

Developing A Creative Framework on The Roles And Effects of Product Placement in Malaysia's Social Media Landscape

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ABSTRACT

Product placement has become a popular marketing strategy in Malaysia due to the quick rise of creator-led media on social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Research on how these placements work across many channels, how Malaysian viewers view authenticity and disclosure, and how these activities differ from more conventional placements in films and TV shows is still lacking. This concept paper suggests a qualitative, exploratory design to (i) determine the purposes of product placement in creator content; (ii) investigate its influence on engagement, perceived authenticity, brand attitudes, and purchase intention; and (iii) integrate the findings into a creative framework that makes platform-specific practices, audience responses, and ethical/disclosure considerations more understandable in the Malaysian context. In-depth interviews with marketing experts and active social media users will be subjected to thematic analysis to identify patterns that connect audience outcomes (such as trust, identification, and engagement) with integration choices (such as prominence, narrative coherence, and creator–brand alignment). A practitioner-oriented, Malaysia-specific framework that directs moral, culturally relevant, and successful placement tactics while enhancing theoretical understanding of embedded persuasion, influencer credibility, and the consequences of disclosure in multicultural digital environments is the anticipated contribution.

Keywords: Product placement, social media, influencer, advertising

1. INTRODUCTION

The dynamic, real-time nature of social media has led to a shift in persuasion and brand management strategies. In contrast to conventional media placements, product placement in creator-led environment is contingent upon discreet integration, creative reputation, and contextual fit. Adoption has been accelerated by Malaysia's widespread usage of social media and its thriving creator communities, but there is still lack of empirical knowledge regarding roles, effects, and ethical considerations, especially when it comes to placement in social media. The concept and framework presented in this study can be used to organise research and guide practice in Malaysia's social media landscape.

Product placement is a marketing strategy where branded products or services are featured prominently within media content, such as films, television shows, video games, or online videos. The combination of product placement and TV advertisements has the greatest impact on both brand recall and purchase intention (Gamage et al, 2023). The objective is to include these items into narrative or environment in a manner that appears organic, rather than depending on conventional advertising techniques such as advertisement.

There are several key advantages to using product placement in social media. Firstly, it allows brands to reach a highly engaged audience. The brand management landscape has changed due to digital media platforms, which provide real-time interaction and high dynamism (Deloitte, 2025; McKinsey, 2025; Santos, 2023; Laradi et al., 2024). Furthermore, the emergence of social media has left a profound impact on the procedure adopted by companies to maintain a relationship with the customers (Sundaram et al, 2020). Product placement on social media involves providing visibility to products through their inclusion in lifestyle images, where the products is not necessarily the central focus of the visual. This may occur in their own images or in those of others, such as through endorsement by celebrities or influencers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Product placement in social media is a marketing strategy where brands pay influencers or content creators to feature their products or services in their social media posts. One of the key aspects of product placement in Malaysia's social media is the use of influencers and celebrities to promote products (*high social penetration + brands shifting ad spend to social; influencer usage common in Malaysia*), (DataReportal, 2025; Malaysian Digital Association, 2025; INSG, 2025).

These influencers often have a large and dedicated following, making them valuable partners for brands looking to reach a wide audience (*Malaysia consumer survey shows strong influence of celebrity/mega-influencers; sizable share of users follow influencers*), (Bernama, 2024; DataReportal, 2025; INSG, 2025). Social media has revolutionized the way people communicate, share information, and interact with each other. Platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, Tik Tok and LinkedIn have become integral parts of daily life for billions of users around the

world. This form of advertising is often more subtle than traditional ads and is integrated into the content in a way that feels organic and authentic to the audience. However, the industries have not been able to explore the field of social media marketing to its full potential and their understanding of digital marketing strategies for the purpose of branding has been limited (Sundaram et al, 2020).

2.1 Product Placement in Social Media

These platforms offer a range of features that allow users to connect with friends and family, follow their favourite brands and influencers, and discover new content (Pew Research Center, 2024; DataReportal, 2025; Sprout Social, 2025). Social media has also become a powerful tool for businesses, providing a platform for marketing, advertising, and customer engagement (Sprout Social, 2025; Pew Research Center, 2025). However, there are also some challenges associated with product placement in social media including disclosure and compliance requirements as well as audience authenticity/trust concerns (FTC, 2023; ASA, 2024/2025; Liao et al., 2024; Ye, X., & Li, C. (2025).

