Can Product Placement be Used for Advertising Purposes in Turkish Series: Case of "Aşk-I Memnu" Necklace (Testing a Measurement Instrument)

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Abstract

Product placement has become an important promotional mix element in recent years in Turkey. Since audiences are skeptical towards commercials, advertisers have begun to turn to a variety of alternative advertising channels in order to reach customers. One of the channels they have begun to use more frequently in recent years is product placement, the placing of branded products in movies and television programs alike. The aim of the study is testing a research instrument appropriate for measuring product placement formation. The study proposes existence of relationship between connectedness to the series and attitude towards product placements in the series, and researches connectedness dimensions having effect on product placement. Research is carried out in Antalya in 2011 with convenience sampling of 300 respondents. The questionnaire form is an adopted version of connectedness scale developed by Russell et al. (2004).

Keywords: Product Placement, Brand Placement, Advertising, Promotion Mix, Soap Operas, TV Series.

1.INTRODUCTION

Product placement has become an important promotion mix element in recent years. Since audiences are skeptical towards commercials, marketers have begun to turn to a variety of

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alternative advertising channels in order to reach customers. One of the channels used in the last two decades is product placement, the placing/usage of branded products in movies and television programs alike.

The strategy of placing branded products in entertainment media is not a new concept as product placement can be dated to 1890s, where Lever Brothers secured the placement of their branded soaps in some of the earliest films made (Hudson and Hudson, 2006). Historically, starting in the 1930s, consumer product manufacturers invested in the production of radio programs to reach their target audiences. This phenomenon was particularly visible in the "soap opera" genre. When soaps moved to television in the 1950s, product placements became part of TV shows and series. Product placement is an estimated $3.4 billion dollar industry and constitutes a part of the marketing mix of over 1,000 brands in the United States (Russell and Belch, 2005).

Product placement strategies have evolved from the just showing the can approach to become increasingly sophisticated formats, and are generally classified into three main types;

1. Implicit product placement; Implicit product placement refers to the placement of a branded product within a television programme without being formally expressed. The placement of a product can be as simple as a product being used in one scene. It plays a passive and contextual role.
2. Integrated explicit product placement; A branded product that is formally expressed within a television programme is defined as an integrated explicit product placement, it plays an active role. In this type of product placement the benefits and attributes of the product are clearly demonstrated. A brand being mentioned by a character in the story, or a logo visible in the background of a frame.
3. Non-integrated explicit product placement; at the other extreme, a product placement can be a critical and integral part of the movie (McCarty, 2004, p.47). In this type of placement, a brand or product becomes a part of the plot or takes a major place in the storyline. The subtlety of the connection between brand reference and plot is important. Current wisdom when handling brand placement in movies is that the portrayal of the brand must 'tell a story' because simply 'showing the can' does not offer a sufficiently powerful narrative context to enhance the brand identity (Hackley, 2003).

There has been an increasing interest towards product placement in the last two decades. Previous studies in the area of product placement have generally related to three topic areas: its' effects on audiences' brand recall (Ong and Meri, 1994), recognition (Babin and Carder, 1996) and attitudes (Vollmers and Mizerski, 1994), and the level of acceptance of product placement in general (Gupta and Gould, 1997; d'Astous and Seguin, 1999; Russell, 2002). Although the effectiveness of product placements in terms of how well they are remembered is measured by most of the empirical studies, a limited number of research on understanding the psychological processes that relate to product placement in relation to variables that will help researchers understand how product placements works remains insufficient (McCary, 2004, p.57).

Researches show that brand placement was not related to behavior or brand evaluations. This means that, although viewers do not remember that they saw a brand in a program or movie, they do show more positive brand evaluations and more preference for the placed brand than viewers who did not see the brand placement. This implies that explicit measures, such as recall, can

show low scores, but at the same time, implicit effect measures can show high scores (van Reijmersdal et al, 2009).

