



The brand that wasn't there: The impact of brand displacement on viewer engagement and brand attitude

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Abstract

Brand placement is a well-established marketing tactic that benefits both brands and media. However, due to financial, legal, or image reasons, brands may choose not to be associated with certain content. In such cases, the brand logo is removed, or “displaced” from the production either digitally or physically to adhere to copyright law, a practice we define as *brand displacement*. This research explores the psychological and brand consequences of brand displacement. Using multiple brands and content, we find brand displacement can positively or negatively impact the displaced brand, depending on consumers’ need for cognition. We show these divergent consequences are driven by displacement’s effects on consumer engagement in the viewing experience and follow an affect-transfer process. We find these consequences are moderated by brand familiarity and offer interventions for marketers to use displacement strategically. A preliminary EEG study, pilot with marketing managers, four primary, and multiple supplemental support our theorizing.

Keywords Brand displacement · Brand placement · Need for cognition · Persuasion · Consumer behavior

Brand placement, defined as a paid or unpaid message aimed at influencing movie, television, or video game audiences via the planned and unobtrusive entry of a branded product into the entertainment medium (Balasubramanian, 1994; Russell, 1998), is a prevalent marketing tactic intimately woven into today’s consumption environment. In 2019, brands paid US\$20.57B in placement licensing fees (PQMedia, 2020). Research generally suggests that placement yields positive outcomes for brands via increased brand attitudes, recall, and choice (Babin & Carder, 1996; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Law & Braun, 2000; Russell, 2002; see Table 1 for a summary of the brand placement literature). Brand placement also benefits

the media content (e.g., movie, television), as the inclusion of real brands enhances perceived realism (Brennan et al., 1999).

However, there are circumstances in which managers decline the opportunity to place their brands in entertainment content, such as fees and contractual issues (Fournier & Dolan, 1997; Hughs, 2016; PopSugar Tech, 2009; Steinberg, 2007), or perceived brand-image concerns (e.g., association with negative or unsavory content; La Monica, 2006). For example, Mercedes-Benz and Coca-Cola refused to allow Academy Award-winning *Slumdog Millionaire* use of their logos because they believed association with the slums of Mumbai would harm their brand image (Brodesser-akner, 2009). Singapore Airlines declined to be included in *Crazy Rich Asians* for fear of a negative reaction from their target market (Verhoeven & Donnelly, 2018). Regardless of the reason, the managerial decision to decline placement results in the digital removal or physical alteration of only the brand logo to adhere with copyright law.

We define this removal of the copyrighted brand logo as *brand displacement*. Importantly, while the removal or alteration of a brand’s logo meets the minimum legal requirement, other visible cues remain that facilitate brand identification, such as packaging, product design or shape, and aesthetics. Thus, exposure to a displaced brand may still have consequences for the actual brand. Despite the

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Table 1 Sample brand placement literature review

Topic/Subtopics	Concept Area	Key Finding	Outcomes	Exemplar Papers
Outcomes/Cognitive	Brand Placement Memory	Brand placement increases memory for the brand	Cognitive	Andriasoava, 2006; Balasubramanian et al., 2006; Babin et al., 2021; d'Astous and Chartier 2000; Karth, 1994; Sawyer, 2006; van Reijmersdal et al., 2009
	Brand Salience (Recall and Recognition)	Brand placement increases brand recognition	Cognitive	Babin & Carder, 1996; Brennan et al., 1999; Brennan & Babin, 2004; Chan, 2022; Matthes et al., 2011; Tsai et al., 2007
		Brand placement increases brand recall		Baker & Crawford, 1995; Bennett et al., 1999; Chan, 2022; d'Astous & Chartier, 2000; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Lehu & Bressoud, 2009; Matthes et al., 2011; Nelson, 2002; Ong & Meri, 1995; Sabherwal et al., 1994; Steortz, 1987
Outcomes/Affective	Attitude	No changes in attitude for placed brands (i.e., no effect)	Affective	Karth, 1994; Ong & Meri, 1995; Vollmers & Mizerski, 1994
		Increase in attitude for placed brands (i.e., positive effect)		Homer, 2009; Matthes et al., 2007; Russell, 2002; Russell & Stern, 2006;
		Decrease in attitude for placed brands (i.e., negative effect)		If implicitly processed, Tsai et al., 2007; van Reijmersdal et al., 2010; van Reijmersdal et al., 2009; Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007
Outcomes/Affective	Attitude	No changes in attitude for placed brands (i.e., no effect)	Affective	Bhatnagar et al., 2004; Cowley & Barron, 2008; Sawyer, 2006; van Reijmersdal et al., 2009
		Increase in attitude for placed brands (i.e., positive effect)		With greater repetition, Homer, 2009; Matthes et al., 2007; Matthes et al., 2011
		Decrease in attitude for placed brands (i.e., negative effect)		Karth, 1994; Ong & Meri, 1995; Vollmers & Mizerski, 1994
Outcomes/Conative	Purchase Intention	Brand placement increases self-reported purchase intentions	Conative	Homer, 2009; Matthes et al., 2007; Russell, 2002; Russell & Stern, 2006;
	Brand Choice	Increase brand choice/usage intentions		If implicitly processed, Tsai et al., 2007; van Reijmersdal et al., 2010; van Reijmersdal et al., 2009; Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007
	WOM	Prominent placements increase eWOM		Bhatnagar et al., 2004; Cowley & Barron, 2008; Sawyer, 2006; van Reijmersdal et al., 2009
Processes/Implicit Processes	Non-Conscious	Mere Exposure Effect: Due to connection to editorial content of movie, higher-order effects may occur without brand placement memory	N/A	With greater repetition, Homer, 2009; Matthes et al., 2007; Matthes et al., 2011
	Attention-Paid	Affect Transfer: Placement in highly appreciated/evaluated programs or well-liked actors → positive brand attitudes toward placed brands	N/A	Baker & Crawford, 1995; Tsai et al., 2007
Processes/Explicit Processes	Attention-Paid	Greater Attention → higher order persuasion effects for the placed brand (i.e., positive outcomes due to increased attention to the placed brand)	N/A	Auty & Lewis, 2004a, b; Law & Braun, 2000; Morton & Friedman, 2002; Redondo et al., 2018; Storm & Stoller, 2015; Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007
				Fossen & Schweidel, 2019
				Auty & Lewis, 2004a, b; Balasubramanian et al., 2006; Cowley & Barron, 2008; Gibson et al., 2014; Law & Braun, 2000; Law & Braun-LaTour, 2004; Matthes et al., 2007; Russell, 2002; Sawyer, 2006
				Well-Liked Actor: d'Astous & Chartier, 2000;
				Well-Liked Program: Russell, 1998; Weaver & Oliver, 2000; van Reijmersdal et al., 2010
				deLorme & Reid, 1999; Gibson et al., 2014; Russell, 2002; van Reijmersdal et al., 2007

Table 1 (continued)

Topic/Subtopics	Concept Area	Key Finding	Outcomes	Exemplar Papers
Moderators/Content Level	Placement Prominence	Prominent placements (v. background placements) are better remembered	Cognitive: Brand Salience (Recall/Recognition)	Brennan & Babin, 2004; Brennan et al., 1999; Bressoud et al., 2010; Cowley & Barron, 2008; d'Astous and Chartier 2000; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Hong et al., 2008; Lehu & Bressoud, 2009; Russell, 2002
		Prominent placements (in terms of length of exposure and size of logo) are better remembered	Cognitive: Brand Salience (Recall/Recognition)	Auty & Lewis, 2004b; Babin & Carder, 1996; Gupta & Lord, 1998
		Prominent placements lower attitudes	Affective: Attitudes	For people who like the program: Cowley & Barron, 2008; Repeated Exposures: Homer, 2009; Matthes et al., 2007; van Reijmersdal et al., 2009
		Less prominent placement + moderate placement repetition positively affects attitudes	Affective: Attitudes	Homer, 2009
		Use of brand by main character increases attitudes	Affective: Attitudes	Gibson et al., 2014; Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007
	Placement Modality	Placements using multiple modalities (visual + verbal, etc.) are better remembered than solo modalities	Cognitive: Brand Salience (Recall/Recognition)	Brennan & Babin, 2004; Bressoud et al., 2010; Law & Braun, 2000; Sabherwal et al., 1994
		Integration into the storyline is better remembered	Cognitive: Brand Salience (Recall/Recognition)	Bressoud et al., 2010; d'Astous and Chartier 2000; d'Astous and Seguin 1999; Dens et al., 2012; Lehu & Bressoud, 2009; Russell, 2002; Sawyer, 2006
		Congruent placements in terms of modality and plot connection lead to greater attitude change (i.e., visual placement and higher plot connection OR auditory placement and lower plot connection seem more natural)	Affective: Attitudes	Russell, 2002
	Brand/Product Category/Movie Familiarity	Well-known brands lead to greater recognition when prominently placed	Cognitive: Brand Salience (Recall/Recognition)	Brennan & Babin, 2004
		Well-known brands less affected by persuasion knowledge (i.e., attitudes remain favorable for placements)	Affective: Attitudes	Wei et al., 2008
		Placement of a brand from unfamiliar product categories increases memorability for a placed brand compared to others within a product category	Cognitive: Brand Salience (Recall/Recognition)	Karrh 1994
		Unknown brands may garner increased brand recall and recognition because brand not previously established	Cognitive: Brand Salience (Recall/Recognition)	Balasubramanian et al., 2006; Nelson, 2002
		Positive purchase intentions are greater for unknown (v. known brands)	Conative: Purchase Intentions	Storm & Stoller, 2015
		Prior exposure to a movie increases brand recall and recognition	Cognitive: Brand Salience (Recall/Recognition)	Bressoud et al., 2010
		Prior exposure to a movie increases brand choice	Conative: Brand Choice	Auty & Lewis, 2004a
Moderators/Individual Level	Judgment of Placement as a Strategy	If brand placement as a strategy is seen as unacceptable, brand recognition decreases	Cognitive: Brand Salience (Recall/Recognition)	d'Astous and Chartier 2000

Table 1 (continued)

Topic/Subtopics	Concept Area	Key Finding	Outcomes	Exemplar Papers
Moderators/Disclosures	Notification of Placement	Placement leads to positive attitudes even if persuasion knowledge is activated when product placement as a strategy is seen as acceptable Disclosures increase memory for placement Disclosures decrease brand recall Disclosures decrease brand preference and attitude Persuasion knowledge activation lowers brand attitudes Persuasion knowledge does not lower brand attitudes	Affective: Attitude Cognitive: Brand Salience (Recall/Recognition) Cognitive: Brand Salience (Recall/Recognition) Affective: Attitude Conative: Brand Choice Affective: Attitude Affective: Attitude	Wei et al., 2008 Bennett et al., 1999; Boerman et al., 2012; Boerman et al., 2015; Boerman et al., 2021; Janssen et al., 2016; Matthes & Naderer, 2016; van Reijmersdal et al., 2013; for adolescents: van Reijmersdal et al., 2017 Campbell et al., 2013 In the absence of self-control depletion: Janssen et al., 2016 When disclosure noticed: Tessitore and Geuens 2013 Boerman et al., 2012; Boerman et al., 2015; Campbell et al., 2013; Cowley & Barron, 2008; Gibson et al., 2014; Janssen et al., 2016; Matthes et al., 2007; Russell et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2008 No effect: Matthes & Naderer, 2016 Under self-control depletion: Janssen et al., 2016 Creates ambivalence: Lorenzon & Russell, 2012

considerable prevalence of this marketing phenomenon (see Appendix A for multiple real-world examples), there is little research that examines how consumers might respond psychologically to the altered brand, or how displacement might affect attitudes toward the actual brand. Could exposure to a displaced brand increase brand attitude as observed in brand placement research, or might it elicit negative reactions that could adversely affect the brand or enjoyment of the content?

