

The Dedicated Truck to Take You to the Train Station:
A Case Study on RAM's Marketing Strategy Through the Hit Series, *Yellowstone*

A Senior Project
presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Experience Industry Management
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Science

by
Hailey Keidel
March 2023

© 2023 Hailey Keidel

ABSTRACT

THE DEDICATED TRUCK TO TAKE YOU TO THE TRAIN STATION:

A CASE STUDY ON RAM'S MARKETING STRATEGY

THROUGH THE HIT SERIES, *YELLOWSTONE*

HAILEY KEIDEL

MARCH 2023

A company's marketing strategy is crucial to said company's success and expansion throughout its lifecycle. When looking at the automotive industry and its marketing standards, RAM is taking a step beyond with its partnership with *Yellowstone*. The purpose of this study was to analyze RAM's marketing strategy in the Paramount series, *Yellowstone*. A case study was conducted on RAM through a tool created by the researcher with data collected from RAM's core site, *Yellowstone's* core site, and a variety of news and statistic outlets. The results of this study determined that RAM's marketing strategy is highly successful in connection with *Yellowstone* as their strategy exposes consumers to RAM's products in a unique way. The researcher suggests an expansion of both RAM's and *Yellowstone's* joint sponsorship and product placement strategies to further connect with current and potential *Yellowstone* viewers and RAM consumers.

Keywords: marketing strategy, sponsorship, product placement, automotive industry, RAM, *Yellowstone*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	1
Background of Study	1
Review of Literature	2
Purpose of the Study	8
Research Questions.....	8
Chapter 2 METHODS.....	10
Description of Organization.....	10
Description of Instrument	11
Description of Procedures.....	11
Chapter 3 PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS.....	13
<i>Yellowstone</i> Synopsis.....	13
Sponsorship Activations & Television Advertisements	14
Product Placement	17
Chapter 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.....	19
Discussion.....	19
Conclusions.....	23
Recommendations.....	24
REFERENCES	26
APPENDIXES	30

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of Study

Marketing strategies are a key component of every company's success and growth to effectively push their products and brand identities to the masses, especially within the automotive industry. In 2022, the automotive industry is projected to have spent over nineteen billion dollars on digital marketing and advertising alone (eMarketer, 2021). These massive portions of their budgets showcase how important a company's marketing strategy is to them with each industry designating a specific portion of their overall budget towards their marketing strategy based on its perceived importance to their business. A company's marketing strategy – their “overall game plan for reaching prospective consumers and turning them into customers of their products” – continuously evolves to ensure the most current and well-developed ideas are pushed to current and potential customers (Barone, 2022). With that being said, the automotive industry is a large, everchanging sector with multiple opportunities for marketing strategy development.

The most notable example of automotive companies and their marketing strategies includes the classic, over-dramatized car commercial. In these commercials, the featured vehicle is tackling some great task - ranging from climbing a mountain, an over-the-top stairway, or some extremely rough terrain - usually with a deep voice in the background talking about overcoming anything. All of these commercials, however, get lost in the buzz as audiences have come to expect this out of every automobile company.

These automobile companies utilize essentially the same commercial format as their competitors – something companies typically shy away from. With the constant rise of social media, experiential marketing, and other unique marketing tools, all companies are looking for a way to stand out among their competitors. The automobile company, RAM, is a perfect example of this search to expand the automotive industry’s marketing principles. The purpose of this study was to analyze RAM’s marketing strategy in the Paramount series, *Yellowstone*.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Business Source Premier, JSTOR, & ProQuest. This review of literature includes the following subsections: marketing strategy, television advertising and sponsorship, and product placement.

Marketing strategies are highly important to a business’s success and development and must be considered as a staple aspect of a business. A marketing strategy is a broad category covering essentially all the marketing activities of a company and is crucial towards a company’s customer engagement. Before analyzing a marketing strategy, it is important to understand what is behind the makeup of customer engagement. Customer engagement is defined as “motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct [physical] brand interactions” (Hollebeck, 2011, p. 790;

Cornwell, 2019, p. 49). A company's marketing strategy holds a lot of influence towards the company's success - including engagement, exposure, and sales – and should be innovated often to maintain this success. In fact, Bouhelal and Adouka (2022) described a marketing innovation strategy as “new solutions to marketing problems and needs through implementing significant changes in product design or packaging, product placement, product promotion, or pricing” (p. 175). In addition, Bouhelal and Adouka found a positive correlation between a company's marketing innovation strategy and the ideas of supporting core business – defined as “workers are more supported so that they can concentrate on doing their work by providing an appropriate work environment and providing the required amenities” – and an increase in revenue, which is considered success in the eyes of the company (p. 175). Companies seeking more success can look towards the development of their marketing strategy to do so.