One challenge is ensuring that the placement feels authentic and not overly promotional. Audiences are increasingly wary of sponsored content, so it's important for brands to work with influencers who align with their values and have a genuine connection to their products. (Yupelmi, M., Yulastri, A., Effendi, H., & Muskhir; et al., 2023). Furthermore, assessing the effectiveness of product placement on social media can prove to be challenging as accurately determining the number of sales or conversions directly attributable to a particular placement is often difficult.

2.2 Challenges and Ethical Issues

Product placement plays a crucial role in Malaysia's social media landscape, offering brands a unique opportunity to connect with consumers in a more authentic and engaging way. Product placement is a factor that affects brand awareness among consumers (Pancaningrum & Ulani, 2020). As product placement becomes more prevalent in social media, there are growing concerns about issues such as transparency, consumer privacy, and the potential for exploitation. Understanding the ethical considerations surrounding product placement in Malaysia's social media is essential for ensuring that marketing practices are conducted in a responsible and ethical manner. Setiawan and Hamdi (2022), found that consumers' positive attitudes towards retail brand social media significantly enhance their purchase intentions. This suggests that the context of the product placement—such as the type of content and the nature of the influencer—can either bolster or undermine its effectiveness.

2.3 Product Placement in Malaysia

Research on product placement in Malaysia's social media is still in its infancy, with several key gaps in the existing literature. However, the intersection of these cultural influences with social media product placement remains underexplored. This gap is particularly relevant given Malaysia's multicultural society, where varying cultural perceptions can impact the effectiveness of marketing strategies (Ghazali et al., 2021). It is essential to analyse how differences in format, audience engagement and disclosure rules between traditional product placement social media product placement affect customer perceptions and behaviours. Understanding these distinctions may provide valuable insights for marketers and advertisers seeking to improve their product placement strategies across diverse media platforms.

2.4 Research Gaps in Malaysian Social-Media Product Placement

The current body of literature highlights several significant gaps, especially regarding the effectiveness, consumer perceptions, and cultural nuances related to product placement within this context. The investigations of product placement within Malaysia's social media environment is an emerging field of study that highlights several significant voids in understanding its efficacy, consumer perceptions, and the cultural factors that shape these interactions. A further study gap is the insufficient comprehension of the determinants affecting the efficacy of product placement in Malaysia's social media.

The current literature predominantly emphasises traditional media, resulting in a considerable gap concerning the effects of social media platforms, which are increasingly crucial in influencing consumer behaviour. One of the primary gaps in the literature is the lack of empirical studies examining the effectiveness of product placement specifically within social media contexts in Malaysia. For instance, while discussing retail brand choice behaviour and its impact on consumer purchase decisions, their findings are rooted in traditional retail environments rather than the digital landscape (Arujunen et al., 2022).

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Strategic Roles of Product Placement in Malaysia's Social Media Landscape

The conceptual framework illustrates how product placement strategically functions in Malaysia's social media landscape, highlighting its significant *roles* in brand promotion. On social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, product placement is marketed as a way to raise *brand awareness*, give *targeted exposure* to specific audiences, and serve as *subtle advertising* that blends in with content without interfering with it. Additionally, through regular but organic exposure, it enables businesses and content creators make *revenue* while fostering *long-term brand recall*. When products are genuinely included into storylines, they also enhance *authenticity and realism*. This enhances the brand's perception as more credible, relevant and seamlessly embedded within daily Malaysian culture.

3.2 Audience and Brand Effects of Product Placement

These strategic functions produce a variety of *effects* on audiences and brand performance. Strategic placements cultivate an emotional connection with audiences and shape customer impressions by associating the brand with esteemed producers and relevant surroundings. This cultivates brand loyalty, improves awareness and recall, and elevates buying intentions, as customers are more likely to consider and choose brands they frequently see in prominent contexts. Additionally, the framework emphasises that product placement can serve as a *cost-efficient marketing* approach, enabling *targeted advertising* without the intrusiveness associated with conventional advertisements. Furthermore, when endorsements are organically included into content, viewers perceive them as more authentic, which further strengthens *authenticity and reliability*. Product placement on social media has a strategic role in producing strong behavioural and psychological effects that eventually improve brand outcomes in the Malaysian market. Collectively, these components delineate a definitive course of action.

