without trespassing too much on other theme premises. This manner of aiming to make each theme tell its own story in relation to the research question is arguably in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006:91) suggestions relying on Patton's (1990) directives.

The trustworthiness of the data analysis method has been considered following the suggestions made by Nowell et al., (2017), regarding how to conduct a trustworthy thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in relation to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) developed qualitative trustworthiness criteria. Some things held in mind throughout the research process was e.g. the need to continuously write down all particularities throughout the analysis and process of coding, hence to clearly document all steps of the way, to have some logical structure when saving the empirical data, following an established framework for achieving a structured coding process, as well as making sure to internally discuss and decide upon common themes and code-names (Nowell et al., 2017). Furthermore, this study mainly based on peer reviewed sources in an attempt to reach trustworthiness (Wilkie, 1996).

## **Findings and Analysis**

The findings embody the themes which the coding and data analysis resulted in, namely; *Clarity*, *Naturality*, *Humour* and *Identity association*. These themes present important aspects of how sustainable brands' dual benefits could be communicated through brand placements in movies and TV series. Hence, the themes could be described as different dimensions of sustainable brand placement. The arguments are supported by relevant quotes from the respondents and discussed using theories from the theoretical framework.

### **Clarity**

There seem to be a tendency among people to interpret the word sustainability differently, meaning that some people might think it is only about how durable the food is, rather than acknowledging that sustainable brands contribute to some kind of environmental development (Company 2). This confusion tendency can be seen as following Markkula and Moisander (2012) concept of discursive confusion of sustainable brands. When confusion arises the need

to achieve clarity or clearness has been discussed among our interviewees as one solution which will create successful sustainable brand placements.

“It can be difficult for the audience to understand that a brand is sustainable if the underlying story behind the brand is not clearly presented” (Company 1).

The complex nature of sustainable brands, i.e. that they need to offer so called dual benefits, enhanced environmental improvement as well as aspects which satisfy consumers’ desires, arguably makes it even more important to communicate and educate consumers about specific sustainable brand characteristics when placing such brands in movies and series (Ottman et al., 2006). Failing to do so might result in audiences’ failure to comprehend brands unique aspects, thereby failing to realize the full customer value of certain brands (Company 1). This is further in line with Ottman et al. (2006)’s description of “green marketing myopia”. How do one clearly communicate the dual benefits of sustainable brands in movies and series then? According to the Brand Placement Agency, placements of more informative verbal character, i.e. so-called script placements (Russell, 1998) could potentially increase the awareness among customers about sustainable brand characteristics. Depending on the target group, there is a need to describe to a greater or lesser extent what a particular brand stands for (Brand Placement Agency), i.e. adapting ones’ brand placements, to successfully meet audience demands, in a dual benefit kind of manner (Ottman et al. 2006). Following this logic, it would be particularly important to clearly explain to a potential target audience that what is being placed is indeed a sustainable brand (Film Producer). To achieve this, a character or program host(ess) could be instructed to speak about particular sustainable brand characteristics (Brand Placement Agency). Moreover, services, due to their tangible nature, could be especially important to highlight in the manuscript (ibid).

“Some spectators can know about particular brand characteristics, if they already know about the brand, although things that are not specifically expressed visually, are important to highlight in order to help the spectator to better understand. Clothes for instance, if one would like to highlight in which factory they have been produced, using which types of methods and material, such information is not obviously transmitted to the audience by simply looking at a brand label” (Brand Placement Agency)

“If we would have placed our brands in a movie or TV series it would have been important to not only highlight our brands as sustainable, but also clarify that as a sustainable company, we let sustainability saturate our entire manner of working” (Company 2)

Company 2 further discusses prioritizing among different brand characteristics and deciding upon emphasising one or two of the most important ones as a manner of successfully communicating sustainable aspects. The logic follows that too diverse and complex messages might be difficult to communicate to a broader audience;

“It is sometimes better to simplify the message in order to avoid confusion, and chose to focus on either vegetarian or sustainable, although it would have been good to communicate both sustainability as well as vegetarian aspects” (Company 2)

The importance of first and foremost creating clearly defined brand messages to know how to strategically communicate sustainable brand characteristics, further follows Fog et al. (2010)'s claims. On the other hand, Company 1 expresses how brand benefits could be successfully communicated through showing the brand while e.g. physically unwrapping the product in a movie or TV series or if a program host(ess) or character make use of the brands in the show or movie. Such screen placements (Russell, 1998) arguably hold the potential to demonstrate specific product functions thereby giving the audience an instant understanding of specific brand characteristics (Company 1), which could;

“Strengthen the entire brand experience, showing specific characteristics of it in a more vivid manner” (Brand Placement Agency).

