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Überweiss
Moving fictional brands into the real world

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School of Business
September 2017
Überweiss

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This thesis is a 30 ECTS credits final project toward a MSc degree in Marketing and International Business at the School of Business, Department of Social Sciences, University of Iceland.

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Prologue

This thesis is a 30 ECTS credits final project toward a MSc degree in marketing and international business at the University of Iceland.

I’d like to thank my supervisor Auður Hermannsdóttir for steady guidance, helpful comments and patience during this process and Þórarinn Hjálmarsson for helpful advice regarding various aspects of the project. I’d also like to thank my fiancée Emílià Gunnarsdóttir for her immeasurable patience with me and unfaltering support. Lastly I am grateful for my friend and fellow sufferer during the summer, Lára Hrönn Hlynsdóttir, for her company, understanding and help.
Abstract

Brands are everywhere. Even in the fictional worlds we escape to for fantasy, comfort and entertainment. Real brands placed in fiction for marketing purposes is generally called product placement or brand placement. Recently, scholars have been wading into a related field called reverse product placement. That is essentially taking brands created in fiction and making them real for commercial purposes. A handful of well-known examples exist such as the Duff drinks from *The Simpsons* and Bubba Gump Shrimp from *Forrest Gump*.

Attention was only drawn to this matter around a decade ago, so much still remains unknown in the field of fictional branding. Alexander Reading and Rebecca Jenkins studied the experiences people had of products born through reverse product placement and found that people generally make three types of connections to them. Connections to the self and others, connections to another world and emotional connections.

The purpose of this study was to see if these connections could be validated and to see whether a clear target group exists for this kind of brands. The measurement was mostly designed by the author, but with the work of Reading and Jenkins, and Muzellec, Lynn and others taken into consideration. The two fictional brands used were Überweiss and Big Kahuna Burger and a total of 500 valid responses were gathered.

The results imply that based on the demographic variables of gender, age, education and income there is no clear target group for fictional brands, although they seem a little more suited for younger audiences. Although the connections of Reading and Jenkins could not be thoroughly validated, they were shown to correlate to purchase intention of the brands.
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1 Introduction

“It’s an industry where everyone thinks that they’re an expert until you talk to them and you realize they have no idea what’s going on.”

Russell & Belch, 2005, p. 73.

The concept of product placement (PP) is far from being a new thing. This act of taking products/brands and placing them in the fictional world seen on film or television for marketing purposes is practically as old as the technology of film, with examples dating back to 1896 (Newell, Salmon, & Chang, 2006). Balasubramanian (1994) defined product placement as a hybrid message, combining the advantages of advertising and public relations. The coverage is paid for by the sponsor, giving him a certain amount of control over the message, but the sponsor is unidentified, which makes the source of the message seem more credible and masks persuasion attempts.

Russell (1998) distinguished between three types of PP; visual, verbal and those that were connected to the plot of the visual entertainment. A visual placement (or screen placement) is when the placed product can be seen on screen, insinuating its presence in the fictional world. A verbal placement is when the placed product is mentioned in the dialogue of the visual entertainment. Both of these types can be of different levels from subtle ones to painfully obvious ones. The third type of placement is what Russell calls the plot placement, where the product takes a major role in the story line or helps to build an identity of a character. Examples of this would be James Bond and his Aston Martin, the Kenny Rogers’ Roasted Chicken episode of Seinfeld or “The One with the Apothecary Table” episode of Friends, where the episode revolves more or less around products of furniture supplier Pottery Barn.

Today, PP is often referred to as brand placement or brand integration, to allow for service brands as well as product brands (Davtyan & Cunningham, 2017). A brand can be defined as a name, sign, symbol, design or a combination of them that identifies goods or services of one seller and differentiates them from those of the competitors (Keller, Apéria, & Georgson, 2012). All this information that consumers use to identify brands is commonly referred to as brand knowledge. Brand knowledge is usually
divided into brand awareness (familiarity of brand) and brand image, that is all the mental associations that they make in the mind of the consumer (Keller, 1993).

The effect of PP on brand knowledge has been studied. According to Russell (2002), low plot connection is better suited for visual placements while verbal placements go better with high plot connection. However, mismatches between modality of placement and plot connection are likely to raise suspicion, but in turn are more memorable. This means that visual placements with high plot connection affect brand memory in a positive way, but brand attitude in a negative way, because of their incongruence.

Much in the same way, Van Reijmersdal, Neijens, and Smit (2007) studied the effects of placements on brand image and brand memory (brand memory here referring to if people remembered seeing the placed brand or not). They found that brand memory and brand image seem unrelated in this context, as brand image is significantly affected by placements while brand memory is not. They also found that people tend to align their image of the placed brand with their image of the TV program, which suggests that marketers should choose their media vehicle carefully when using placements.

Disclosure of brand placements has been shown to affect adolescents and adults differentially. Younger audiences seem to show less persuasion knowledge toward brand placements (critical attitude toward brand placements and recognizing them as advertisements), but still an increase in brand memory (Van Reijmersdal, Boerman, Buijzen, & Rozendaal, 2017).

Russell and Stern (2006) studied the effect of placed products in TV sitcoms on brand attitudes, with results indicating that consumers adopt the attitude of television characters towards a brand, based on their attachment to the characters. This is especially true when the character has a negative attitude towards the brand.

The main topic of this paper however will not be product placement but reverse product placement (RPP).