This research examines the psychological and downstream marketing consequences of brand displacement and proposes that a critical factor that determines consumer reactions to a displaced brand is need for cognition (NFC, Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). For consumers who enjoy cognitive challenges, or those high in NFC (HNFC), displacement positively increases engagement with the media content (e.g., movie). We define engagement as the degree to which a person attends to the entertainment viewing experience. In our context, the attention-focus on the media is coupled with positive increase in cognitive effort such that higher engagement is a pleasant experience for viewing consumers. Thus, we propose that engagement is a positive affective experience which could influence how consumers respond to the media and brand placements. Following an affect-transfer account (Russell, 1998), we propose that this increased engagement leads to positive attitudes toward the media content, which are misattributed to the displaced brand. For consumers who do not enjoy cognitive challenges (low NFC, LNFC), we find that displacement is detrimental. Exposure to a displaced brand decreases engagement, which reduces attitudes toward the media and, subsequently, the brand.

This research makes several contributions to theory and practice. First, we provide the first empirical investigation of brand displacement, a common marketing phenomenon relevant to both marketing researchers and brand managers. We explore both a psychological process and downstream marketing consequences of displaced brand exposure and propose a conceptual framework to understand how and why consumers respond.

Second, we contribute to the NFC literature by documenting a novel phenomenon (brand displacement) and psychological process (engagement) specific to marketing and consumer behavior that are directly impacted by this individual difference. Past work has examined how NFC can influence attitude change through a central cue—persuasive argumentation (ELM, Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; e.g., strong arguments lead to greater attitude change for HNFC, Batra & Stayman, 1990; Haugtvedt et al., 1992). We show, however, that brand attitude among HNFC is influenced *not* by a persuasive argument, but through an engagement and enjoyment process—a peripheral cue. Specifically, displacement is *more (less)* engaging for HNFC (LNFC). By showing that attitudes among HNFC can be influenced through processes other than argumentation, we both extend prior theory and open potential research avenues exploring the role of NFC in a consumer domain outside central message processing.

Third, we expand the marketing-specific exploration of uncertainty and ambiguity resolution (Hsee & Ruan, 2016, 2020; Jepma et al., 2012; Ruan et al., 2018) in the realm of entertainment. We find that displacement, in removing partial information about a brand while leaving other recognizable elements, can positively draw attention for those consumers with HNFC. This contributes to the literature on visual concealment and curiosity in marketing communications to suggest that displacement, if able to be resolved, can positively influence brand attitudes through an engagement process.

Finally, we offer practical insight to brand managers into the consequences of displacement. Indeed, by declining a placement opportunity, managers may perceive that the absence of their brand's logo maintains a "status quo" perception among consumers. However, we show that displacement affects brand attitude in both beneficial and deleterious ways, depending on the consumer. While displacement decisions are typically driven by trademark law (MacLochlainn, 2019), our work suggests that a displacement decision need not be about brand protection only—it could also provide a strategic opportunity to increase brand equity. We provide insight into a unique individual difference and suggest actionable tactics through which this can be utilized to benefit the brand. This insight informs and helps brand managers more clearly differentiate between placement and displacement effects to best utilize their brands in today's rapidly changing media environment. In addition, by demonstrating that displacement does not bring persuasion knowledge to the forefront of consumer's minds, we provide insight into how brand displacement can potentially be an effective persuasive communication technique.

Conceptual framework

Brand placement

To understand brand displacement, it is important to first understand how and why traditional brand placement benefits brands. The literature on placement is vast. Because we focus on displacement, we do not provide an exhaustive review of the past placement literature, and instead present pertinent work that motivates our predictions. However, to acknowledge the insightful work of past scholars, we provide a summary table that outlines the key constructs, effects, and moderators that have been examined previously (see Table 1).

Brand placement has been shown to be a useful marketing tactic through increased reach (Balasubramanian, 1994), greater lifetime brand impressions, and cost-effectiveness compared to television commercials (Karrh et al., 2003; Magiera, 1990; Russell & Stern, 2006). A large body of research demonstrates that placement increases memory and awareness for the placed brand (Brennan & Babin, 2004; Bressoud et al., 2010), while a smaller, yet important, set of studies shows actionable benefits to brand attitude and behavioral outcomes (Davtyan

& Cunningham, 2017; De Gregorio & Sung, 2010; Yang & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007; for reviews see Babin et al., 2021; Balasubramanian et al., 2006; van Reijmersdal et al. 2009). These benefits emerge because placement circumvents consumers' persuasion knowledge under certain conditions, an element shown to reduce effectiveness of persuasion attempts when activated (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

When a brand appears within a media vehicle, people may not perceive this placement as an explicit attempt at persuasion (Wright, 2002). Researchers suggest that brand placements improve persuasion because they are unobtrusive (Cowley & Barron, 2008), which can make them more of a "soft-sell" technique (Chan et al., 2016). With persuasion knowledge not activated, positive feelings toward placed brands can result from affect transfer (Russell, 1998) or repeat exposure (Baker, 1999; Janiszewski, 1993). For example, Russell (1998) suggests that if the placement is processed nonconsciously (e.g., in the background of a scene), then the positive experience with the movie is transferred to the brand, leading to positive brand outcomes. When persuasion knowledge is explicitly activated, however, these positive effects are diminished among some consumers (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Gibson et al., 2014; Lorenzon & Russell, 2012; Russell et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2008). Much of this past work suggests placements are most effective when they do not activate persuasion knowledge or for consumers who deem placement to be an acceptable practice. The suggestion is that when the placement activates persuasion knowledge, this can take the consumer out of the experience (i.e., lowers engagement), which decreases enjoyment, and thus lowers attitudes (Russell et al., 2017). Given these established findings for brand placement, how might the displacement of a brand's logo influence consumer reactions and downstream brand consequences?

On the one hand, previous brand placement research generally suggests that brand displacement would have no consequences for the actual brand, given that prominence is linked to effectiveness. Thus, if the brand logo is not present, the documented positive brand effects may not occur. It is also possible that given the absence of the brand logo, consumers may simply not pay attention to the displaced brand. On the other hand, given the ubiquity of brand placement, exposure to a displaced brand may break through the clutter and have both psychological and brand consequences. Specifically, consumers may attend to the altered product (e.g., Brasel & Gips, 2008; Kivetz & Simonson, 2000) and connect the displaced brand to the genuine brand through other visually present characteristics (e.g., packaging, shape, color).

Anecdotal sales data suggest that this proposition may have merit. Returning to the *Slumdog Millionaire* example, following release of the film, sales of Coca-Cola India and Mercedes-Benz India increased 18% and 47%, respectively, even though the logos were digitally removed prior to theatrical release (Brodesser-akner, 2009). Although anecdotal, this suggests that exposure to a displaced brand may yield

measurable benefits for the actual brand. These observed financial responses to displacement beg the question: Could exposure to a displaced brand—a brand that is not technically there—yield positive brand outcomes? If exposure to a displaced brand can potentially be positive (or negative), how and among which consumers might displacement impact brand attitudes?

Preliminary investigation

To inform our investigation, we conducted a preliminary experiment using novel technologies to understand if and how consumers respond to brand displacement. We partnered with a computer-engineering firm that specialized in eye-tracking and electroencephalogram (EEG) technologies to examine reactions to both brand displacement and placement in real-time. The eye-tracking technology allowed us to examine whether consumers visually attend to a (dis)placed brand (as opposed to not noticing it, a potential alternative explanation). The Emotiv EEG headset captured consumer brain activity and quantified emotional reactions to the video stimuli. This preliminary study was conducted by trained personnel from the engineering firm.

Undergraduates ($n = 138$) were presented with one of two 2:30-min clips from the movie *Elf*, a holiday comedy starring Will Ferrell in which Coca-Cola is strategically placed.¹ The original clip served as the placement clip. To examine displacement, we hired a media professional to digitally alter the clip such that any time Coca-Cola was on screen, the brand logo was edited to be illegible (see Appendix B for stimuli used in this and all studies). Importantly, consistent with our definition and real-world application, the bottle shape and label color (red) were left intact. In the scene, the Elf character is having dinner with his family. The clip begins with a conversation between the parents,² then shifts to the focal placement scene where a Coca-Cola bottle is placed on the table (~1:10 min). The placement appears on screen for approximately 20 s, and then the scene continues for another minute after the brand is off camera. We chose this brand placement clip in line with past literature on tactic effectiveness (prominent visual placement and integration into the scene with a main character, e.g., Balasubramanian et al., 2006; d'Astous & Chartier, 2000; Davtyan & Cunningham, 2017; Lehu, 2007).

Participants completed the study individually. They were seated in front of a large monitor that housed the eye-tracking technology and were fitted with the EEG headset. This EEG technology enables the monitoring and quantification

levels of the following emotions: engagement, frustration, disgust, long-term excitement, drowsiness, and joy.³ Participants were randomly assigned to watch one of the two *Elf* clips (Displacement vs. Placement).

Trained personnel from the computer-engineering firm, blind to the hypotheses, compiled and analyzed the eye-tracking and EEG data and provided us with the results. The eye-tracking technology recorded two pieces of data when the Coca-Cola bottle was on screen: whether the brand logo was attended to (yes/no) and the unique number of brand fixations (unique number of times participants looked at the brand logo). Results revealed that participants in both conditions noticed and attended to the logo equally. Specifically, the proportion of participants who viewed a displaced brand attended to it at least once (98.5%) and fixated on it as many times (8.81) as participants who viewed the actual placed brand (noticed: 97.1%; unique fixations: 8.28; both $ps > 0.50$). Thus, consumers do in fact notice and attend to displaced brands just as they would a traditional brand placement. This suggests that observed effects are likely not due to participants simply not noticing the displaced brand. We next examined potential displacement consequences via EEG responses.

Individual EEG data was recorded at 0.1 s intervals, and participant scores were averaged within condition to generate overall scores for each emotion. The EEG results revealed some intriguing reactions to displacement. Engagement, which is defined by Emotiv as the level of attention to and concentration on the entertainment experience (Emotiv, 2020), was significantly affected by displacement. When the brand was present on screen, participants became significantly more engaged in the experience when the brand logo was displaced than when it was placed (the actual clip). Interestingly, engagement in the displacement condition remained significantly higher over the remainder of the clip, even after the brand was off screen. This suggests that displacement may have consequences not only for the brand but also for the media in which it is placed, consistent with an affect-transfer account (see Web Appendix A for moment-to-moment scores and significance regions between conditions). We also observed a second emotional reaction difference, although it only emerged at the end of the clip. Participants who viewed the displacement (vs. placement) clip experienced more frustration. Although only observed at the very end, it hints at the possibility that displacement may have affective consequences. No other EEG results were significant. Taken together, EEG results suggest that exposure to a displaced brand may have both psychological and affective consequences to viewing consumers.⁴

¹ We selected Coca-Cola as the brand because it (a) is positively viewed, (b) incorporates placement in its strategy, and (c) is positioned to benefit from this tactic (market leader in its respective industry, Russell & Belch, 2005).

² We included the introduction to provide context and to disguise the brand (dis)placement interest of this study.

³ The measurement of emotional reactions using the Emotiv EEG headset has been validated by multiple independent research studies (e.g., Inventado et al., 2011; Khushaba et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2020).

⁴ We note that we also asked an exploratory brand recall measure as part of a separate study; however, recall is not the focus of our investigation and as such is not discussed in the main discussion.

