Subliminal Advertising in Movies

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Abstract
This project covers subliminal perception, how it affects people in their daily lives, its methods, usages, and limitations. The paper will be covering the pivotal points in the history of subliminal manipulation, how the science was established and how it evolved from experimental psychology to being used in the real world to influence consumers. The project will discuss the theory of subliminal priming and explore its usage in movies where we will be using Fight Club as our primary example, amongst other films, for the usage of subliminal manipulation in movies.

We go through exploring the theoretical and empirical knowledge revolving the science of subliminal perception in pursuit of finding out whether or not it is actually possible to sell products or services with subliminal advertisements and product placement.

We will be talking about the study of James Vicary, who presented a study showing that influencing people using hidden messages was very possible and very effective. We look at how the experiment was falsified and look at a few experiments attempting to replicate Vicary’s findings.

We look at subliminal perception’s use in the field of psychology, using and comparing the findings from these groups to how it can be used in subliminal advertisement. We use the works of Vance Packard and his scientific observations about subliminal advertisement, and look at experiments performed by a team of psychologists, on the psychological usages of subliminal priming.

We conclude that subliminal advertisement simply isn’t a powerful tool, but instead we learnt how it is actually being used in real life, and what it means for the field of marketing.

Summary in Georgian
პროექტი აღწერს ქვეცნობიერი აღქმის სფეროს, თუ როგორ გავლენა აქვს მას ხალხის ყოველდღიურზე, მეთოდებზე, გამოყენებებზე და შესაძლობლობებზე. პროექტში წაიკითხავთ მოცემული საგნის ისტორიას, რიგის ჩამოყალიბება და რიგის ავტორდანაც ჯარიმატების ქვეცნობიერ ჩანერგვის მაგალითთან დაადგინეთ საგან პროექტის ძირითად მომხმარებლების ყოველდღიურ შეაფასება.

პირველად ისახენთ ქვეცნობიერი ჩანერგვის თეორიებზე და გამოყენებებზე მის გამოყენების ფონზე, მათ შორის Fight Club-ს, რომელშიც ჩვენ პროექტში დისტანციურად გამოყენდება. პირველად განხორციელდება სხვადასხვა თვალით თანამედროვე ფილმების ქვეცნობიერი აღქმის სხვადასხვაობები ოდენიმე, რომ ჩექროშ გამოყენება შეიძლება მივიღოთ, რომ პროფესიონალურ და სერიოზულ ვალდობის მიზნით.

ჩვენ გამოვიყენოთ ჯერს ჯარის გამოცდებს, ერთ პირველთან შედარებით ათაზოლობისას იმ სისტემაში, რომ ქვეცნობიერი ჩანერგვით შეიძლო პროდუქტის გაყიდვის სექტორში. ჩვენ ასევე გამოყენდებათ თუ რა შეიძლო მით შესახებ თავისი იდეალის.

ორიგინალია, ჩვენ გავითვალისწინეთ ვაში პასუხის ფორმა ჩვენი თავისებურობაში ქვეცნობიერი ჩანერგვის ფოსილება და გადაბრუნების სხვადასხვა ფილმების მოძრავად გვერდით გავაჯერა. 
Summary in Danish
Dette projekt dækker den underbevidste opfattelse, hvordan den påvirker mennesker i deres dagligdag, dens metoder samt anvendelser og begrænsninger. Opgaven vil dække de centrale punkter i historien om underbevidst manipulation, hvordan videnskaben om den underbevidste opfattelse var etableret og hvordan den udviklede sig fra eksperimental psykologi til at være anvendt i den virkelige verden til at påvirke forbrugere. Dette projekt vil diskutere teorien om underbevidst påvirkning og undersøge dens anvendelse i film, hvor vi vil bruge Fight Club som vores primære eksempel, samt andre film, på anvendelsen af underbevidst manipulation i film.

Vi udforsker den teoretiske og emperiske viden omkring videnskaben bag den underbevidste opfattelse i vores søgen på svaret om hvorvidt det er muligt at sælge produkter og tjenester ved hjælp af underbevidst reklamering og product placement.

Vi vil undersøge eksperimentet af James Vicary, som introducerede et studie, der viste at det er muligt at påvirke folk ved hjælp af skjulte beskeder, og at det er meget effektivt. Vi ser på hvordan andre har forsøgt at genskabe hans resultater, på trods af at hans eksperiment var forfalsket.

Vi ser på den underbevidste opfattelses anvendelse indenfor psykologi, ved at anvende og sammenligne vores observationer fra de forskellige grupper, for at se hvordan de kan blive anvendt i underbevidst reklamering.

Vi benytter værkerne af Vance Packard og hans videnskabelige observationer om underbevidst reklamering, og ser på eksperimenter udført af en gruppe psykologer, om den psykologiske anvendelse af underbevidst påvirkning.

Vi konkluderer at underbevidst reklamering simpelthen ikke er så kraftfuldt et redskab som man før har troet, men istedet fandt vi frem til hvordan det bliver anvendt i virkeligheden, og hvad det betyder for marketing.
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Problem Area

Problem Formulation

We have formulated a problem formulation which we have tried to answer in this project:

"How did contemporary Western society come to fear subliminal advertising, and how big of a threat does it actually pose to the individual?"

To find the answer we chose to collect relevant theoretical data about subliminal advertising, product placement, and diversity of human perception. We have found a lot of examples from the past which could be used in our research procedure and analysis. Our third chapter is focused on the basic theory of subliminal advertising, followed by the fourth chapter, explaining the theory of product integration. The next chapter is primarily concentrated on scientific research of diversity of human perception. The information and knowledge we gathered are used in the sixth chapter to analyse the movie Fight Club, as well as other movies.

Our interests look more into the subliminal processes that occur without our awareness and that is why we chose as our main focus the aspect of advertising that is not necessarily publicly seen or obvious. The task of the project is to investigate the past and the present of subliminal advertising, why we prefer one brand over the other, and how this type of advertising is used. The science of human perception opens the door for understanding why the sex or violence which speak to our primal instincts can be used as an effective tool to advertise.

In order to answer our research question we developed three main working questions which we followed throughout the investigation of the topic.

Working questions:

1) What is subliminal advertising and how has it been used in the past?

2) What do marketers attempting to use subliminal advertising need to be aware of in the diversity of human perception when affecting an audience.

3) How is product placement and advertising used by the Western film industry?
Methodology – Approach to research

We have immersed ourselves into reading material on the subliminal realm to have collected fruitful and relevant data which we could then use for an analysis and thoughtfully answer the problem formulation of our project.

This research has been conducted by investigating both, theoretical and empirical information, as well as the relation between them. We moved from the theory to the findings and observations. In our project, we followed the deductive approach, firstly collecting the knowledge and theory required for effectively delving into the analysis and then using the theoretical data for analysing movies.

To support the main focus of our paper – subliminal advertising, we chose to back the theory part by using an analysis of the movie Fight Club amongst other films.

We decided that the movie analysis would help us in exploring the theory of subliminal manipulation (which is an existing and dynamic process) on a different level, as it is often noticed in advertisements but is not as much publicly talked about in the medium of films. We tried to investigate whether it is possible with the knowledge we gained to be able to perceive the subliminal advertising easier and analyse the movie Fight Club in the depth and more fundamentally than we would if we hadn't possessed the knowledge of the subject.

The method we chose suited us the best from our point of view since we needed to know an enormous amount of information to be able to select and cut out the parts we did not need to use at the end for our analysis.

Dimensions

The dimensions we have chosen to include and work with are “text and sign” and “history and culture”.

The inclusion of dimension “text and sign” was a logical choice fitting our project, since we decided to analyze a movie and mention hidden advertisements in commercials for brands such as "Coca-Cola" or "Camel". The project covers theoretical approaches which then are used to interpret the scenes from movies, commercials or other kinds of advertisements. This dimension leads us to theoretical and empirical aspects of the science of perception, the reader's judgement of subliminal advertising, and its evidence and the scientific value of information about human perception.

We took the dimension of “history and culture” into consideration because we used sources such as the book The Hidden Persuaders written by Vance Packard from the year 1957 and studied the history of subliminal advertising to better understand the development of it. It helped us during the process to be able to approach critically the theory we gained and to evaluate what was important and what was unnecessary to mention. The study of the history of the subliminal advertising broadened our horizons further and with the relevance of it we could apply for explaining the theory part clearer. This dimension supported the main dimension by having a deeper point of view on the subject.
Subliminal Advertising

Introduction

Subliminal advertising is not a new term in branding, though with rapidly growing technology it has recently started to be more and more perceived as an effective tool to increase desires of consumers and to change purchase behaviour among perceivers. However, hidden brand advertising had been in movies many decades before, in late 1940s and early 1950s; for instance, Jack Daniel’s Tennessee Whiskey drank by movie star Joan Crawford in the movie *Mildred Pierce* from 1948.

The origin of public interest was started by a fraud. In 1957, a market researcher James Vicary claimed to insert two flashes of the text “eat popcorn” and “drink Coca-Cola” into a clip (Moore, 1982: 38) of the movie which was watched in the cinema in the United States. After he publicly said what he claimed to be a subliminal persuasion in his experiment, the subliminal advertising was banned in USA, Great Britain and even in Australia. However, in the year 1962, Vicary had to admit that he manipulated the whole process of his experiment and the results of increase in sold Coca-Cola and popcorn. Even though he falsified results about increase in sales of these two products, the public fear of what Vicary’s theory could do, didn’t go away.

The awareness of this activity raised and the book *Hidden Persuaders* from 1957 was written by Vance Packard. Packard not only wrote about subliminal advertising, but also about the influences of subliminal messages in everyday life of children, whom he posed, were more vulnerable than adults, and in political campaigns. Since then, a lot of scientific research has been done with a broad range of results.

The topic of subliminal advertising is still a highly discussed phenomenon and people who are interested in the topic still debate whether the practice is even possible. It is important for analysing certain parts of subliminal advertising to fully understand both theory and empirical evidence which was collected throughout time.

Using psychological science to manipulate consumers and create propaganda to sell ideas has its has existed for a long time, for example, it was not new when methods of how to manipulate or influence opinions of crowds were developed by entire teams for dictators in history and now the same thing is happening with the marketing companies. Psychoanalysis became a basis for multimillion-dollar industry (Packard, 1957: 31).

Even though our focus is primarily on subliminal advertising in movies, it is worth mentioning that the subliminal realm has also extended in the fields of videogames and music videos and is being used to sell opinions, ideas, or ideologies. It is important for an analysis to understand that it does not matter what is aimed to be sold, but *how* it is done. The root of the science itself is that we know what we feel towards a certain product but we do not know why.

There are two ways to deliver non-conscious primes: either subliminally, in which case the primes themselves are not accessible to the person’s awareness, the information is inside the subconscious part of the mind, or supraliminally, in which case the person is aware of the primes but maybe not of their potential influence. The person gained information but without awareness of its persuasive intention (Bargh, 2002: 282). The plenitudes of marketing influence reassures that sponsors can carefully choose the context and exact time and length
of the scene in which their product should be shown or mentioned, so it evokes positive emotions towards it, and the results show that product integration works.