Furthermore, a company's marketing strategy is highly multi-faceted and cannot be described through a singular marketing operation. Companies do not solely rely on social media, in-person advertising, or even experiential marketing activations to create their entire marketing strategy and, instead, create their marketing strategies from a variety of outlets. Godfrey and Higgens (2020) describe a company's marketing strategy as being “derived from quantifiable goals and objectives, in combination with a more vaguely defined mission or vision,” and “is typically task-oriented with measurable outcomes” (p. 870). Marketing strategies work towards building customer engagement where marketing engagement opportunities lean towards “satisfying emotional relationships that result in interactions” (Cornwell, 2019, p. 50). Companies utilize their

mission and goals to target what is most important to them to then be marketed to their current or potential consumers and build their customer engagement.

A crucial part of many companies' marketing strategy is sponsorship and sponsorship activations. Overall, a sponsor is defined as "a person, brand or corporation that gives money to a project, individual, etc. for a specific commercially oriented purpose, in exchange for directly related benefits such as publicity, hospitality, or sales opportunities" (Collett & Fenton, 2011, p. 236). These sponsors – whether in the form of a singular person or a company – work together with their chosen partners to create sponsorship activations to be pushed to current and potential consumers. A company's sponsorship activations hold a multitude of opportunities for current and potential consumers to engage with said company's products and brand identity. Sponsorship activations are considered a more influential form of marketing than traditional advertising in that consumer engagement is heightened due to a more in-depth connection between a consumer's passion and the product (Meenaghan & O'Sullivan, 2001; Cornwell, 2019, p. 49). There is a vast array of options available for companies to sponsor, all of which allow companies to further connect with their current and potential consumers by becoming a part of their experience in an integrative manner (Cornwell & Kwak, 2015). Sponsorship activations can occur in multiple forms including television advertising, television sponsorship, special events, and even experiential marketing activations.

When looking at television advertising and sponsorship, one can categorize these under specific sections of a company's marketing strategy. Television advertising and sponsorship can include a variety of activations including commercials regarding

products, a brief promotion stating “This show is brought to you by Company X,” or even a company’s logo being flashed on the screen while the show is paused – commonly seen on streaming services like *Hulu*. It is crucial to establish television advertising and sponsorship activations that are effective, not only in the eyes of the company itself, but in the eyes of the viewers who are potential customers. Overall, sponsorship is considered “an established marketing communications platform that takes many forms ... and has functioned like advertising for decades” (Cornwell, 2019, p. 49). Television sponsorship – in the form of lead-in messages or company’s logos – are a great strategy to be utilized in order to replace or lessen the reliance on full commercials or advertisements (Bellman et al., 2019). Furthermore, television sponsorship combined with advertising or other marketing measures can expand a company’s reach and exposure effect on the viewers (Bellman et al.). Companies must find their perfect combination of television advertising and sponsorship messages to best impact their intended audience with their proposed product or service.

When considering best practices for television advertising, there are several routes for companies to consider during ad creation that lead to consumer interest including authenticity, creativity, and energy. Current and potential customers want to see something advertised to them in an authentic and reliable manner to better gauge their purchasing. Becker et al. (2019) considers the term of authenticity “as a multilayered concept pertaining to distinct context cues that render an advertisement authentic” (p. 25). To take this even further, Becker et al. defines advertisements based in authenticity as “one[s] that [are] genuine, real, and true with regard to some executional element or dimension” (p. 25). This means that authentic advertisements showcase the marketed

product doing something it actually can accomplish in a realistic setting by a realistic user. Becker et al. created an outline of best practices in television advertising which includes the following practices: preserving the brand essence, honoring brand heritage, showing a realistic plot, and presenting a credible advertising message (pp. 27-30). Customers also value creativity when processing advertisements. Dall'Olio and Vakratsas (2023) looked into the interaction between creativity and elasticity in advertising and established several creative templates for use in commercial creation. These commercial creation templates include the following: analogy, extremes, consequences, and dimensionality alteration (Dall'Olio & Vakratsas, p. 31). These creative templates better lead to elasticity in advertising with these same researchers stating that their research showcased a positive relationship between strategic, creative thinking during advertising creation and advertising pay off (Dall'Olio & Vakratsas, 2023). Finally, high-energy in a television ad sense is considered an ad that is “active, exciting, and arousing for the viewer to experience” and can be applied to both audio and visual forms (Puccinelli et al., 2015, p. 1). Yang et al. (2022) discovered “on average, longer ad-tuning rates are associated with higher energy in ad content” (p. 856). Overall, these routes can help to boost audience interest in the advertised and marketed products.