The preliminary study suggests that displacement impacts consumers. Results show that consumers do notice the displaced brand and respond both psychologically and emotionally. We acknowledge that the elaborate nature of the experimental set-up we employed (e.g., wearing EEG headset, full disclosure of brain activity measurement to participants) is quite different than a normal movie-viewing environment, and may have situationally heightened involvement and curiosity in the stimuli participants viewed. Thus, the natural consequences of displacement are likely more complex than observed in this study. It is also important to note that this preliminary investigation demonstrated that both displacement and placement equally drew attention from participants. This could suggest that displacement may cause greater engagement due to more than just the attention fixation rates—that the experience of engagement may be encompassing both attention and cognitive effort or intentional focus on the material. However, given the nature of the clip with its lengthy and prominent brand placement and displacement, these gaze fixation results may be partially affected by the nature of the stimuli. These limitations notwithstanding, we perceived the benefits of utilizing the EEG paradigm, both in terms of the insightful data we were able to generate and the unique methodological advancement to studying media content, outweighed the potential conceptual drawback. Thus, what is unclear is when, why, and among who will the observed psychological and affective consequences of brand displacement emerge? Moreover, how do these reactions affect attitude toward the brand?

We propose that displacement can positively or negatively affect brands, depending on the consumer, and contend that these downstream consequences occur because displacement differentially impacts consumer engagement with the media content (e.g., movie, television).

What is engagement? In this work, we define engagement as the deliberate attentional focus on the media experience. This definition aligns with Higgins' (2006) concept of engagement: a greater degree of concentration on or attention to a focal experience (see also Diehl et al., 2016; Scott & Craig-Lees, 2010). However, research in media studies tends to define engagement similarly to “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997), immersion (Witmer & Singer, 1998), or transportation (Green & Brock, 2000; Green, et al., 2004). While each of these conceptual definitions includes a discussion of attentional focus, the outcome of feelings of immersive engagement is a sense of getting lost in or being fully absorbed in the experience. Past work in brand placement suggests that greater immersion into the media may lead to more positive consequences for the brand (Ansons et al., 2011), and narrative transportation should lead to more resources being focused on the narrative which consequently allows for persuasion to be more effective (Avramova et al.,

2017; Green & Brock, 2000). Thus, definitions focusing on absorption into the story would suggest that anything that might divert focus from the story (i.e., displacement) would decrease engagement. We acknowledge that our definition of engagement varies from this stream of media research and return to this difference in the general discussion.

We suggest reactions to displacement, however, will not be uniformly negative, and are best understood using Higgins' (2006) view of engagement. As such, we focus primarily on the attention-related elements when developing our theory. This is because we explore how displacement, in drawing consumer attention, may be differentially impacted by whether consumers experience higher utility in resolving uncertainty. The greater utility in resolving the displacement uncertainty, or “solving the puzzle,” the greater the engagement with media content. Thus, experienced this way, engagement is a positive emotional experience which can then transfer from the media to the brand. We propose that a critical factor that determines how exposure to a displaced brand will affect engagement with the media, and subsequently the reaction toward the brand, is consumer need for cognition.

The critical moderating role of need for cognition on engagement

We hypothesize that displacement will increase engagement for consumers who like and naturally seek out mental challenges, or those high in NFC (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). Since engagement positively affects enjoyment (Diehl et al., 2016), any increased engagement will result in increased positive attitudes to the media content, and these positive attitudes may subsequently be misattributed (transferred) to the brand (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Gresham & Shimp, 1985; Kim et al., 1998). Prior work on emotional conditioning (Kroeber-Riel, 1984) suggests that the effects of entertaining content can spill over onto embedded persuasive messages (Balachander & Ghose, 2003). This presumes that the enjoyment of the media content can positively affect the evaluation of the placed brand. Thus, if engagement is a positive emotional experience, increased engagement can lead to greater downstream consequences. Conversely, for LNFC consumers, we propose that the additional forced processing of the displaced brand will decrease engagement in the viewing experience, reduce content enjoyment (Heppner et al., 1983; Petty & Jarvis, 1996), and subsequently spill over to brand attitude.

Need for cognition is an individual difference defined as the “tendency to engage in and enjoy thinking” (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982, 116). HNFC individuals are motivated to process information to which they are exposed, and they have been shown to naturally organize, elaborate on, and evaluate such information (Cohen, 1957; see Cacioppo et al., 1996 for a review). Conversely, LNFC individuals

have been shown to actively avoid effortful processing and require external prompting to participate in such processing (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000). Therefore, HNFC consumers are more likely to engage with a message, whereas LNFC consumers expend less cognitive effort (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and are thus less likely to naturally engage with a message or experience unless forced to.

We posit that for HNFC, brand displacement will increase engagement with the focal media content. This is because HNFC enjoy effortful thinking and problem-solving, and the increased processing from displacement will be perceived to have positive utility. For these consumers, displacement increases the cognitive challenge, and solving the “puzzle” subsequently increases engagement in the viewing experience (Zillmann, 1991). Indeed, work on curiosity and uncertainty resolution supports this argument.

Curiosity, a motivational state aimed at seeking information (Hsee & Ruan, 2016; Menon & Soman, 2002; Peracchio & Meyers-Levy, 1994; Ruan et al., 2018), typically arises when there is a “closeable” knowledge gap (Loewenstein, 1994). Past work has found that incomplete stimuli or blurred images elicit curiosity (Jepma et al., 2012). In other words, uncertainty about a stimulus can elicit greater curiosity. Importantly, previous research has shown that NFC is strongly positively correlated with curiosity (Olson et al., 1984). Thus, in the case of displacement, a blurred or removed brand logo may elicit curiosity in HNFC consumers and increase engagement in the media content through resolving the curiosity. In fact, Hsee and Ruan (2016, 2020) suggest that the greatest motivation for curiosity or uncertainty resolution is a function of the expected resolution utility (i.e., the pleasure of resolving the uncertainty) and the outcome utility (i.e., the overall experience of the outcome). Thus, exposure to a displaced brand should increase engagement among HNFC consumers, and this experienced positive utility results from resolving the uncertainty through “solving the brand puzzle.” Prior work in fact suggests that HNFC consumers do derive utility from cognitively engaging tasks (Knobloch-Westerwick & Keplinger, 2006; Rosenbaum & Johnson, 2016).

Conversely, LNFC do not enjoy active problem-solving and avoid effortful processing whenever possible (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000). Indeed, LNFC are more likely to enjoy media that is less cognitively complex (e.g., less complex mysteries: Knobloch-Westerwick & Keplinger, 2006; enjoy spoilers: Rosenbaum & Johnson, 2016; prefer explicitly [v. implicitly] drawn conclusions: Martin et al., 2004). Thus, we propose that the forced cognitive processing imposed by exposure to a displaced brand will negatively affect engagement in the viewing experience for low (but not high) NFC consumers. Formally, we propose an interaction effect between need for cognition and displacement on engagement such that:

Need for Cognition will moderate the relationship between brand displacement and engagement in the viewing experience such that:

H1a Exposure to a displaced brand (vs. control) will increase engagement among consumers high in NFC.

H1b Exposure to a displaced brand (vs. control) will decrease engagement among consumers low in NFC.

Affect transfer: Engagement as a positive experience

Given our proposed interaction effect of NFC and brand displacement on engagement, how might this displacement-driven engagement affect brand attitude? We propose a positive relationship between engagement and brand attitude through an affect-transfer process (Batra & Ray, 1986; Russell, 1998). Prior research has found engagement to positively influence persuasion through increased attitude and belief change (Escalas, 2007; Green & Brock, 2000; McFerran et al., 2010) and reduced counter-arguing (Dal Cin et al., 2004; Slater & Rouner, 2002). In addition, engagement in an experience has been shown to increase enjoyment and positive affect (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2006; Diehl et al., 2016; Green et al., 2004), even for experiences that are already enjoyable in nature (Larsson et al., 2001). Thus, the more engaged one is in an experience, the more enjoyable one perceives it to be. In addition, work on uncertainty resolution suggests that the act of seeking information can be rewarding (Litman, 2005) and resolving the uncertainty by “solving” the puzzle, in and of itself, results in a positive affective experience (Berlyne, 1960; Golman & Loewenstein, 2018; Jepma et al., 2012; Loewenstein, 1994; Ruan et al., 2018). Thus, the more engaged consumers are in a media viewing experience, the more they will enjoy the media (especially if they are able to resolve the uncertainty induced by displacement) and, following an affect-transfer process, the higher the likelihood that positive media attitudes will be transferred to brand attitudes.

Affect transfer: Media attitudes affect brand attitudes

Affect transfer is a well-established process by which affective appeals can improve brand attitudes by transferring the positive affect elicited by the ad to the brand (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Walker & Dubilsky, 1994). This process results from the positive affect elicited by the ad increasing attitude toward the advertisement itself, which in turn is attributed to the focal brand (Allen & Madden, 1985; Batra & Ray, 1986; Edell & Burke, 1987; Gardner, 1985; MacKenzie et al., 1986). The brand placement literature provides evidence for affect-transfer process in media, wherein attitudes toward the movie or elements of the movie content positively influence attitudes toward the placement and, subsequently, the brand (Balasubramanian et al., 2014; d’Hooge et al., 2017;

Redker et al., 2013; Russell & Stern, 2006). For example, Jin and Villegas (2007) found that brands placed in humorous scenes experienced higher brand attitude due to greater pleasure and arousal elicited from the scene; Mitchell and Nelson (2018) found support for direct affect transfer such that (unknown brands) that appeared in a positive emotional scene had more positive brand attitudes. Moderators of this process include placement prominence (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Dens et al., 2012; Matthes et al., 2007), repetition of placements (d’Hooge et al., 2017), program liking, persuasion knowledge, etc.

Overall, research supports affect transfer as a viable process through which brand attitude is positively affected by placement. In this research, we suggest that affect transfer can also occur for a displaced brand. However, we focus on the positive experience of engagement and uncertainty resolution as the main source of affect (unrelated to the valence of the media content in which the brand is displaced). As engagement is an enjoyable experience, we expect this positive affect to be transferred to the media (e.g., desire to watch the movie; Russell, 1998), which would then positively impact the brand. Past work has found that liking of the media content can spillover into attitudes toward the placed brands (Gibson et al., 2014; Nelson et al., 2006), and that pleasure and enjoyment of the media can positively increase reactions to a placed brand (Natarajan et al., 2018). Thus, if displacement increases engagement for those with HNFC because they enjoy the increased processing (e.g., solving the puzzle), this heightened engagement will increase attitudes toward the media content, which will then be misattributed to the displaced brand and result in positive brand attitudes (Escalas, 2004; Russell, 1998). In contrast, because forced cognitive effort is unpleasant for LNFC, we propose that displacement will decrease engagement in the viewing experience, thus resulting in lower entertainment content attitudes and, subsequently, lower brand attitudes (see Fig. 1 for conceptual model).

Importantly, while brand placement literature has explored a variety of marketing related outcomes such as brand recall, recognition, and attitudes (e.g., Babin et al., 2021), we focus primarily on attitudes. We do this because past work on affect transfer examines the misattribution of

an emotional experience onto attitudes toward the advertised or placed brand. In addition, we theorize that displacement may garner greater engagement and attention by introducing perceptual uncertainty. Thus, we would expect that recognition (and, potentially, recall) is a necessary component of our process as it represents successful uncertainty resolution (we validate this proposition empirically below). Thus, we will focus our exploration only on brand attitudes and not all potential downstream consequences. Formally,

H2 Engagement and media attitudes will serially mediate the relationship between displacement and brand attitude.