Product placement saved some brands or raised them from the dust again, for instance: Ray-Ban, a Z3 by BMW or Red Stripe beer. In year 1983, the movie The Risky Business increased fame for both Tom Cruise and Ray-Ban glasses which became so popular that 360,000 pairs were sold in the same year; in year 1995, the movie Golden Eye showed James Bond not driving the usual favourite Aston Martin but Z3 by BMW and after the first month after the releasing of the movie there were 9000 orders for the same type of the car; or in year 1993, in the movie The Firm both Tom Cruise and Gene Hackman drink Red Stripe Beer in one scene, sales of this brand increased by more than 50% in the USA and a majority stake of the company was sold to Guinness Brewing Worldwide for $62 million (www.cnbc.com).

Above are just a few examples of how product placement can be used to boost sales of specific products. The after-movie influences may also have negative effects on the usage of the product, for instance in year 2004 the movie Sideways shows two men on a trip in a wine country, where the main character loves to be seen drinking pinot noir and express a big antipathy towards merlot by avoiding it. The movie became an unexpected success and Oscar winner. After the release of the movie the sale of pinot noir and especially Blackstone brand increased by 150% and US sales of merlot fell by 2% (www.cnbc.com).

**Brief History**

At one point, a problem occurred in the market. Namely, in the early fifties, there was an overproduction of goods that threatened many fronts in the western sales industry. Marketers were troubled with the fact that people were very easily satisfied with what they already had. An executive of the publishing company of McGraw-Hill concisely summed up the situation in his statement:

"As a nation we are already so rich that consumers are under no pressure of immediate necessity to buy a large share - perhaps as much as 40% - of what is produced, and the pressure will get progressively less in the years ahead. But if consumers exercise their option not to buy a large share of what is produced, a great depression is not far behind."

As the quote explains, the growing economy would suffer, unless a drastic change occurred. People had to consume more, whether they wanted to or not, and it had to be changed fast. That is when the executive planners changed from being maker-minded to market-minded (1957).

As mentioned earlier, over half a century ago, the fruitful work of Vance Packard (The Hidden Persuaders, 1957) brought the Western world to the realisation of the subliminal influences on the mind. Although, some of the experiments associated with subliminal studies date back to as far as 1917, when Otto Potzl, who did one of the first modern subliminal studies, used a camera shutter for getting stimulus exposures down to 0.01 seconds and succeeded in reproducing certain effects that he had observed with neurological patients who had sustained damage to the visual cortex. He was one of the first scientists to use a technological device that was similar to a tachistoscope, but Potzl’s experiment came before the tachistoscope. Then in 1885, Ebbinghaus (1885) showed that just-learned materials that are ignored by the subject are forgotten over time. This gave the modern subliminal
psychology grounds to found one of the methods used within contemporary subliminal science: the Ebbinghousian Subliminality (Erdelyi and Zizak), which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Ever since the discovery of the phenomenon of subliminal advertisement, advertising agents, motivation researchers, sales executives, members of the advertising market etc. have been fighting for the power it would give. Therefore, subliminal advertising, together with the evolution of regular advertising, seemed to hold the key to raising the consumerism level to a new degree.

Human behaviour is the product of an endless stream of perceptions, feelings, and thoughts, at both conscious and unconscious levels. The idea that we are not aware of the cause of much of our behaviour can be difficult to accept (Mlodinow, 2012).

"We all hold dear the idea that we're the captain of our own soul, and we're in charge, and it is a very scary feeling when we're not. In fact, that's what psychosis is - the feeling of detachment from reality and that you're not in control, and that's a very frightening feeling for anyone."

In spite of it being a difficult fact to grasp, we are still going to be affected by the unconscious influences, whether we agree of its control or not. The key to this inability of total control is that all humans have conscious and unconscious minds and the interplay between these two is very complex. The roots of the complexity originate in the physiology of our brains. As mammals, we have new layers of cortex built upon the base of our more primitive reptilian brains; and as humans, we have yet more cerebral matter built upon those. We have an unconscious mind and, superimposed upon it, a conscious brain. Our experiences and actions always seem to be rooted in conscious thought and we can find it difficult to accept that there are hidden forces at work behind the scenes. But even though those forces may be invisible, they still exert a powerful pull.

Conscious awareness may be the way to comprehend the world around us in the cognitive sense, to accumulate knowledge, use memory, to solve problems that need thinking, and contemplate on future events. But when it comes to the instinctual, survival aspects of life, instances and events that need an immediate reaction, such as avoiding being hit by a car or catching a vase that just slipped off the table, the unconscious is an irreplaceable tool.

The unconscious also contains what in Freudian terms is referred to as the Id (Latin for "it"), one of the three agencies of the human personality, along with the ego and superego. Being the oldest of these psychic realms in development, the Id contains the psychic content related to the primitive instincts of the body, notably sex and aggression. Advertising agents know this very well; in fact, they have spent great resources, on research, hiring social workers, psychoanalysts, cultural anthropologists, sociologists, and others in the field to understand better ways to get into the consumer's mind. That is why we see so much emotionally as well as sexually provocative material in advertisements.

Hypnosis is also being used in attempts to probe our subconscious mind to find more ways of understanding what makes consumers tick. There was a case of a man being hypnotised where under the hypnotic state he was able to recall word for word of an ad he had read more than twenty years ago (Packard 1957). This proves how long-lasting effects, ads may have on our minds and hence on the way we may behave in the future.
Advertising is a phenomenon of wide spectre that works not only on our buying habits, but also on the ideological level. Ads present us with another world that seems like reality but is better and more promising. Advertisements must be taken into account not only the inherent qualities and attributes of the products they are trying to sell, but also the way in which they can make those properties mean something to the consumer (Williamson 1978). Advertisements are selling something else besides consumer goods, providing consumers with a structure in which they (the consumers), and those goods, are interchangeable. They create a connection.

Over the last few decades the advertising agents realized that the field of shopping and browsing was not entirely a reasonable phenomenon. A Milwaukee advertising executive commented on this matter:

"The Women are buying a promise. The cosmetic manufacturers are not selling lanolin, they are selling hope.... We no longer buy oranges, we buy vitality. We do not buy just an auto, we buy prestige."

Companies realized that people did not necessarily prefer one product over the other because of their physical properties.

"People have a terrific loyalty to their brand of cigarette and yet in tests cannot tell it from other brands. They are smoking an image completely."

In a research, three hundred smokers, loyal to one of three major brands of cigarettes, were given the three brands to smoke; however, the labels were taped in a way so that they wouldn't recognize the brands visually. The participants were asked to identify their own favourite brand among the three. The test ended with surprising results. Only 35% of the smokers were able to identify their favoured brand. It would be similar percentage if they had been choosing purely by guessing. Somewhat comparatively similar results were obtained when merchandisers tried to blindfold the participants on beer and whisky (Packard 1957).

Bearing in mind that roughly 65% of all smokers tend to be absolutely loyal to their preferable brand of tobacco, it is astonishing to witness the illusion they carry with their habits. If they cannot recognize their favourite brand because of its physical qualities and can only do so because of the indication from the label, that means that the most of the characteristics to which they designate their preferences are simply illusions created by the image of the brand. If taste and physical properties among products are almost alike, with not much difference in taste or quality (not necessarily applies to all products), what then makes consumers stick to and favour a certain type of product?

From the early years, marketers began to form beliefs and ideologies on products in order to attract customers using a different approach to emotional attachment. Essentially, shopping is an emotional process and involves experiencing feelings towards the visible goods. The shopping experience becomes more complex as we get more products to choose from, and as things such as health and well-being get into cultural focus, consumers are not satisfied merely by the gratification of the basic needs, the product lacks value unless it is powered by an additional trait together with its primary purpose. Such empowerment can be ideology, which gives the customer something more to hang onto.
Over time, after conducting researches on marketing strategies, the methods of constructing subliminal messages have changed and above all, been refined to suit the viewer's mind more effectively. The earliest studies were mainly based on research in controlled, quiet, distraction-free environment, in which the participants gave their full attention to the specific stimuli that was presented, had a good amount of time to consider the choices and tried hard to follow the instructions given by the researchers. However, the researchers soon began to question if the same outcome would follow if the environment were to be altered to the actual, noisy, complex, socially distracting and busy world.

The question was answered, and the researchers began to conduct their experiments in more naturalistic surroundings. What changed was that an element of conscious choice was removed from the whole process of making choices. This thesis, among others, was proved, by an example that Fazio and his collaborators (1986) provided in a study called "On the Automatic Activation of Attitudes." Namely, that evaluation of surroundings was conducted in an automated manner by the use of subconscious impulses and not by conscious choice. Even the behaviours in social interactions were found to be based on the automatic social-perceptual mechanisms (Bargh, Chen, and Burrows 1996).

Researchers also suggested that information that is given to the consumer unexpectedly is more likely to stand out than the information that is expected (Von Restorff, 1933). As consumers already have a set of expectations when viewing advertisements, they have more defences against the possibility of being influenced from the information that is being fed to them, whereas, in the case of placing a brand or product in an unexpected situation (such as in movies) will be equal to introducing it to them while their guards are down.

Although, before such discoveries could have been made, scientists had to conduct many experiments with subliminal probing on the subconscious mind to grasp the realm of how it could be influenced. In a study conducted by Byrne (1959) the word "beef" was flashed for successive five millisecond intervals during a sixteen-minute movie. According to word association tests, experimental and control subjects' verbal references to the word “beef” did not differ. Neither did the experimental subjects express a higher preference for beef sandwiches, in a following situation after the experiment where they had to choose one of the sandwiches among five alternatives. However, the study did not end without an outcome; the experimental subjects rated themselves hungrier than the controlled ones. Another experiment with a similar conclusion was that of Hawkins (1970) where they flashed the word "coke" for 2.7 millisecond-intervals during the presentation of other susceptible material. Likewise, in this study the experimental subjects rated higher in thirst than the control group. Hawkins concluded that "a simple subliminal stimulus can serve to arouse a basic drive such as thirst." Or in the case of Byrne: Hunger.

These experiments prove the existence of a strong connection between the subconscious impulses and the Id, and this is nicely complimented by the study conducted by Zuckerman (1960) requiring student nurses to write stories describing the contents of a series of visuals that were projected onto a screen in front of them.

Unknown to the subjects, the instructions "write more" and "don't write" were tachistoscopically superimposed on the pictures at successive points during the presentations. A control group was treated in a similar way; however, it received no subliminal commands. The study was composed of three successive stages: in the first, no subliminal messages were presented; in the second, the experimental group received frames that flashed the instruction
"write more" for 0.02 seconds, concurrently with the picture they were asked to describe; and finally in the third, the subjects in an experimental group received the instruction "don't write", again superimposed for the same amount of time on the picture being projected. During each condition, pictures were presented for 10 trials each. After each trial, subjects wrote a description of what they had seen. Zuckerman found that nurses in the experimental group wrote more during the second condition, thus, interpreting it as evidence that the subliminal instructions were working.

To compare this study with the above-mentioned two, in which there was no instruction but a mere word, we can conclude that the flashes of "beef" and "coke" had no output because the unconscious did not know in which way to interpret and process the information and therefore it did not mean anything to the subjects. Hence, there was only a portional effect, namely, the most basic reaction of hunger and thirst, and it went no further than that. Whereas in the case of the writing nurses, there was a clear instruction, a command; "write more" or "don't write". This had a visible effect because subliminal influence works by communicating to the subconscious - just like hypnosis. If a hypnotist tells a subject in hypnotic trance a single word "beef" without any implications, there will be no impulse from that to the subject's behaviour. However, if the hypnotist commands the subject under trance in an authoritarian style to do something specific (i.e. open your eyes) the subject will in most cases act with a corresponding behavioural change.