Russell (2002) states that memory is influenced by depth of processing such that more elaborate processing facilitates the subsequent recall of information, that is, memory is greater when the stimulus is spoken than when it is only visually presented. In addition the relationship between memory and attitude is not straightforward: merely because a person remembers seeing or hearing a brand in a show does not mean that his or her attitude toward that brand will change. The congruency/incongruency literature provides insights into this nonlinear attitude-memory relationship: when a brand's modality of presentation is not congruent with its level of plot connection, viewers tend to think about the reason for the brand's presence in the show and raise their cognitive defenses (Friestad and Wright 1995). When the modality and plot connection match, the placement seems more natural and less effort is spent on analyzing why it is there, thereby making access to persuasion knowledge less likely (Campbell and Kirmani, 2000). Also the effects of involvement levels with the medium vehicle in which brands are placed are mainly positive (Reijmersdal et al, 2009).

There are three theories that explain effects of brand placement.

1. Intentional exposure theory predicts the effects of commerciality of the placement on attention and memory. This theory states that audiences primarily expose themselves to media for the editorial content rather than for the advertising (Gupta and Lord, 1998; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2005). When brands are integrated into editorial content, they profit from the attention that is paid to the editorial content. As a consequence, brand placements in editorial formats, as opposed to more commercial formats, gain more attention and are better remembered (Cameron and Curtin, 1995; Lord and Putrevu, 1998; Van Reijmersdal et al., 2005).

2. Source-credibility theory proposes that placements that are more editorial than commercial are perceived as more credible. On the one hand, commercial content is not perceived as credible because audiences know that advertisers have the aim to persuade and to increase sales. This perception makes audiences more skeptical about commercials than about editorial content, resulting in more negative attitudes to placements that are commercial, and to less positive brand-related behavioral intentions (Becker-Olsen, 2003; Lord and Putrevu, 1998).

3. Persuasion knowledge theory explains effects of brand placement prominence. Prominence has positive effects on some outcomes but negative effects on others. On the one hand, prominent placements lead to better memory than subtle placements (e.g., Babin and Carder, 1996; I. Brennan et al., 1999; Schneider and Corn-well, 2005). Furthermore, the audience starts thinking about the reasons for the brand's presence when brands are prominently placed (Matthes et al., 2007; Russell, 2002), which can activate the audience's knowledge about persuasion techniques and influence attempts. People's persuasion knowledge can make them realize that the brand is placed for commercial reasons. This might lead to counter-arguing and skeptical attitudes toward the placement (Balasubramanian et al., 2006; Matthes et al., 2007). Similarly, the effect of placement length is predicted to be negative; when placements are too long, they are perceived as intrusive and distracting from the media experience (Herandez et al., 2004)."

2.Research Method

2.1.Research Model

The study researches a branded product (a necklace) placed in a popular TV series (Aşk-ı Memnu). The necklace is placed as an integrated explicit product placement strategy. The study proposes existence of relationship between connectedness (Russell et al, 2004) to the series and attitude towards product placements in the series, and researches connectedness dimensions having effect on product placement.

Russell et al. (2004, p.152) define connectedness "as the level of intensity of the relationship(s) that a viewer develops with the characters and contextual settings of a program in the parasocial television environment". The original connectedness scale captures 6 dimensions; Escape, Fashion, Imitation, Modelling, Aspiration and Paraphernalia. Connectedness is assumed to have effect on product placement, and higher the connectedness level the higher the positive attitude towards product placement is expected (Russell et al., 2004). However, in this study, we hypothesize that not all connectedness dimension have equal effect on attitudes towards product placement, and research the relationships between connectedness dimensions and product placement. We conduct correlation analysis and linear regression equation in order to demonstrate the relationships. Thus, we hypothesize;

H1: Audiences connected to the TV series are more moderate to product placement.

H2: Connectedness dimension have different levels of effect on product placement.