Managerially-relevant moderators

The role of brand familiarity on engagement Our framework proposes that the positive effects of displacement emerge for HNFC because they derive utility from increased cognitive effort (Cacioppo et al., 1996). Past work on mystery media enjoyment speculates that HNFC derive greatest enjoyment when the consumer’s hypothesized solution to the mystery is confirmed (Zillmann, 1991). This is because HNFC obtain utility from successful problem-solving, not simply required cognitive effort. If the utility garnered from solving the displacement puzzle is driving the positive effects among HNFC, then increased engagement should not result under conditions in which HNFC are unable to solve the puzzle. We propose that brand familiarity will moderate the relationship between displacement and engagement for HNFC. If a displaced brand is unfamiliar, the ability to identify it, and the associated utility, will not be realized for HNFC and no increase in engagement will result. Given that LNFC do not receive positive utility from increased cognitive effort, we do not expect brand familiarity to have any effect among these consumers. Formally,

H3a Brand familiarity will moderate the relationship between displacement and engagement among HNFC such that engagement will be higher when the displaced brand is familiar compared to when it is unfamiliar.

H3b Brand familiarity will have no effect on engagement for LNFC.

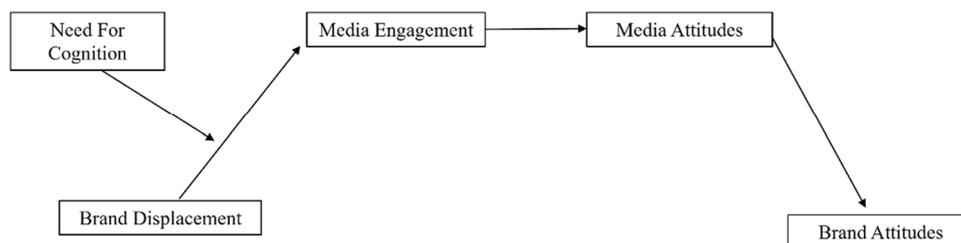


Fig. 1 Conceptual framework for effect of displacement x NFC on brand attitudes*. *Note: This is a conceptual framework pertaining to our predictions on how brand displacement will impact brand attitudes and does not account for the large literature of brand placement

Manipulating NFC-engagement Need for cognition is an individual difference, which is typically difficult for managers to utilize when designing strategy as it is not readily available as a segmentation variable. However, we explore an actionable approach in which NFC can effectively be used by managers. Although NFC has not been previously manipulated directly, we focus on the driving factor of increased engagement to increased brand attitudes through displacement as a potential actionable means to use displacement strategically. We suggest that our insights about various editing strategies and movie subtleties could heighten consumer engagement with a displacement scene and help consumers derive positive utility from the experience. Thus, if we can identify a method to activate HNFC-engagement, regardless of trait NFC-level, this will provide an actionable tool for practitioners, and demonstrate whether displacement's positive brand effect can be achieved across consumers.

Overview of studies

We first motivate our research with a pilot study that examines marketing manager intuition regarding the effect of displacement on the actual brand. We find that, overall, marketing managers believe that displacement will not impact the actual brand. If, as we propose, displacement does have downstream consequences for the actual brand, revealing practitioner intuition to the contrary demonstrates the managerial relevance and value of this research. We then test whether brand displacement activates persuasion knowledge among consumers and what attributions are made about the practice (Study 1). We then test our proposed framework across three additional primary and multiple supplementary studies (see Table 2 for summary of studies). Study 2 demonstrates the interactive effect of displacement and NFC on engagement, and empirically documents our proposed affect-transfer process of displacement on brand attitude. In Study 3, we provide deeper insight into the psychological impact of displacement by examining a managerially-relevant moderator: brand familiarity. Study 4 explores how brand managers might harness the positive potential of displacement. Specifically, we design and employ a HNFC-engagement manipulation to demonstrate a positive direct effect of displacement on brand attitude. Across our empirical package, we rule out potential alternative explanations (e.g., attention) and individual difference factors.

In our studies, participants are presented with a real film clip wherein a real brand is strategically and effectively placed. Using insight from previous placement literature, we selected all clips to facilitate an ideal and effective placement context: a prominent visual placement and association with the main character (Balasubramanian et al., 2006; Davtyan & Cunningham, 2017). In the brand-placement

(e.g., control) conditions, participants view the original clip. In the brand-displacement conditions, participants view the identical clip with the brand logos digitally removed by a media professional (see Appendix B for all study stimuli). Importantly, we deliberately used well-known brands. Consistent with our displacement definition, we suggest that only when there are visual brand cues (i.e., color, shape of product, etc.) that foster increased processing and ability to solve the puzzle will positive displacement outcomes emerge for those with HNFC. Moreover, this focus maximizes external validity by manipulating the brands according to industry standard (i.e., only the logo is removed while other elements such as package shape and color remain).

To validate that our experimental operationalization of displacement aligned with industry practices, we conducted a test utilizing screencaps of three experimental stimuli and three real displacement examples. These were tested on relevant dimensions of ability to notice the displacement, brand recognition, ease of recognition, perceived level of attention-grabbing, and level of digital manipulation. Results revealed that our stimuli align with industry-tactics of displacement (Web Appendix B, preregistration details: https://aspredicted.org/LYX_T52).

Finally, it is important to note that the natural experience of brand displacement exposure is a low-involvement consumer behavior that occurs in a relaxed setting (e.g., at home). As such, consumers are likely to process the content in a low-involved, cursory manner (i.e., similar to advertising; Kassarijan, 1978; Sengupta & Dahl, 2008; Sengupta & Gorn, 2002). Thus, following the lead of past research on low-involvement consumer behaviors (e.g., Dahl et al., 2009), our study designs fostered a low-involvement mindset by situating the study later in experimental sessions. This placement simulates the manner in which consumers would typically view movies with placement or displacement.

Pilot study: Marketing manager intuition

We designed a pilot study to examine managerial insight regarding whether brand displacement has consequences for the actual brands. Specifically, we sought to assess whether marketing managers familiar with brand placement believe displacement impacts the actual brand, and if so, in what direction (i.e., positive, negative, or neutral). If, as we anticipate, manager intuition holds that displacement exposure has little or no impact on the actual brand, our empirical demonstration to the contrary is critical, and illustrates the need to systematically understand displacement's psychological and downstream brand consequences. We sent a short interview to 48 marketing executives about their familiarity with brand placement as a practice and asked whether they believed displacement would have any effect on the brand itself (see Web Appendix C.1 for full study details). Results revealed that while managers were familiar with the practice

Table 2 Overview of performed studies

Study	Study Design (IVs)	Dependent Variables (DVs)	Method	Main Findings
Pilot (N = 48 Marketing Professionals)	Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brand Placement Familiarity - Brand Placement Effectiveness - Use of Brand Placement - Brand Displacement Effect (Y/N) - Type of Effect (Positive, Negative, Neutral) - Open-ended Response 	Online Survey	Marketing Professionals are familiar with brand placement and believe it to be effective. These managers generally believe, however, that brand displacement should either have no effect or a neutral effect on the actual brand
Study 1 (N = 199)	Survey (continuous: Need for Cognition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of Thoughts - Persuasion Knowledge - Attributions: Legal Reasons, Financial Reasons, Image Concerns 	Online Survey	Overall, participants do not see displacement as a persuasion tactic (e.g., does not activate persuasion knowledge). Displacement is seen to occur for financial, legal, and image reasons. NFC does not influence persuasion knowledge activation or other attributions, but does influence number of thoughts (i.e., HNFC à greater thinking)
Study 2 (N = 205)	2 (Movie Condition: Displacement v. Placement) × continuous (Need for Cognition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engagement - Brand Attitude - Media Attitude 	Lab Experiment: Moderated Serial Mediation	HNFC: Displacement (v. Placement) leads to greater engagement with the entertainment content, which increases media attitudes, and brand attitude LNFC: Displacement (v. Placement) leads to lower engagement with entertainment content, which decreases media attitudes, and brand attitude Process: Greater displacement-induced engagement leads to greater media attitudes, which lead to greater brand attitudes
Study 3 (N = 155)	2 (Brand Familiarity: Familiar v. Unfamiliar) × continuous (Need for Cognition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engagement - Brand Attitude - Media Attitude 	Lab Experiment: Linear Regression	HNFC: Familiar brands when displaced lead to greater engagement, which increases media attitudes, and brand attitude. Unfamiliar brands show no benefit from displacement LNFC: No effect of displacement for familiar or unfamiliar brands on engagement
Study 4 Pretest (N = 168)	NFC Engagement Manipulation × continuous (Need for Cognition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engagement 	Online Experiment (Prolific): Linear Regression	HNFC manipulation led to engagement regardless of level of measured NFC
Study 4 (N = 502)	2 (Instruction Manipulation: NFC Engagement v. Control)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brand Attitude 	Lab Experiment: T-Test	NFC engagement manipulation led to higher brand attitudes towards the displaced brand compared to the control instruction

Table 2 (continued)

Study	Study Design (IVs)	Dependent Variables (DVs)	Method	Main Findings
OVERVIEW OF PERFORMED SUPPLEMENTAL EXPERIMENTS: WEB APPENDIX				
Study 2 Follow-Up: Planned Replication (N = 200)	2 (Movie Condition: Displacement v. Placement) × continuous (Need for Cognition)	- Engagement - Media Attitude - Brand Attitude Need for Closure (measured alternative process variable)	Lab Experiment: Moderated Serial Mediation	HNFC: Displacement (v. Placement) leads to greater engagement with the entertainment content, which increases media attitudes, and brand attitude LNFC: Displacement (v. Placement) leads to lower engagement with entertainment content, which decreases media attitudes, and brand attitude Process: Greater displacement-induced engagement leads to greater media attitudes, which lead to greater brand attitudes Alternative Explanation: No main effect or interaction with Need for Closure
Study 2 Follow-Up: Brand Positioning (N = 510)	3 (Movie Condition: Displacement v. Placement – Control v. No Brand – Control) × continuous (Need for Cognition)	- Engagement - Media Attitude - Focal Brand Attitude - Non-Focal Brand Attitudes - Ad Skepticism - Persuasion Knowledge	Online Experiment (MTurk): Linear Regression and Moderated Serial Mediation	Replicated main results when examining Displacement v. Placement – Control. Displacement led to greater engagement, media attitude, and focal brand attitude for HNFC For the Displacement v. Placement – No Brand, observed replication of decreased effects for LNFC, but not HNFC. Likely due to the greater baseline engagement of the no-brand clip due to occurring later in the movie Spillover Effects: In Displacement v. Placement – Control, found positive spillover of displacement for HNFC on competitor brand, which was positioned similarly to Starbucks, but not the brand with dissimilar positioning Alternative Explanations: No main effects or interaction of either Ad Skepticism or Persuasion Knowledge
GD Study 1 (N = 277)	Continuous (Need for Cognition)	- Movie Genre Preference - Movie Choice (High- v. Low- Intellect Movies) - Individual Movie Attitude	Online Survey (MTurk): Linear Regression	HNFC: More likely to prefer war movies, independent movies, foreign movies, and documentaries. More likely to choose “high-intellect” movies. Showed greater attitudes toward individual movies that fell into the “high-intellect” categories HNFC more likely to choose “high intellect” (v. “low intellect”) movie
GD Study 2 (N = 499)	Continuous (Need for Cognition)	- Movie Choice	Online Survey (MTurk): Binary Logistic	

of placement, the majority (70.3%) believed that displacement would have no effect on the brand itself. Thus, there appears to be a stark disconnect between prevailing manager intuition and our proposition, demonstrating the managerial importance of a systematic investigation to better understand brand displacement. If, as we propose, brand displacement can lead to both positive and negative outcomes, understanding when, why, and among which consumers such effects manifest is critical information for marketing managers.

Study 1

We designed Study 1 with two primary goals in mind. The first goal was to explore the attributions that consumers make about displacement as a practice following exposure to a displaced brand. Understanding consumer attributions about the absence of the logo, and whether such attributions vary as a function of NFC, would help provide insight into how and why displacement affects the brand. The second, related goal was to examine whether consumers perceive displacement as a persuasion tactic. Put another way, does exposure to a displaced brand activate persuasion knowledge? Our framework suggests that displacement should not be seen as a deliberate tactic given that it removes branded content. Thus, it should not activate persuasion knowledge. However, it is possible that consumers could perceive displacement as a marketer's attempt to persuade, an outcome that has been shown to reduce brand placement effectiveness (e.g., Russell et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2008).