Particular sustainable brands' dual benefits (Ottman et al. 2006) could arguably be demonstrated in a similar manner on the screen. Moreover, illuminating sustainable brands functional and environmental attributes in this manner, further follow Hartmann et al. (2005) views.

The potential usage of brands that require no further explanation is moreover emphasised by the Brand Placement Agency. Placements that “speak for themselves” in this manner are for instance brands with eco-labels, brands with visually descriptive packages and brands with particularly unique and clear designs, for which it is argued superfluous to focus on any logotype. The logic of using certain brand labels echoes Hatanaka et al. (2005) claims seeing such symbols as credibility enhancers resulting in less consumer scepticism. However, it is moreover explained that brand placements in which e.g. the camera zooms in on brand labels, become visual to the extent that it would be redundant to add additional descriptions of those brands in the script (Brand Placement Agency). This logic, i.e. that excessive brand exposure could negatively affect consumer brand preferences, agrees with the views of e.g. Homer (2009) and is more thoroughly discussed in the naturality paragraph. The degree to which a brand is emphasised in a production has further been discussed by Russell (1998) as ‘plot placement’. Company 2 on the other hand, stress that brand placements of more sustainable character could be achieved using a combination of script and screen placements (Russell, 1998). For instance, if the characters are planning a party discussing what type of food they will offer their guests, they could verbally consider more sustainable options such as vegetarian food, provided from a particular company which brand label would additionally be seen in the movie. The Brand placement agency similarly admits that there are situations in which it would be efficient to both talk about and use a product in a movie or TV series. The Film Producer however argued that;

“All stories have some kind of message, and in order to place more sustainable products in movies, there would be a need to let the sustainability message saturate the entire story”.

What the film producer suggest is thus to build up a plot placement of high intensity as suggested by Russell (1998). Such arguments are in accordance with Fog et al. (2010) views claiming storytelling can be used to effectively communicate positive company and brand

aspects, and Brooke (1995)'s claims concerning the power of stories to teach us about particular things in life.

### **Naturality**

According to the majority of the interviewees, brand placement seems to be something which ought to be naturally woven into the movie or TV show. It should not "take over" the story or plot, if doing so it might be deemed as non-trustworthy and unnatural, too obvious or commercial. This follows e.g. Beverland (2005), Gilmore and Pine (2007), and Homer (2009)'s arguments claiming that if appearing too commercialized the entire concept of brand placement may fail. Too evident brand placements might even lose their influential effects (Film Producer), and confusing, disturbing or provoking brand placements could potentially ruin the entire spectator experience (Production Designer 2, Brand Placement Agency, Company 2). This basically echoes Homer (2009)'s views claiming such placements have negative influence on customers' brand attitudes. The logic follows that too obvious brand placements fail as a result of too pronounced character promotions of specific brands (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Thereby, the potential to affect consumers with brand placement messages might also be disrupted, at least if relying on the logic of Bandura (1976; cited in Russell & Stern, 2006) and Dal et al. (2004).

"As soon as a decision is made for any other reason than the story/plot demands, the credibility of the story and its message is undermined" (Film Producer).

This can be seen as in line with Homer (2009)'s view claiming that unmistakably noticeable placements can negatively affect both consumer perceptions of the brands as well as the credibility of the entire plot. The key to brand placement success rather seem to be about putting the brand in its natural context or finding situations in which the brand naturally fits-in (Brand Placement Agency).