2.2.Research Method

The research is carried out in Antalya in 2011 with convenience sampling of 328 respondents. The questionnaire form is an adopted version of connectedness scale developed by Russell et al. (2004). Attitudes towards product placement are measured with four items (Garza 2003). The questionnaire form also contains items regarding demographics. Original connectedness scale and attitude towards product placement scale are given in Table 1.

Table 1: The Data Collection Tool

Escape:

Watching ___ is an escape for me

___ helps me forget about the day's problems.

If I am in a bad mood, watching ___ puts me in a better mood.

Fashion:

I like the clothes they wear on ___.

I like the hairstyles on ___.

I often buy clothing styles that I've seen in ___.

Imitation:

I imitate the gestures and facial expressions from the characters in ___.

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I find myself saying phrases from ___ when I interact with other people.

I try to speak like the characters in ___.

Modeling:

I learn how to handle real life situations by watching ___.

I get ideas from ___ about how to interact in my own life.

I relate what happens in ___ to my own life.

Aspiration:

I would love to be an actor in ___.

I would love to meet the characters of ___.

Paraphernalia:

I have objects that relate to ___ (badge, book, picture, etc.).

I read books if they are related to ___.

Attitudes Towards Product Placement

I mind if brand-name products appear in movies?

I mind if movie producers receive money or other compensation from

advertisers for placing their brands in movies?

I think it is unethical for movie producers to attempt to influence the audience by

including brand-name products in their movies?

I think that seeing the brand-name product in a movie makes the experience more

realistic?

3.ANALYSIS

3.1.Validity and Reliability of the Research Scale

In order to test reliability of the research scale Cronbach's alpha is calculated both for connectedness scale and attitudes towards product placement scale (Table 2). Cronbach's alpha value calculated for connectedness scale is 0,857, representing high reliability (the Cronbahc'a alpha value calculated for the original connectedness scale is 0.84 (Russell et al. 2004, p.152)). Cronbach's alpha value calculated for connectedness scale is 0,527. However it represents low level of reliability, it is still acceptable.

Table 2. Cronbach's alpha values for Connectedness and Attitudes Towards Product Placement Scales.

Cronbach's Alpha for Connectedness	N of Items
,857	16

Cronbach's Alpha for Att. Prod. Plc.	N of Items
,527	4

In order to ensure validity of the scale, previously validated scales are used (Russell et al. 2004; Garza, 203). To test construct validity of the connectedness scale we have conducted exploratory factor analysis. Rotated component matrix with varimax rotation is given in Table 3. Connectedness scale items are collected under 5 factors/dimensions. Five dimensions explain %69,8 of the total variance.

Results of factor analysis are as expected; all the items are collected under expected dimensions except aspiration and paraphemalla. Items of aspiration and paraphemalla are collected under one unique dimension. Instead of separating these two dimensions, analysis are continued with this factor structure.

Table 3. Rotated Factor Loadings Matrix with Varimax Rotation for Connectedness Scale

	Factors				
	IMITATION	ASPIRATION/ PARAPHEMALLA	FASHION	ESCAPE	MODELLING
I try to speak like the characters in ___.	,832				
I find myself saying phrases from ___ when I interact with other people.	,811				
I imitate the gestures and facial expressions from the characters in ___.	,757				
I would love to meet the characters of ___.		,834			
I would love to be an actor in ___.		,805			
I read books if they are related to ___.		,695			
I have objects that relate to ___ (badge, book, picture, etc.).		,540			
I like the hairstyles on ___.			,833		
I like the clothes they wear on ___.			,789		
I often buy clothing styles that I've seen in ___.			,694		
Watching ___ is an escape for me.				,835	
If I am in a bad mood, watching ___ puts me in a better mood.				,826	
___ helps me forget about the day's problems.				,797	
I relate what happens in ___ to my own life.					,824
I get ideas from ___ about how to interact in my own life.					,765
I learn how to handle real life situations by watching ___.					,739
Variance explained by each dimension (%)	**32,577**	**13,309**	**9,822**	**7,473**	**6,624**
Total variance explained (%)					**69,804**

3.2.Analysis and Results

Using the exploratory factor analysis results, 16 items are collected under 5 dimensions; Imitation, Aspiration/Paraphemalla, Fashion, Escape and Modelling. Arithmetic mean for each dimension is calculated to be the representatives for the dimensions. Correlation and regression analysis depend on these arithmetic means.