Past work suggests that the positive effects of placement occur only if persuasion knowledge is not activated. In instances when consumer's attention is drawn to the practice, either through direct activation such as placement disclosures (Gibson et al. 2014, Matthes & Naderer, 2016), experimental reminders of the practice (Cowley & Barron, 2008; Wei et al., 2008), or by advertising directly before a movie with placement (Russell et al., 2017), positive effects are attenuated, and consumers demonstrate lower attitudes toward the brand (Lorenzon & Russell 2012). Russell et al. (2017) found evidence for hedonic contamination such that advertising prior to a movie activated persuasion knowledge, which lowered enjoyment of the movie and subsequent brand attitudes. This raises the question as to whether displacement is seen as a form of persuasive communication. If it is the case that consumers see displacement as a form of persuasion, then we would not expect to observe increased engagement with the movie or downstream brand attitudes. It behooves us to explore whether consumers perceive brand displacement similarly to brand placement. While this does run counter to our predicted effects, exploring how consumers perceive displacement and whether these perceptions differ according to NFC would provide managers with a better understanding of the displacement process. To achieve these goals, we

conducted an exploratory proof of concept study to examine natural responses to displacement (e.g., Schnurr et al., 2022).

Procedure

One hundred ninety-nine participants from Prolific Academic (ages 20–76, $M_{age} = 41.3$, 48.2% female, 2.5% preferred not to indicate gender) completed this study in exchange for financial compensation. Participants were told that they would be watching a short movie clip and would then provide their thoughts on the clip via open-response questions.

Need for cognition We measured NFC to examine whether it impacted attributions of displacement. To minimize any potential order or demand effects, we randomly assigned participants to complete the 18-item NFC scale (1 = Completely false to 5 = Completely true; Cacioppo et al., 1984) either at the beginning or end of the study. To mitigate the potential for order or demand effects, in our subsequent studies we purposely varied measurement timing of NFC (NFC measured before stimuli: Study 2, Supplemental Study 1; NFC measured at study completion: Study 3, Supplemental Study 2; NFC measured one day prior: experimental stimuli test; NFC-engagement manipulated: Study 4). We find no evidence of order or demand effects in this or any of our studies and results are consistent with our theoretical predictions.

Displacement stimuli Next, participants watched a clip from the movie *The Proposal* in which Starbucks was displaced. The clip was approximately seven minutes long, and Starbucks was strategically placed using the brand logo on the main character's (Sandra Bullock) coffee cup. The placement in the original clip occurred intermittently at short intervals throughout the clip. In this study, all participants viewed an edited version of the clip in which the brand logo was digitally removed (see Appendix B). A separate pretest ($n = 45$ undergraduates) showed that while the brand was displaced, it was recognizable as Starbucks. This identification supports our postulation that the additional brand cues that remain following logo removal facilitate brand recognition. It also suggests that any positive attitude differences observed in future studies as a function of NFC are due to the differential engagement experienced by high versus low NFC upon viewing the displaced brand (see Web Appendix D for full pretest details).

Attributions Upon completion of the clip, we asked participants a series of questions about their experience, with our final question specific to displacement attributions. First, we asked participants an open-ended thought listing question about their general experience with the movie clip. Next, we asked them if they noticed the Starbucks logo on the coffee cup was digitally altered (yes/no). Finally, we asked

our focal free response question specific to displacement. We provided participants with the definition of displacement along with a screen cap showing the displaced brand in the clip they watched. Participants then provided their thoughts on the displacement practice. Finally, participants completed demographic items and indicated their previous experience with the movie clip (Have seen: yes/no). Results across this and all studies are not affected by previous experience viewing the movie clip. For completeness, we provide statistical test results for all relevant studies using prior movie experience as a covariate in Web Appendix E.

Results

Consistent with the results of the pretest and our conceptualization of displacement, significantly more participants were able to identify the displaced brand as Starbucks (80.4%, 160/199) than not able to recognize it (19.6%, 39/199, $\chi^2 = 73.6$, $p < 0.001$).

We next report the results of our focal displacement open-response measure. We first read all participant responses and created the following six categories that captured displacement attributions: persuasion knowledge, legal, cost to brand, cost to production, image concern-brand, and image concern-production. Two coders, blind to the hypotheses, coded the total number of thoughts per participant and attributions of displacement (0 = absent, 1 = present). Because participants could provide more than one attribution, the coders coded each individual attribution category (see Web Appendix F for coder instructions and results by attribution category). Coder agreement was 98.5% and disagreements were resolved through discussion. Number of unique thoughts ranged from 1 and 6, with an average of 2.49.

We first examined whether displacement activated persuasion knowledge. Interestingly, results revealed that only 6.5% (13/199) of participants mentioned any possible connection of using the displaced brand as a means of advertising or its potential to be used deliberately as a tactic. This proportion was significantly lower than expected when comparing it to the other attributions participants made ($\chi^2(1) = 150.4$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, in line with our conceptualization, the results suggest that displacement may not be seen as a persuasive communication tactic. As such, persuasion knowledge pertaining to utilizing displacement as a form of persuasive communication does not appear to be top-of-mind for most respondents. We next examined the most frequent attributions of displacement. Results revealed the most common attributions were: (1) legal reasons (44.2%, 88/199); (2) financial reasons (Total: 50.8%, 101/199), either the brand not wanting to pay the production (32.7%, 65/199) or the production not wanting

to pay the brand (20.1%, 40/199); or (3) image reasons (Total: 30.2%, 60/199, either the brand worried the production would tarnish brand image (15.1%, 30/199) or the production worried association with the brand would negatively reflect on the movie (20.6%, 41/199⁵). Thus, it appears that displacement is seen more as a brand protection mechanism than a persuasion tactic.

Finally, we examined whether NFC ($M_{\text{NFC}} = 3.41$, $SD = 0.77$) predicted participant attributions of displacement, and results revealed it did not. It did, however, predict the number of unique thoughts that participants had about displacement ($b = 0.23$, $t = 2.05$, $p = 0.042$). In line with expectation, HNFC provided more thoughts and depth of thinking about displacement.

Discussion

Study 1 provides valuable insight into consumers' natural responses to displacement. Displacement does not appear to be perceived by consumers as a persuasion tactic, nor is persuasion knowledge pertaining to utilizing displacement as a form of persuasive communication top-of-mind for most respondents. This result aligns with our conceptualization of displacement and proposed conceptual framework. Specifically, if displacement activated persuasion knowledge pertaining to the use of this tactic for persuasive purposes, our proposed positive response to displacement among HNFC consumers should not be realized because such activation has been shown to lower the effectiveness of brand placement (e.g., Russell et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2008, see Table 1). Put another way, a persuasion knowledge activation account would predict a negative effect of displacement compared to the interactive effect of displacement and NFC that we propose.

Instead, consumers appear to naturally attribute the displacement practice to legal issues, cost issues (on either brand or production side), or brand image concerns (again on either brand or production side). While these thoughts do suggest that participants acknowledge the practice is done for financial reasons (a component of persuasion knowledge), it is not seen as being done so to persuade the consumer like brand placement does. Additionally, results showed that HNFC participants had more thoughts about displacement. Although this study design limits us from making causal claims, this result aligns with our theorizing that solving the displacement puzzle is an enjoyable experience for HNFC. This could lend support for affect transfer as the process through which displacement ultimately affects the brand. We directly

⁵ If participants listed cost or image on both brand and production sides, this was only recorded once in the total score.

test our full conceptual framework and affect transfer process in a controlled setting in Study 2.

Study 2

The goal of Study 2 was to demonstrate support for our conceptual framework by examining the interactive effect of displacement and NFC on engagement, and downstream brand attitude consequences. Following an affect-transfer account, we propose that changes in engagement will influence attitudes toward the media content (e.g., movie, television show), which will, in turn, be transferred to the brand.

Procedure

Two hundred five undergraduate students from a large North American university (ages 19–52, $M_{age} = 21.6$, 47.8% female) completed a series of studies during a 60-min session for course credit. We positioned the focal study in the middle of the session to foster a mental state that is most similar to watching a movie or television show (this positioning is consistent across the lab studies). Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (Condition: Displacement, Placement [Control]) \times continuous (NFC) between-participants design.

Need for cognition Participants were told that they were going to complete multiple studies within the survey, the first of which was ostensibly a personality assessment. Within this section, we measured NFC. We deliberately measured the moderating variable prior to stimuli and manipulation exposure in this study to minimize potential demand effects. Upon completion, participants were told the personality study was over and were re-directed to the next study.

Displacement manipulation Next, participants completed a media experience study in which they were told that they would be assigned to watch one of several film clips. All participants watched the same clip from the movie *The Proposal* in which Starbucks was placed (placement) or displaced (displacement). Participants in the Placement – Control condition watched the original clip in which the Starbucks brand was visible on the coffee cup. Participants in the Displacement condition viewed the edited clip from Study 1.

Consumption emotions To empirically verify that engagement is a positive affective experience, participants completed the 14-item consumption emotions scale (Richins, 1997).

Engagement To measure engagement in the viewing experience, participants completed three bipolar items about the extent to which they felt engaged in the movie clip, in terms of greater concentration or attention to the focal experience:

1 = not engaged at all/not focused/not at all attentive, to 9 = very engaged/very focused/very attentive ($\alpha = 0.97$). Participants then completed an unrelated filler study for approximately 15 min before completing brand and entertainment content measures. We deliberately placed this gap to separate the manipulation and brand measures to reduce any possible demand effects (Campbell et al., 2013).

Brand attitude To align directly with our displacement definition, we employed two measures to assess brand attitude. Participants indicated their feelings about the brand in the film clip and about Starbucks using the following bipolar items: 1 = negative/dislike/unfavorable, to 7 = positive/like/favorable. As expected, and consistent with the results of the pretest, the two measures operated together and all six items were combined to form our brand attitude index ($\alpha = 0.94$). We note results are consistent if analyzed individually, and this applies across our studies.

Media attitudes We assessed participant experience with the media content via the following two questions that assessed the desire to watch the full movie: “How much do you want to watch the movie *The Proposal*?” and “How likely are you to watch *The Proposal* in the next 30 days?” (1 = not at all/very unlikely, to 7 = very much/very likely, $\alpha = 0.82$). Participants then completed exploratory and demographic measures (we report focal measures in the manuscript for brevity and provide all measures in Web Appendix G).

Results

To test our model, the results are reported in the following order. First, we show the interactive effect of displacement and NFC on engagement. Second, we show how displacement-driven engagement influences entertainment content attitude and brand attitude. Finally, we examine the affect-transfer proposition by showing moderated serial mediation through both engagement and media attitudes.

Engagement We first tested the relationship between NFC and displacement on engagement. NFC was mean-centered ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.54$), and we entered displacement condition (-1 = Displacement, +1 = Placement), NFC, and their interaction into a linear regression to predict engagement. Results revealed only the expected interaction ($b = -0.53$, $t = -2.28$, $p = 0.023$). Supporting our predictions, floodlight analysis showed that brand displacement led to higher engagement than placement among HNFC participants (+1.83 SD, $B_{JN} = -0.51$, $SE = 0.26$, $p = 0.05$; see Fig. 2). Conversely, brand displacement led to lower engagement than placement among LNFC participants (-1.59 SD, $B_{JN} = 0.46$, $SE = 0.23$, $p = 0.05$). Importantly, simple slope analysis revealed that the observed NFC effects are driven by the displacement condition such that as NFC rises,

engagement increases ($b = 0.89$, $t = 2.69$, $p = 0.008$). Taken together, results suggest that reactions to a displaced brand differ depending on NFC level.