"The alpha and omega with brand placement is that it is supposed to fit with the overall image. It ought to become a natural part, and can never take over the character or story, that would be negative for both parties [brand and movie] involved" (Production Designer 2)

Achieving natural brand placements becomes even more important when dealing with sustainable brands, as such brands need to be communicated as authentic, following the logic of Ottman et al. (2006)'s third C (credibility of product claims). How could natural sustainable brand placements be achieved then? According to Company 2, when placing sustainable brands in TV series and movies such brands would have to occur as a natural part of the plot. An example could be if a character recycles in a scene and it appears as a logical part of the character's life. Production Designer 2 and the Film Producer further stress that creating sustainable-oriented characters could be a manner of making sustainable brand placements seem more natural and thereby more credible, arguing that it would not be odd for such characters to consume environmentally friendly brands:

“For instance, if creating a character that would like to save the world, one can let this character become a person who wears organic cotton, eats vegan food and uses a particular sort of bike”  
(Film Producer)

It is further argued by both Production designers that if e.g. filming a breakfast table of a contemporary modern Swedish family, it would nowadays be perfectly fine to involve sustainable brands, e.g. showing a package of sustainable oat milk instead of the conventional cow’s milk. This is due to that such food has become accepted as a natural part of the generalized image of a Swedish breakfast (Production Designer 2). Arguably, considering the naturalness of the brand placement when placing sustainable brands in this manner is necessary to achieve authenticity (Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013). This is arguably what consumers strive to find in brands (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), hence creating the need for sustainable brands to acknowledge authenticity in their communication efforts (Ottman et al., 2006).

It is further emphasised that if the program hosts or actors interact in a relaxed and natural manner with the scenery and the brands placed in it, the credibility of the entire production could be emphasised (Production Designer 1, Brand Placement Agency). For instance, Yang and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2007) saw that brand – character interaction could possibly lead to more positive brand associations. The Brand placement agency further highlight that if the program hosts or characters also say something about a brand in a movie or series, in a script placement (Russell, 1998) kind of manner, this need to be naturally involved in the manuscript to become accepted. Failing to do so, script placements can become part of the “too commercialized” problematic discussed above.

To further make brands fit in, brand placers ought to make sure that the brand placements are in accordance with the company and brands’ overall image and marketing goals (Brand Placement Agency), which can be seen as in line with the views of Wiles and Danielova (2009) and Morton and Friedman (2002). Because, showing a brand in an unnatural production could arguably have disastrous effects for the brand image, associating the brand with ill-fitted aspects which the brand might not stand for. Thus, a company could only be considered authentic if their brand actions are in accordance with their corporate values (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Fog et al., 2010).

## **Humour**

A recurrent discussion among the interviewees, regarding how sustainable brands’ dual benefits could be communicated through brand placement, covered the aspects of genre. Arguably, it is of great importance to consider what type of movie would fit well with a particular brand, as the outcome of brand placement can moreover differ depending on the genre. This is highlighted by the brand placement agency and the film producer:

“In a very easy-going movie or series, the product can be presented in a more happy and delightful context... In drama series you work more with the environments. In drama is it possible to get more inspired by an interior design brand and in an action-movie is it easier to

place a cool car. You have to work with different product groups in different environments”  
(Brand placement agency)

“Within drama series... I can imagine it is possible to create a positive relationship to fashion and items” (Film producer)

Park and Berger (2010) similarly argued that genres could affect brand placements differently depending on the nature of the particular brand placement, whereof e.g. drama was seen as good at provoking increased brand recognition. Karrh (1998) similarly discussed the various outcomes happy contra aggressive movies could have on the audiences’ social judgements. Furthermore, the genre in which humour and drama is combined seems to be effective to use when placing sustainable brands. Production designer 2 for instance, emphasised how a particular Swedish drama-comedy TV series could be relevant when placing more sustainable brands. Additionally, it was argued by the majority of the interviewees that humour could turn serious issues into something more approachable and easy to grasp. Humour could allow the brand placement to be educative in an easy-going way which would facilitate the audience information comprehension:

Interviewer: Which genre would be effective to use when placing sustainable brands?

