

# Promoting Consumer Products with Fictional Stories

Mizuki Sakamoto, Tatsuo Nakajima, and Sayaka Akioka

Department of Computer Science and Engineering  
Waseda University, Japan

{mizuki, tatsuo, akioka}@dcl.cs.waseda.ac.jp

**Abstract.** Our everyday consumer lifestyle has been enhanced by embedding stories in our daily life. The stories define the meaning of an artifact appeared in them. In Japan, promoting consumer products with fictional animation stories is recently very common. We believe that analyzing the stories gives us useful insights to design future ambient intelligent services that integrate virtual and real worlds. This paper discusses the analysis of several product promotions that use fictional Japanese animation movies, and presents guidelines for successful promotions. The insights presented in the paper are effective for designing future product promotions.

**Keywords:** Fictional stories, Product promotion, Reality, Alternate Reality Game, Transmedia storytelling.

## 1 Introduction

Our everyday consumer lifestyle is enhanced by embedding various stories. The stories tell us how to use products, and how they are effective or attractive in our daily life [2]. Recently, storytelling is an essential issue in the human computer interaction research community, and especially, using a fictional story to mix the fictional world and the real world is an important topic for integrating stories in our daily life. For example, alternate reality games (ARGs) [3] will be used in a variety of future product promotions for embedding fictional stories seamlessly in our daily life. Transmedia storytelling [1] will be a basic way to enhance the meaning of products for promoting technology enhanced products. However, design guidelines are necessary to mix fictional stories in our real world in a more seamless fashion. In Japan, fictional animation movies have been used for promoting commercial products and their brands. They make it possible to use mysterious artifacts, super human powers, futuristic scenes that do not exist in the real world to expand people's imagination and fantasy. Thus, they offer a feeling to increase human potentiality, and the effect can be used to provide strong impressions on our experiences in the real world. Recently, the promotion is broadcasted on public video streaming services such as Youtube and NicoNico Douga<sup>1</sup>, and is advertised through social media like Twitter and Facebook. The reputation of the promotions becomes well known through a word of mouth

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nicovideo.jp/>

delivered in social media. This paper shows the analysis of existing promotion that uses Japanese animation movies. The analysis leads to design guidelines identifying why the promotions have been successful. Then, we present some case studies to show how the successful promotions fit the guidelines. The insights extracted from the analysis presented in the paper are useful to design future ambient intelligent services that integrate virtual and real worlds.

## 2 Promoting Products with Fictional Animation Stories

Using animation movies is very useful because it is easy to offer fictional worlds and characters. This makes us to offer empathetic fictional creatures and marvelous futuristic worlds to attract us easily. The animation story is easy to embed ideological messages that represent human dreams and expectation. Also, many Japanese animation stories are full of positive thinking, so the stories can increase our self-efficacy to overcome hard problems while enjoying the stories. Currently, typical product promotions use empathetic characters that are appeared in popular animation stories. For example, Pokémon<sup>2</sup> characters are widely used for promoting foods for kids like a retort-packed curry food and bread. The animation movie is very popular by most of Japanese kids so the promotion broadcasted within the animation television movie is effective to appeal the products to these kids. However, although the promotion makes it possible to increase their buying impulse, the promotions do not make them believe that the products are attractive. Thus, the products will be forgotten when they become adults.

## 3 Guidelines to Promote Products with Fictional Stories

In this section, we present four design guidelines for promoting commercial products by using fictional stories. The guidelines are extracted while discussing in workshops to watch several video animation movies for product promotions.