Although research has shown engagement is a positive affective experience (e.g., Diehl et al., 2016), for completeness we tested and verified it in a displacement context. For manuscript and model parsimony, we provide the full analysis in Web Appendix H, but note here that engagement positively predicted experienced positive affect ($p < 0.001$) with opposing conditional indirect effects for HNFC and LNFC, respectively.

Affect-transfer process account: Media attitude An affect-transfer account suggests that the differential effects of engagement will spill over to the media content, which will then be misattributed to the displaced brand. As hypothesized, controlling for displacement condition, NFC, and their interaction, engagement significantly predicted media attitude ($b = 0.49$, $SE = 0.06$, $t = 8.75$, $p < 0.001$). Importantly, the conditional indirect effects of displacement on media attitude through engagement were significant and opposite for LNFC and HNFC (10,000 resamples, PROCESS Model 7; Preacher et al., 2007). Among HNFC, displacement led to higher media attitude than placement ($b = -0.17$, $SE = 0.09$, CI_{95} : -0.373 , -0.008). Conversely, among LNFC, displacement led to lower media attitude than placement ($b = 0.16$, $SE = 0.10$, CI_{90} : 0.005 , 0.343). Importantly, engagement significantly mediated each of the opposing effects (index of moderated mediation: $b = -0.26$, $SE = 0.12$, CI_{95} : -0.515 , -0.049). Thus, results suggest that the NFC-based engagement does spill over into attitudes towards the media content.

Brand attitude As predicted, controlling for displacement condition, mean-centered NFC, and their interaction,

engagement significantly predicted brand attitude ($b = 0.14$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 2.99$, $p = 0.003$). The conditional indirect effects displayed the identical pattern observed for media attitudes. Displacement led to higher brand attitudes than placement among HNFC, but lower brand attitudes among LNFC, compared to placement. Importantly, engagement mediated both opposing effects (index of moderated mediation: $b = -0.07$, $SE = 0.05$, CI_{95} : -0.235 , -0.007 ; for manuscript flow and ease of reference, all conditional indirect effect statistics are presented in Table 3, and the results are discussed in the main text).

Moderated serial mediation Finally, we performed a moderated serial mediation analysis to test our full affect-transfer account of the effects of displacement on brand attitude (PROCESS Model 83). Specifically, we predicted that displacement-driven engagement will spill over into media attitudes, which will drive brand outcomes. Controlling for displacement condition, NFC, and engagement, media attitude predicted brand attitude ($b = 0.25$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 4.37$, $p < 0.001$). Supporting our affect-transfer account, the index of moderated serial mediation was significant ($b = -0.06$, $SE = 0.04$, CI_{95} : -0.143 , -0.008).

Discussion

The results of Study 2 provided initial insight into not only the psychological experience of brand displacement, but also downstream brand consequences. First, we demonstrated that engagement responses to displacement depend on NFC level. For HNFC, exposure to a displaced (vs. placed) brand increased engagement in the viewing experience (H1a). However, for LNFC, we observed the opposite such that

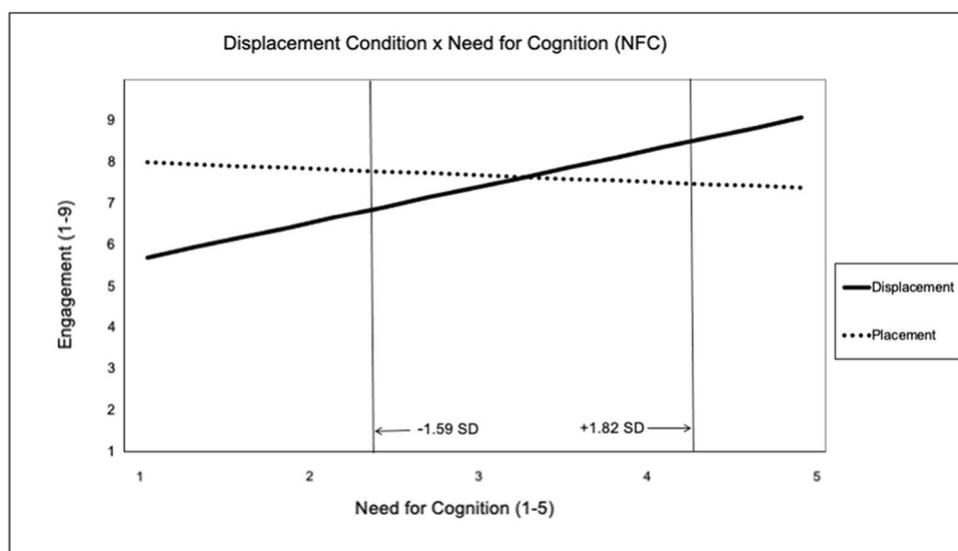


Fig. 2 Engagement as a function of NFC and displacement condition

Table 3 Partial summary of studies and key statistics

Study 2 (n = 205, Undergraduate students)				
Displacement vs. Control Placement	LNFC	HNFC	Index of Moderated Mediation	Index of Moderated Serial Mediation
Measure				
Engagement	-1.59 SD, B = .46, SE = .23, p = .05	+ 1.83 SD, B = -.51, SE = .26, p = .05		
Media Attitude	b = .16, SE = .10, CI ₉₀ : .005, .343	b = -.17, SE = .09, CI ₉₅ : -.373, -.008	b = -.26, SE = .12, CI ₉₅ : -.515, -.049	
Brand Attitude	b = .05, SE = .04, CI ₉₀ : .004, .166	b = -.05, SE = .04, CI ₉₅ : -.193, -.004	b = -.07, SE = .05, CI ₉₅ : -.235, -.007	b = -.06, SE = .04, CI ₉₅ : -.143, -.008
Study 3 (n = 155, Undergraduate students)				
Familiar vs. Unfamiliar Brand	LNFC	HNFC	Index of Moderated Mediation	Index of Moderated Serial Mediation
Measure				
Engagement	NS	+ 1.20 SD, B = -.47, SE = .24, p = .05		
Media Attitude	b = .10, SE = .08, CI ₉₅ : -.043, .288	b = -.15, SE = .09, CI ₉₅ : -.350, -.007	b = -.20, SE = .12, CI ₉₅ : -.482, -.016	
Brand Attitude	b = .04, SE = .03, CI ₉₅ : -.013, .125	b = -.06, SE = .04, CI ₉₅ : -.147, -.005	b = -.08, SE = .05, CI ₉₅ : -.202, -.008	b = -.003, SE = .01, CI ₉₅ : -.028, .015

Indirect effects use 10,000 resamples with replacement; LNFC and HNFC conditional indirect effects are reported at the 10th and 90th percentiles, respectively, with bias-corrected confidence intervals. Coding for each study is described in the main manuscript, as are interpretations of b-path co-efficients

exposure to a displaced brand decreased engagement (H1b). Second, the results provide support for the critical role that engagement plays in driving downstream brand consequences via an affect-transfer account. Engagement serially mediated the interactive effect of displacement and NFC on brand attitudes such that the increased (decreased) engagement led to higher (lower) brand attitudes for HNFC (LNFC) participants. As noted in Study 1, the movie clip used in this and the remaining studies are taken from films which participants may have seen, and our results hold when controlling for movie familiarity (as a reminder, covariate analysis for all studies are provided in Web Appendix E).

Two follow-up studies provided additional support for Study 2 and our overall conceptual framework. The first follow-up study was a successful planned replication of the main study (n = 200 undergraduates, see Web Appendix I for full study details), and ruled out need for closure (Roets & Van Hiel, 2011) as a potential alternative individual difference moderator. The second follow-up study again replicated the focal engagement and brand results from Study 1. Importantly, this study included an additional control condition where no placement or displacement was present (via a different clip; see Web Appendix J.1–J.5). While the actual placement clip is the most appropriate control condition because it (a) situates the investigation in prior placement research, and (b) ensures consistency across conditions, we felt this additional condition was important to empirically explore. In doing so, this study helped us better investigate how displacement influences engagement and attitudes when

considering media without a brand present. This study also ruled out trait persuasion knowledge (Bearden et al., 2001) and ad skepticism (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998) as alternative individual difference moderators, and explored potential spillover effects of displacement into other brands.

In Study 3, we focus on the positive effects of displacement observed among HNFC consumers and introduce brand familiarity as a moderator. This allows us to examine how HNFC consumers respond to displacement when they are unable to “solve the puzzle.” In doing so, Study 3 shows a managerially-relevant boundary condition, while simultaneously ruling out the alternative account that displacement increases engagement simply by drawing attention.

Study 3

The primary goal of Study 3 was to examine a theoretically- and managerially-relevant moderator: brand familiarity. Our framework proposes that the positive effects of displacement emerge for HNFC consumers because they derive utility from the increased processing (“solving the puzzle”), which boosts engagement. This increased engagement is then attributed to the media content and brand. If this positive attribution fosters increased engagement, when a brand is unfamiliar the ability to solve the puzzle and gain subsequent utility will not be realized and no positive brand outcomes should result (H3a; Spencer et al., 2005). We do not expect brand familiarity to have any impact on LNFC consumers

(H3b). In addition to providing theoretical support, this study's examination of displacement's relationship with brand familiarity is managerially relevant because it informs managers when, and among which brands, displacement should be avoided or potentially employed. To test this factor, we digitally replaced a known brand with an unknown brand in a clip.

Examining brand familiarity also helps provide evidence for engagement as a combination of attention and positive intentional focus. In other words, for engagement to increase, we would expect that there should be positive utility from resolving the uncertainty or "solving the puzzle". Put another way, we should observe an interaction effect such that engagement is higher among HNFC when the brand is familiar compared to unfamiliar.

Procedure

One hundred fifty-five undergraduates from a large North American university (ages 18–24, $M_{\text{age}} = 19.0$, 38.7% female) participated in this study in exchange for course credit and were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (brand familiarity: familiar, unfamiliar) \times continuous (need for cognition) between-participants design. In this study, all participants were exposed to a displaced brand.

Participants were told that they would be watching a storyboard of a Hollywood movie. Specifically, they would watch a video in which still pictures from a movie were presented on screen accompanied by the actual audio of the film. We employed a storyboard design to digitally edit and replace the brands in the film in a controlled manner, thereby not compromising the visual quality of the film from extensive editing. Storyboards have been used successfully in prior marketing research (e.g., Escalas & Luce, 2004), and have been shown to foster immersion and engagement in the presented narrative (e.g., Nielsen & Escalas, 2010).

Participants watched a 3:20-min storyboard video from the movie *Love Actually*, wherein two characters have a discussion in a kitchen where a cereal box is placed.

Brand familiarity manipulation To manipulate brand familiarity, we hired a professional graphic designer to digitally edit in either a displaced Kellogg's Frosted Flakes (familiar) or displaced Mr. Kanny Choco Smile (unfamiliar) cereal box (Web Appendix K). Mr. Kanny is an Italian brand not sold in North America. We conducted two separate pretests that confirmed that participants were unaware of the Mr. Kanny brand and could not identify it when exposed to the displaced screen shot (see Web Appendices K and L for full descriptions and results). Four of the eighteen storyboard scenes contained the displaced brand.

Process measure: Engagement Participants completed the three-item engagement index from Study 2 ($\alpha = 0.94$), then completed a picture-rating filler study to reduce potential demand effects before being presented with our key dependent measures.

Brand attitude Participants indicated their attitudes towards Kellogg's using the same six-item index from previous studies ($\alpha = 0.81$).

Media attitude Participants indicated their attitudes towards the content using the items from previous studies ($\alpha = 0.82$), followed by demographic information.

Need for cognition After completing demographic items, participants completed the need for cognition scale ($\alpha = 0.79$). We deliberately measured NFC at the end of the study to rule out any potential measurement order effects and note condition did not predict NFC ($p = 0.545$).