“Homer Simpson’s drink of choice, Duff Beer, doesn’t exist in the real world. Imagine if it did. That’s the idea behind reverse product placement.”

Wasserman, 2007, p. 5.

The method of taking product placement and turning it around, is young, has gone relatively unstudied and is arguably underused. The term is believed to have been used
first in an article written by David Edery and published in Harvard Business Review in 2006 titled *Reverse Product Placement in Virtual Worlds*. There, Edery (himself a video game developer) defines reverse product placement as “the commercial translation of fictional brands or products from games into the real world” (p. 24). He mentions that the method could be applied to any type of virtual world. The fact of the matter is that this can be done in any type of fictional worlds including those in books, films, television shows etc.

It is important to distinguish between RPP and merchandizing. Lubbers and Adams (2004) defined merchandizing as “creating or licensing others to create merchandise that is based upon the movie” (p. 58). This can be done not just with movies, but any type of fiction and is a popular way to increase the entertainment’s revenue stream. A countless number of examples exist, but none do it better than Disney, who sells toys, clothes, video games and food products connected to just about every film they make. A doll of Bart Simpson sold in a toy store would be categorized as the offspring of merchandizing, whereas a t-shirt with the logo of the store Kwik-E-Mart (that appears in the same fictional world of The Simpsons) would fall under RPP because it is a separate brand, created within the show. All sorts of brands and products are now being sold as companies become increasingly aware of the possibilities that RPP offers. A list of a few real-life examples follows later.

Alexander Reading and Rebecca Jenkins (2015) studied consumer experience of products that were born through RPP. They conducted qualitative interviews with people who had purchased and used products of fictional brands and found that people seem to make three types of connections with this type of products:

1) Connection to another world
2) Emotional connection
3) Connection to the self and others

As the landscape regarding fictional branding and RPP is largely uncharted, the aim of this research is first and foremost to shed more light on the relatively unexplored world of reverse product placement. By investigating key attributes of target group, clues can be given to what kind of people the defictionalized material should be marketed
towards. The conclusions of Reading and Jenkins (2015) assumed that consumers made three types of connections to products that were offsprings of RPP. Testing these conclusions should give insight into how consumers feel about this type of products.

The number of research questions is therefore two;

1. Is there a particular target group to which products of RPP nature suit the most, and if so, what are its characteristics?
2. Do the three types of connections that Reading and Jenkins (2015) identified hold?

The next chapter of this paper is a literature review that also explains some key terms. Then the methodology behind the study conducted in connection with this research will be explained. Results and discussion will follow.
2 Literature

2.1 A brief history of RPP

At first, scholars who researched RPP were mostly interested in the gaming world, and notably in real world simulators like Second Life (Lynn, Muzellec, & Szymanski, 2009; Wasserman, 2007). Second life is an online, virtual reality world where players create avatars and perform everyday actions like shopping, exercising and discussing with other players.

Lynn, Muzellec, and Szymanski (2009) theorized the concept of “brand precession”. According to their definition, brand precession “can be described as the process of fomenting a brand aura entirely in the abstract and the virtual but captures the imagination and emotional attachment of real consumers. Here the virtual brand precedes the real and is not necessarily dependent on a physical existence to generate commercial value” (p. 3). They categorized fictional brands into four different categories of brand precession, according to their level of attachment to the real world. One of these categories applied to brands that didn’t require any sort of connection to reality in order to generate commercial value. As an example of this they used Alyssa LaRoche and her Second Life avatar, Aimee Weber. LaRoche created a clothing brand restricted to the Second Life world, named *PREEN*, based around the style of her avatar. She opened various in-game locations where the clothes could be bought for the in-game currency of Linden Dollars (who in turn could be exchanged into real life currency). LaRoche is said to have pondered the option of opening physical locations but the idea is yet to materialize. Nevertheless, this shows that fictional brands can generate income without being productized in reality.

Muzellec, Lynn, and Lambkin continued with Branding in fictional and virtual environments: Introducing a new conceptual domain and research agenda, that was published in 2012. Building on the aforementioned conference paper, the authors hypothesized a new typology for brands, based on their existence in reality, and the reality of the world they exist in. This typology is illustrated in Figure 1 and shows the four quadrants of brands examined in the article.
According to this classification, *PREEN* would be in quadrant B, a virtual brand in a virtual world. Quadrant C is the opposite of that, real brands in the real world e.g. buying a physical product in a brick and mortar store. Quadrant A represents traditional product placement where real brands enter a virtual world for marketing purposes or to enhance the reality seen on screen. The last quadrant (D), covers this paper’s topic; reverse product placement, where fictional brands enter the real world.

The authors hypothesized that since a brand is after all just a set of perceptions in the mind of the consumer, it wouldn’t require a tangible product in order to be defined. These brands that hadn’t been productized and existed only in the virtual world were called protobrands. They argue that “there is a significant economic incentive related to the early identification and protection of protobrands, particularly for media companies, even where such potential is identified as a by-product of a master brand” (Muzellec et al., 2012, p. 820).

