

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN TELEVISION DRAMA PROGRAMS IN JAPAN AND THE USA

Kazuhiro Kishiya and Gordon E. Miracle

ABSTRACT

This study investigates relationships between television viewer motivations and their attitudes toward product placement (ATPP) in television dramas in Japan and the USA. It was found that there is a significant positive relationship between the viewers' need for entertainment and ATPP in both countries. However, other factors had a different relationship to ATPP in the two countries—some significant, some not. The results suggest strategy similarities and differences for advertisers, as well as differences in the underlying theory for Japanese and US television viewers. The results may also have public policy implications for the somewhat controversial practice of product placement¹⁾.

INTRODUCTION

Product placement in television programs has become increasingly popular in many countries. Russell and Belch (2005) reported that product placement is being used increasingly instead of TV commercials, especially in the USA. The reasons, they add, are that advertisers and their agencies have had an increased interest in product placement because of advertising clutter on television, the declining effectiveness of TV commercials, and their escalating cost.

The increased industry use of product placement has stimulated an increased number of scholarly studies to investigate various issues relating to product placement (Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Parwardlhan 2006). Considerable research has been done on the use of product placement in movies, including comparisons of the use of product

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placement in movies in different countries (e.g. Gould, Gupta, and Grabner-Käuter 2000). Compared to television, movies have exposure to more audiences. Movies are shown not only to audiences in theaters, but also to television audiences, since some movies are subsequently shown on television (Ong 2004). Moreover, movies often are exported to the world (Gould, Gupta and Grabner-Käuter 2000). Probably because movies are given such wide exposure, many more research studies have focused on product placement in movies than on product placement in television programs.

However, as mentioned, Marketer and Advertiser were placed product placement as new advertising media (Karrh, Mckee and Pardun 2003 ; Russel and Belch 2005) Therefore this study will attempt to advance knowledge about product placement in the relatively neglected area of television. This research also investigates the use of well known actors or other public figures in television programs to determine if parasocial relationships exist between viewers and such characters in both Japan and the USA. In Japan the use of well-known actors or other public figures in television commercials has been popular since the beginning of television broadcasting in Japan, and famous actors are quite likely to appear in advertising (Praete 2000 ; Kishiya 2005). Additionally, in Japan famous actors perform frequently in television. Indeed, appearances in television advertising in Japan have frequently turned unknown actors into celebrities or stars (Morean 1996).

In the USA prominent actors or other public figures have also been used in advertising. Recent studies show that the characters in the program have an impact on viewer attitudes toward product placement (e.g. Russell and Stern 2006 ; Russell 2004). Therefore it is important to learn more about the parasocial relationships between television viewers and television characters, and how such relationships are related to attitudes toward product placement.

The practice of placing products in television in Japan is in an earlier stage of development than in the USA. The purposes of this study are: (1) to extend the findings of the few recent studies have focused on product placement in television programs (e.g. ; Russell and Stern 2006 ; Russell 2004), and (2) to contribute to knowledge about the factors related to attitudes toward product placement in television drama programs in Japan and the USA. This study no only provides initial crosss-cultural information on this topic between Japan and the USA, but also lays the groundwork for future research. Also, in addition to providing information to support advertising practice and theory, it may be of interest to support public policy decisions. Since product placement in television is somewhat controversial, there may be increased interest in regulating product placement in

television in Japan and the USA, and there may be an increasing need for such research to guide public policy in other countries as well.

Kishiya and Mizuno (2008) reported that there is a great gulf between the penetration of product placement in Japan and in the USA. Since product placement as an advertising method has not yet been used widely in Japan, and since Japanese audiences have not been exposed to as many examples of product placement in television programs as US audiences, Japanese viewers are at best only somewhat familiar with product placement in television. Most Japanese audiences are unlikely to recognize product placement as a new advertising method or a new advertising form when they are exposed to it. Indeed the Japanese language does not yet have an appropriate expression for product placement. Nevertheless, product placement has been discussed in the media and has become a topic of interest (Kishiya and Mizuno 2008).