Results

Engagement We contrast-coded brand-familiarity condition (familiar brand = -1, unfamiliar brand = +1), mean-centered NFC ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.47$), and entered both factors into a linear regression to predict engagement in the viewing experience. Results revealed only the predicted interaction ($b = -0.66$, $SE = 0.32$, $t = -2.06$, $p = 0.042$; see Fig. 3). Consistent with our framework and supporting H3a, the positive engagement effects among HNFC participants (+1.20 SD) emerged when the displaced brand was familiar compared to when it was unfamiliar ($B_{\text{JN}} = -0.47$, $SE = 0.24$, $t = 1.98$, $p = 0.05$). Put another way, when HNFC participants were able to solve the displacement "puzzle," they became more engaged in the viewing experience relative to when they could not solve the puzzle. In line with H3b, no effects emerged for LNFC.

Media attitude We next tested whether the positive effects of displacement-driven engagement increase media attitudes. Controlling for brand-familiarity condition, NFC, and their interaction, we found that engagement significantly predicted media attitudes ($b = 0.31$, $SE = 0.07$, $t = 4.40$, $p < 0.001$). As expected, the positive effects of displacement emerged when the displaced brand was familiar compared to when it was not for HNFC ($b = -0.15$, $SE = 0.09$, $CI_{95\%}: -0.350, -0.007$) but not LNFC, and engagement significantly mediated this relationship (index: $b = -0.20$, $SE = 0.12$, $CI_{95\%}: -0.482, -0.016$).

Brand attitude Controlling for brand-familiarity condition, NFC, and their interaction, we found that engagement significantly predicted brand attitudes ($b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.04$,

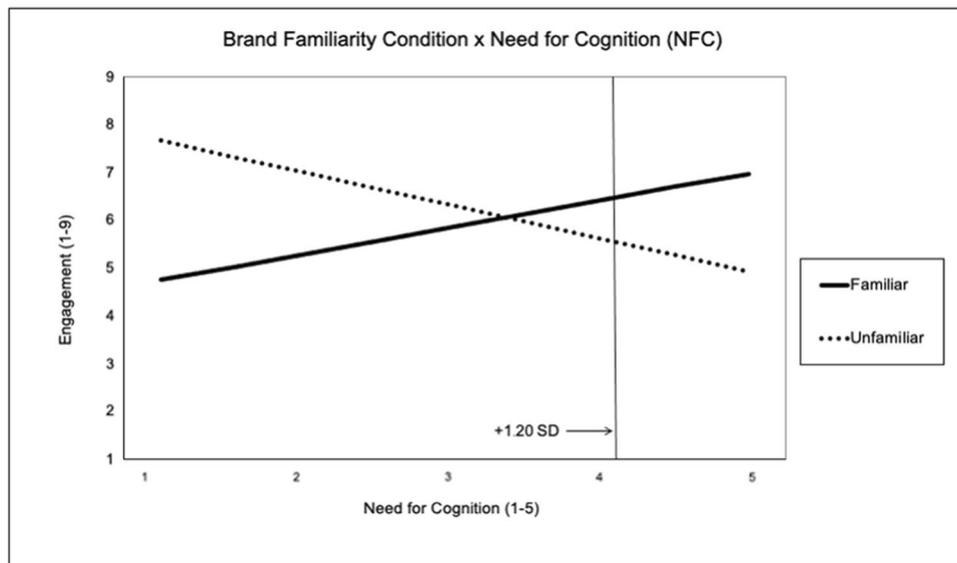


Fig. 3 Engagement as a function of brand familiarity condition and NFC

$t = 3.42, p < 0.001$). Displacement increased brand attitudes through engagement when the brand was familiar versus when it was not familiar for HNFC ($b = -0.06, SE = 0.04, CI_{95}: -0.147, -0.005$) but not LNFC, with engagement mediating this relationship (index: $b = -0.08, SE = 0.05, CI_{95}: -0.202, -0.008$). Thus, the brand consequences are realized among HNFC consumers because of the utility garnered from identifying the displaced brand and “solving the puzzle” (see Web Appendix M for additional discussion).

When we conducted a moderated serial mediation analysis, we did not observe the significant moderated indirect effect. Given the consistent results across Study 2 and follow-up studies, we believe this likely occurred because of the necessary procedural change used to examine the brand-familiarity factor (i.e., actual film clip viewing vs. still-picture storyboard).

Discussion

The results of Study 3 extend our understanding of brand displacement by examining a moderator relevant to both theory and practice: brand familiarity. The positive effects of displacement emerged among HNFC only when the brand was familiar. This supports our conceptual framework by showing that increased engagement is due to the positive utility HNFC garner from the increased processing of “solving the puzzle” of the displaced brand.

Moreover, these results provide managerial insight by informing managers which brands benefit most from displacement. Specifically, results showed that only familiar or well-known brands garnered positive consequences among

HNFC consumers, while none emerged among lesser-known brand. This suggests that allowing or utilizing displacement may be limited to managers of established brands, an intuition mentioned by some managers in the pilot study.

In Study 4, we apply our conceptual findings regarding NFC and engagement to elucidate the implications of brand displacement for marketing managers. Specifically, we design and employ a theoretically-driven manipulation of greater engagement to demonstrate a direct positive effect of displacement on brand attitude, regardless of NFC.

Study 4

The purpose of our final study is to examine when displacement may elicit a greater direct effect on brand attitude regardless of measured NFC. We have demonstrated that displacement increases engagement with the media content (e.g., movie, show), which in turn leads to higher brand attitude for the displaced brand among high (but not low) NFC consumers. However, NFC is a stable factor not explicitly in the marketing manager’s control. To offer both a tactic to marketing managers to use displacement and theoretical support for our process via moderation (Spencer et al., 2005), we sought to manipulate HNFC-engagement.

To our knowledge few, if any, studies have successfully manipulated NFC. We performed an exhaustive search of prior NFC work and found no direct manipulations. However, preliminary evidence in marketing and consumer research suggests it can be done. For example, work by Ahluwalia (2008) and Melnyk et al. (2012) found that asking rhetorical questions as part of print ad copy leads

consumers to focus on the product details to a greater extent and enhances cognitive elaboration of the message content, suggesting a shift to a higher NFC mindset. Unfortunately, this manipulation would not be logical or relevant in the context of movie viewing. Theoretically, however, the heightened cognitive elaboration resulting from the rhetorical question suggests that the inquisitive mindset of HNFC consumers may be temporarily activated. Thus, motivated by this work, we attempted to manipulate HNFC-engagement by drawing attention to the subtleties of the post-production process. Specifically, we shared that subtle edits take place in post-production that are aimed to be undetectable, such that the majority of viewers are unable to spot them. We reasoned that searching for the “edits” and the subsequent enjoyment of discovering them might shift consumers into a HNFC-engagement mindset and increase attitude towards the displaced brand. To support our mindset manipulation, we selected a clip from a high-intelligence movie genre: psychological thriller. We validated this genre as preferred by HNFC in two additional managerially-relevant studies that we discuss in the general discussion (full details of these studies are provided in Web Appendices N and O). In this study, all participants viewed a clip in which the focal brand was displaced.

Procedure

Pretest We conducted a pretest ($n = 168$ Prolific participants) on our manipulation. Across multiple studies, we find that exposure to a displaced brand increases engagement as a function of NFC (HNFC > LNFC). Thus, the goal of our manipulation is to elicit a greater engagement response among LNFC such that they respond to displacement in a similar manner as HNFC. Participants first completed the NFC scale, then received the following HNFC-engagement manipulation prior to viewing the film clip:

You will now watch a 4-minute movie clip. Interestingly, nearly all movies require changes and undergo editing during post-production that alters the scene from how it was originally filmed. These changes happen for a variety of reasons, and are usually subtle so that they do not interrupt the movie-watching experience. While these post-production changes are very common, very few movie watchers tend to spot these post-production changes....

Participants watched a 3:30-min clip from the movie *Fight Club* in which Starbucks was placed via the logo on the coffee cup (Appendix B). A professional film editor displaced the logo. Following the clip, participants completed the three-item engagement index ($\alpha = 0.90$).

Given the consistency of our NFC engagement results (see Study 2 and supplemental studies), our manipulation would be successful if we observed a non-significant slope of NFC on engagement. This is exactly what we found. Regression results revealed a non-significant slope of NFC on engagement ($b = 0.24$, $t = 1.50$, $p = 0.137$). With the slope still positive but only directional in nature, this result suggests that our manipulation successfully heightened HNFC-engagement by inducing LNFC to respond to displacement more like HNFC.

Main study The goal of the main study was to observe a direct main effect of displacement on brand attitude. Five hundred two undergraduate students (ages 17–25, $M_{\text{Age}} = 18.9$, 61.0% female) from a large North American university participated in this study in exchange for course credit and were assigned to one of two conditions (High NFC-Engagement vs. Control). Since there has been no previous manipulation of NFC, we were uncertain of the effect size; however, we suspect it is likely to be small given the nature of NFC and pretest results. Therefore, we recruited as many participants as possible over a three-week period.

The cover story mirrored Study 2. Participants were told they were going to watch a film clip and then answer some questions about their experience. All participants watched the 3:30-min *Fight Club* clip from the pretest in which the brand was displaced.

HNFC engagement manipulation Participants in the HNFC-engagement manipulation received the instructions outlined above in the pretest. Consistent with prior studies, participants in the control condition were told: *You will now watch a four-minute video clip.*

Participants then watched the clip, performed a picture-rating filler study to separate stimuli from measures, and then completed the brand-attitude index. We predicted participants in the HNFC-engagement condition (vs. control condition) would report higher brand attitude.

Results

As predicted, we found that participants in the HNFC engagement condition reported higher attitude toward the displaced brand than did participants in the control condition ($M_{\text{NFC-Engagement}} = 4.92$, $SD = 0.91$ vs. $M_{\text{Control}} = 4.76$, $SD = 1.00$; $t(500) = 1.83$, $p = 0.068$). The result was marginal, confirming our suspicions about a small effect size; however, we were able to successfully manipulate HNFC-engagement and observe a direct effect on brand attitude using a manipulation theoretically in line with our framework, and actionable to the brand manager.

Discussion

Using previous marketing research as theoretical motivation, in Study 4 we designed and implemented a manipulation of HNFC-engagement to show a direct positive effect of displacement on brand attitude. To our knowledge, this is one of the first examples of a HNFC-engagement manipulation. Moreover, from a managerial perspective we show that the potential exists to use displacement as a strategy to positively impact brand attitude. Our manipulation aimed simply to draw attention to various editing techniques that exist within the movie industry. This actionable insight could be employed in multiple ways. Similar information could be inserted into news publications to draw consumers' attention to editing and be framed in a way that allows readers to derive positive utility from increased engagement. Additionally, these simple instructions, or potentially an inference of them, could be inserted into movie trailers or parts of promotional material to activate engagement. In sum, these results offer both theoretical support for our framework via moderation, and actionable insight to marketing managers.

General discussion

Across a preliminary EEG study, a pilot study with marketing managers, four primary studies, and multiple supplemental studies, we provide the first empirical investigation of brand displacement. We propose a conceptual framework to understand the psychological impact that exposure to a displaced brand has on consumers and the downstream marketing consequences of such exposure. Using eye-tracking and EEG technology to measure real-time reactions, our preliminary study found that consumers attend and react to a displaced brand. The marketing manager pilot study demonstrated the managerial importance and relevance of exploring displacement as a marketing tactic by revealing the disconnect between practice and our findings. Study 1 provided greater understanding of displacement by illustrating that displacement is not seen as a persuasion tactic and does not activate persuasion knowledge. Study 2 directly countered marketing manager intuition by demonstrating the interactive effect of displacement and NFC on viewer engagement, and the mediating role of such engagement on the downstream brand attitude. We found that among HNFC (LNFC), exposure to a displaced brand decreased (increased) engagement, which in turn was attributed to the brand through an affect-transfer process. Study 3 showed that the positive outcomes of brand displacement among HNFC did not emerge when the “puzzle” could not be solved. A familiar brand has aesthetic cues (e.g., color, package shape, etc.)

that foster identification when the logo is displaced. As such, a displaced familiar brand can be identified and provides positive utility and increased engagement for HNFC. If the brand is unfamiliar, there are no cues present to foster solving the puzzle, and thus heightened engagement does not result. Finally, Study 4 manipulated HNFC-engagement and showed that displacement can be used to positively influence brand attitude.