Another avenue to consider when analyzing television advertising and marketing is advertising avoidance – also described as changing the channel, speeding through, or even going on one’s phone during an advertisement or commercial. Wilbur (2016) argues that “a more efficient selection of advertisements may improve viewer welfare, enlarge the audiences available for advertisers’ messages and influence networks’ incentives to make further investments in programming” (p. 52). In their research, Wilbur also noted

that certain networks promote less advertising avoidance including those “whose programming is highly differentiated, sports-oriented, or instructional” (p. 70). Therefore, customers consider relevance to themselves and their lives when absorbing advertisements – both consciously and subconsciously – resulting in advertising avoidance or customer engagement (Kelly et al., 2020). Television agencies and companies looking to advertise through television media can use this information to create more targeted advertisements and marketing materials to be pushed towards their proposed audiences.

Product placement is another more unique outlet within a company’s marketing strategy that is often underutilized or even subconsciously ignored by audiences. The idea of product placement was first defined in the early 1990’s as “a paid inclusion of product messages in a movie or television program to unobtrusively influence the audience” (Balasubramanian, 1994; Guo et al., 2019, pp. 215-216). Product placement is often done innately in the eyes of the audience and can come in many forms. This inclusion may vary from the main character driving a certain kind of car to another character always drinking a certain kind of soda. Companies pay for this inclusion in television shows or movies as the advertising reach is the same as the program’s reach. Furthermore, product placement is often considered a more appealing and attractive form of marketing compared to other formats (Sabour et al., 2016). This marketing strategy outlet is often underutilized and is a great opportunity for companies to expand their reach.

Just as all aspects of marketing strategies are expanding, product placement continues to evolve with the ever-changing media climate. No longer is product placement restricted to solely television and film but now includes forms like music

videos, video games, songs, and even books due to developments in advertising and media (Guo et al., 2019). This expansion of product placement broadens how consumers are exposed to products meaning companies need to understand how product placement impacts viewers and their understanding of the products being exposed to them.

Constructs like advertising and marketing credibility, consumer attitude regarding advertising, consumer attitude regarding product placement, and consumer attitude regarding product placement regulation are important to understand (Sabour et al., 2016).

Companies take the outcomes of these constructs and utilize them in developing their product placement opportunities in television and other media to best market their products to their proposed consumers. Ultimately, companies need to understand their own core marketing goals to better target what activations would serve as the best fit.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze RAM's marketing strategy in the Paramount series, *Yellowstone*.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What sponsorship activations, including television advertisements and special events, are implemented through *Yellowstone* for RAM?
2. What product placement strategies are implemented in *Yellowstone* for RAM?
3. How effective are the sponsorship activations implemented through *Yellowstone* for RAM?

4. How effective are the product placement strategies implemented in *Yellowstone* for RAM?

Chapter 2

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to analyze RAM's marketing strategy in the Paramount series, *Yellowstone*. A case study was conducted on RAM and their marketing strategy through the series, *Yellowstone*. This chapter includes the following sections: description of organization, description of instrument, and description of procedures.

Description of Organization

A case study was conducted on RAM and their marketing strategy through the Paramount television series, *Yellowstone*. RAM trucks themselves first appeared in 1917 as a truck divisional section of the Dodge brand (Forbes Media, 2023). A little more than ten years later, Dodge was acquired by Chrysler while Dodge Ram trucks appeared in the market in 1981 (Forbes Media). In 2009, Chrysler was merged under the Fiat umbrella and RAM was then announced as its own singular brand (Forbes Media). As one of the most widely-known pickup truck brands, RAM has over a hundred years of experience in the creation of trucks ranging from light to heavy-duty pickup trucks. Now – as a part of the Fiat Chrysler Automobiles family along with Chrysler, Dodge, and Jeep – RAM hosts their headquarters in Auburn Hills, Michigan (Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, 2023). Furthermore, RAM is a highly awarded and reliable automotive company. A few of their awards include: *2022 IIHS Top Safety Pick* for four years in a row for the Ram 1500 and *U.S. News & World Report Best Truck Brand* running from 2020 to 2022 (Fiat Chrysler Automobiles).