Muzellec and Lynn took these ideas one step further a year later (2013) with *Fancy a coffee with Friends in Central Perk? Reverse product placement, fictional brands and purchase intention*, which was co-authored by Dr. Christopher Kanitz. They studied the perceived service quality of two iconic situational comedy (sitcom) hangouts that both represent excellent examples of fictional service brands; the Central Perk coffee house in *Friends* and MacLaren’s Pub from *How I Met Your Mother*. The results of the study
confirmed that the concept of protobrands is valid, and that attitudes toward a fictional brand are driven by perceived quality, identification with the brand, and attitudes toward the television program (sometimes referred to as the master brand or media vehicle). This in turn all influenced purchase intention of the studied fictional brand. Their hypotheses, which were all supported, are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2 - The four hypotheses that were proposed and confirmed by Muzellec et al. (2013)

Abela (2003) proposed two ways of defining a brand:

- a) The additive interpretation, which depicts the product and brand separate, with the brand as a mark that is added to the product.
- b) The inclusive interpretation, which portrays the product and brand as a combined unit, where the product is included in the brand.

Muzellec, Lynn, & Kanitz (2013) asked the question that if the additive interpretation was used, could that mean that brand and product can be created separately and managed independently without relation to each other? Their concept of protobrands seems to confirm this interpretation and show that brands can in fact be created without any connection to a real product or service. This conclusion is in line with the work of Keller (1993), that shows that brands exist once they capture the imagination of
potential customers. This will be tested in this research, along with the connections that Reading and Jenkins (2015) claim consumers have with defictionalized products.

2.2 Connections to products of RPP

The first type of connections identified by Reading & Jenkins (2015) refers to the ones that people feel brings them closer to the fantasy world where the brands first existed. That escaping to fantasy worlds of differing levels of reality can be a welcome break from everyday life. The second type of connections refers to how these products generally seemed to be of great sentimental value to their owners. They would often be stored unopened, displayed with pride or only used on special occasions. Reluctance to dispose of these items was also a common theme.

Reading and Jenkins (2015) only interviewed people who had purchased products of fictional brands. These products seemed to give their owners a sense of belonging to a special community or an exclusive club. Interestingly enough, and quite contradictory, the owners didn’t seem to think that these products were in any way rare. Just that they helped to understand cultural references that others didn’t and gave an elite status of fandom. Lastly they thought that these fictional brands defined them much better than real, conventional brands ever could. That “it was their interests reflected through their fictional purchases that represented their inner selves, and at the same time revealed their desired selves and fantasies” (p. 165). These feelings were summarized into the third type of connections; to the self and others (Reading & Jenkins, 2015).

The self has been defined as “the totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings with reference to [the] self as an object” (Rosenberg, 1989, p. 34). Advertising effectiveness (consisting of brand memory, brand attitude and purchase intention) has been shown to depend on the relationship between the advertising appeals and the viewers’ self-concept (Hong & Zinkhan, 1995). Consumer products do not hold only utilitarian, functional value for their users, but also symbolic value that is often mediated through the purchase and consumption of brands (Bhat & Reddy, 1998). This means that people tend to buy products from brands that they believe have a similar personality to their own (Aaker, 1999).

The self that has been discussed thus far is commonly known as “the actual-self”. But other types of self-concept have been identified, one of them being “the ideal self” –
how an individual would like to see himself/herself (Jamal & Goode, 2001). McCracken (1988) hypothesized that consumerism acted like a bridge between one’s actual self and ideal self. That people as consumers, often think that acquiring a certain object will lead to a better life or bring them closer to an ideal state. However, these bridges burn down when said object is acquired and the ideal self not achieved, so that these hopes and desires must be attached to new things that have the possibility of making us whole.

Products made from fictional brands have the possibility of sustaining this connection for much longer as they link an individual to an ideal self from a fantasy world. As this self can almost never be fully accomplished due to the nature of the fiction, the brands and products that spring from them offer a direct, tangible link to an alternate reality, that would otherwise be unreachable to its fans (Reading & Jenkins, 2015). Nostalgia also plays a big part in this regard. In a study of Disney consumption, Dholakia and Schroeder (2001) found that people typically create a part of themselves that belongs to the fiction they consume. This emotional bond can happen through either characters or nostalgia. RPP could benefit from this connection, giving people a tangible link to past experiences, feelings and memories.

In much the same way, brands (conventional and fictional) have the ability to bridge the gap between one’s social self and ideal social self. The social self referring to how an individual feels other people see him/her and the ideal social self meaning how an individual would like to be seen by others (Jamal & Goode, 2001). Interviewees of Reading and Jenkins (2015) spoke about how the realized fictional goods gave them an elite status of fandom or the sense of belonging to an exclusive club. This indicates that people view ownership of RPP products as a seal of approval from their like-minded peers.

2.3 Types of PP and RPP
So far, scholars generally agree on the existing number of types of RPP. Patwardhan and Patwardhan (2016) distinguished two types; serendipitous and planned. Hosea’s (2007) definition was similar whereas she said they were either done unconsciously or consciously. Most current examples of RPP (e.g. Duff beer) represent the former category, where marketers have sought out the opportunity to produce products that formerly appeared in entertainment. The latter would require a certain level of strategic
planning by a marketer, with him approaching the producers of the fictional entertainment, with a near ready product, seeking exposure ahead of future commercialization.

Chang, Newell, and Salmon (2009) proposed three models of product placement; serendipitous, opportunistic and planned. The first kind is mainly done to enhance the realism of a certain scene in a film or TV program, and the producers of the entertainment use a certain product or brand to fill empty spaces on screen or for continuity purposes. The opportunistic placements are mostly initiated by entertainment firms trying to lower their production cost. They let agencies know of possible placement opportunities which the agencies then forward to their respective clients/brands. These are generally short term, but more predictable than the serendipitous placements, because brand managers have a certain notice about the upcoming placement opportunity.