Theoretical contributions

This research contributes to theory by providing the first empirical investigation of brand displacement. We propose a framework to outline how consumers respond psychologically when exposed to a displaced brand, and the downstream brand consequences. Importantly, we identify NFC as a necessary factor in predicting the effects of displacement and demonstrate engagement as the psychological process through which displacement impacts subsequent brand attitudes. Our framework adopts an affect-transfer process (Russell, 1998) to propose that for consumers high in NFC, exposure to brand displacement (vs. placement) increases engagement with the media experience and leads to positive media attitudes, which transfer to the brand. Conversely, for consumers low in NFC, exposure to brand displacement decreases engagement and leads to negative media and subsequent brand attitudes. We also contribute theoretically to the brand placement literature both by introducing brand displacement as a novel variation on brand placement and by providing additional empirical evidence for the existence of an affect-transfer process wherein the engagement within the movie can act as a positive affective cue (Russell, 1998). Finally, we contribute theoretically to the NFC literature in two ways. First, we expand the focus of NFC influence to a brand-placement realm, and in doing explore novel processes through which NFC can influence attitudes: engagement with content. Second, we develop a method to manipulate HNFC-engagement in the brand-placement context. To our knowledge, this research is the first to manipulate this individual-difference factor.

Managerial contributions and directions for future research

Our research makes valuable substantive contributions for marketing managers. First, we empirically demonstrate that brand displacement can have downstream consequences on brands. The choice to displace one's brand is usually made for budgetary or brand image maintenance reasons under the assumption that no consumer or brand effects will result. However, not only do we show the psychological impact of exposure to a displaced brand, but we also show that it can have meaningful

downstream consequences for brands, both negative and positive.

Across our studies, we observe a negative effect of displacement among those low in NFC. Specifically, exposure to a displaced brand reduced engagement in the viewing experience, which in turn lowered attitude towards the media content and displaced brand. This is an interesting finding, given that past work on satiation found that interrupting satiation of a pleasant experience should increase subsequent enjoyment (Nelson & Meyvis, 2008). However, we find that because displacement is a cognitively effortful interruption, LNFC consumers are less inclined to engage and thus show less positive responses. This implies that media producers should be careful when determining when to use placement endorsements and how to price placements to brands. Our results suggest that displacement could be detrimental for media and brand managers when dealing with LNFC consumers, and awareness of displacement's potential consequences can help brand managers make more informed decisions.

On the other hand, we show that among HNFC consumers, brand displacement yielded positive brand outcomes through engagement for familiar brands. This suggests that under certain conditions marketers could allow, or potentially use, displacement as a persuasion tactic. This finding is important given that brand placement is on the rise due to cord cutting among consumers resulting in higher media streaming. Given our findings that displacement may result in positive outcomes among some consumers, depending on media category brands could consider utilizing displacement as well as placement. This suggests a potential shift to a multi-tier placement/displacement pricing strategy, to allow various brands and media to better design and implement effective brand strategy.

Second, we inform marketers regarding when to avoid or allow displacement, and how to use NFC as an actionable segmentation strategy. Specifically, results suggest that traditional placement strategies should be employed in media most likely to be viewed by LNFC consumers, while displacement could be allowed into content targeted to HNFC consumers. This segmentation strategy could be operationalized through the genre of movie or television show, such that placement would fit comedy or romance, while displacement would be received more positively in suspense thrillers or science fiction. To test this managerial implication, we conducted a two managerially-relevant studies that examined the relationship between NFC and choice, attitude, and preference for different movie genres (see Web Appendices N and O for full details). If NFC affects choice of movie genres (i.e., genres that elicit heightened engagement among HNFC), having this knowledge would be insightful, informative, and actionable as a segmentation strategy for marketing managers when deciding whether to avoid or utilize displacement of their brand.

We hypothesized that HNFC consumers would demonstrate a preference for and choose to view movies requiring and emphasizing higher (vs. lower) degrees of intellect. The first study assessed liking and preference for multiple movie genres. After completing the NFC scale, participants ($n=277$) indicated their liking and preferences for 18 different movie genres (e.g., documentary, comedy). In addition, participants reported their attitudes toward twenty-two individual movies that differed on intelligence level and indicated whether they had seen the movie. Results once again supported our NFC proposition and managerial implication of displacement, showing that as NFC rose consumers were more likely to prefer genres requiring psychological thought such as independent movies, foreign films, and documentaries. Examination of individual movies showed that as NFC rose, consumers were more likely to both express higher attitudes towards intelligence-focused movies and report choosing these movies in the past. In the second study, (preregistration materials: https://aspredicted.org/K8X_L8X), after completing the NFC scale, participants ($n=499$) were presented with a choice between movie clips of two different genres: psychological thriller (high intellect) and comedy (low intellect). As predicted, we found that as NFC rose, consumers were more likely to choose to view a movie genre requiring psychological thought. Together, these results suggest that NFC can be actionably utilized via movie genres, and thus offer actionable direction for managers regarding product placement or displacement strategic decisions.

Finally, we provide initial evidence that displacement is not perceived as a persuasive communication technique (Study 1). This knowledge may allow managers to strategically incorporate an engaging brand displacement that can draw attention without activating persuasion knowledge. If consumers find utility in resolving the uncertainty and engaging more in the media, attitudes can still change without seeing an attenuation due to persuasive skepticism.

We believe our work provides considerable opportunities for future investigations. Primarily, we explored only how displacement could influence brand attitudes. However, brand placement literature has found effects on measures of recognition, recall, and behavior. Future research could explore whether the displacement x NFC effects extend into other pertinent brand measures. Some managers from our Pilot Study, for example, suggested that placement is primarily an awareness tool—if displacement obscures the brand, then awareness should be lower. Our results suggest this not to be the case, due to other contextual cues that inform uncertainty resolution. However, future research could directly test these outcomes.

Moreover, displacement typically occurs in two major forms: unbranding (i.e., removal of the logo through digital or physical means) and fictionalization (i.e., creating a parody or fictional brand to take the place of a real brand, or spoofing; e.g., Let's Potato Chips, Coffeebucks). We exclusively

examined unbranding. Would the observed engagement process operate the same way on downstream brand outcomes through fictionalization? On the one hand, using a parody brand would likely increase engagement and cognitive effort in consumers' attempts to process the displaced brand. Conversely, could the parody brand activate a different neural network wherein consumers process the brand as if they were processing the actual brand? There has been preliminary work exploring how "spoof" brands (e.g., brands which are parodying real brands such as "fitendo") affect brand image. Naderer et al. (2020) find that spoof brands can increase recall for real brands because the characteristics allow for activation of brand associations without needing the actual brand to be present. Future research could expand on this to see if engagement differs in addition to association activation. In addition, might the phonetic or physical packaging similarities play a role? If so, which is more important?

A third and important direction would be to examine potential moderators. In this work, we show that brand familiarity is a necessary condition for displacement-driven engagement to occur for HNFC. Thus, the recognizable features play a role in increasing engagement. This begs the question: What effect would a generic brand have in this context? Generic brands often mimic the color schemes of popular brands (Redondo et al., 2018). In this case, would the presence of a generic "Cola" generate similar responses as a displaced image of Coca-Cola? If so, might the placement of a generic brand likewise have positive outcomes for major brands? In addition, there are other managerially relevant moderators that might influence displacement's consequences. For example, does technology device through which the media is being watched have an effect? Specifically, might the consequences differ depending on which viewing platform is being used (i.e., streaming, broadcast) or the type of device used to view (e.g., TV, theatre, computers, phones, tablets)? Past work suggests that the size of the screen matters in effectiveness of brand placement awareness (Bressoud et al., 2010), might this also influence displacement effects? In addition, different media has varying levels of involvement—might viewing a displacement through a movie on television versus on a computer change how involved the consumer is in processing the media content or activate different processes? In addition, could contextual factors in which the media is enjoyed change the effectiveness of the process? For example, do shows at different times (e.g., daytime v. primetime) change the type of audience or a predetermined level of engagement? Would watching media alone versus with others change the utility derived from "solving" the displacement puzzle? Future research could investigate these possibilities to provide greater depth on the effects of displacement.

We also wish to acknowledge the limitations of our work. First, we acknowledge that our framework does not integrate

the vast and exceptional work of all past placement scholars. We focused our framework and theoretical argumentation using literature that would affect responses to displacement; however, in doing so we understand that we cannot possibly account for the considerable range of findings, underlying processes, and moderators of placement effects. Future research could systematically explore these moderators, outcome variables, and potential alternative explanations. For example, for the sake of our framework we chose to focus on attitudes but fully acknowledge that much placement literature examines recognition, recall, and behavior. As such, future research could examine how displacement affects these downstream variables. Second, we acknowledge that our definition of engagement differs from that of previous media studies. In our examination, we focus more on the attention and intentional focus paid to the media experience. It is crucial to be aware that this conceptual definition differs from extant research. In media research, for example, engagement often revolves more around absorption into the media and an experience of "flow" or immersion (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Green & Brock, 2000). This literature would suggest that anything that draws attention away from the experience would disrupt the immersion, lower engagement, and potentially lower the enjoyment of the media. Thus, since displacement does draw attention, and require cognitive effort to resolve the uncertainty, this line of research would contend that engagement should decrease. In our paradigm of attentional engagement, this is not the case. Instead, we show that those who derive utility from cognitive effort (i.e., HNFC) find positive utility and increased attentional engagement with the media in response to displacement.

Since these more traditional conceptualizations of engagement were not measured in the current studies, we cannot rule out that immersion-focused definitions of engagement are not playing a role in displacement. Future research should examine whether immersion or absorption in the media is affected by the presence of displacement and whether this has downstream consequences both for media enjoyment and brand outcomes. These limitations notwithstanding, we hope the introduction of brand displacement contributes both theoretically to the placement literature and substantively to brand managers.

In conclusion, we provide an empirical investigation into the marketing phenomenon of brand displacement. While naturally resulting from budgetary, brand image protection, and contractual decisions, our work shows that brand displacement may in fact have implications for the actual brand. As such, our research highlights the importance of understanding both placement and displacement in branding strategies and informs marketing managers in making educated decisions when planning their media strategies. Indeed, the brand that *wasn't* there may be the very brand consumers want to buy.

Appendix A

Examples of displacement in practice



Physically Altered Pringles and Scott's Nature Scapes Logos (Reality TV)



Physically Altered Apple Logo (*How I Met Your Mother*)



Obstructed Apple Logo (*Gossip Girl*)



Digitally Blurred Jeep Logo (*The Sarah Connor Chronicles*)



Digitally Removed Mercedes-Benz Logo (*Slumdog Millionaire*)



Digitally Blurred St. Louis Cardinals Logo (*The Bachelor*)

Appendix B

Study stimuli

Preliminary Investigation: Eye tracking and EEG Study

Displacement



Placement



Study 1, Study 2, Supplemental Studies 1 and 2, General Discussion Study 2:

Displacement



Placement



Study 3:

High-Familiarity Brand



Low-Familiarity Brand



Study 4, General Discussion Study 2:



Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-022-00901-7>.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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