Interviewee: “Humour. There is an opportunity to turn it into something funny, so that the audience can grasp it. Humour is a good way, it makes it easy-going and recognizable. I think it’s possible to get highly influenced by entertainment” (Production Designer 2)

“Humour, absolutely! It’s educating in an easy-going way. It makes it possible to turn around something that may feel serious to something less serious. It makes it funnier and easier so that the audience can digest and cope with the information. If the message is too heavy, there is a risk that the audience shuts off and fails to embrace it. It is important to integrate the message so that it gets approachable for the audience”. (Brand placement agency)

An example in which humour was used to highlight sustainability aspects can be seen in the Swedish sitcom *Solsidan*. In one of the scenes, the main character talks to her stylish friend who informs her of that one needs to consider the CO<sub>2</sub> emission allowances when travelling with airplanes, additionally claiming that people who buy tiger prawns are crazy since they contribute to an enormous environmental hazard. Although, sustainable brands might not have been specifically placed in this scene, this example could still highlight how humour could be used to communicate sustainability.

The importance of humour to communicate environmental issues is also highlighted by previous studies. Skurka et al. (2018) demonstrated that more humorous and relaxed movies could effectively increase environmental engagement, especially among younger audiences. According to Eisend (2009; cited in Skurka et al. 2018), the use of humour could further be an effective strategy to catch people’s attention regarding environmental issues. Karrh (1998) additionally claim that happier movies, to a higher degree, lead to more optimistic views among the audience. Since humour makes the story more easy-going it could be argued that it enhances narrative transportation, and thereby the chances of influencing the viewers would increase (Dal

et al., 2004). Thus, humour might be an especially effective genre to use to communicate sustainable brands' dual benefits in a way that enables the audience to grasp the message while being influenced by it to a larger extent.

However, it is of great importance to consider the subjective nature of humour, i.e. that it can be perceived in a variety of different ways. The brand placement agency discussed that a joke or a specific character in a humorous movie or series, could either be perceived as hilarious or, to the contrary, annoying. Consequently, the brand placement could result in negative outcomes if perceived in an undesirable way. It is therefore, as argued by Wiles and Danielova (2009), important to make sure that the movie, the brand and the audience is in accordance with each other in order to minimize the risk of misinterpretation.

### **Identity Association**

Since brand placement offers possibilities of better reaching out to particular target groups (Wiles & Danielova, 2009) is it, according to the interviewees, important to consider what group of people one aim to target with the placement, as well as what one aim to associate the brand with (Morton & Friedman, 2002), in order to achieve suitable brand placements. A recurrent statement among the interviewees was that the target audience had to be able to identify themselves with the characters for the brand placement to be effective. Yet, the nature of the brand had to be determined to know what to associate it with in the first place, and the brands' target audience therefore ought to be defined before choosing which character to use for the placement:

“It’s important that the audience is able to identify themselves with a character. Therefore, you have to know who the target audience is on beforehand”. (Company 2)

“It’s all about choosing between different characters and finding the right one to attain a match with the audience, someone they can identify themselves with. Companies have to consider what they want to be associated with and what audience they want to reach before determining in which production or on what character to place their brand”. (Brand placement agency)

“We want to reach out to affluent middle-aged consumers who appreciate interior design... they usually have that lifestyle we aim to be associated with. It’s positive if the characters or personalities who interacts with our brand are successful people... and that our brand is shown in elegant programs and environments” (Company 1)

An example of placing brands according to identity can be seen in the movie “Solsidan” where brands from company 1 were placed on affluent, successful, middle-aged characters who lives in a luxurious, elegant home. This phenomenon is further seen in the program “Sofias Änglar” where some construction tool brands were placed on craftsmen with the aim to enhance the credibility and professionalism of these workers.

The importance of considering identity when placing brands in movies and series has been discussed by several scholars. As argued by Cohen (2001) so called “identification” within

media could lead to that viewers start to agree with characters perceptions, emotional state of mind and aspirations. Characters further give cues to the audience about how to socially behave which the spectators actively or subconsciously start to mimic in accordance with the logic of the social learning theory (Bandura, 1997; cited in Karrh, 1998). Since brands have become important symbols representing our image, values, identities and the lifestyles we wish to belong to (Kornberger, 2010; Schmitt, 2000) is it essential that the character and the media production possesses the qualities that a particular brand is created to embody. Moreover, if a character interacts successfully with a brand, positive brand associations could be achieved among the audience (Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007).