In order for a subliminal message to exert a behavioural effect, the full and precise meaning of the message would have to be extracted from it. Dixon (1971) has reviewed many subliminal perception studies showing that when words are used as stimuli, "the stimulus tends to elicit responses from the same sphere of meaning" (p. 102).

The meaning of the message is constructed by the receiver in active, complex, and often specialized ways. Therefore it is necessary that the message is clear enough to be correctly delivered to and understood by the subject's subconscious and yet be subtle enough not to be comprehended by the conscious.

Advertising

Advertising itself is the act of drawing attention to products or service in order to promote and sell them. Advertising has become a natural and inevitable part of our lives, because it is all around us and we come across with it in every public place. Advertisements are an important factors forming our reality and ideology.

Even if a person does not own a television and does not buy newspapers and is trying to avoid advertising, it is enough for them to just walk outside the door and the colourful public spaces will do their job. Nowadays, billboards are almost everywhere along with commercial posters, or cars with brand stickers.

Typically, these persuaders see us as a bunch of day dreamers with irrational emotional blockages (Packard, 1957: 33). Even if we consider ourselves as rational human beings, capable of controlling our desires and urges, we are still to some extent carried away by our feelings and emotions. We are responding to advertisements with the feeling we get from it, often unaware that our actions are activated by someone who intended to provoke this
emotional response. They are used to offer us more than the actual product, focusing more on selling the brand. For instance, the Dove campaign for the real beauty is selling self-esteem and inner beauty to women. In their advertisements, they use women from any age category, any race, and any body type and still sell products for appearance which are supposed to make us beautiful on the outside.

We do not buy soaps, fruit or good champagne. We buy beauty, vitality and prestige. There is no purchase of Aston Martin anymore, it is James Bond’s car which we see behind it. Dr. Dichter emphasised that the emotional factor in advertising is much more important than we used to think. He claims that any merchandiser must find the emotional hook (Packard, 1957: 52).

Lewin’s influential field theory says that one is unable to manipulate with goals that people did not already have themselves; however, the goals can be influenced by activating or manipulating them. The principle is to match subliminal stimulus with the subject’s current goals or needs (Bargh, 2002: 283).

There are at least three forms of subliminal stimulation which have been proved effective to stimulate behaviour in subjects: a visual stimuli, the use of intensive speech in low volume auditory messages and hidden sexual imagery or the word “sex” in pictorial, animated advertisements (Moore, 1982: 40) or even cartoons for children. Disney is accused of hiding the word “sex” or images of genitalia into the frames.

In 1973, Wilson Bryan Key exposed hidden sexual images in brands and logos. He exposed an image of a man with an erection in a logo of Camel cigarettes, when he tried to show that advertising is mainly attacking our basic desires. The famous brand Coca-Cola underwent the similar scandal when in their commercial a woman practising oral sex was shown in the ice cube with the slogan “Feel the Curves!” (www.mindpowernews.com)

That is why subliminal advertising in movies lately has caused more and more awareness. If we watch a movie, we take it as a form of escapism from the real world. We do not expect to be in touch with advertisement, or to be persuaded to build our desire or need towards some product, because our favourite main character loves a particular drink or wears a particular brand. The differences in processing between art and promotion are also what lead to blurred lines between what is entertainment and what persuasion is (Shrum, 2012: 10). These lines can be blurred by both receivers and transmitters. A receiver does not do it on purpose; it is just simple misunderstanding of the persuasive intention in the movie, and a transmitter reaches its goal by blurring the lines because it is an aim to sell the product.

The term “subliminal”
What does it mean if we call something subliminal? According to the Oxford Dictionary, subliminal can be defined as below the threshold of sensation or consciousness; perceived by or affecting someone’s mind without their being aware of it. The term originates from Latin in the late 19th century: from sub- ‘below’ + Latin limen, limin- 'threshold' + -al (oxforddictionaries.com). This definition explains that subliminal is placed below our level of awareness and even though we gain some information and it is located in our subconscious, we are not able to recognize that we were influenced by someone or something.
There is a distinction between *explicit* proceeding and *implicit* proceeding. *Explicit* perceiving is consciously taken in by an individual; it is in the layer of the brain, which we are aware of, and which we can easily control. We are able to observe something, experience it and take in information from it.

On the other hand, *implicit* perceiving is the subconscious perception. It is shown in our behaviour, opinions and strong desires but we are often not able to reason why. Even though we are taking in information, we cannot manipulate with this experience as with the explicit one.

We are not aware of our subliminal mind, yet our conscious and subconscious still communicate and interact without our input to do so. It’s close to impossible to make general assumptions about how to influence the subconscious, because every individual is different. As Timothy E. Moore writes, there is no particular stimulus intensity or duration that can guarantee success among all perceivers (Moore, 1982: 39).

Each brain is “programmed” differently and that is why scientists are not yet able to track down preferences of a “general perception”. That means that those with low thresholds need weak stimulus to add subliminal information which would cause it not to reach perceivers with higher thresholds at all.

There is no right formula which explains how to influence all perceivers at the same time, but there are general theories on how to influence at least specific groups. This is the tricky act to do, since it is proven that for a person who has tendency to have low threshold one day, it can be higher another day. We are all changing every day and our perceptions vary from hour to hour (Ibid: 40).

Even though we are focusing on the area of subliminal advertising, subliminal methods are widely used, not just among advertising, but also among political campaigns, in propaganda, newspapers, photographs, and movies with hidden messages. In an American city in May 1978, police investigators scattered among TV news frames subliminal messages describing the real murder to TV news viewers in an effort to arrest a murderer (Ibid: 38).

Political campaigns are known for using underhanded methods to defame or sabotage candidates. Rapidly growing implication and refined implicit processes (processes which are outside of the awareness) open more doors on how to influence voters. In addition, since candidates know their voters, they are able to focus on specific groups and polling, relying on conscious self-report (Weinberger & Westen, 2008:635). As it is generally known, political campaigns are meant to be strongly influencing voters from the country which is preparing for elections.

The last 15 years of psychological research in neuroscience, social psychology and political psychology showed that people are unable to report some of their reasons in questionnaires for why they voted as they did, even when they think they can provide reasonable answers (Ibid: 632). Applying the difference between explicit and implicit, in theory voters should be able answer why they are against euthanasia, but they should not be able to answer whether the pro-advertisement for euthanasia showing a dying person in agony, who wants to be allowed to die in order to end their pain, will influence them towards the candidate who wants to allow euthanasia in the country. It is not logical reasoning which is most important in our subconscious - it is emotion.
One of the most well known cases is from 2000, during the presidential election in USA, where Vice President Al Gore accused republicans of using frames flashing with the word “RATS” in their political advertisement. In a republican commercial which criticised Al Gore and his politics, the word “rats” appeared on a screen for a blunt moment. George W. Bush denied his accusing with the claim: “One frame out of 900 hardly, in my judgement, makes a conspiracy.” (abcnews.go.com)

Subliminal Priming Today

Today subliminal advertising is widely used in spite of its controversies. Even though the methods have been altered and refined, and the researchers have started to obtain successful subliminal effects. The three most widely used psychological techniques for degrading psychological stimulus are: Ebbinghausian subliminality, Pavlovian subliminality, and Freudian subliminality.

Ebbinghausian Subliminality

In Ebbinghausian subliminality, forgetting is used as a tool. In short, Ebbinghaus proved that all ignored information wears off or is forgotten over time but it is not completely gone. It is at least partially, if not fully, stored below the threshold of consciousness. In another study (Erdelyi and Kleinbard, 1978), subjects actively thought of some just-learned information and tried to retrieve it back to its freshest state, and it was concluded that the conscious accessibility of that memory is progressively increased over time. Hence, the more the subject repeats or revises the memory, the better the process of recollection becomes.

However, the statistics differ if the memory recalled is a picture or a word. Pictures and visual memories tend to have a gradual increment by the repetition. However, according to Erdelyi and Kleinbard's retention functions for pictures and words (1978), when recalling is repeatedly tested for words, their memory fails to produce a reliable increment over time; the recollection tends to fluctuate and never exceed the vividness of pictorial memories.

After some time though, a discovery, made in 1996, showed that the reason subjects did not progress in recalling the words, was because the earlier experiments only involved nonsense syllables and lists of irrelevant words. It turns out that the stimulus does not have to be illustrations in order to have a lasting effect. Poetry, engaging narratives and sensible sentences work as well. Therefore, the more flashes of brands people get subliminally, the more likely it is that they will remember it.

Pavlovian Subliminality

Pavlovian Subliminality was constructed upon Pavlov's famous dog experiment (1927), where the dog was primed with a ring of a bell before the food was given to it, and salivation was witnessed on the ring of the bell because for the dog, the sound meant that food was going to be delivered soon after.

The well known Pavlovian conditioning involves the association of a conditioned stimulus (bell) with an unconditioned stimulus (food) which then causes an unconditioned response
Scientists have found that these associations not only work on animals, but also on humans. Advertisers have used this method of association perhaps most commonly of all among the other subliminal techniques. It is a standard technique where something exciting, i.e. emotionally or sexually arousing stimulus (e.g. sexually attractive woman) is used as the conditioned stimulus (e.g. deodorant).

After a number of pairings, it becomes almost equal for the subject to think of the conditioned stimulus (a neutral product, in our case a deodorant) as the conditioned response (sexual arousal). This process occurs because the conditioned stimulus is used as a predictor of the unconditioned stimulus. Thus it is how a neutral product comes to the point where it implies sexual arousal.

However, the implication of the product on the stimulus should not be overtly explicit; otherwise the consumer might be offended by the direct implication and will not purchase the product. The message of association should be implicit and covert. Too much conscious thought triggers critical or defensive evaluations of the message and may well lead to its rejection (2012). As long as the implied message is subtle enough as to not arouse too much attention of the conscious, the association will be created.

**Freudian Subliminality**

This type of technique involves much more insight into thoughts than the others do. In his research on psychology and the human mind, Freud came up with dream-work techniques (1917) which were designated to uncover dreams and decipher their meanings. The techniques involve four main parts; 1. Censorship (omission, hints, modification, allusions, displacement of accent); 2. Condensation; 3. (Primitive) Symbolization. 4. Plastic-word representation/dramatization.

However, dreams are not the only realm that these techniques can be used on. They can also be used to understand a deeper meaning and interpret the latent content of jokes, and advertisements. Advertisers have started to construct ads using these techniques to raise the demand of products. As an example, Freudian symbolism is being widely used by advertisers to hide the explicit meanings of ads and deliver them in friendlier, acceptable, and legal conditions, like a lollipop in place of a phallus.

**Product Integration**

Product integration includes all methods of product placements which are found in movies, visual, spoken or hidden in the background. In the past, product placement and product integration meant the same practise.

Nowadays, the product integration is the most general term for all kinds of product placements which developed throughout history. It is the general term for product placements, product immersions and reverse product placement, describing the practice of inserting a product or a service into a movie in return for payment of money or other promotional consideration by a marketer (Ibid:11).
There is a difference between paid brands which were used in a movie and brands which simply fit with the character. For instance, if there is a character that is sporty, it enhances him or her to wear Nike shoes or if a character represents an unhealthy lifestyle, it would suit him/her better to have empty boxes and paper from McDonalds or Burger King all around his room. If there was no purchase between those who create the art and those who create the product, it cannot be called product integration. The character sometimes needs to be authentic for some specific part of society, whether the story describes a bookworm, athlete, rebel or so on.