As stated previously, this study also analyzes RAM through the lens of the television series, *Yellowstone*. *Yellowstone* tells the story of the Dutton family and their ranch in Montana while overcoming various political and personal obstacles (Paramount, 2023). The series contains several television stars including Kevin Costner as the family patriarch – John Dutton (Paramount). This hit Western drama was created by John Linson and Taylor Sheridan and has been on air since 2018 (IMDB, 2023).

Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a case study guide developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). The original *Questions* and *Areas of Focus* for this instrument contained the following: Overall Marketing Summation, Website Development, Social Media, Television Activations, Sponsorship, and Product Placement. These *Areas of Focus* were discussed and analyzed through the two lenses of *Description* and *Additional Comments*. A pilot test was conducted on this instrument using a similar organization - Ford Motor Company. After the pilot test was run, several changes were made to the instrument including removing Social Media due to a change of focus within the research, reworking Overall Marketing Summation into Overall Marketing Strategy, reworking Website Development into Website Activations, and reworking Television Activations into Television Advertisements.

Description of Procedures

A case study was conducted on RAM and their marketing strategy through the series, *Yellowstone*. The instrument utilized in this study was a case study guide

developed by the researcher. Social media data were collected utilizing the following sources of RAM's and RAM Rodeo's Instagram account and YouTube account. A large amount of information regarding RAM and their activities was obtained from their core website. When analyzing *Yellowstone*, a large amount of data was collected from the Paramount *Yellowstone* homepage along with actual episodes of *Yellowstone*.

Furthermore, data were collected from *Yellowstone*'s social media accounts – specifically YouTube. Various news articles and other statistics are being utilized. These sources specifically include the Yellowstone Set Tour, Stellantis North America, Shorty Awards, NFR Experience, Looper, Shop the Scenes, Motor Biscuit, Entertainment Weekly, Variety, Statista, TV Insider, IMCDB, and IMBD.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to analyze RAM's marketing strategy in the Paramount series, *Yellowstone*. A case study was conducted on RAM and their marketing strategy through the series, *Yellowstone*. This chapter includes the following sections: *Yellowstone* synopsis, sponsorship activations & television advertisements, and product placement strategies.

Yellowstone Synopsis

The hit Paramount television series, *Yellowstone*, has been on the air since 2018 and is currently operating in its fifth season. Created by Taylor Sheridan and John Linson, *Yellowstone* tells the story of the Dutton family and their ranch, entitled the Yellowstone Dutton Ranch, located in Montana. The show details how John Dutton - the patriarch of the family portrayed by Kevin Costner - along with his family, protects their ranch from a variety of attackers. The villains of this series range from land developers to the bordering National Parks and even the neighboring Indian reservation who are all seeking to utilize the land in their own ways. *Yellowstone* features several political, love, and family plotlines all tying the Dutton family, their ranch hands, and even enemies together.

Yellowstone features a variety of actors - including Kelly Reilly, Cole Hauser, Luke Grimes, and Mo'Nique - to create the star-studded lineup of the show itself. These actors bring their various experiences to the *Yellowstone* cast; therefore, providing

a deep and rich background for viewers. *Yellowstone* is filmed on an actual working ranch, which is showcased to viewers through a multitude of scenarios including herding, wrangling, and even branding. This educates viewers on the multitude of aspects that are a part of ranch life or allows those who do work, own, or operate ranches to better connect to the show and characters.

Throughout its five seasons, *Yellowstone* has developed a loyal fanbase and has emerged as one of the most popular current television shows. For reference, the season five premiere of *Yellowstone* in 2022 saw over twelve million viewers watching the premiere either live or the same day it was released. Additionally, between the years of 2021 and 2022, *Yellowstone* was ranked as the third most watched television show in the United States just behind *NFL Sunday Night Football* and *NFL Thursday Night Football* with *NFL Monday Night Football* falling in fourth. This establishes *Yellowstone* as the most watched drama in the United States.