Planned product placements differ in many ways from the first two in that they are formal, contractual and predictable, because they are based on previous successful cooperation between entertainment producers and brand stakeholders. Often this includes an exclusive agreement between the studio and the branded entity, excluding the studio from using products of the same type from other companies, or instructing them to always use the branded products in certain situations (Chang et al., 2009)

Muzellec et al. (2013) said that these three models of placements might well be transferred to RPP, although citing that all known instances of RPP seemed to belong to the first two models. One could even argue that the third model couldn't apply to RPP, since it is based on previous collaboration. If the fictional brand has been placed before, and someone has acquired the rights to commercialize it and made a deal with the studio to place it again, wouldn’t that mean a conventional product placement was taking place, even though the brand hadn’t been productized?

2.4 Real examples of RPP

Although only 10 years have passed since Wasserman’s piece in Brandweek, the scenery regarding fictional brands has changed quite a bit. Firstly, the Duff beer really does exist now. After growing tired of countless counterfeit versions of Homer’s favorite beverage in Europe, South-America and Mexico, 21st Century Fox decided to brew an actual,
officially licensed version to fight the knock-offs. In addition they also made an energy drink of the same name (Kreps, 2015).

Omni Consumer Products Corporation (cleverly named after the evil megacorporation in *Robocop* (1987)) is an American product development company, specializing in defictionalization and reverse product placement. To date they have developed and launched products such as the Sex Panther cologne from *Anchorman* (2004), bars of soap based on the iconic pink ones that appeared in *Fight Club* (1999), the Tru Blood beverage from HBO’s *True Blood* series and Stay Puft Marshmallows modelled on the villain’s manifestation in *Ghost Busters* (1984) (Omni Consumer Products, 2015).

Arguably the most renowned example of reverse product placement though has to be Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. This chain of seafood restaurants is based on the eponymous company from box-office hit *Forrest Gump* (1994). Initiated by the film’s production studio, Paramount Pictures, the fictitious seafood restaurant chain became reality in 1996 when they joined forces with restaurant business Rusty Pelican. The first location was opened in 1996 and they currently operate in 43 locations, most of them in the USA. Scott Barnett, the company president at the time, said in an interview in 2007 that their market research suggested that there was an unforced translation from the movie to the restaurant. That because of the success of the film (it was one of the top five grossing films of all time when the first restaurant opened), the chain had a 94% unaided awareness (Hosea, 2007).

Maeve Hosea wrote this article that covered the story of Bubba Gump in Brand Strategy Magazine in May 2007. Titled *Fantasy brands on a reality check*, the findings i.a. suggested that speed was of the essence and that an entertainment property needs to act fast on marketing the defictionalized brand in order to take advantage of the placement. Also, that the connection between fictional brand and media vehicle needs to be obvious and marketers shouldn’t try and force this connection if it isn’t clear to people.


3 Methodology

3.1 Chosen brands

Choosing the fictional brands to use in the study proved a challenge. The initial idea was amongst other things to study RPP in different types of genres of fictional visual entertainment. This idea was abandoned after initial research revealed that the concept seems dominated by the genre of comedy. Muzellec et al. (2013) said that sitcoms might be particularly suitable for RPP due to their frequency, endurance, syndication likelihood and positive induced moods. Advertising research has also indicated that compared to sad TV programs, happy ones are more likely to induce happier moods when watching commercials and greater perceived commercial effectiveness (Goldberg & Gorn, 1987). This has been shown to apply to PP as well (Karrh, McKee, & Pardun, 2003; Van Reijmersdal, Smit, & Neijens, 2010) so it should come as no surprise that the tendency of introducing fictional brands is higher in comedy than in other genres.

Fictional brands in genres other than comedy often have a negative image. A common motif in science fiction is the big evil megacorporation, that often uses technology/science for morally questionable things. Examples include Cyberdyne Systems from the Terminator franchise, InGen from the Jurassic Park franchise, The Tyrell Corporation from Blade Runner (1982) and Omni Consumer Products from RoboCop (1987). As this type of companies is deemed to have a predetermined negative image, and unlikely to manufacture typical consumer goods, the idea of including them or sci-fi in the study was scrapped.

According to Low and Lamb (2000), the effectiveness of product placement is based on the necessary conditions of high familiarity and exposure to a brand, but also positive attitudes towards the brand. To get a better idea of what brands to use I referred to the systemization of fictional brands used by Muzellec et al. (2013). Shown in Figure 3, it distinguishes between animated and non-animated fiction and also between product and service brands. A strategic decision was made to go with product brands of non-animated origins, and ideally something that consumers would be willing to buy more than once.
Figure 3 – A systemization of fictional brands by Muzellec et al. (2013, p. 14)

Awareness of the origin (the master brand) had to be sufficient enough to generate reasonable numbers. Muzellec et al. (2013) measured both awareness of origin and awareness of coherent fictional brands. A few origins proved to have awareness of 94% or higher. Two of these were chosen for this study; *Friends* (1994) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994). According to aforementioned study, *Friends* had an awareness rating of 99.2% while *Pulp Fiction* had 96.8%. Both respective numbers that prove that these two fictional worlds have generally the same level of awareness.