In particular moments, it is inevitable for a movie not to show special brands, if it needs to describe an important feature of the character. For example, in the movie *I, Robot* from 2004, the main character played by Will Smith hates the modern era including robots, and that is why he listens to an old cd-player by the brand JVC and wears Converse shoes from 2004 when it is the year 2035.

However, for the viewer who is watching the movie or TV show, it essentially makes no difference at all, because there is still an exposure of advertisement, whether it was paid by sponsors or not. Since these messages are not in an open commercial, but mentioned or shown briefly in a movie, we have a tendency to take them in a different way. When the same commercial is on the television several times per hour promising low prices or the best quality of some product, most of us automatically get annoyed, alerted or defensive. As we perceive it, it is obvious for us to see that the commercial was paid to persuade us to purchase something, to exaggerate the real quality of the product and to make us believe in it.

On the other hand, the product integration in a movie, which for us is something entertaining and we deliberately choose to watch it, is not identified as persuasion. The sponsor gets the best of both of these traditional forms of communication, advertising and publicity (Ibid: 18). The famous actors are selling movies just with their faces which assure the publicity for sponsors. The product integration in any form assures advertising. Subliminal advertising is the beneficial package for sponsors and selling concrete products, because it is a way for viewers to not be aware of persuasive intention between the scenes. The commercial is tied together with the name of a company whereas the flash of a logo in the movie belongs to the story and it is presented as a part of storyline, not violently excluded from the plot.

**Diversity of product integration**

There are various ways on how to include advertising of concrete brands into a movie. As we mentioned above, there can be a visual stimuli, spoken stimuli or sexual imagery. The brand can be seen *visually* and be a dominant facet of the scene. It can be in the background of the scene just casually shown in the surroundings. It can be *mentioned* by characters in the movie in a dialogue, or in the background, so the viewers can *hear* the name of the brand. In addition, products can be *used* by characters; for instance, drinking of a concrete brand of a beverage, wearing a dominant brand of clothing, eating in a famous chain of restaurant. In other words, product integration can be characterised in a three-dimensional framework. The first dimension is the visual one, where the product or brand is shown, and the level of visual placement vary according to how much or how many times it is seen. The second dimension is the spoken one which varies according to whether it is “incidentally” mentioned or
emphasised. The third dimension includes whether or not the product or brand is a part of the story (Ibid: 23).

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**Product Placement, Product Immersion & Reverse Product Placement**

Product placement and product immersion are subcategories of the general term product integration. Product placement includes all products which are in a movie or TV show, mentioned, seen on the screen or briefly used by the character (Ibid: 12). Typically, visual product placement is a logo appearing on a screen, advertisement in the background or product itself shown on the screen. For instance, a scene of a ticking Swiss watch in the movie Inception from 2010 may not fit into the main character. The running time was important for the story and they just had to use some kind of watch to increase the tension.

Product placements have been of growing interest to researchers as well as practitioners of marketing in recent years. Whereas most of the attention has been given to placements that occur in movies and on television, they are beginning to increasingly participate in other popular media realms, such as books, magazines, newspapers, and even in video games and music.

Unless consumers realize that marketers are attempting to persuade them, the likelihood of setting up mental barriers, becoming sceptical, and carefully scrutinizing brand claims is very low. As a result, some researchers argue that product placement is deceptive and needs to be strictly regulated, primarily because they may be mistaken for unbiased approval by the media vehicles involved.

However, it is hard for consumers to determine whether product-related content in movies, television programs, books, newspapers, magazines, and the like is commercially sponsored or not. As long as consumers don't get suspicious about the nature of the placed product (i.e. it is not apparent if it was paid to be there or not, if it is a sponsored ad or just a neutral product) the comprehension of the brand or the product is less sceptical.

Marketers, who believe that their audiences are completely unaware of the subliminal influences, may reveal too much information that can be used against them. If they put a concealed message that would, if revealed, cause an upheaval (such as those instances of the word "sex" was seen in Disney movies), they may have to face a huge punishment, and so can all the others who use subliminal priming detrimentally on audiences. This is why it is important for the people behind advertising to broaden their understanding of the conditions under which placements, that can be more or less successful, and those under which they can actually be harmful.

With companies in steep competition, everyone strives to make consumers aware of their products and services. Therefore, firms relentlessly bombard their audience with persuasive messages in attempts to mould the attitudes of consumers positively towards their goods. Nowadays, companies can choose one or many among the several types of media available to them: television, radio, magazines, newspapers, movies, novels, etc. for affecting a specific audience. Some products are only attractive to a certain age group, such as, for example, a Barbie doll. Therefore, it will be wiser for the manufacturers to use a media that would fit the
criteria of the corresponding age group; television or movies, instead of newspapers and novels in our example. Those are some of the factors that the advertising agents keep in mind when making their decisions to influence an audience.

A proposed advantage of product placements over other forms of persuasion is the natural and covert method of message delivery. Consumers, who notice paid placements where they are not expected to be seen, may feel betrayed and this may in fact result in them having a negative reaction to the product for ruining their expectation. This is the nature of subliminal advertisement, for its success, the cover shouldn't be blown.

Product placements are not necessarily a part of the story and they do not have to fit in with any of the characters. They are used as a subliminal advertisement, even though they do not at all have to be included in the plot to make a story authentic.

On the other hand, product immersion is meant to be a part of the story. It is mentioned several times and being used more often by a particular character or group of characters. Product immersion puts a product into a whole new position, when it is not just shown for a few seconds, but used or present throughout the whole storyline. For example, movies like The Internship from year the 2013 (with Hollywood stars Owen Wilson and Vince Vaughn) is one big advertisement for Google, clearly tied together with the whole plot, although it is done obvious enough that it is not hard to be aware of it. There is also the movie Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man from the year 1991, where the main characters are named after the two well-known brands that are mentioned in the title.

Reverse product placement is a practise where the idea of the product is first introduced without any existing product on the market. The product is advertised and widely known even before some company actually starts producing it. This practise is not that heavily used as the previous two, but the demand after the product is released on the market is enormous since people hear about the product before but cannot see it or get it. The simple human curiousness wins in this type of situation. For instance, Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans in Harry Potter or Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. in Forrest Gump (Ibid: 42) were introduced to the market after the huge success of the movies and became quickly popular among the consumers.

Product Placement Symbol (PP), Public Policy towards Product Placement
Practising of the product integration started to be more and more publicly popular and among viewers increased contradictory reactions. Public policymakers worry that the “below the threshold concept” is only beneficial for sponsors and not for viewers. Since their focus is the comfort of the viewers, they were aware of the effect it can have on the purchase behaviour, memory and attitudes (Ibid: 51). Some countries such as the United Kingdom decided to prohibit involvement of product integration into the local production (Ibid: 51). It did not include foreign movies or TV shows since they do not have influence over the production abroad.

Other European countries, under the EU Audio-visual Media Service Directive, took another approach. They decided to make viewers aware of the subliminal advertising in the movies and TV shows by showing the Product Placement symbol, which is a big logo with two letters “PP”, at the beginning and after the end of a particular movie or TV show (Ibid: 51). It is a more tolerable attitude towards sponsors but still an intention to highlight the product
placement and thus make viewers knowledgeable of persuasive input in the movie or TV show they are about to watch.

However, by emphasising the consciousness about these integrations, it made viewers influenced even more when they knew there is advertising in the movie somewhere. The memory was “turned on” by a big label right at the beginning, and IP Deutschland tested the memory level with the result that an unaided recall increased by a staggering 80% and an aided recall increased by a still impressive 23% (Ibid: 51). They found out that the memory of viewers, which was supposed to be not influenced, was influenced even more than before. Their first intention to protect viewers did not go as they had planned; the warning exposed the integration to the light even more and drew attention to look for it consciously, and not to take it subliminally as it would be without a warning. The PP symbol was meant to assist viewers to not fall for hidden advertisement, but the paradox turned it against it.

Instead of harming the persuasive intention, the PP symbol actually helped the brand to be advertised even better by building an awareness of it inside of the movie or TV show hence made it easier to remember the brand or product. Sponsors benefited from the PP symbol, which is why it lasted only approximately 8 months in Belgium (Ibid: 53). On the other hand, at least viewers reconfigured the subliminal effect to a conscious one and changed it from implicit to explicit, and even though it was still beneficial for sponsors more than for public policymakers, viewers in these cases were aware consciously of what is offered to them through the movies or TV shows. The PP symbol warning presented at the beginning of each movie at least permits viewers to handle product placements with their conscious mind, hence limiting the effect better (Ibid: 54).

So why didn’t the PP symbol work? Logically, it should have made viewers aware of the products and therefore brought them into the conscious, making them less likely to be affected by the product placement.

However, the opposite effect occurred, watching the PP symbol triggered many people to look for product placement. What the PP symbol ended up doing, was trigger the brain to become more attentive, and especially pay more attention to the products displayed. It is likely that many saw the PP symbol and had an impulse to look for products, but then as the movie progressed they forgot about it, with their subconscious mind still actively focusing on placements.

A closely related example of this is the experiment where a number of people were told to count the red dots that appeared on the screen in rapid succession. The dots would be accompanied by other dots of different colors which the subjects were asked to ignore. The dots would secretly spell out different things to trigger thirst. It was difficult to spot however, because the words were made up of all the different colored dots. This study worked quite well on the subjects, in general it worked better than most studies where the subjects where shown similar messages in images or the like. This study suggests that having the conscious concentrate on something also triggers the subconscious to concentrate in the same way, but the subconscious tends to be far better at keeping focus than the conscious (Henley, 1991:95).
Product Integration’s influence on children

A market dedicated to products for children is extremely important to advertisers. Statistics all around the world show huge numbers when it comes to children’s toys, games, candy and clothing. The size of the global toy market is estimated to be around 84 billion U.S dollars in 2012 (www.statista.com). In the United Kingdom, it is annually established that children spend around 12 billion (Ibid: 65) pounds per year by themselves, spending their pocket money on toys and games which are in fashion.

It is not just about the purchasing of new inventive toys, but also about searching for a role model. Young people and children are especially proved to be more vulnerable to the influence from a lot of angles. A number of parents are trying to raise their children in a way that they will respect the value of money. However children are constantly exposed to advertising.

Even in countries where the government fights for regulations of advertising aimed at children, they either ban them completely or limit them to lower amounts (for example in Sweden, where advertisers cannot appeal to children unless they are at least 16 years old and since 1991 all advertising during children’s prime time is illegal due to findings that children under 10 years old are not able to distinguish between a commercial and a program and cannot understand the purpose of advertising till they are around 12 years old), advertisers respond back with self-regulation and blame parents for not raising and controlling their children as they should.

According to the APA (American Psychological Association), research shows that children under the age of 8 are not capable of critically assimilate televised advertising messaging, lack the cognitive development to understand the persuasive intention and they have a tendency to evaluate everything in the television as truthful and legit (www.apa.org). Thus the youth market has a huge potential economically and it is estimated that American advertisers are spending more than 12 billion dollars per year on advertising which is aimed to reach out specifically to children (www.apa.org).

Youth is hence exposed to commercials in television and surrounded by advertising which is hidden in cartoons and movies. Our research suggests that children’s limited cognitive abilities may make them exceptionally defenceless towards subliminal advertising. The American Psychological Association reports that for viewers to resist the persuasive intention of a subliminal advertisement they need to be able to differentiate between commercial and non-commercial content of a movie or TV show and predicate persuasive intention to any product integration that occurs (Ibid: 68).