The importance of identity association is relevant to consider when placing sustainable brands as well, as such brands need to offer dual benefits; i.e. delivering e.g. personal value, social benefits, offering status and symbolic meanings simultaneously as environmental brand aspects (Ottman et al., 2006). However, achieving sustainable brand identity association is arguably a more complex process than doing so with conventional brands, since conflicting views were found regarding how this should be done most effectively. Some of the interviewees claim that sustainable brand placement should be done in a way that strengthens the character's identity. Hence, if the character is engaged in sustainability related matters, it would be a better-, and more authentic match to place sustainable brands on that person:

“The brand placement should match the character and add something to its personality. You can't place whatever on whomever. You have to find which character that would most effectively match with a sustainable brand. For example, if a family have a more sustainable approach, it would be reasonable to place sustainable brands on them” (Brand placement agency)

“The character has to be a sustainable conscious person in order for the placement to be credible. You could place for example, eco-labelled carrots on such a character and make the person more alternative and distinguished from others” (Production designer 1)

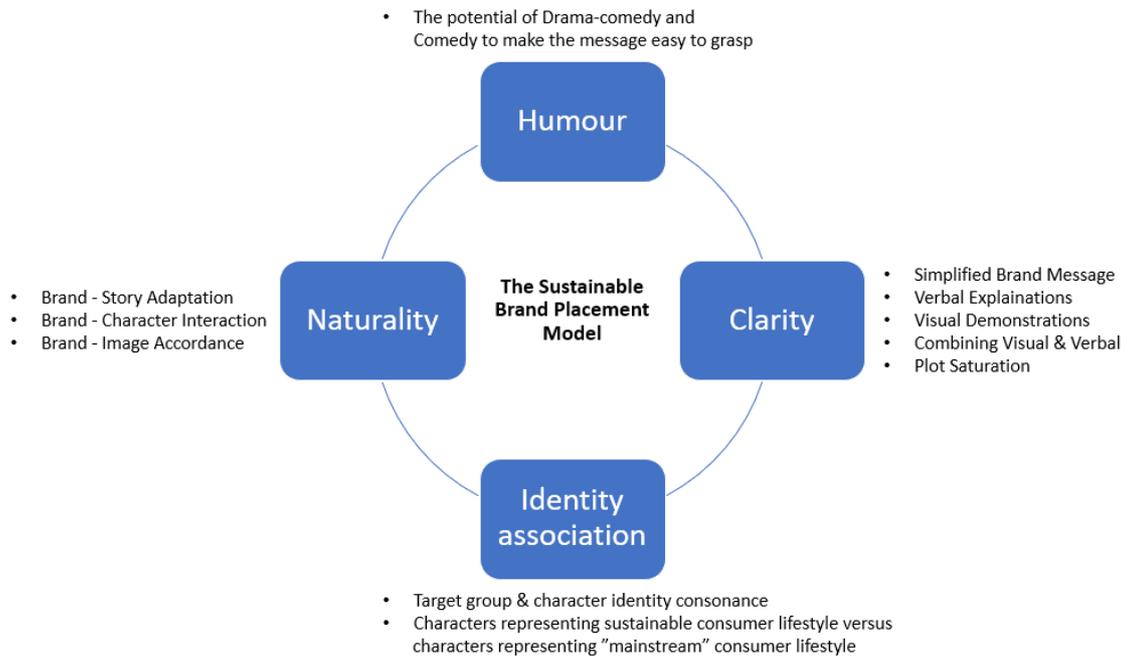
Even though, some scholars argue that brands have to be placed in accordance with the identity of the characters (Russell & Stern, 2006; Wiles & Danielova, 2009), e.g. on persons who expectedly would use the particular brands, this placement strategy might not always be applicable for sustainable brands. For instance, since the audience does not necessarily consist of already sustainable conscious people, it could be favourable to place sustainable brands on ordinary characters in order to deliver desired symbolic and personal value to a variety of consumers, which might widen the acceptance for green products (Ottman et al., 2006). This is further discussed by one of the interviewees:

“It's important that sustainable brands are presented in ordinary contexts... so that sustainability doesn't get associated to a specific type of people when there are many others who could and would like to act more sustainably. Sustainable brands should be placed on ordinary characters... i.e. not on a stereotypical, obvious environmentalist. It's important to change the norm” (Company 2)

In order to further widen the acceptance for green products, it is essential to include sustainability into various lifestyles and identities, since consumers of today's society might not follow-, and therefore could have difficulties to relate to a "radical green consumer" lifestyle (Moisander, 2007). As further argued by Martin and Schouten (2012), people search for social recognition and aim to achieve a sense of belonging. If sustainable products were only placed on stereotypical environmentalists it would mean that other lifestyles and identities would be excluded (Giddens, 1991) which would further decrease the possibility for others to recognize themselves with a more sustainable lifestyle. Thus, to be able to communicate sustainable brands' dual benefits through brand placement, there ought to be a balance between amplifying the identity of a character while simultaneously stepping away from the stereotypical image to widen the acceptance for green products.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This article contributes to the theoretical field of sustainable branding specifically dealing with sustainable brand discourse confusion, derived from the issues of communicating sustainability (Markkula & Moisander, 2012). Additionally, this study contributes to the field of brand placement by including theories of sustainable branding. It has been shown that movies and TV series could work as good means to reach out to consumers with particular brands (e.g. Wiles & Danielova, 2009), however previous brand placement research have had limited focus on the placement of sustainable brands. Therefore, this study offers a new perspective of how to communicate sustainable brands' dual benefits in order to provide a potential solution for the sustainable discourse confusion (Markkula & Moisander, 2012), i.e. through placing such brands in movies and TV series. The new perspective involves four identified aspects which need to be strategically considered and operationally fulfilled in order to successfully communicate sustainable brands dual benefits in movies and TV series. The four aspects; humour, clarity, identity association and naturality, are shown in the framework; The Sustainable Brand Placement Model (Model 2). By integrating these four aspects when placing sustainable brands in movies and TV series, the issue with discourse confusion regarding how to act sustainably could potentially be solved in the following manners; by authentically showing how sustainable brands could be a natural part in peoples' everyday lives, consumers' understanding of the potential real life usage of sustainable brands could be enhanced; by offering different practical methods for how to clearly communicate sustainable information, the understanding of sustainable brands could become more easily grasped; by adding the aspect of humour, complex and serious sustainable information could further be more easily understood and coped with; and by associating the sustainable brands to specific identities and lifestyles, consumers might more easily relate themselves to sustainability and thereby understand how they could potentially use sustainable brands. The main idea of the model is to provide a framework for 'what to have in mind' when placing sustainable brands in movies and TV series to achieve the outcomes mentioned above. The four aspects can be used combined or separately to effectively communicate sustainable brands dual benefits.



### *Model 2. The Sustainable Brand Placement Model*

In order to better communicate and educate consumers about specific sustainable brand characteristics, and potentially deal with the so called “green marketing myopia” (Levitt, 1960; cited in Ottman et al., 2006), the Clarity aspect conclude five specific strategies which could be used to more clearly communicate sustainable brands dual benefits. These are *Simplified Brand Message, Verbal Explanations, Visual Demonstrations, Combining Visual & Verbal* and *Plot Saturation*. Simplified Brand Message incorporates creating clearly defined brand messages to strategically communicate sustainable brand characteristics (Fog et al., 2010) and avoid sustainable discourse confusion (Markkula & Moisaner, 2012). Making sure to focus on the most important brand values rather than communicating multiple diverse attributes. Verbal Explanations involve verbally emphasising specific sustainable brand characteristics, using so called script placements (Russell, 1998). Through devoting specific character lines to express complexities of sustainable brands in the script, one could better reach out to the target audience with clear sustainable brand messages. Visual Demonstrations comprise of visually illuminating specific sustainable brand characteristics, in a screen placement kind of manner (Russell, 1998). By showing spectators sustainable brand functions (Hartmann et al., 2005), increased brand understanding and attitude could arguably be achieved. This could be done through showing brands with visually descriptive packages, brands with particularly unique and clear designs, and brands with eco-labels, for which the latter could clearly enhance brand credibility and avoid consumer scepticism (Hatanaka et al., 2005). Combining Visual & Verbal concerns as the name indicate involves using both manners to make sustainable brands dual benefits clearer for the spectator. Plot Saturation contains building the entire story around a sustainability message, i.e. creating a plot placement of high intensity (Russell, 1998).