In order to test H1, we have conducted correlation analysis (Table 4). Results of correlation analysis show that all the dimensions (Fashion (0,227, p<0,001), Imitation (0,136, p<0,05), Modelling (0,175, p<0,01), Escape (0,118, p<0,05) and Aspiration/Paraphemalla (0,286, p<0,001)) are correlated with attitude towards product placement. However correlations are found to be very weak. Thus H1 is accepted, which means, there is a correlation between connectedness dimensions and attitude towards product placement, however the relationships are weak.

Table 4: Correlations between Attitude Towards Product Placement and Connectedness Scale Dimensions

		FASHION	IMITATION	MODELLING	ESCAPE	ASPIRATION/ PARAPHEMALLA
PLACEMENT	Pearson Correlation	,227	,136	,175	,118	,286
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,019	,002	,039	,000

In order to test H2, we have conducted linear regression with enter method. Results of regression analysis show that R2, which represents the explained variation, is calculated as 0,097. Thus, 9,7% of the variation in attitudes toward product placement can be explained by connectedness dimensions. This is very low level of variation explained.

Although R2 value is very low, regression equation is found to be statistically significant (p<0,001), which means that our model is statistically significant. Upon inspection of regression equation, it is understood that the only statistically significant relationship found is between aspiration/paraphemalla dimension and product placement. Although statistically not significant, imitation and escape dimension have negative effects on attitudes towards product placement, and fashion and modelling dimension have positive effects. Aspiration/Paraphemalla dimension is found to positively affect attitudes towards product placement; however it is weak (0,172).

Results of regression analysis results support H2, that is, connectedness dimensions have different levels of effect on attitudes towards product placement. However, connectedness scale cannot be used to explain product placement as the variation explained (R2) is very low.

Product Placement= 2,146 + (,056) Fashion +(-,007) Imitation + (,086) Modelling +(-,003) Escape + (,172) Aspiration/Parahemalla

(,000)   (,321)   (,900)   (,120)   (,949)
(,002)

Table 5. Determination Coefficient

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,312	,097	,080	,79429

Table 6. Regression Analysis

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	17,928	5	3,586	5,683	,000[b]
	Residual	166,557	264	,631		
	Total	184,485	269			

Table 7. Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2,146	,198		10,858	,000
	FASHION	,056	,056	,075	,995	,321
	IMITATION	-,007	,057	-,009	-,126	,900
	MODELLING	,086	,055	,107	1,558	,120
	ESCAPE	-,003	,046	-,004	-,064	,949
	ASPIRATION/PARAPHEMALLA	,172	,055	,219	3,117	,002

4.CONCLUSION

Product placement offers alternative promotion mix tools for the advertisers. Although it is not a new concept, it is new to Turkish producers and advertisers. Product placement is an estimated $3.4 billion dollar industry in the United States (Russell and Belch, 2005). It is expected that product placement practices in Turkey may increase in the near future.

The aim of the study is to test a research tool that can increase our knowledge about formation of attitudes towards product placement. It is assumed that connectedness level to the series is related to attitudes towards product placement. We have tested our hypothesis using correlation coefficient and regression analysis. Although analysis are significant, correlation levels and variance explained are found to be very low. Thus, we suggest that connectedness level has a weak but statistically significant effect on attitudes toward product placement. Relationship level

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is so low that, it may be inappropriate to use connectedness scale researching attitudes towards product placement.

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