The product integration imbeds products or brands into the context, so it becomes the part of the storyline on which the attention is drawn. Since children do not have cognitive capacity on a high level yet, implicit processes start to be activated. The product integration is typically processed at a preconscious level, and cooperation with consciousness is in these cases certainly improbable (Ibid: 69).

Several studies showed that children can be influenced by product integration to a level, where they can switch their preference towards a brand. There are examples from several experiments with children around age 10-12. For instance, when the children of one group were exposed to a brand advertising of Pepsi in the movie Home Alone and a second group was presented with the same clip without subliminal advertising in it. When they were asked
to pick a drink afterwards, the first group picked Pepsi among the drinks they were offered and they could not really explain why it was the most appealing drink to them. Children were unable to recall seeing Pepsi, confirming the theory that they were influenced to switch their preference of selecting Pepsi over Coca-Cola, without an answer to it in the conscious recognition (Ibid: 70).

In addition, several studies suggested that explicit memory is improving during the childhood, then has its peak during young adulthood and finally declines all along middle age (Ibid: 70). On the other hand, implicit memory is active throughout our entire lives, not tied with aging or influenced by experience or knowledge.

As mentioned above, the change in purchase behaviour is mostly followed after the change in emotion rather than rational reasoning. As we get older, we learn to control our emotions to some extent even though we are not consistently successful. However, children are completely driven by the feelings and emotions they get from their surroundings. Adults can be attracted to something banned or illegal in a sense of forbidden fruit, but children on the other hand are always looking for something joyful and positive. The mood context among product integration is one of the key concepts of how to be successful in a subliminal advertisement.

Previously it was believed that viewers in a good mood were much easier to influence than viewers who were upset (Ibid: 81). However in movies there are more factor to consider. A viewer who’s enjoying the movie, or likes the genre in general is easier to manipulate, and it’s also important for the character to be well liked to influence an audience through product placement.

In the study of Owen, Lewis and Auty (Ibid: 83) the focus laid on exploring whether or not mood context had an impact on children watching movies. It was a study containing a Nike brand showed in two video clips, either in a positive light or in a negative light.

In a positive context, the main character wears Nike shoes and wins an important basketball game and the whole clip is cheerful and the audience is applauding. In a negative context, the main character is attacked by bullies and his Nike shoes are stolen and thrown up on the cable.

These video clips were tested on two groups, 128 children in total. The results showed that those children who watched a positive video clip were more influenced by the Nike brand than those children who watched a video about bullying. This study proves that an implicit processing is embraced if the product integration is tied together with a joyful and positive scene.
The basic science of subliminal perception

The subliminal perception is, at its core, everything we perceive which we don’t realize that we perceive. The human mind takes in a large number of stimuli every second, and our brain then decides what is relevant to us at current time and what it will store for a while, in case it becomes relevant later. If this process was not there, we would not be able to focus on someone talking if there was music, the two would blend together and we would have to pay equal mind to both of these stimuli.

But as Ebbinghaus proved, there are many ways to get the subliminally stored information into the conscious mind if it becomes important later. This is because our eye can see around $10^8$ bits per second (100,000,000) and of those, only around 50 is transmitted to the conscious mind. (Löwenheart, 1991: 9) This means that a person may have witnessed a crime without realizing it, and may have seen the criminal’s face. At the time the person saw the face, it was irrelevant; it was just another face. However, if presented with the right stimuli, the person may be able to recall the incident, even if he or she didn’t pay attention to it when it happened.

If not all, most of what we experience is stored in our subconscious. This information is used to make our everyday lives easier. It’s what allows us at a psychological level to “go through the motions”, we experience small stimuli that lead our subconscious to conclude a number of things based on these small stimuli, thus making the decision for us that will lead to a need. The information stored in the subconscious is what makes us able to perform tasks without conscious thought. Most people have brushed their teeth so many times that its second nature to us, this is because our subconscious can perform the task without aid from the conscious at all. This principle is important when talking about subliminal advertisement. Going back to the Pavlovian method it’s not necessarily hunger that makes you hungry; it just helps. When one smells food, the unconscious recognizes that maybe one should be hungry, and then sends a signal to remind the body, if it is hungry. This is why almost all food advertisements showcase the food. If a person walks by a restaurant that has a picture of a burger on the side, and they smell the aroma of a burger coming from the building, their subconscious will be reminded of food and alert the individual that they may be hungry; if there were no vivid implications of the restaurant showing its purpose (a place to eat) the by-passer wouldn’t be impulsively affected by it, the subconscious would render the restaurant as another meaningless building, and they will more likely ignore it. This is the basic element of enticement and plays an important role when looking at the subliminal perception and exploring the advertisements that are made to trigger consumer’s minds.

How do you feel?

**Nudging** is the act of using something we already want to reintroduce the need for. If someone already likes Coca Cola, and recognizes the brand, all that’s needed to make that person want a Coca Cola, is a flash of the image of one or the easily recognizable sound of a can being opened. Anything that reminds them of their need for consumption, will trigger the need for the brand. Nudging cannot however introduce an alien concept to us, such as previously feared. You cannot use nudging to turn someone into a suicide bomber for example. For nudging to be effective, two base things must be established. The person to be
nudged must already know, understand and have tried the concept introduced, and the person must have a basic need or want for the action or product (Packard, 1957: 33).

A classic example of nudging is seeing running water making us need to urinate. These associations work well on most people, but they aren’t universal, and only work in some cases. This is because the stimulus is heavily reliant on the person knowing and understanding the connection between the stimuli and the action, and the need in the person to take such an action. You cannot get someone to want to urinate again who had just been to the bathroom by introducing stimuli. And you cannot make a person thirsty who has just emptied a glass of water (Yale courses, 2008).

Another important factor in nudging is timing. Many marketers have recognized that if people become aware that a product is being pushed onto them that potential customers will become defiant; the thought that “I am smarter than this advertisement, it doesn’t control me” or something similar, occurs a lot when watching commercials or seeing billboards. This is why advertisers have to be a bit craftier.

A classic example of nudging is in the way the supermarket sets up their products. Walking in you first see the greens and healthy foods, the products that are good for you and that you know you should get more of. They are at the front of the store because when you first enter, you have the most willpower and energy, and therefore you will have the energy to buy these products. You then move through the store which takes up a lot of energy, some stores are deliberately dark grey and gritty, to make people waste more energy looking for items. Another trick to make people more tired is to move around the items in the store frequently so the customers have to spend time looking around for them, thus giving them more time to stumble onto products which they might also buy, and also using more energy on the task. Free samples gives the store an excuse to have the place smell of food and entice further, and because the customers need to use so much energy going through their shopping they are very likely to try the samples.

Having music playing in the store can help consume energy if the store is normally silent, however if the store has a lot of costumers on a daily basis, such as most grocery stores, it’s usually better to let the noise of other shoppers be all that’s heard. Then of course at the end of the store they have the candy and other things that are bad for you and that you know you shouldn’t eat, but at this point your defenses are lowered and you don’t have the willpower necessary to resist such temptation (Packard, 1957:116).

Our unconscious and our Id are very closely linked; it is people's most primal needs that marketers have to speak to when attempting to nudge them. Sex, violence and taboo acts are the most effective ways to activate the part of the brain which can be affected by nudging. The most commonly occurring element used within advertisements is sex. Most people working within the field know by heart that “sex sells” and this is because it awakens our inner desires. We see something which activates our Id, and our conscious mind gets distracted, loosing focus on everything except for the stimulus. When the conscious mind is distracted, this is when we are at our most vulnerable to advertisements, especially subliminal advertisement (Silverman, 1986: 57).

How you feel at the time the stimuli is introduced is very important to how well your subconscious responds to stimuli. A subject being in a bad state of mind, such as being overly emotional, is unlikely to be affected by a subliminal stimulus at all. If the person for example
is very sad, happy or angry, their subconscious won’t respond to sexual stimuli because it’s busy just feeling its emotions. On the other hand if the person is emotionally distant, bored or absent minded it’s also not possible to affect them with simple stimuli. The perfect mood for the person to be in, is attentive, slightly happy or angry and physically comfortable. That’s the immediate mood, but for the person to be influenced by the stimuli. They should also be a bit sexually frustrated and feel a bit stressed in their everyday life. Again if the person is too stressed or sexually frustrated, the stimuli likely won’t work, and if they aren’t at all it also won’t work. This, in theory, is why movies are the perfect time to affect the subconscious because you can affect the mood of the movie goers with the actual movie, and have the scene with the nudging fit into a sequence that puts the viewer in the correct mindset for being nudged (Dixon, 1991, 41).

It’s a lot more difficult to prime the subconscious to want a certain brand, such as Coca Cola. You can lead consumers to cola, and you can make them drink if they are thirsty, but it’s proven very difficult to get subjects to choose Coca Cola over Pepsi. Through this method at least. When Dixon tried to affect a group of people with a flashing image of “drink Coca Cola” he could induce thirst in the subjects, but they mostly choose their normal favorite brand, not Coca Cola.

Branding is extremely important for subliminal advertisement to work, because a brand needs to be established before you can make the subconscious recognize certain stimulus with one specific brand, not just a type of product. Branding is a large field which we won’t go into in too great detail, but at its core, branding is when a company makes their product known for something other than simply being the product. This can be colors, people, music or even vague concepts, such as national pride. Take the example of the Super Bowl commercial for the Chrysler 200. The car commercial doesn’t focus on the product at all; in fact it says nothing about the car whatsoever. The commercial simply shows the city of Detroit, the sights, the sounds and the atmosphere. It presents a picture of Detroit filled with nationalistic pride, a sleek, cool demeanor and a feeling of prosperity and wealth. The commercial isn’t trying to sell a product, it’s selling a brand, and it’s trying to tie its brand to certain stimuli. Eminem narrates the commercial, and he then becomes part of the brand for the product. When we think of Eminem, an unlikely character to be bought with luxury, we think Chrysler has all the power in the world for convincing anyone to be fond of their brand. In this way a subconscious connection is created (Imported from Detroit, Chrysler commercial).

What many aren’t aware of are the numerous subconscious connections that exist within our brain. Freud famously claimed that we see phallic symbols all around us every day, and that our subconscious is constantly looking to make everything it sees into a phallic symbol (McLeod, 2013).

Who are you?

When attempting to influence the subconscious, almost all studies have run into the problem that people are different. While it often holds true that the best time to market to someone is when they have the emotional factors that can be seen above, this isn’t always the case. Studies have shown that women are more likely to be affected by nudging if they are stressed, whereas men tend to need to be of a fairly calm mind when subjected to the stimulus and children should in general be happy and entertained.
According to Dixon, creativity as well as cultural taboos towards sex, violence and drugs, can be a factor against too blatant subliminal nudging. (1991:43) Creative people also have a tendency to not be affected in the same way as most others. They will associate further, and often get a completely different meaning out of imagery. For example, a dessert or the word dessert being shown to a normal person might invoke thirst, but a creative person might see it and go from dessert to sand, to glass and then their subconscious will remind them that they need new glasses. This process happens even in the subconscious for many creative individuals, and it can be harder to market to them. Shy people tend to have a hard time with sexual or graphically violent association, which is otherwise one of the most effective ways to reach most groups, according to Dixon.