Sponsorship Activations & Television Advertisements

RAM is creatively aligned with the Paramount television series, *Yellowstone*, when it comes to television advertisements and sponsorship activations. RAM does utilize the traditional television advertising format by paying for television commercials to air during the show itself alongside “brought to you by” messages. However, RAM does take viewer engagement and advertising creativity a step further. They have utilized the newest technology available in smart televisions to create interactive commercials for use by viewers to extend the viewer experience. These interactive commercials feature five gallery slides that viewers can scroll through with the corresponding smart television

remote to give viewers a deep dive into current RAM models. Details included in these commercials range from vehicle performance to even the closest RAM dealer to the viewer based on their location. However, RAM does not stop at television commercials in their advertising and sponsorship efforts with *Yellowstone* and has instead branched into several marketing strategy opportunities including the *Yellowstone Set Tour*, *Stories from the Bunkhouse*, and presenting at Cowboy Christmas.

RAM and Paramount partnered to create the *Yellowstone Set Tour*. The *Yellowstone Set Tour* is a fully immersive, virtual experience for *Yellowstone* fans that provides an up-close-and-personal view into the most current *Yellowstone* set from season five. This is all seen by the viewers from the comfort of their own homes extending the viewer experience. However, viewers do not simply click from one section of the tour to another. Instead, they drive there from behind the wheel of the 2023 Ram 1500 Limited Longhorn truck. Each experience is fully customizable by the viewer as they move through a map and interact with videos, photographs, fun facts, and trivia questions all specially curated by RAM. For viewers, it does not stop there. Instead, they also can explore the Ram 1500 by selecting vehicle features in the same manner they move through the ranch. RAM and *Yellowstone* branding cover the entirety of the webpage that hosts the *Yellowstone Set Tour* directly linking the two in brand image.

RAM does hold another piece of sponsorship activation when it comes to *Yellowstone*. The Paramount Network releases roughly ten-minute videos entitled *Stories from the Bunkhouse*. These videos feature the *Yellowstone* cast as they discuss their experiences, funny stories from the set, and even what occurs in recent episodes. However, Paramount is not the sole brains behind *Stories from the Bunkhouse*. RAM has

partnered with Paramount to release these videos throughout the *Yellowstone* seasons with a clear “presented-by” message stated at the beginning of the majority of the episodes. Furthermore, in the YouTube description, these same videos also mention a partnership statement linking RAM and *Yellowstone* in brand image. *Stories from the Bunkhouse* has made a large impression on *Yellowstone* fans with this campaign gaining over forty million impressions and twelve million views over a variety of platforms – including Facebook and YouTube.

Another example of RAM’s and *Yellowstone*’s sponsorship partnership is seen during Cowboy Christmas at the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo (NFR) in Las Vegas, Nevada. Cowboy Christmas is the official trade show and gift show of NFR and has been an institution connected with the rodeo itself since 1986. This exhibition features more than three hundred exhibitors allowing NFR visitors to shop for western-wear, boots, jewelry, gifts, and more. Interactive exhibitions are also apart of NFR’s Cowboy Christmas with RAM being featured as a showpiece. RAM has furthered their brand connection with *Yellowstone* over several years by including interactive exhibits for NFR’s Cowboy Christmas’s guests by featuring current RAM models decked out in *Yellowstone* gear and branding – exactly as seen in *Yellowstone* episodes. RAM also brought *Yellowstone* cast members – including Cole Hauser who portrays Rip Wheeler – to interact with RAM and *Yellowstone* fans alike by signing autographs, taking pictures, and more all in front of *Yellowstone* branded trucks. This exhibition has continuously drawn rodeo, RAM, and *Yellowstone* fans further exposing them to the current details and options these companies have to offer.

Product Placement

Within each episode of *Yellowstone* throughout its current, five season run, there is no shortage of product placement. Each character contains their own identity and therefore their own opportunities for companies to expose viewers to products that align with their favorite characters. In fact, viewers are encouraged to shop the scenes to purchase products worn and used by the characters within the show and can do so on several different websites. The *Yellowstone* website, alongside one entitled *Shop the Scenes*, allows viewers to see less identifiable products – products that do not contain a logo on them – such as Beth Dutton’s jewelry, John Dutton’s jacket, or even Rip Wheeler’s boots. Through *Yellowstone*, Paramount has approved and utilized product placement to push across several recognizable brands, including Coors and Carhartt, to viewers in order to establish the brand identity of *Yellowstone*.

The most prominent focus of the show in regards to product placement is RAM. RAM is the primary truck showcased within the show and is utilized by the main characters with the most screen time compared to any other trucks driven on the show. In fact, the show’s villains are the ones that do not drive RAM trucks and instead drive trucks from brands like Ford. The heroes of *Yellowstone* only drive RAM trucks varying from John Dutton himself to every ranch hand to even the livestock agents. These RAM trucks are not simply featured waiting in driveways or parked on the side of the road.