At least two brands were available for selection from *Pulp Fiction*. Big Kahuna Burger and Red Apple Cigarettes. As studies have shown that the product category of tobacco can cause a negative attitude towards a brand placement (Gupta, Balasubramanian, & Klassen, 2000; Nebenzahl & Secunda, 1993), a decision was made to go with Big Kahuna Burger (BKB). The Big Kahuna Burger brand has appeared in more films written by the film’s director, Quentin Tarantino; *Death Proof* (2007), *Four Rooms* (1995), *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996), *True Romance* (1993) and *Reservoir Dogs* (1992). Never nearly as prominently though as in *Pulp Fiction*. The brand is not just mentioned, but discussed in a minute long sequence early in the film. Packaging is seen on screen for most of that time and the actual product (hamburger) is seen, tasted and judged on taste by a main
character. The placement is so prominent that it is almost inevitable to assume that the brand is real and that conventional product placement is in question. In spite of that, the brand only scored a 21.3% awareness rating with Muzellec et al. (2013).

When deciding on a fictional brand from Friends, other than the Central Perk Café, there were two strong contenders. The Überweiss detergent and Mama’s Little Bakery. Both feature only once on Friends and both are referred to in the title of each respective episode, although by product and not by brand. A decision was made to use the Überweiss detergent as it features very early in the Friends series, and has more distinctive packaging than the cheesecake of Mama’s Little Bakery.

3.2 Measurement
The only empirical study from the realm of fictional branding that the author found and could base the measurement on was that of Muzellec et al. (2013). It differs from that of Reading and Jenkins (2015) in the aspect that respondents had no actual experience of the brands in question. As this study involves the same concept, an effort was made to employ many of the same items regarding measurements, although some needed to be designed or adjusted by author (for questionnaire see Appendix 1).

First, awareness of origin needed to be measured, followed by awareness of each respective fictional brand. As measuring awareness of the fictional brands and their origins was not the aim of the research, the use of images regarding the fictional brands was deemed alright to help refresh respondents memories’. The respective awareness levels can be seen in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fictional brand</th>
<th>Origin of fictional brand</th>
<th>Awareness of brand</th>
<th>Awareness of origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Überweiss</td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Kahuna Burger</td>
<td>Pulp Fiction</td>
<td>53.1%</td>
<td>95.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants that were familiar with the fictional brands were asked to disagree/agree with a number of statements about them on a 5-point Likert-scale, anchored by “strongly disagree” (1) and “strongly agree” (5). Participants that were familiar with both brands answered the same questions twice so the number of items
was kept to a minimum in order to avoid drop outs. Background information was restricted to the demographic variables of gender, age, education and income.

A total of 13 items were asked regarding each brand. Firstly, they included the dimensions of credibility and purchase intention. The dimension of credibility included three items and was designed by the author, with credibility defined as “whether or not people thought the product/brand had been/could be created in reality”. The dimension of purchase intention included two items and was adapted from Stafford (1998) as used by Muzellec et al. (2013).

The connections hypothesized by Reading and Jenkins (2015) were tested with six items adapted by the author. A detailed list of these can be seen in Tables 4 and 5 under results. Lastly the respondents were asked about the effect of productization on the master brand, in accordance with the ideology of Muzellec et al. (2012, 2013). This was done by asking whether or not, productization of fictional brand would diminish people’s opinion of the relevant master brand.

3.3 Data collection and participants
A convenience sample was used with the help of social media platform Facebook. This was considered a reasonable approach since recent numbers indicate that around 90% of Icelanders over the age of 18 use the medium (Gallup, 2015). This suggests that people of both genders and a wide variety of age can be found there, although the younger users certainly seem to use it a lot more.

The survey was shared on a total of four different pages on Facebook; the researcher’s personal profile, a group dedicated to questionnaires, an Icelandic fan page for TV programs named S01E01 and lastly a page for Icelandic cinephiles named Bíófíklar. The survey opened with information about the subject and that it was part of a final thesis for a master’s degree in marketing and international business. No compensation was offered for participation. The questionnaire was designed in Icelandic and then translated to English after data collection.

Data was collected in a period of 48 hours between the 16th and the 18th of August 2017. After the removal of invalid responses a total of 500 valid responses remained. 62.6% of the study’s sample were women while 37.4% were men. Level of income was generally of low or medium, but education was generally quite high, as 66% of the
sample had finished either an undergraduate or graduate degree at university. Respondents were generally of younger ages, a vast majority of them under the age of 40 (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>41+</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 Results

4.1 Target group for RPP

A cluster analysis was performed with the aim of finding an ideal target group for RPP brands. The items used were the three items concerning the fictional brands that were deemed to indicate the most interest in them;

1) “I would like to try this product”
2) “I would actively seek out this product/service”
3) “I would tell others if I purchased a product from this brand”

A hierarchical cluster analysis with Ward’s method (Ward, 1963) and squared Euclidean distance measure was used. Ward’s method is the most common hierarchical cluster analysis method when it comes to market segmentation analyses (Tuma, Scholz, & Decker, 2009) and has generally yielded good performance (Punj & Stewart, 1983).