Dixon poses that too frank subliminal messages will make people associate things that have little to do with the actual stimuli. In his test he showed a number of words using a tachistoscope, flashing them too quickly for the people to consciously see them. He found that, when trying to remember what words had been flashed, that people could usually remember most of the words, however when using the word “COCK” almost none of the test subjects could remember it, using instead words loosely associated with it, such as “TRAIN” and “CANNON”. If taken into the world of subliminal advertisement, this means that, although sex sells, you cannot be too frank. Presenting a product in such a way that it makes the subconscious think of sex is a good way to sell a product; presenting sex to sell the product becomes too direct, and makes most people disassociate with your product. Too explicit sexual imagery might also shock the subconscious so much that it warns the conscious that something is wrong, which could allow the subject to recognize the stimuli and be offended (Ibid:46).

Another important factor when it comes to the subliminal perception is culture. Culture plays a large role in how people associate things subconsciously. Just like our conscious is formed by our environment while growing up, so too is our subconscious. This means that when marketing to different cultures, it’s important to look at what works and what does not work for the target group.

In most of America the audience reacts best to explicitly sexual stimuli, whereas in most European and Asian cultures, if the sexual stimuli becomes too much, the product is quickly disassociated. In America people are also more likely to associate a color or a certain shape with a product, possibly because of marketing and branding. Whereas in most Asian cultures they are more likely to associate sounds with a product. In an American study they found that Asian-Americans were much more likely to respond positively to products that show superiority to other brands, such as a person choosing one product over the other. (Stanfor.edu: 2005)

**Visual perception**

Our eyes don’t send signals to the same part of the brain. The center which your eye sends to usually depends on which hand you predominantly use. A right handed individual will send the stimuli they receive through the right eye to the left hemisphere, and the left eye sends stimuli from the left eye to the right hemisphere for the left handed individuals, their left eye will usually send to their left hemisphere, and their right eye will send to their right
hemisphere. This is very important for the subliminal perception, especially when talking about quickly flashing words.

Normally the English language is read from left to right, but if a word flashes in front of us for a very short time we do not have time to read it, in fact, we usually won’t realize its there. This means that our subconscious has to read the message on its own to be able to gather meaning from it, and it’s not always good at that.

When using a simple word such as “DRINK” it’s usually possible for the subconscious to understand the meaning of the word, however, when using longer sentences, such as “COCA COLA IS THE BEST BRAND” it becomes a lot trickier. If the sentence with Coca Cola flashes so briefly that it doesn’t stimulate the conscious, it’s likely that our subconscious also didn’t see the entire message. Our eyes may not have been focusing on the exact point in the middle of the word to be able to gather the meaning, or it may simply not be able to process the complex meaning behind the words.

Furthermore, if the subject looks directly at the message, they are likely to see the “COCA COLA IS” with their left eye, and “THE BEST BRAND” with the right. This means that the Coca Cola part, the part the advertisers care about, will go into the right hemisphere with most of the audience, because most people in the world are right handed, and according to Levy (1986:105) the right hemisphere is just incapable of comprehending such a complex message and is more likely to see it as an image than as words. You could center the text further to the right, but then the subject is likely to just not see the last part of the message, and even if it worked on the majority of people, the advertisers would lose a part of their audience already simply because not everyone takes things from the right eye into the left hemisphere.

According to Silverman, if the message has more than 4 points of fixation, such as more than four words or just words that are more than 5 letters or not commonly encountered or spelled, there is an inevitable loss of information. Flashing a string of words numerous times doesn’t greatly increase the chances of understanding a difficult message, as the subconscious cannot decipher a message over numerous tries. If it understood the message the first time, it will continue to understand it, and the stimuli will be strengthened. But if the message is not understood the first time, the subconscious will not see a second flash of the same message as a new piece to the puzzle it’s trying to solve; it will simply be presented with a new puzzle. The best case scenario is that the subconscious understands part of the message and that part of the message is then strengthened in the subject upon further viewing (Silverman, 1986:107).

It’s important to point out that for a message to be perceived subliminally, it needs to be almost directly in the center of our field of vision, the letters, if using a written message, also needs to be of a very precise size to correctly stimulate the subconscious, which can make it difficult to create hidden messages to more than one person, because the subjects will have different angles to the screen. This presents a problem when presenting hidden flashes in movies, because it’s hard to tell exactly where the audience will be looking. For the message to work it needs to be almost exactly at the center of the field of vision, with a very small margin. In a cinema this excludes the front and the back rows from even seeing the message in the first place, even if the message has been framed perfectly where everyone is looking. All of this makes advertisement through flashing words on the screen close to impossible in the cinema, but perhaps possible in movies enjoyed on a television or in computers (Ibid, 1991:110).
Emotional priming

The tachistoscope may not be the greatest tool for selling products directly like many people fear. However, it is still a useful tool in the field of psychotherapy. One test often used in many north European countries when dealing with stressed, angry, or otherwise emotionally unstable patients, is the MCT (Meta-Contrast Technique). This test presents patients with two pictures, one which they are aware of and one of which they are not. The picture they are aware of (B) shows a young person sitting at a table with a window in the background. This picture is showed a few times to the patients, too fast for them to see anything consciously in the picture, though they will see a blur. After presenting B 5 times like this, another picture is introduced (A) which shows an image of a threatening face, which will be presented directly before B. First, A and B will be shown at the same frequency, but then the exposure time of B becomes prolonged step by step, while A remains constantly too short for the consciousness to see. Eventually image A flashes for such a long duration that it can be seen as a quick blur, while still difficult to make out, the subjects will be able to figure out what they are seeing a picture of. When it is recognized by the subjects, the test ends. This exercise is created to test whether patients tend to defend themselves against anxiety provoking threats, and how they do this. (Smith, 1991:281)

Generally the patients for the MCT fall into four categories.

1. Clear signs of projection; this means that the patient recognized the person in the picture, likely as a family member or loved one. Those who fall into this category will often believe that the frames moved, and have seen a narrative in the images, not just a still frame. These subjects are likely to have spotted the additional figure, or feel that there were two people in the picture.
2. Moderate signs of projection; these patients have most commonly seen movement in the pictures.
3. Clear signs of sensitivity; these patients have likely dreamed up a narrative for the person, but figure A remains completely subliminal. These patients are likely to have the strongest emotional responses.
4. Marginal signs of projection-sensitivity or no signs at all.

This test has proven effective when deciphering the narcissistic tendencies of patients. It also measures dread of open aggression and, generally, patients’ ability to cope with any kind of stress.

Patients who project heavily are likely to have quick tempers and tend to be paranoid. They are likely to experience fits of rage or anxiety.

The moderate response is a patient with a fairly healthy relationship between anxiety and defense. They deal with stress like most people.

Patients who showed clear signs of sensitivity are very prone to paranoia and emotional outbursts. They are also self-centered, not realizing that others have problems too.

Showing no signs of projection can be caused by faulty perception but can also be a sign of psychopathy and a general lack of empathy (Ibid, 1986:283).

This may not look directly tied to subliminal advertisement, however. As the research shows that showing words like “DRINK” isn’t a very effective way of using the subliminal perception to sell products. It’s important to note that product placement can be a very
effective way to do so, especially if the audience is in the right mood at the time of viewing
the product. This test has proven effective to garner emotional responses from subjects.
Meaning that priming with things unrelated to the product in order to provoke the best
possible emotional response for being subjected to subliminal advertisement; for example by
showing the word “SEX” or “COCK” on the screen, could really be a useful strategy when
used together with explicit imagery associated to branding, or product placement.
Subliminal messages, advertisements, and product placements can be found in movies, if one carefully looks for them. In the following chapters, we will be looking into different movies and examine the advertisements as well as the methods that have been used in these movies by using the theoretical knowledge discussed in chapters above. We are going to analyze and compare some examples from these movies, while our primary focus will be on the David Fincher’s Fight Club.

**Fight Club** is a cult film from the year 1999 that stars actors Brad Pitt and Edward Norton as the leads. It was directed by David Fincher and is actually a film adaptation of the novel of the same name that was published in the year 1996 and written by Chuck Palahniuk. The 1999 film is (according to [rottentomatoes.com](http://rottentomatoes.com)) considered to be a *darkly comic drama*, and it is also without a doubt a film that has been admired by many fans throughout the years.

In *Fight Club*, we follow a young man (portrayed by actor Edward Norton in the movie), who is depressed and suffers from insomnia. His name remains unknown throughout the movie, and we only know him as *the narrator* because this is what he is named as in the credits. He meets a man named Tyler Durden (portrayed by actor Brad Pitt) who completely changes his life by introducing him to unusual, violent, and somewhat disturbing activities, such as starting a so called *fight club*, where men can join to fight each other to feel more alive. Across the country, more fight clubs are formed, and the violent activities worsen when Durden forms an organization called *Project Mayhem*, which has the purpose of destroying modern civilization. The narrator looks up to Tyler Durden, who is the man that the narrator wants to be. In the end it’s revealed that the narrator suffers from multiple personality disorder, and that Tyler is actually a figment of the narrator’s imagination, and everything Tyler did was actually done by the narrator, without him realizing it before the end.

**Subliminal Messaging**

The movie *Fight Club* is known to contain several subliminal messages that are somewhat important to the plot and the characters. For example, there are several hints that prove to us that it is in fact the narrator who does everything that Tyler Durden was believed to do, and that Durden was just his alter ego.

Before meeting Tyler Durden, a short scene is shown where the narrator is watching television in a hotel room. The screen shows a group of waiters, and if you look closely, actor Brad Pitt (who portrays Tyler Durden) can be seen as one of the waiters (*Fight Club*: 00:20:06). This could indicate that the narrator creates his alter ego based on other people that he has seen in his life. He and Tyler Durden can also be seen wearing some of the same clothing items, but in different scenes; a hidden message that tells us that they are the same person.

In the beginning of the movie, the narrator also explains that he sometimes wakes up in strange places with no memory of what he has been doing (Ibid, 00:05:44). This is also a hint that shows us that he’s living a double life as Tyler Durden, and that he has no memory of it.
The most well-known of the subliminal messages in *Fight Club* are the scenes in the beginning where Tyler Durden briefly appears for a split second, even before the narrator actually meets him (for example, Tyler Durden can be seen appearing behind the narrator’s doctor (Ibid: 00:06:19)). It is a manipulative kind of cut that visually disturbs the viewer, and is also a cinematic effect that is known from the advertising industry.

The term *subliminal* also exists in the world of moviemaking, and the cuts mentioned above are called *subliminal cuts* (Dahl, Anders: p. 131). When movies at 24 frames per second are shown at the movie theater, the ultimate subliminal picture can only be shown in one single frame which is 1/24 second (Ibid: page 131). Subliminal cuts are used extensively in *Fight Club*, and if you blink at that exact moment where these cuts appear, you are going to miss the short glimpses of Tyler Durden. In order to get a clear look at the image, you would need to play the scene in slow motion or pause it at the exact moments where these subliminal pictures appear.

These subliminal pictures serve as mysterious and enigmatic surprise cuts, as we haven’t been introduced to Tyler Durden yet at that moment. The reason why it is called *surprise cuts* is because it appears as a surprise to the viewer who wouldn’t have expected this to happen (Ibid: page 142). The subliminal pictures also serve as what the moviemaking industry calls *set-up and pay-off* (Katz, Per B.: p. 35). A set-up discreetly introduces something that will have a greater impact later in the movie. The subliminal cuts of Tyler Durden are therefore several set-ups that indicate that Tyler is part of the narrator’s subconscious, and that he is gaining more control. The pay-off occurs when Tyler is revealed as a part of the narrator.

The purpose of a subliminal message is to trigger something in the viewer’s subconscious, and this is exactly what subliminal cuts in movies also are supposed to do. Subliminal cuts are not something that is extremely overused in movies, and most of the times they can be really hard to detect; especially if we don’t know that they’re there.