RAM trucks are featured in *Yellowstone* as in-action and hard at work. Those at RAM and *Yellowstone* have placed these trucks in a variety of situations to not only enhance or follow the chosen plot, but also to highlight specific traits and aspects of the RAM trucks that are important for viewers and potential customers to know. In order to

showcase the towing capacity of RAM trucks, they are utilized in towing horse trailers and livestock trailers to and from rodeos, livestock shows, and more. To highlight the speed of these trucks, they are shown in high speed chases after villains or in races to meet and protect important characters. Finally, to emphasize the functionality, RAM trucks are utilized in everyday ranching scenarios by the working characters. Overall, all of these individual scenarios work together to create RAM's overall product placement strategy within *Yellowstone*.

The same RAM truck is not featured over and over again within the span of *Yellowstone's* run. RAM has utilized a variety of years and models from their truck lines. Several RAM trucks featured within *Yellowstone* include a 2014 Ram Heavy Duty 2500, 2017 Ram Heavy Duty 2500, 1998 Dodge Ram, and a 1994 Dodge Ram. Perhaps one of the most important RAM truck appearances comes in the form of the 2013 Ram Heavy Duty 3500 Laramie Crew Cab which serves as patriarch, John Dutton's truck.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Unique marketing strategies are at the forefront of modern marketing development. It is essential for companies to utilize their marketing strategies in creative and highly effective ways to influence potential customers and reinforce current relationships. This concluding chapter influences the following: a discussion of the findings, limitations of the research, conclusions based on research questions, and recommendations for the future.

Discussion

RAM utilizes television advertisements and sponsorship activations connected with *Yellowstone* to successfully push across their own goals and strategies. Through traditional television advertising, RAM is effectively exposing the millions of *Yellowstone* viewers to the different aspects and appeals of RAM vehicles. They have also combined this traditional television advertising with television sponsorship – “brought to you by” messages and logo flashes – to layer customer exposure to RAM products. Cornwell and Kwak (2015) describe sponsorship – including the aforementioned television sponsorship activities – as a more integrative form of marketing especially considering consumers opinions and processing of advertisements and other marketing methods. Bellman et al. (2019) discovered that these forms of television sponsorships assist in successfully diversifying a company’s marketing strategy and differentiation from standard or traditional marketing methods.

Additionally, when considering RAM's sponsorship activations outside of television sponsorships – including *Cowboy Christmas* and *Stories from the Bunkhouse* – RAM has directly placed themselves in the line of site of their preferred customers. Cornwell (2019), alongside the research of Meenaghan and O'Sullivan (2001), identifies sponsorship and sponsorship activations as a higher form of marketing due to furthered connections between known brands and customers' lives. Both RAM and *Yellowstone* have creatively combined their efforts within these sponsorship activations and drawn in new consumers to expand their customer loyalty base. Dall'Olio and Vakratsas (2023) describe a highly positive connection between creative and strategic thinking during sponsorship and advertising development that pays off in customer loyalty development. The aforementioned sponsorship activations between *Yellowstone* and RAM also effectively showcase the connections that these two brand images emulate. By directly associating both the core *Yellowstone* and RAM ideals together, these companies have accurately showcased RAM products in fitting scenarios where they best reached their target audiences. After analyzing the sponsorship activations established by RAM and *Yellowstone*, the researcher recommends the creation of a specialty, *Yellowstone* RAM model equipped with the same branding as seen on the same trucks in *Yellowstone* episodes to be made available for purchase by consumers. This would further the connection between *Yellowstone* and consumers by bringing the physical vehicle in their own homes.

By creating a partnership with *Yellowstone*, RAM has become an extremely successful example of product placement within modern media. RAM has gone where no other automobile company has by becoming the sole vehicle associated with *Yellowstone*.