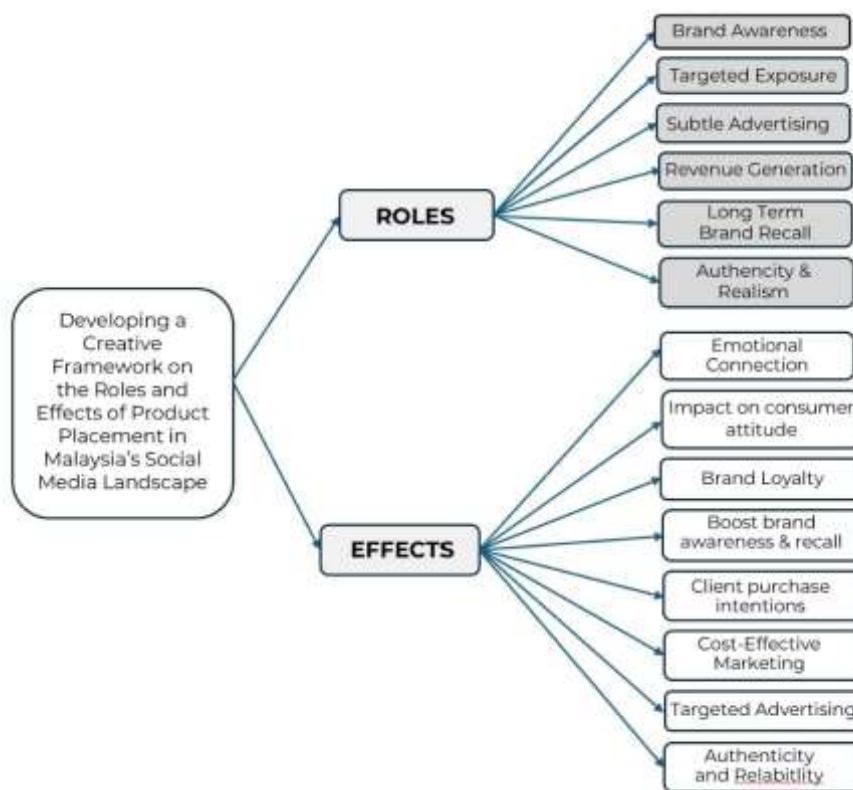


Figure 1. Creative Framework for Malaysian Social-Media Product Placement.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the conceptual framework presents a creative model of how product placement operates within Malaysia's social media landscape. The framework positions social-media product placement as a strategic communication mechanism that connects (i) contextual and creative design choices, (ii) audience-level psychological responses, and (iii) brand-level and system-level outcomes. In a multi-ethnic, culturally diverse environment such as Malaysia, these relationships are further shaped by local cultural norms,

platform usage patterns and the perceived authenticity of influencers and content creators.

3.1 Strategic Roles and Design of Product Placement in Malaysia's Social Media

Within this framework, product placement on social media is regarded as more than merely a background branding instrument. For marketers and content producers alike, it fulfils a number of strategic purposes.

- **Brand visibility and awareness:** Frequent exposure to branded items in everyday content on platform such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X enhances brand recognition and maintains brand prominence in the minds of Malaysian consumers.
- **Targeted and segmented outreach:** Partnership with particular influencers or creators enable marketers to engage narrow audience groups (such as age, lifestyle, interest, or language group), aligning product placement with the creator's follower demographics.
- **Discreet and unobtrusive marketing:** Instead of disrupting users with traditional commercials, product placement incorporates branded goods or services into narratives, activities, and visual arrangements, rendering the promotional message more natural and less intrusive.
- **Authentic narrative and cultural resonance:** When products are situated inside locally recognised contexts, dialogues, and practises, they can embody Malaysian values, humour, language, and everyday realities, so augmenting the perceived authenticity of both the content and the brand.
- **Monetisation and partnership opportunities:** Product placement serves as a cash source for influencers and content creators, facilitating enduring relationship and collaborative campaigns that align brand objectives with creator identity and artistic expression.
- These strategic roles are operationalised through a set of **design dimensions** that are represented in the left side of Figure 1. Key dimensions include:
 - **Placement modality and prominence** (for example, visual vs verbal mentions, subtle background vs focal display).
 - **Narrative and experiential fit**, i.e., how well the placement aligns with the storyline, content theme, and platform format.
 - **Creator–brand congruence**, which concerns the match between the creator's persona, values and audience expectations and the image of the brand being promoted.
 - **Disclosure and transparency practices**, including whether and how paid partnerships are signposted to audiences.

- **Cultural and contextual alignment**, such as sensitivity to local norms, religious considerations, language choice and representation of Malaysia's diverse communities.

Within the framework, these roles and design choices jointly determine the **quality of the placement execution**, which then feeds into audience-level responses.