The Identity association part of the model show that target group identification with characters could work as an essential manner for achieving effective sustainable brand placements

(Russell & Stern, 2006). However, the arguments differ in terms of how this could be favourably achieved. Some claim that sustainable brands should be placed on characters who represent a sustainable lifestyle to reach an authentic match. On the other hand, sustainable brands could be placed on various lifestyles and identities to enhance less sustainable minded people to recognize themselves with sustainability as well, thereby widen the acceptance for green products (Moisander, 2007). The concluding remark is that balance ought to be attained among the conflicting views in order to equally present various possible contexts for communicating sustainability. This could potentially widen the acceptance for green products and minimize the discourse confusion regarding sustainability (Moisander et al., 2010).

The Naturality construct of the model emphasise important aspects that need to be considered to achieve natural and thereby credible sustainable brand placements. This have been argued as key in order for consumers to accept sustainable brands (Ottman et al., 2006) as what consumers seem to seek in brands is authenticity (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), which is why one need to effectively communicate brand characteristics as authentic (Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013). The findings suggest that to communicate authentic sustainable brands', three specific strategies could be employed, notably; *Brand-Story Adaptation*, *Brand-Character Interaction* and *Brand-Image Accordance*. The Brand-Story Adaptation involves placing sustainable brands in TV series/movies in a fitting manner making them occur as a natural part of the plot. For instance, by placing such brands in the home of more modern and sustainable-oriented characters. The Brand-Character Interaction further emphasise that characters or program hosts could advantageously interact with the sustainable brand, either by using them or speaking about the brands (script & screen placements, see Russell, 1998) in a natural and relaxed manner and thereby achieve trustworthiness. Although the risk of emphasising the brand too much is further highlighted as a potential drawback leading to lower trustworthiness (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Brand-Image Accordance reflects that brand placements need to be in accordance with the company and brands' overall image and marketing goals (e.g. Wiles & Danielova, 2009). Because, showing a brand in an unnatural production could have disastrous effects for the brand image, associating the brand with ill-fitted aspects which the brand might not stand for.

The Humour aspect of the model explains that comedy and drama-comedy is seen as specifically relevant genres to use to successfully place sustainable brands (Park & Berger, 2010; Eisend 2009; cited in Skurka et al. 2018), as such genres might lead to increased narrative transportation among the audience (Dal et al., 2004). Moreover, TV shows and movies containing humoristic characteristics could make sustainable brands' dual benefits easier to grasp and thereby be more efficiently communicated among the audience (Skurka et al., 2018). This said without undermining the potential of other types of movie and TV series genres for achieving successful brand placements, such as action or thrillers'.

### **Managerial Implications, Limitations and Future Research**

The introduced model aims at providing brand representatives with guidelines to consider when placing sustainable brands in movies and TV series to successfully communicate sustainable

brands dual benefits. The study has additionally aimed at informing sustainable companies of the potential of brand placement in movies and TV series as a means to communicate sustainability, to increase the awareness for sustainable brands among customers, and thereby potentially widen the acceptance for sustainable brands in general. The framework could further provide marketers with insights for developing advertisements and campaigns to communicate sustainable brands dual benefits in other medias. However, the framework should be tested in order to monitor actual performance, i.e. if the four aspects; humour, clarity, identity association and naturality, actually can contribute to successfully communicate sustainable brands dual benefits in movies and TV series. Another suggestion for further research could be to investigate what importance the “three branches” within the creative production could potentially have for sustainable brand placement, through observing how these professionals work with brands throughout the movie or series production process, as this study mainly focused on the three collaborating pillars of brand placement, i.e. the brand representatives, the brand placement agency and the creative production. Further research could additionally test which genres could be used to successfully communicate sustainable brands dual benefits in TV series and movies. It would moreover be of interest to gain perspectives from scriptwriters, and sustainable brands which potentially have placed their products in movies and TV series to gain insights of what approaches they have used.

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