**I. Offering the strong visual impact that makes us attract the products.** Pepsi NEX uses Cyborg 009<sup>3</sup> for the product promotion, and Tiger & Bunny<sup>4</sup> uses several Japanese company logos such as Softbank and Bandai for promoting the company brands. In the Pepsi NEX promotion, cyborg heroes move very speedy so this becomes a metaphor of the Pepsi NEX's sharp taste. Also, a pretty heroine brings us an empathetic feeling on the products. In the story of Tiger & Bunny, justice and heroics are commercialized commodities. Some people choose to become costumed superheroes, and each is sponsored by a major present real-life company, which is featured as advertisements on the heroes' uniforms. These cool superheroes become metaphors that the companies are also cool. These vivid expressions in an unusual daily life

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pokemon.com/us/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://009.ph9.jp/pepsi-nex/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://tigerbunny.wikia.com/wiki/Tiger\\_%26\\_Bunny\\_Wiki](http://tigerbunny.wikia.com/wiki/Tiger_%26_Bunny_Wiki)

make it possible to offer people surprises that memorize strong impressions on target products.

**II. Offering the non fictional story that makes us believe the promotion.** TAISEI corporation promotes its brand image by using an animation movie<sup>5</sup>. In the movie, a lady is working on the construction of the Bosphorus tunnel. The non fictional story presents that her work contributes to a amazing work that can be appeared in the world map. The movie shows the fact that the company has achieved the amazing work as trusted information so the audience of the movie can own the positive feeling on the company through amazingly realistic scenes of the tunnel. The promotion is very useful because most of us do not know that TAISEI corporation has built such amazing constructions all over the world.

**III. Offering the reality that makes us believe the fictional story in the promotion.** In the DOCOMO's promotion named Xi AVANT<sup>6</sup> to show the vision of the future mobile phone, the promotion movie uses the several realistic landscape scenes of present Barcelona. The reality of the background landscape scene offers a feeling that the vision told in the fictional story will be realized soon. The Tokyo Disney Resort's promotion<sup>7</sup> reminds each person's real memory that she visited to Tokyo Disney Resort before. So the story shows that she will enjoy to visit Tokyo Disney Resort even she becomes old. Therefore, we think that the happy memory in Tokyo Disney Resort will be inherited to our children.

**IV. Offering the empathy that makes us attract the products in the promotion.** This is a typical way to use animation characters in the promotion videos. As described previously, Pokémon characters are used for promoting various commercial products for kids. Also, Japan Racing Association uses characters and giant humanoids in Evangelion, which is a very popular animation movie that many Japanese young adults like<sup>8</sup>. The purpose of the promotion is to promote the horse racing to young adults. The animation stories are usually preferred in a wide generation in Japan, but each animation covers only specific target generation. Thus, the animation that is interested in a specific generation can be used to appeal to a different generation who may not have strong interests in the target products.

*Toyota's Peace Eco Smile*<sup>9</sup> promotes its brand by using an original animation story. In the movie of the story, a young male person who comes from an outer space tries to learn products and rules in our world. Especially, the story tells that the technologies developed by *Toyota* are very eco-friendly with his love story. However, the characters in the story are not enough empathetic. Also, the story does not give us enough information that the *Toyota's* technologies are superior. Also, the background scenes are not enough realistic, and there are a few impressive visual representations to give us metaphors showing *Toyota's* excellence. Thus, the promotion that does not fit to these guidelines has not been successfully accepted from the most of audiences.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKoC1-3E0Vw>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IP5nAkG51ME>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1Fq7xwxV-Q>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=toEcZ4inet8>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.toytoyota.com/pes/>

## 4 Case Study: Analyzing Advertisements with Original Animation Stories

This section analyzes three promotion movies that use original animation stories discussed in our *workshops*. The movies are successful to promote products and company brands. We consider how the movies fit to the guidelines explained in the previous section.

