

Does Hedegreen Research Need a Bucket?

A Mario popcorn container raises a ridiculous question with a serious edge: if a publication is a media product, why does the product stop at the screen?

DRAFT PREVIEW DENNIS HEDEGREEN ANALYSE DRAFT-LOCAL

[HTTPS://HEDEGREENRESEARCH.COM/ARTICLES/DOES-HEDEGREEN-RESEARCH-NEED-A-BUCKET/](https://hedegreenresearch.com/articles/does-hedegreen-research-need-a-bucket/)

Where does a media product end?

My son got a Mario popcorn container.

That should not have produced a research question.

It did.

The obvious interpretation is that a cinema and a media franchise managed to put another piece of plastic around a familiar character. But the object is stranger than that description. It holds food while somebody consumes media. It extends a fictional world into the hand. It can survive after both the food and the film are gone. And objects like it have become valuable enough that the cinema industry has given them a formal name.

So here is the stupid question:

Does Hedegreen Research need a bucket?

Not literally.

Probably.

The serious question hiding inside it is where a media product ends.

The audience has a body

A website can deliver words to a screen and call the transaction complete.

A cinema cannot pretend so easily.

The customer enters a building. They sit in a designed seat, in designed darkness, at a designed temperature, facing a designed screen, inside a timed social environment. They may carry food and drink sold by the same business.

Cinema therefore delivers more than moving images. It delivers conditions for consuming moving images.

This is not a new discovery. Research on what service designers call the *servicescape* has long treated physical surroundings as part of the service rather than neutral scenery.[1] Cinema made that relationship unusually visible because the screen, room, sound, seat, timing and concessions are difficult to separate in

practice.

Even popcorn had to earn its place. Early US movie theatres often resisted it. During the Great Depression, vendors sold it outside, theatres gradually brought concessions inside, and the snack became economically entangled with moviegoing.[2]

The bucket was originally subordinate to that system.

Popcorn needed somewhere to go.

Then the bucket became interesting.

Would you buy it empty?

That may be the cleanest test.

Ordinary packaging loses most of its purpose when the contents disappear. A collectible cinema vessel can do the opposite.

AMC calls these objects “collectible concession vessels”. In its 2025 annual report, the company says they can drive moviegoers to theatres and increase engagement.[3] That is AMC’s claim, not independent proof of causation. But it shows that the company no longer treats the vessel as disposable packaging.

AMC’s chief executive said the company sold \$54 million of movie-themed merchandise in 2023, up from virtually nothing a few years earlier.[4] That figure is revenue, not profit, and it covers movie-themed merchandise rather than popcorn buckets alone.

The category has kept evolving. In May 2026, AMC said a handbag-shaped popcorn bucket for *The Devil Wears Prada 2* sold out almost immediately and was subsequently offered for preorder.[5]

At that point, calling the object a container becomes incomplete.

The thing inside it can disappear while demand for the vessel remains.

The package has crossed into product.

The browser made the body somebody else’s problem

Digital media performed a useful separation.

Netflix does not need to provide your sofa. A newspaper website does not need to provide your coffee. Hedegreen Research does not need to know whether you are reading at a desk, on a train, in bed, hungry, caffeinated, interrupted every thirty seconds or holding a pencil.

The browser standardized the informational interface and externalized almost everything around it.

That is efficient.

But it also creates an assumption worth examining: that all those physical conditions are outside the media product.

Are they?

A concession stand for a publication

This is where the bucket joke becomes dangerous, because the obvious answer is merchandise.

Make an HR mug. Print a logo. Sell coffee. Problem solved.

Except that would answer the wrong question.

The useful question is not whether Hedegreen Research can put its name on physical objects. It is whether a physical object can become part of what the research is trying to do.

A coffee tied to a long reading session could be merchandise. A notebook could be merchandise. A printed issue could be merchandise.

But each could also be part of a designed reading protocol.

The distinction needs a test:

If the object disappeared, would the media experience lose something other than merchandise revenue?

If the answer is no, it is probably merch.

If the answer is yes, the boundary of the media product may actually extend beyond the screen.

The case against the bucket

There are good reasons to leave the body alone.

A physical layer can become a new sales surface disguised as care. Food can distract as easily as it can create ritual. Branded objects can become waste. A designed environment can narrow access for readers who cannot enter it. And a publication that tries to choreograph the reader's chair, drink and attention may simply become controlling.

The servicescape literature shows that physical surroundings can shape behaviour. It does not prove that an HR notebook, coffee or room would improve comprehension, memory or judgment. That would require an experiment, not a mood board.

The digital publication also has a moral advantage: it can travel without demanding that every reader buy the same physical world around it.

So the test must be harder than “people liked the object” or “the object sold”. A physical extension should have to improve the experience the publication actually claims to provide. If it only improves merchandise revenue, then merchandise is what it is.

Do we need the bucket?

Not yet.

The popcorn bucket is useful precisely because it makes the category problem ridiculous enough to see.

Cinema learned long ago that an audience arrives with a stomach as well as eyes and ears.

Digital publishing became very good at delivering to the eyes. It may have mistaken technical separation for a natural boundary.

Hedegreen Research probably does not need a bucket.

But I am no longer sure that a research publication ends where the browser does.

— Dennis Hedegreen, trying to see the structure

Sources

[1] Mary Jo Bitner (1992), “Servicescapes: The Impact of Physical Surroundings on Customers and Employees,” *Journal of Marketing* 56(2), 57–71. [DOI \(https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299205600205\)](https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299205600205).

[2] Natasha Geiling (2013), “Why Do We Eat Popcorn at the Movies?”, *Smithsonian Magazine*. [Source \(https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/why-do-we-eat-popcorn-at-the-movies-475063/\)](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/why-do-we-eat-popcorn-at-the-movies-475063/).

[3] AMC Entertainment Holdings, Inc. (2026), Form 10-K for the year ended 31 December 2025, p. 9. [SEC filing \(https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1411579/000141157926000016/amc-20251231x10k.htm\)](https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1411579/000141157926000016/amc-20251231x10k.htm).

[4] AMC Entertainment Q4 2023 earnings call, 28 February 2024. Transcript hosted by Stock Analysis. [Transcript \(https://stockanalysis.com/stocks/amc/transcripts/120837-q4-2023/\)](https://stockanalysis.com/stocks/amc/transcripts/120837-q4-2023/).

[5] AMC Entertainment Holdings, Inc. (4 May 2026), press release on *The Devil Wears Prada 2* opening weekend and handbag popcorn bucket preorder. [Source \(https://investor.amctheatres.com/news-events/press-releases/detail/422/\)](https://investor.amctheatres.com/news-events/press-releases/detail/422/).

RELATION MEMORY

NEARBY [How to Read Hedegreen Research](#) · Both examine what the Hedegreen Research reading experience is and which parts of it belong to the publication itself.

NEARBY [The First Thought Was Just a Bottle](#) · Both begin with an ordinary physical object and use it to expose a larger product or system boundary.