With the expansion of product placement opportunities outside of television, RAM has fully taken advantage of this opportunity to expose consumers to their products not only on television but also in experiential sponsorship activations (Guo et al., 2019). Instead of highlighting a single vehicle, RAM has instead utilized every available vehicle in their arsenal and implemented a variety of their most prominent trucks to be associated with *Yellowstone* and its characters. As stated by Sabour et al. (2016), product placement is considered a better form of marketing, especially when considering consumers' negative views on standard marketing methods. When accomplished innately and naturally, product placement is highly effective and motivational with consumers. Instead of consumers having to watch staged and overly animated commercials about a RAM truck, they are instead exposed to the vehicle accomplishing something it can actually do and in scenarios the show's fans and consumers actually may find themselves in. Throughout *Yellowstone*, RAM trucks are highly romanticized through the characters' use within multiple plotlines as *Yellowstone's* heroes utilize RAM trucks as their sole form of transportation. By doing so, *Yellowstone* viewers intrinsically associate RAM trucks as being the superior truck brand. The researcher recommends expanding *Yellowstone's* and RAM's combined product placement strategy into the music video realm by connecting with *Yellowstone* actor and musician, Luke Grimes. Grimes, who portrays Kayce Dutton, is an up-and-coming country singer while still acting on *Yellowstone*. It is the researcher's suggestion to showcase *Yellowstone*-branded RAM trucks in upcoming music videos to further connect RAM with all aspects of *Yellowstone*, including the actors' lives.

Yellowstone and RAM combined have created an authentic portrayal of RAM in settings that RAM products would be traditionally utilized. They have not overly exaggerated in their depictions of RAM products and instead have created something truly authentic combining an American-made product with a show that has swept the country. By doing so, RAM has successfully built their customer engagement - something that both Hollebeek (2011) and Cornwell (2019) defined as being based on direct brand interactions – into one that incorporates the identities of both RAM and *Yellowstone*. Overall, the research also suggests increasing the combined, branded social media efforts of *Yellowstone* and RAM to, again, further lock down the brand identity and brand connection between RAM and *Yellowstone*.

When critically examining this study, there are a variety of limitations that must be discussed and acknowledged. Considering the time constraints, this study occurred over ten weeks with the research period consisting of around two weeks. Furthermore, this study revolved around virtually obtained material albeit scholarly journals and articles. There is a lack of information available regarding RAM and *Yellowstone* together – being as this show has only been on the air since 2018 and running for five seasons. Additionally, the researcher’s own biases must be addressed, including a similar religious background to the one present in *Yellowstone*, alongside a personal and familial affinity with RAM and their products. However, the researcher was able to acknowledge these biases and prevent them from convoluting the research at hand. Even with the aforementioned limitations, this study showcases the effectiveness of a well-developed and multi-faceted marketing strategy through the lens of RAM and *Yellowstone*. The

researcher suggests an in-depth look at sales statistics for RAM models after the airing of *Yellowstone* for future research.

RAM's marketing strategy – including television advertisement, sponsorship, and product placement – was determined as highly effective and successful especially through the lens of the hit series, *Yellowstone*. By creating a holistic approach to marketing, RAM was able to ensure that all current or potential customers were exposed to RAM and their products through immersive activations, passive advertisements, and natural product placement. This can provide a template or suggestive guide towards other automobile companies looking to step outside standard marketing strategies. Overall, RAM and *Yellowstone* have joined forces to create something truly unique and have moved RAM beyond the marketing standard within the automotive industry.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. RAM implements a variety of sponsorship activations in association with *Yellowstone* including traditional television advertising, in-person sponsorship activations, and virtual, immersive activations.
2. RAM utilizes fully integrated and seamless product placement within every *Yellowstone* episode, all while associated with the hero characters.
3. The sponsorship activations accomplished by RAM and *Yellowstone* have provided both current and potential customers the chance to experience RAM products hand-in-hand with *Yellowstone* in both immersive and passive ways;

therefore, providing sponsorship activations that will appeal to all types of viewers.

4. Product placement within *Yellowstone* is highly effective and has exposed the millions of *Yellowstone* viewers to RAM products while allowing viewers to directly associated vehicles features in *Yellowstone* with RAM.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. A more holistic approach to a company's marketing strategy should be utilized throughout the automotive industry.
2. RAM and *Yellowstone* should continue to manage their partnership and extend this into a specialty vehicle available for purchase by consumers including specialty brand packages that would match those made specifically for the *Yellowstone* show.
3. RAM and *Yellowstone* should expand their product placement partnership into one that includes a more audio aspect such as a RAM product placement occurring in music videos to also showcase the audio capabilities of RAM vehicles.
4. RAM and *Yellowstone* should expand their combined social media presence by including more dual-branded material on their respective social media accounts.

5. Future research on this topic should include a more in-depth analysis on RAM sales and sales statistics due to the effects of the combined efforts of RAM and *Yellowstone*.