Three items for each brand were used to determine the clusters, meaning a total of six items. The results of the hierarchical clustering suggested that a two cluster solution would be ideal, although a four cluster solution might also be possible, (for dendrogram see Appendix 2). As it seemed more feasible, it was decided to use the two cluster solution. This was also confirmed with a two-step cluster analysis with the same variables where respondents were put in evaluation fields of demographic variables. The two clusters more or less represented those who were negative towards the brands and those who were positive, where cluster 1 was the negatives and cluster 2 the positives. Ergo cluster 1 was named The Negative Nancys and cluster 2 The Positive Pollys. Descriptive statistics of the two clusters can be seen in Table 3.
As seen in Table 3, the number of respondents in each cluster was very low or around 30. A two-step cluster analysis on the awareness of the two brands showed that out of the 399 people that gave answers about awareness of the brands, only 73 were familiar with both of them or 18.3%. No significant difference in demographic variables tested between the clusters, except on age. The Positive Pollys (M=1.55) were generally younger than The Negative Nancys (M=1.9).

### 4.2 Connections of Reading and Jenkins

The connections of Reading and Jenkins (2015) were tested with a total of six items. A detailed description can be seen in Tables 4 and 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The Negative Nancys</th>
<th>The Positive Pollys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would like to try this product - Ü</td>
<td>31 2.29 1.01</td>
<td>33 3.27 1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would actively seek out this product in a store - Ü</td>
<td>31 1.48 0.72</td>
<td>33 3.09 1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would tell others if I purchased a product from this brand - Ü</td>
<td>31 2.29 1.35</td>
<td>33 4.30 0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to try this product - BKB</td>
<td>31 3.13 1.06</td>
<td>33 4.27 0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would actively seek out this chain of restaurants, if it existed in reality - BKB</td>
<td>31 2.26 1.15</td>
<td>33 4.12 0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would tell others if I purchased a product from this brand - BKB</td>
<td>31 2.68 1.28</td>
<td>33 4.27 0.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 - Descriptive statistics of the two clusters, see Ü for Überweiss and BKB for Big Kahuna Burger
Table 4 - Descriptive statistics of connections to the Überweiss brand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement item</th>
<th>Type of connection</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buying a product from this brand would allow me to be part of a society of people that think like me</td>
<td>Connection to self and others</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying this product would make me feel as if I was part of a special set of fans</td>
<td>Connection to self and others</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would tell others if I purchased a product from this brand</td>
<td>Connection to others</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that this brand would have more sentimental value for me than practical</td>
<td>Emotional connection</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying a product from this brand would connect me better to the world of Friends</td>
<td>Connection to another world</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring a product from this brand would liven up my daily life</td>
<td>Connection to another world</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 - Descriptive statistics of connections to the Big Kahuna Burger brand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement item</th>
<th>Type of connection</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buying a product from this brand would allow me to be part of a society of people that think like me</td>
<td>Connection to self and others</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying this product would make me feel as if I was part of a special set of fans</td>
<td>Connection to self and others</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would tell others if I purchased a product from this brand</td>
<td>Connection to others</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that this brand would have more sentimental value for me than practical</td>
<td>Emotional connection</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying a product from this brand would connect me better to the world of Pulp Fiction</td>
<td>Connection to another world</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring a product from this brand would liven up my daily life</td>
<td>Connection to another world</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As seen in Tables 4 and 5 the measurements yielded no decisive results. Scores were all around 2-3,5 meaning that respondents generally somewhat disagreed to these connections or were between disagreement and agreement. The item that tested the highest on average between the two brands was “I would tell others if I purchased a product from this brand”, meaning that willingness to share news of a product bought from a fictional brand was quite high. Cronbach’s alpha for the first three items tested 0.77 for both brands. For the last two items it tested 0.76 for Big Kahuna Burger but 0.71 for Überweiss. Cronbach’s alpha was also calculated for the dimensions of credibility and purchase intention of the two brands. They can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6 – Cronbach’s alpha for credibility and purchase intention of the two brands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Überweiss</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purchase intention</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Kahuna Burger</td>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Purchase intention</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three assumptions for linear regressions were tested. For Überweiss, the residual showed that only 1.2% of the cases had standardized residual values of over 2 or under -2, which gave no sign of data outliers. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (p = 0.873) indicated multivariate normality. The correlation matrix for Pearson’s bivariate correlation showed that no multicollinearity was in question with values all between 0.53 and 0.73. For BKB, there was no multicollinearity either, as all values in the correlation matrix were between 0.59 and 0.72. The Komogorov-Smirnov test (p = 0.762) indicated multivariate normality. Only 0.8% of the cases had standardized residual values over 2 or under -2 which indicated no data outliers.

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed, in order to see if aforementioned connections could predict purchase intention. In both cases a significant regression equation was found, but in both cases the emotional connection showed little correlation to purchase intention. For Überweiss, the variance in the independent variables explained 33.8% of the variance in the dependent variable ($F(3,142) = 24.12, p<0.001$). See Table 7 for coefficients.
As said before, the same analysis for Big Kahuna Burger also revealed a significant regression equation \( F(3,176) = 33.86, p<0.001 \), with an \( R^2 \) of 0.366. Variance in the connections was therefore able to explain 36.6% of the variance in purchase intention for Big Kahuna Burger. See Table 8 for coefficients.