The movie *The Exorcist* from the year 1973 actually has a lot of subliminal cuts, where a sinister looking demon face appears for a split second; similar to the way that Tyler Durden appears in the beginning of *Fight Club*. The difference is that the demon face in *The Exorcist* appears throughout the entire movie instead of just one part of the movie. It usually appears in a dark corner in some scenes, but it also fills out the entire frame in other scenes which makes it even more visible and harder to miss. These subliminal cuts also serve as surprise cuts and since it is a horror movie, it is definitely there to scare the viewer.

Earlier in the movie, Durden is seen working in a movie theater where his job is to switch the projectors in between reels when a movie is showing (*Fight Club*: 00:32:28). As he does this, he likes to splice in a frame of pornography into the movies.

In the ending of *Fight Club*, there is a very noticeable picture of a penis right before the end credits (Ibid: 02:15:15). This is also a subliminal cut, but it appears in a different style than the other subliminal cuts that we’ve seen in the beginning. While the previous subliminal cuts show Durden suddenly standing somewhere in the scene, this one shows a random picture of a penis that fills out the entire frame. In the earlier scene, we see the same picture of a penis that is shown to us in a subliminal cut in the end. This could indicate that Tyler Durden is still alive and lurking somewhere, even though the movie ends with the narrator killing his alter ego. It is therefore a cut which is supposed to create the illusion as well as manipulate the
viewer into thinking that Tyler Durden is playing tricks with us, and has therefore inserted a pornographic picture into the movie we're watching.

As mentioned before, the advertising industry sometimes hides sexual imagery (such as the word sex or images of genitalia into the frames.) Advertising is all about getting into the consumer’s mind, and since sex is one of the primitive instincts of the human body, it has become common for the advertising industry to include hidden images of something sexual or pornographic in advertisements – it is even used in movies, and the picture of the erect penis in the end of Fight Club is a good example of that; so not only is the pornographic picture there to indicate that Tyler Durden is alive, but it is also there as a sort of advertisement to get the viewer’s attention.

Advertising and Product Placement

Not only is Fight Club full of subliminal messages, but it also contains a lot of advertising and product placements. The most noticeable one is an advertisement for Ikea furniture, where the narrator is seen ordering an item from an Ikea catalogue (Ibid: 00:04:47). In the same scene, he narrates that he has become addicted to Ikea furniture and as he puts it: “If I saw something clever like a coffee table in the shape of a yin-yang, I had to have it.” The camera then pans across his apartment where it is revealed that every single item that he owns is from Ikea – and that he has even decorated his home to look like a picture from an Ikea catalogue. The scene is even edited in a way so that it resembles a page from an Ikea catalog with descriptions and prices on every item.

Ikea is known to arrange their catalogues to give you inspiration and to lure their costumers into buying their furniture – which is exactly what it seems that has happened to the narrator in Fight Club. It also seems that he has based his life on Ikea furniture and vice versa, as he says that he looks for furniture that defines him as a person (Ibid: 00:05:24). This shows how the narrator has been influenced by advertisements. Ironically, the scene is at same time also a clever advertisement for Ikea furniture; as soon as the camera pans across his apartment that resembles an Ikea catalog, calm music starts playing in the background. It is the kind of music that you would normally hear in a shopping mall or Ikea.

The movie is cleverly taking the viewer into an Ikea-universe as part of an advertisement. The Ikea furniture is, as well as the Ikea catalogue, product placement. We now know that product placements normally aren’t a part of the story and they do not necessarily have to fit into any of the characters in a movie. However, as seen in Fight Club, the Ikea furniture does fit into one of the characters, as the narrator is addicted to the Ikea.

The director David Fincher has declared that there is a Starbucks coffee cup hidden in every scene of the movie (imdb.com). These coffee cups are of course more visible in some scenes than they are in others, but it is again a clever way of creating advertisement. Just like the Ikea furniture, the many Starbucks coffee cups are product placements. Regular coffee cups, which are not labeled with the Starbucks logo, are also seen several times throughout the movie. For example, the first time the narrator talks to Helena Bonham Carter’s character Marla, she had just been standing in front of a coffee machine with several coffee cups next to it (Fight Club: 00:15:00). In another scene, the narrator is served a cup of coffee on an airplane; and we even see the coffee cup in a close up shot (Ibid: 00:19:48).
Later in the movie, the narrator and Tyler Durden even destroy a coffee shop along with the members of the organization they had created (Ibid: 01:45:35). It was actually intended to be a Starbucks coffee shop; however, Starbucks didn’t want their name and logo to be destroyed in the scene, which is why the name of the coffee shop isn’t visible (imdb.com).

Most of the product placements in *Fight Club* are basically destroyed or being part of something violent, which is very interesting and unusual, since product placements in movies are usually there to advertise for certain products and companies with the intention to promote their products. In one scene in the movie, the narrator comes home only to discover that his apartment has been destroyed and that all of his precious Ikea furniture (that had been part of such clever advertisement before) has been ruined (*Fight Club*: 00:25:50). The coffee shop, that should have been intended to be a Starbucks coffee shop, is also destroyed in a similar explosion, and an Apple Store is also seen being broken into and destroyed (Ibid: 01:21:19). There is also a scene where Edward Norton’s and Brad Pitt’s characters are seen destroying the headlights of a Volkswagen Beetle (Ibid: 01:20:30).

The Pepsi logo is also visible several times throughout the movie, on cans, television ads, or soda dispensers, but isn’t destroyed in any way. Although many of the products are destroyed in the movie, they still function as product placements and advertisements. The many coffee cups as well as the Starbucks and Pepsi products that are visible in the movie could have been placed there as a subliminal advertisement to make the viewer thirstier – and therefore cause an increase in both Starbucks and Pepsi sales.

As mentioned earlier, Byrne conducted a study in the year 1959, where experimental subjects rated themselves hungrier after watching a movie where the word “beef” had been flashed several times. The Starbucks and Pepsi products in *Fight Club* are not part of any studies; however, the techniques used are sort of the same; *Fight Club* and the movie that was shown to the experimental subjects in Byrne’s study both include an advertisement. The difference is that in Byrne’s study, a word was flashed and in *Fight Club*, the product was actually shown. After all, the movie *Fight Club* is known to include many subliminal messages and cinematic effects that manipulate the viewer as mentioned earlier, so it would be logical to assume that the movie also used subliminal advertisements and product placements to manipulate the viewer into getting thirstier, with the intention of increasing the sales of Starbucks and Pepsi as the placed items would be the primary associations with quenching thirst. However, the study conducted by Byrne did not increase the sales in beef, so it isn’t very likely that the same would happen for Starbucks and Pepsi after *Fight Club* – unless a visual image of the product instead of a word would have a different impact on the viewer.

**Advertising in Movies**

In *Fight Club*, the narrator is a depressed young man who experiences a lot of bad things; he suffers from insomnia, he dislikes his job, and his apartment gets destroyed with all of his precious belongings. It is normal for the viewer to feel sorry for him, even though he is later involved in violent activities. After all, he is the hero of the movie, since he prevents the organization that he formed from doing any more harm by killing his alter ego, and he also saves Helena Bonham Carter’s character Marla. However, despite his problems, he seems to be an ordinary person who has a normal job and lives in a normal apartment – so it would also be easy for any person to relate to him.
Even though the big advertisement for Ikea furniture is cleverly made, the narrator is also used as a link between the viewer and the advertisement. The narrator is very fond of Ikea furniture and is even addicted to it, and if we feel sympathy towards him or simply relate to him, it can be imagined that we are very likely to be even more influenced by the advertisement, because the character is associated with the products.

Let’s take an example from another movie; Back to the Future from the year 1984 is a family comedy that stars actor Michael J. Fox as the lead Marty McFly. This movie was a great success back in the 1980s and the early 1990s, and it has a much larger target group than Fight Club, and can therefore reach out to a larger number of people. According to Imdb.com, Fight Club has received an R-rating because of the violent behavior as well as the sexuality and language in the movie, which makes it inappropriate for a younger audience. Most teenagers are able to relate to the main character Marty, as he seems to be a typical teenager who’s living a normal life – and because Back to the Future is a family comedy, it is very likely that Marty is also admired by the younger audience. Marty is also portrayed as a brave person, as he is able to stand up to bullies, which might also be appealing for a younger audience (Tew, Edward: 2014).

Throughout the entire movie, several Pepsi cans are visible in the background, and Marty is even seen drinking a Pepsi soda a couple of times; he’s even seen ordering one at a café. The many Pepsi products could have a similar purpose as the Pepsi and Starbucks products in Fight Club and the study conducted by Byrne; to make the viewer thirsty (or in Byrne’s case: hungry) and increase the sales in Pepsi products.

The camera also pays a lot of attention to Marty’s footwear, as there are several close up shots of his Nike sneakers. He is also wearing some very noticeable Chuck Taylor All-Stars sneakers at one point in the movie.

The movie Back to the Future is basically full of advertising and product placements, and Marty is turned into a link between the viewer and the advertisement, just like Edward Norton’s character in Fight Club in the scene with the Ikea advertisement. The younger audience, who admires the character Marty, might get tempted to have a drink of Pepsi or own a pair of Nike sneakers or Chuck Taylors.

The type of Pepsi product that Marty drinks is actually a Pepsi Free, which is a caffeine-free variation of the Pepsi-Cola (usasoda.com). It was introduced back in the year 1982, which means that it was fairly new when Back to the Future came out in the year 1984. This could be the reason why Marty didn’t drink the regular variation of the Pepsi-Cola, but the new caffeine-free variation, as this product probably needed some more advertising and promotion at the time.

Since the Back to the Future franchise is about time travelling, the director Robert Zemeckis had the opportunity to show how different brands and products looked like in different time periods. When Marty is sent back to the year 1955, he still drinks Pepsi. Of course the caffeine-free variation of the Pepsi-Cola, which was his preferred drink in present time, does not exist in the 1950s; so instead, Marty drinks a regular Pepsi from the year 1955.
The second movie in the franchise came out in the year 1989, and in this movie, Marty travels 30 years into the future. Here, Robert Zemeckis had the opportunity to demonstrate how different brands and products could look like in the future.

After the first movie, it seems that Pepsi products and Nike sneakers have become Marty’s trade mark, as he is seen drinking a futuristic variation of the Pepsi-Cola and wears a pair of futuristic Nike shoes. Even though these products of Pepsi and Nike sneakers are fictional and only exist in the movie, it still counts as product placement for promoting the brands of Pepsi and Nike.

Not only did Zemeckis include product placement in the future scenes, but he also put in a fake advertisement for a sequel to Steven Spielberg’s Jaws franchise. Even though this is set as a joke, Back to the Future Part 2, is actually promoting the Jaws franchise by having it included in a scene. This is also seen in Fight Club; in one scene, the narrator and Marla are seen walking on the street, when a movie theater in the background is advertising the movie Seven Years in Tibet (1997) which also stars the actor Brad Pitt(Fight Club: 01:59:37).

A newer movie that contains visible product placement and advertisement is the movie Twilight from the year 2008. The main character Bella, who is portrayed by actress Kristen Stewart, is seen using a MacBook a couple of times throughout the movie. She owns an Apple iPod as well, and she is also seen several times wearing white ear pods, which are a trademark of Apple. In one scene, the camera pans across the back of Bella’s MacBook so that the Apple logo is clearly visible. Bella is portrayed as an ordinary teenage girl, and since a big part of today’s youth owns an Apple product (whether it’s an iPhone, iPod or a MacBook), it is not unusual for a character like Bella to be seen with an Apple product.