REFERENCES

REFERENCES

- Balasubramanian, S. K. (1994, December 1). Beyond advertising and publicity: Hybrid messages and public policy issues. *Journal of Advertising*, 23(4), 29-46.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4188949>
- Barone, A. (2022, June 13). Marketing strategy: What it is, how it works, how to create one. *Investopedia*. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/marketing-strategy.asp>
- Becker, M., Wiegand, N., & Reinartz, W. J. (2019, January 1). Does it pay to be real? Understanding authenticity in TV advertising. *Journal of Marketing*, 83(1), 24-50.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242918815880>
- Bellman, S., Murphy, J., Arismendez, S. V., & Varan, D. (2019). How TV sponsorship can help television spot advertising. *European Journal of Marketing*, 53(1), 121-136. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2176738527?accountid=10362>
- Bouhelal, F., & Adouka, L. (2022, January 4). Shift from product innovation strategy to marketing innovation strategy to add value to the firm. *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, 10(2), 167-178. <https://doi.org/10.2478/mdke-2022-0012>
- Collett, P., & Fenton, W. (2011). *The sponsorship handbook: Essential tools, tips, and techniques for sponsors and sponsorship seekers*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Cornwell, T. B. (2019, January 1). Less “sponsorship as advertising” and more sponsorship –linked marketing as authentic engagement. *Journal of Advertising*, 48(1), 49-60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2019.1588809>

- Cornwell, T. B., & Kwak, D. H. (2015, March 1). Sponsorship-linked marketing: Introduction to topics. *Journal of Sport Management*, 29(2), 133-136.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/JSM.2015-0055>
- Dall'Olio, F., & Vakratsas, D. (2023, January 1). The impact of advertising creative strategy on advertising elasticity. *Journal of Marketing*, 87(1), 26-44.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/002224292211074960>
- eMarketer. (2021, Aug. 16). Automotive industry digital advertising spending in the United States from 2011 to 2023. *Statista*. <https://www-statista-com>
- Fiat Chrysler Automobiles. (2023). *RAM trucks and vans: Home page*. <https://www.ramtrucks.com>
- Forbes Media. (2023). Ram. *Forbes Wheels*. <https://www.forbes.com/wheels/cars/ram/>
- Godfrey, R., & Higgins, M. (2020, August 1). Marketing strategy and the hunt for era V. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 36(9-10), 867-887. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1747521>
- Guo, F., Ye, G., Hudders, L., Lv, W., Li, M., & Duffy, V. G. (2019, April 1). Product placement in mass media: A review and bibliometric analysis. *Journal of Advertising*, 48(2), 215-231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2019.1567409>
- Hollebeek, L. D. (2011). Demystifying customer brand engagement: Exploring the loyalty nexus." *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(7-8), 785-807.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2010.500132>
- IMDB. (2023). Yellowstone. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4236770/>

- Kelly, L., Kerr, G., & Drennan, J. (2020, August 1). Triggers of engagement and avoidance: Applying approach-avoid theory. *Journal of Marketing Communication*, 26(5), 488-508. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2018.1531053>
- Meenaghan, T., & O'Sullivan, P. (2001, February). The passionate embrace – Consumer response to sponsorship. *Psychology and Marketing*, 18(2), 87-94. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6793\(200102\)18:2%3C87::AID-MAR1000%3E3.0.CO;2-L](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6793(200102)18:2%3C87::AID-MAR1000%3E3.0.CO;2-L)
- Paramount Network. (2023). Yellowstone. <https://www.paramountnetwork.com/shows/yellowstone#about>
- Puccinelli, N., Wilcox, K., & Grewal, D. (2015, March 1). Consumers' response to commercials: When the energy level in the commercial conflicts with the media context. *Journal of Marketing*, 79(2), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.13.0026>
- Sabour, N. I., Pillai, D., Gistri, G., & Balasubramanian, S. K. (2016, March 1). Attitudes and related perceptions about product placement: A comparison of Finland, Italy and the United States. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(2), 362-387. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2015.1031205>
- Wilbur, K. C. (2016, April 1). Advertising content and television advertising avoidance. *Journal of Media Economics*, 26(2), 51-72. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08997764.2016.1170022>
- Yang, J., Xie, Y., & Papatla, P. (2022, August 1). High-energy ad content: A large-scale investigation of TV commercials. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 59(4), 840-859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222437211067802>

APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Instrument

Questions/Areas of Focus	Description	Additional Comments
Overall Marketing Strategy		
Website Activations		
Sponsorship		
Television Advertisements		
Product Placement		