### Table 8 - Coefficients for purchase intention of Big Kahuna Burger

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self_and_others_BKB</td>
<td>.398</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>.388</td>
<td>4.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another_world_BKB</td>
<td>.242</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.265</td>
<td>2.852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that this brand would have more</td>
<td>-.005</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>-.006</td>
<td>-.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sentimental value for me than practical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Dependent Variable: PI_BKB</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.3 Other results

50.8% of respondents had seen every episode of Friends more than once. 49.9% said they found the show very likeable. An additional 35.7% found the show rather likable. Table 9 shows the relation between familiarity with Überweiss and attitude towards the show \( \chi^2(4, N=499) = 50.49, p<0.001 \).
Table 9 - Familiarity of the brand Überweiss depending on attitude towards Friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How unlikable or likable do you find the TV show Friends?</th>
<th>Are you familiar with the brand Überweiss?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very unlikable</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather unlikable</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither unlikable nor likable</td>
<td></td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>86.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather likable</td>
<td></td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>77.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very likable</td>
<td></td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9 shows that the more people like the show, the likelier they are to be familiar with the fictional brand. Pulp Fiction and Big Kahuna Burger generated similar results, that can be seen in Table 10 ($\chi^2(4, N=398) = 68.56, p<0.001$).

Table 10 - Familiarity of the brand Big Kahuna Burger depending on attitude towards Pulp Fiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How unlikable or likable do you find the film Pulp Fiction?</th>
<th>Are you familiar with the brand Big Kahuna Burger?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very unlikable</td>
<td></td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather unlikable</td>
<td></td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither unlikable nor likable</td>
<td></td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>86.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather likable</td>
<td></td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>60.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very likable</td>
<td></td>
<td>70.5%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>53.0%</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked whether productization of the fictional brands would diminish their opinion of the master brands, respondents were in rather strong disagreement. The mean scores were 1.85 for Überweiss and 1.89 for Big Kahuna Burger.

The items that measured credibility and purchase intention had already been combined into dimensions for the linear regression in chapter 4.2. It was decided to see if the two were linked. For both brands a positive correlation was found between credibility and purchase intention. Überweiss, $r(147) = 0.56$, $p<0.001$ and Big Kahuna Burger, $r(189) = 0.61$, $p<0.001$. 
5 Discussion

This study’s objective was twofold. One was to see if there was a clear target group for fictional brands and reverse product placement. Two clusters were distinguished, with one having a negative attitude towards the two brands in question and the other one a positive attitude. A slight difference in age tested between the clusters, meaning that The Negative Nancys were more or less in the age group of 31-40. The Positive Pollys on the other hand were spread almost equally between 18-30 and 31-40. This means that if a marketing decision had to be made regarding a brand’s possible defictionalization, it would probably be better to target a younger audience. This is in line with the recent work of Van Reijmersdal et al. (2017) that shows that young people are less prone to critical attitudes toward brand placements.

Other than that, the results of this study indicate that there doesn’t seem to be a specific target group for RPP based on the variables of gender, education and income. This means that if a clear segment for this type of brands is to be formed, it must be done based on other information, such as lifestyles and interests for example.

The second objective of the study was to test the connections to RPP products identified by Reading and Jenkins (2015). Judging by the means of the relevant items of measurement, the connections don’t seem to be entirely warranted. That could well have to do with the fact that in their research, they tested actual experiences of this type of products, whereas here, strictly fictional brands with no tangible aspects were tested. All answers given by respondents regarding the two brands, Überweiss and Big Kahuna Burger, were therefore in a way hypothetical. Also, Reading and Jenkins spoke to owners of various sorts of memorabilia, while this study was restricted to hamburgers and detergent, things that might be considered as typical consumer products with mostly short-term practical value.

However, the effect of these connections on purchase intention was quite interesting. For both brands, these connections were able to explain around 35% of the variance in purchase intention, meaning that marketers should definitely view these connections as a factor when deciding whether do defictionalize.
Considering that Friends had a familiarity rating of 100% and that 50.8% of the sample had seen every episode more than once, the 34% familiarity with Überweiss could be interpreted as surprisingly low. In contrast, Big Kahuna Burger had 53.1% familiarity which is vastly superior. That might be due to the fact that BKB features more prominently in its master brand, appears in more titles of fiction, and has a better ratio in terms of appearance/total minutes of fiction. If we look at Russell’s three types of PP (1998) both of the brands used were placed using a mix of verbal and visual placements. However, Big Kahuna Burger is much closer to being a plot placement, which might explain its superior familiarity level.

Muzellec et al. (2012) feared that productization of fictional brands could have negative impacts on their master brands. Participants generally disagreed to the statement that productization of fictional brands would diminish their opinion of the origin. This provides encouraging evidence to producers of fiction currently pondering making fictional brands real, using reverse product placement. The image of the master brand should thus not be affected in a negative way by any production of tangible goods or services of related fictional brands.

Social media plays an integral part in the life of many in the modern world (Lister, 2017) and e.g. three-quarters of Facebook users use the site daily. 64.2% of the participants agreed that they would share the news of purchasing the Überweiss detergent and 60.7% for BKB. Although this was not limited to social media, the fact that they provide excellent platforms for social activity and sharing information suggests that social media marketing could be a suitable way to raise awareness about newly realized fictional brands. This can be interpreted as an angle of the “connection to others” that Reading and Jenkins (2015) found, and also relates to the difference between the social self and the ideal social self (Jamal & Goode, 2001). In a way, the eagerness to share the news of this kind of purchase implies that some people see it as raising others people opinion of them.

In Hosea’s article (2007) it was suggested that RPP worked best if brands were defictionalized shortly after the release of their respective fiction/master brand. This study used two titles dating back to 1994, although Friends of course ran for a decade
after the appearance of Überweiss. Despite the age of these titles, the awareness of the brands used was respectable, although it certainly could have been more.