Not only are the Apple products included in the movie as a product placement to advertise and promote Apple and its products, but they also help to describe the kind of character that Bella is. The Nike sneakers that are worn by Marty McFly in Back to the Future, also perfectly describe him as a sporty person. Most times, a brand is used in a movie for advertising and promoting a product, but a brand can also be used simply because it suits the character. In Fight Club, it also suits the narrator to own a lot of Ikea furniture, because Ikea is known to have a wide range of designs for every taste, and therefore has a very large target group. Ikea furniture would therefore suit most people, as they have various collections of items and furniture that would fit into every home.

The Existence of Subliminal Advertising

Until now, we have been looking at a few examples of advertising and product placements in different movies – but are they in fact still considered subliminal advertising, even if you do see the product that is advertised or the word that is being flashed? We now know that the purpose of subliminal messaging is to trigger something in a person’s subconscious, and the goal of subliminal advertising is therefore to use subliminal messages to advertise products or services to people.

The movie The Exorcist (1973) is one of the most well-known movies to have used subliminal messaging by inserting an image of a demon face several times throughout the movie. However, after the movie came out, the author William Peter Blatty, whose book The Exorcist
was based on, spoke against the concept of subliminal messaging. He believed that if the image is visible, there aren’t any subliminal messages (Love, Dylan: 2011).

According to William Peter Blatty’s theory about subliminal messages, the idea that *Fight Club* is supposed to make you thirstier by including several hidden coffee cups and Starbucks and Pepsi advertisements doesn’t work, since all of the products are visible to the eye. Seeing the product placements and advertisements in *Fight Club* could make you thirstier and persuade you into buying a Starbucks or a Pepsi product, but it wouldn’t be subliminal advertising. The same goes for the *Back to the Future* franchise, where several Pepsi products were also included in the movie and even mentioned several times.
Conclusion

Subliminal advertisement and its effect on consumers were first introduced into the populace by Vicary in 1957, based on a falsified study. Advertisers have attempted since then to replicate his study and bring it into reality. What’s so interesting is that even though Vicary’s study was falsified, many people know of it, and believe it to be true. This has created a lot of fear of what subliminal advertisement could actually do, and how it may already be used to influence moviegoers worldwide.

Silverman, Henley and a number of other psychologists, have had moderate success affecting small groups of people through specifically tailored experiments, done in enclosed environments. This means that there is some truth to the science of subliminal advertisement, and that perhaps one day, it’ll be possible to influence entire theaters with the principles found in it. At current time though, it’s completely implausible.

We set out believing, like many people, that subliminal advertisement was a huge scary science that could affect us and our children like Pavlov’s dogs. Our original intention was to figure out whether being aware that someone was trying to sell you products when watching a movie, could be an effective way to avoid the terrible effects of subliminal stimulation. What we found however is that the science just isn’t that scary. Marketing schemes and millions of dollars worth of research makes subliminal advertisement something to consider when looking at marketing as a whole. Subliminal advertisement is good for supporting an already substantial marketing campaign. Getting the consumers to associate your brand with a famous character through product placement, even if they are unaware that the reason they like the product is that they saw James Bond driving in it, is a good way to help boost sales of a product.

The science has flaws and pitfalls, so many that a unified way to subliminally market a product simply cannot exist. Not only that, but subliminal advertisement has never been proven to be worthy of anything except a supporting pillar in the vast science of marketing.

So is subliminal advertisement a scary hypnotizing entity, just a few years away from total mind control? No it’s not. Subliminal perception surprised all of us with how tame it truly is. The flashing words, unseen by the naked eye, is a gimmick within advertisement, capable only of the smallest changes, and only really effective when used in clinical trials, not when used in actual movies. This is really interesting because this practice is what we, and so many others, fear to be a truly terrifying part of marketing which we are unaware of.
Project Work

Communication in the group
Not only did we want to make the best project that we could possibly make, but we also wanted to make sure that the group dynamic was as good as it could get, as we felt that this would make the planning and the actual working process much smoother. This meant that there a lot of time and energy was put into trying to get to know each group member, as this would help us create a better group dynamic and collaboration.

However, it didn’t exactly go as planned, and eventually we realized that our primary focus should not necessarily be making the group dynamic better. It doesn’t mean that we wanted to give up on the group dynamic entirely, but we simply realized that we needed to plan our time differently in order to start making progress on the actual project.

The reason why we thought that healthy communication was so important was because we thought it would be a good thing to have in a group when doing problem-oriented project work; we would know each group member individually and have a clear idea on what each member can provide to the project, their strengths and weaknesses, while doing the group work. With this, would also know what each member would not be so good at and that way we would also know what tasks to dedicate to each other in order to work harmoniously.

Unfortunately, we realized that our plan did not go as we had thought, and we came to the conclusion that we had to prioritize differently. Together we decided that we had to put much more effort into the project. However, we did not have the best communication in the group, which was one of the biggest issues we had that brought the project work down to a slower pace.

Because of the miscommunication, we had a hard time being honest to each other, and we didn’t always like to admit the problems we had. This resulted the group in not being very good at asking the other group members for help, whenever a member was stuck on something in the work process. We lost the gist of motivating each other, and the project became something of a task that we had to do, instead of being a mutually felt exploration of the field that we chose. It was also hard to give each other critique on their work, as many of us feared overstepping the other person’s boundaries as well as being misunderstood, or causing the other person to be upset.

We also experienced a lot of misunderstanding between the group members, which led to endless discussions and frustrations.

Instead of spending so much time and energy being friends and trying to assess what type of people the other group members were, what we should have been doing was present our strengths and weaknesses, and figure out how to best work together as a group working on a project, not as a group of friends. The other members in the group became people whom you feared annoying, that you wanted to like you.

The way we should have accomplished this is by talking about ourselves and our experiences with doing similar work, as well as our knowledge fields, best ways to work, greatest weaknesses etc. In the end of the project, the very last few days, we actually worked together very well, we knew what we were good at and what we could ask for help with, it just came way too late.
Group splitting

The miscommunications lead to the group splitting on several occasions. At one point in the progress, the group had a hard time showing up to group meetings, which involved being absent because of sickness and being late, which wasn’t a good thing neither for the project nor for the group. Members also left meetings early or didn’t show up at all because of other plans, which also was a problem – we didn’t feel comfortable confronting the people about this too much though, because of the miscommunication we talked about above.

We faced some troubles with keeping the internal deadlines for our group, which, because of the miscommunication and frustration in the group, lead to anger and distrust. This also resulted in the group splitting and the communication worsening, as some members felt intimidated and didn’t feel that they were able to provide any help to the rest of the group. The situation was very stressful for the entire group, but in the end we decided to do our best as a group, despite the bad energy. The group splitting also resulted in some group members being insecure about their work and effort, which made them afraid of the other members’ opinion and judgments about them. Some members were also feeling insecure because of their fear of the other group members’ attitude towards them, which was not at all good for the project; the frustrations made it harder to feel motivated in the writing process.

Healthy communication could have solved most of these problems, but some groups will simply not communicate well. These are the groups in which it is especially important that members aren’t afraid to ask for help. Sometimes a group will be split; this creates opposition, unhealthy cooperation and promotes back talking etc. A way to avoid the group being split into camps is to make sure that there is a mutual respect between the members. Something which we should have done was make sure to differentiate whom group members were working with, so it’s not always the same two people sitting together.

Trust

One of the things we tried to do to have healthy communication in the group was to use a few social exercises which we learned from one of our tutors. These exercises were meant to make it easier to talk about things that were going wrong, personal problems, and learn each others strengths and weaknesses. These exercises were a little too personal and uncomfortable and we didn’t feel that it was helping our working progress. Also, because these exercises made us uncomfortable, it was usually hard to take them seriously and because of that, we mostly ended up trying to work on the actual project instead, although the plan was to try and make the exercise before we continued the project work.

The reason why we didn’t feel comfortable with the exercises probably derives from the timing of them. In the beginning of our project, we didn’t have our whole group together; one of our members arrived a few weeks later because of some problems with visa and travel. This meant that we had the nagging feeling that anything we had discussed at that point would later become a problem, and we had a tough time finalizing any decisions, even if they might have been important – because what if the final member turned out to have a different view on the topic or simply didn’t agree with what we had discussed? Then all of our work would be wasted, and we would have to start all over, which created a kind of uncertainty in the group.

When faced with a problem from other group members, people had a tendency to go into denial, and not realize the problem – which not only caused frustration in the group, but also anger towards whoever was in denial at the time, or towards the one giving the criticism. This also made our distrust
for each other greater, seeing as we didn’t trust each other to being able to talk about problems that the group had with you.

Something that would have helped avoiding distrust would have been to be better listeners, and maybe not be so quick to defend ourselves, and take the criticism given to us by the group. The exercises we attempted might actually have been very healthy for our group early on, but we didn’t feel comfortable opening up to people we hardly knew, if we could have gotten over this fear early, we might not have experienced as much distrust later on.

**Structure and group planning**

The first thing we did as a group was attempt to figure out, which direction we wanted to take the project. Although we started out with “Neo Noir” as our topic, we felt the need to move to something a bit more substantial and deeper than the cultural implications of the Neo-Noir genre.

We were ambitious and wanted to find out how we could make the best project possible. We felt that a good way to do this was to choose a topic that was provocative or had some clear cultural implications, something that meant something to us.

The first change happened before our group had even been properly formed; we looked at our common interests and ambition level and concluded that we wanted to work with the psychological attraction to the macabre. This was greatly within the vein of what we wanted to work with and it was tied well with how we wanted to work with the project. However, even though we had found a topic that we all were really passionate about, it was too broad and we faced a lot of problems when we tried to boil it down.

At the time we thought that changing the topic again was the only way to go, but at the same time we wanted to keep some of the material, as we had already spent a lot of time on it. We tried to move around on the field that we already had. One piece of material was the movie *Fight Club*. The reason why we had chosen that specific movie in first place was because we thought that it fit very well into the topic of the macabre, as it is quite a grim movie. Besides, it was also a movie we all liked and which we had already watched together as a group at this time.

After watching *Fight Club*, we realized that it had a lot of subliminal messaging, which we all found really interesting. Our discussions about subliminal messaging lead us to want to make an exploration on the topic of subliminal advertising and product placement. However, we were still very unsure whether this was what we wanted to write our project about – but we eventually realized that we had to anchor our project as soon as possible, as we had already wasted half of our time trying to come up with a good topic that wasn’t too broad.

Changing our project from Neo-Noir to “the psychosexual attraction” was a good move that put us in a bad state of mind. We turned a project, which we felt was a bit impersonal and boring, into something we really cared about, and which we felt was our project. This was great for our enthusiasm and a good way to start the project; however, with the idea that this was our project came the expectation that this had to be the best project ever. We had a lot of vague ideas and nothing concrete, and we should have made a problem field and started focusing on what to do and how to do it. Instead when we had it pointed out to us that our project was vague, we got scared that we were doing something wrong, and then panicked and changed the project again. Then next meeting when we weren’t any closer to making a good project, we changed our entire project again, meaning that we couldn’t get started on writing, which set us back quite a lot.

We had to learn that no project will ever be the perfect one, or be exactly the way that one wanted it to be, and that it is just something we have to accept, so that we can at least make it a good project.
Bibliography


Websites