The first is the promotion movie for Meiji fruits gummi candy. The story is named Megumi and Taiyo Tweet Love Story<sup>10</sup>. In the story, a heroine Megumi eats a grape gummi candy when something needs to be considered deeply. The scene fits to guideline 1. When using a fictional story, it is not easy how the audiences feel the reality on the story in *accordance* with guideline 2. Tweet Love Story uses a social media, Twitter, to make us feel the reality of the story. The audience can talk with the story's hero Taiyo via Twitter. Taiyo gives us answers when we gave him some advices on how to get closer to Megumi. Megumi and Taiyo also talk with each other on Twitter so everyone can know their conversation. The audiences' advices have strong impacts on the conversation between Megumi and Taiyo. This means that the story changes its ending according to our advices to Taiyo, and the fact feels us that the story is realistic in our world.

Taiyo is working at a vineyard, and there are some scenes showing that grapes are healthy and delicious. This gives enough information showing the product's excellence in accordance with guideline 3. Finally, the story chooses a character designer whose characters are recently very popular in many media. Thus, the audience easily feels the empathy on the characters even though the story and its characters are original. Then, guideline 4 is satisfied.

The second is the promotion movie named Mercedes-Benz Next A-Class<sup>11</sup>, which promotes Mercedes-Benz's new A-Class cars. In the story, the promoted car is depicted in a near future world. The speediness of the car is nicely shown in the movie. This fits to guideline 1. Also, the movie shows that the car offers very high performance that is fit to guideline 2.

In the animation movie, the presentation of the car is very realistic. Also, the story is just to catch a *legendary* ramen noodle shop. Finding a nice ramen noodle shop is very popular culture for Japanese young adults. Thus, the story is especially very realistic for the young adults who are target users for the A-Class cars. This fits to guideline 3.

Finally, the movie adopts a character designer of Evangelion, where most of young males know and like Evangelion. It is one of the most popular animations in Japan, and its characters are also well known. People who like Evangelion's characters also like the characters in Next A-Class. Thus, this fits to guideline 4.

The third is the promotion movie of Subaru, which is a Japanese automobile company. The promotion movie is named Wish Upon the Pleiades<sup>12</sup>. The promotion is

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.meiji.co.jp/sweets/candy\\_gum/fruits\\_gummi/part1/](http://www.meiji.co.jp/sweets/candy_gum/fruits_gummi/part1/)

<sup>11</sup> <http://next-a-class.com/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://sbr-gx.jp/>

very interesting because a very few are promoted about Subaru in the movie. The name of the main heroine is *Subaru*, but the movie does not show any cars in the story. However, the characters in the story and the story itself offer strong attractiveness to many Japanese traditional animation fans. The story is based on magic girls' story, and many scenes in the movie are very typical in the magic girls' animation movie. Thus, the movie becomes very empathetic to many animation fans, and the characters in the movie become very famous in the geek animation communities.

The movie makes the name Subaru well known although the company name may not be popular in young adults. Also, the company has opens several public attractions using the *characters*. Many young adults having interests in the characters visited to the attractions, and learn more details about the company. The original story follows only guideline 1 and 4, but guideline 2 and 3 that do not satisfied in the story may be compensated by the reality offered in real world attractions. This shows the future possibility to use transmedia storytelling for effective promotions.

Original stories need not take into account the consistency with promoted products. Thus, there is a very big freedom for the promotion, but the cost to create the movie of an original story is high.

## 5 Conclusion and Future Direction

This paper presented design guidelines to promote products by using animation stories. We showed some case studies to discuss the analysis of the several promotion movies. The insights from the analysis are useful to design future ambient intelligent services. We are interested in to use the proposed guidelines to analyze a story fragmented on multiple media. In Japan, especially, animation movies are recently used to promote local regions that are used in the story. The region plans to attract people who like the story when visiting to the region for enjoying extra original new stories. The proposed guidelines are helpful to consider how the unsatisfied guidelines in the promotion movie are supplemented in regional real world attractions. Our approach is also useful to analyze the story to compose multiple existing stories. For example, MacDonald sells Happy Meal that gives us character goods in various stories. Currently, there is no interaction among the characters in different stories. On the other hand, our approach offers a promising way to enhance their consumers' experiences by consistently integrating stories of multiple characters.

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