Even though attitude towards the fictional brands wasn’t tested in this study, attitude towards the origin does seem to dictate the familiarity of fictional brands, that resonates well with the work of Russell & Stern (2006) and Muzellec et al. (2013).

The fact that around 150 people answered questions about Überweiss and around 200 about BKB implies that the additive interpretation of brands used by Abela (2003) is correct and that the concept of protobrands put forward by Muzellec et al. (2012) more than holds. Participants had no experience or physical evidence to base their answers on, and yet they were able to disagree or agree to the statements made about the brands. This very much confirms the idea that brands are created in the minds of consumers and that they are more than anything just a set of associations that people link to them (Keller, 1993).

5.1 Limitations
Due to a lack of research in the particular field of fictional branding and reverse product placement, the measurement was mostly designed by the author. This may have caused it to be not quite as accurate as possible, leading to insignificant results. More items regarding emotional connections would have been ideal in order to create a concrete dimension for the concept.

The study’s sample was relatively young, as only 17.7% were over the age of forty. This makes it difficult to generalize the conclusions about a larger audience, especially in terms of age. Lastly, as a lot of responses came through sites that suggest interest in films or TV shows, it could skew numbers about enthusiasm and familiarity regarding this type of entertainment.

5.2 Future research
As said earlier, defining a clear segment for RPP based on values and lifestyles is maybe the first step to help future marketers in this niche business. It seems pretty clear that the best genre for introducing fictional brands is comedy, or at the very least entertainment that inspires happy feelings. Studies on the qualities of the media vehicles could provide evidence to the contrary, but they are maybe not of high priority.
As listed by Muzellec et al. (2012), finding out how to measure customer-based brand equity (Keller, 1993) for fictional brands and determining their financial value would be a significant step in providing information, whether productization of protobrands would be profitable or not. In any case, more qualitative research on the subject of fictional branding might be needed, to get a better understanding of how people feel in regards to this matter, and to provide a platform for other future research in this field.
References


Appendix 1 – Questionnaire

1. Introduction

2. Are you familiar with the TV show Friends?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3. All in all there were 236 episodes of Friends made. How many would you say you have seen?
   a. I have not seen any episodes of Friends
   b. 1-20%
   c. 21-40%
   d. 41-60%
   e. 61-80%
   f. 81-100%
   g. I have seen all the episodes more than once

4. How unlikable/likable do you find the TV show Friends?
   a. Very unlikable
   b. Rather unlikable
   c. Neither unlikable nor likable
   d. Rather likable
   e. Very likable

5. Are you familiar with the brand Überweiss?
   a. Yes
   b. No

6. How much would you say that you disagree or agree to the following statements about the brand Überweiss?
   a. I have at some point believed that this brand existed in reality
   b. I have thought about how fun it would be if this particular product existed in reality
   c. I think that this product could be created in reality exactly as it appears in the TV show
   d. I would like to try this product
e. I would actively seek out this product in a store
f. I often think about this brand when I buy comparable products from other brands
g. Buying a product from this brand would allow me to be part of a society of people that think like me
h. Buying this product would make me feel as if I was part of a special set of fans
i. I would tell others if I purchased a product from this brand
j. I believe that this brand would have more sentimental value for me than practical
k. Buying a product from this brand would connect me better to the world of Friends
l. Acquiring a product from this brand would liven up my daily life
m. My opinion of Friends would weaken if Überweiss became real

7. Are you familiar with the film Pulp Fiction?
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. Have you seen the film Pulp Fiction?
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. How unlikable/likable do you find the film Pulp Fiction?
   a. Very unlikable
   b. Rather unlikable
   c. Neither unlikable nor likable
   d. Rather likable
   e. Very likable

10. Are you familiar with the brand Big Kahuna Burger?
    a. Yes
    b. No

11. How much would you say that you disagree or agree to the following statements about the brand Big Kahuna Burger?
    a. I have at some point believed that this brand existed in reality
    b. I have thought about how fun it would be if this particular product/service existed in reality
c. I think that this product could be created in reality exactly as it appears in the film
d. I would like to try this product
e. I would actively seek out this chain of restaurants if it existed
f. I often think about this brand when I buy comparable products from other brands
g. Buying a product from this brand would allow me to be part of a society of people that think like me
h. Buying this product would make me feel as if I was part of a special set of fans
i. I would tell others if I purchased a product from this brand
j. I believe that this brand would have more sentimental value for me than practical
k. Buying a product from this brand would connect me better to the world of Pulp Fiction
l. Acquiring a product from this brand would liven up my daily life
m. My opinion of Pulp Fiction would weaken if the Big Kahuna Burger chain became real

12. What is your gender?
   a. Man
   b. Woman

13. What is your age?
   a. 20 or under
   b. 21-30
   c. 31-40
   d. 41-50
   e. 51-60
   f. 61 or over

14. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
   a. Primary education
   b. High school education
   c. Vocational education
   d. Undergraduate university education
   e. Graduate university education
15. What is your monthly income before tax?
   a. 200.000 ISK or lower
   b. 200.001-400.000 ISK
   c. 400.001-600.000 ISK
   d. 600.001-800.000 ISK
   e. 800.000 ISK or over
Appendix 2 – Dendrogram of cluster analysis