3.2 Audience-Level Psychological and Behavioural Effects

Figure 1's fundamental block illustrates the impact of purposeful and meticulously crafted product placements on audiences at cognitive, emotive, and behavioural levels. According to the concept, audiences are more likely to react favourably in the following dimensions when placement executions are cohesive, open, and sensitive to cultural differences.

- **Cognitive responses:**
 - Attention to the content and the embedded brand.
 - Enhanced brand awareness and recall due to repeated yet natural exposure.
- **Affective responses:**
 - **Perceived authenticity** of both the content and the endorsement, especially when the product appears genuinely useful or relevant to the creator's life.
 - **Trust and credibility**, arising from the perceived expertise, honesty and consistency of the influencer or content creator.
 - **Identification and relational closeness**, where audiences feel emotionally connected to the creator and, by extension, more receptive to the brand.
- **Behavioural engagement:**
 - Interactions with the content (liking, commenting, sharing, saving).
 - Follow-up behaviours such as searching for more information, visiting the brand's page, trying samples or discussing the product with peers.

Simultaneously, Figure 1 identifies a possible adverse pathway. Placements may cause suspicion, annoyance or feelings of inauthenticity if they are viewed as too obtrusive, inappropriate for the creator's persona, culturally insensitive or inadequately stated. In such circumstances, audiences may dismiss the message, disengage from the content, or even cultivate adverse perceptions

towards the brand and the influencer. As a result, the framework's audience responses serve as a mediating layer that directs the impact of innovative design choices towards either positive or negative.

3.3 Brand Outcomes and Wider Consequences

The right side of Figure 1 depicts the correlation between audience-level reactions and brand outcomes, as well as broader implications for practice and governance. The framework forecasts three significant outcomes when product placement in Malaysian social media is meticulously strategized, yielding positive cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses.

3.3.1 Results at the brand level:

- i. Increased and long-lasting brand awareness as a result of regular, contextually relevant exposure.
- ii. Improved perceptions of the brand and brand attitudes as it is linked to reliable, ambitious, or relatable producers.
- iii. Increased brand engagement, which includes continuing to interact across platforms, following brand accounts, and taking part in campaigns or user-generated content.
- iv. Increased purchase intention and loyalty as audiences transition from interest to trial and repeat purchases, especially where placements support perceived utility or lifestyle fit.

3.3.2 Implications for the system and ethics:

- i. Product placement has been accepted as a common social media advertising tactic in Malaysia, impacting business procedures and agency-brand-creator partnerships.
- ii. Ethical standards and legal frameworks pertaining to disclosure, audience protection (particularly for young people), and cultural sensitivity in branded material are more important.
- iii. Possibilities to create best practices tailored to the local environment for Malaysian creators and companies instead of depending only on models imported from Western markets.

When combined, the conceptual framework in Figure 1 shows a clear path from audience perceptions and behaviours to brand performance and broader industry

consequences, as well as creative and contextual design of product placement. It provides a structured framework for analysing how practitioners and audiences comprehend the functions and impacts of product placement in Malaysia's social media environment, guides the development of interview questions, and shapes the thematic analysis.

4. IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

The conclusions and suggested framework suggest that product placement in Malaysia's social media landscape should be viewed as a strategic communication tool that incorporates creator-brand congruence, narrative fit, and contextual sensitivity rather than as a mere supplement to conventional advertising tactics.

4.1 Practical Implications for Marketers

The study offers marketers a decision-making guide for scheduling placements on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok by elucidating the connections between factors like audience reactions, brand awareness, targeted exposure, subtle integration, long-term recall, authenticity, and realism. This helps professionals go from random influencer posts to planned campaigns that use creator selection, message design, disclosure style, and cultural cues to achieve specific psychological and behavioural goals, like trust, engagement, loyalty, and purchaseintention.

4.2 Ethical and Policy Implications

The framework profoundly affects ethics, governance, and industrial standards in Malaysia. In a multicultural environment where persuasion, religiosity, and cultural norms are highly sensitive, the study underscores the necessity for more explicit, context-appropriate guidelines on sponsored content by emphasising authenticity, disclosure visibility, and audience trust as central components. It advocates for collaboration among regulators, platforms, and brands to establish clear, non-disruptive disclosure standards that safeguard consumers while preserving creator reputation.

4.3 Theoretical and Research Implications

The framework provides scholars with a testable model to inform future empirical research on embedded persuasion, influencer credibility, and cross-cultural reactions to product placement, thereby filling gaps in Malaysian and Southeast Asian literature and fostering the creation of locally relevant theories instead of depending exclusively on Western-centric models.

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