The literature on culture and consumption (e.g. McCracken 1986 ; Ritson and Elliott 1999), indicates that cultural differences among countries have an impact on attitudes toward advertising. Also, differences in general attitudes toward advertising are related to attitudes toward product placement (Gould, Gupta, and Grabner-Käuter 2000 ; Gupta and Gould 1997). Indeed the simple recognition of products placed in television programs might be related to differences in individuals' attitudes toward product placement. Therefore, since the Japanese and US cultures have significant differences (e.g. Hofstede 1991) .This research focuses on the differences in attitudes toward product placement between television viewers in Japan and the USA.

However, this study relates individual-level variables in each country to viewer attitudes rather than using country as a proxy for culture, as so many studies in the past have done (Choi and Miracle 2004).

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Product Placement in General

Gould, Gupta, and Grabner-Käuter (2000) found that product placement is more acceptable to viewers in the USA than in other countries. One reason might be that in the US self-presentational culture, which is typical of an individualistic culture, viewers are likely to pay attention to brands which represent their self identity (Karrh, Frith, and Callison 2001). Gould, Gupta, and Grabner-Käuter (2000) also found that US viewers accept product placement more readily than those in other countries, and also were relatively more

likely to report that purchase intention was influenced by product placement. Therefore:

H1: US viewers of television have a more positive attitude toward product placement than Japanese viewers.

Internet usage and product placement

Ong (2004) reported that there are more interactions between viewers watching TV than between viewers watching a movie in a theater, describing those interactions by stating that television has *more diversity in usage* by viewers than movies. Rubin (2002) also reported that there are two categories of television usage: instrumental and ritualized. The former is active and purposive in seeking and using media content. The latter is less active or less-goal directed; ritualized usage is characterized by the use of the media to pass time.

Rubin and Perse (1987) found that in soap operas: (1) instrumental usage includes seeking information, entertainment, escapist relaxation and social interaction, and (2) ritualized usage focuses more on the motive to pass-time. From Rubin and Perse (1987) and other sources cited below, the following information on instrumental usage is relevant to this study:

(1) People with an *information motive* for viewing television have a tendency to see useful and valuable information in product placement in TV programs. They obtain details regarding ideal life styles (Hirshman and Thompson 1997). Thus they obtain information not only on the characteristics and usage of such products and services but also the role and the meaning in ideal life style; television provides viewers with a frame of reference for viewers to interpret their daily life.

(2) People with an *entertainment motive* for watching television are influenced by product placement in TV program. Kretcher (2004) that pointed out that advertising and entertainment in the broadcast media are inextricably intertwined and that the entertainment element is necessary to generate favorable attitudes toward products placed in programs.

(3) People with the need for *escapist relaxation* tend to identify with the television program, and with the characters and story in it (Radway 1984 ; Rubin and Perse 1987). This phenomenon leads views to have attitudes that are similar to those of the characters in the program.

(4) When some people see products placed in television drama programs they use them as a topic of conversation, thereby deriving social utility from seeing such product placements.

Russell, Norman, and Heckler (2004) point out that such connections between two or more viewers is an important influence on their attitudes toward product placement. They add that people who derive social utility from product placements tend to have relatively favorable attitudes toward products placed in television programs.

Therefore:

H2: Instrumental usage of TV programs by viewers in Japan and the USA is positively related to attitudes toward product placement.

TV Characters and Product Placement

Russell, Norman, and Heckler (2004) found that product placement provides a basis for connections between characters and viewers. Such connections are called parasocial interactions. Viewers that establish a parasocial interaction with the characters have a strong emotional involvement with them. Furthermore, as viewers tend to identify with characters, they tend to accept the character's ideas and product usage (Russell and Stern 2006). Since characters in the television dramas sometimes use products placed in them, such interaction may also influence the attitudes of viewers toward product placement.

Therefore:

H3: Parasocial interaction by viewers with the characters in television drama programs in Japan and in the USA is positively related to attitudes toward to product placement.

RESEARCH METHODS

Samples

Two student samples for this study were drawn from undergraduate courses in a university in Japan and the USA. Student samples are appropriate for research on product placement (Gupta and Gould 1997), especially since students are familiar with television programs and the characters in them. Therefore the selection of television dramas is also appropriate; also a parasocial relationship is more likely to occur with a television drama than with other television genre.

The size of the sample is 271 (119 in the USA, and 152 in Japan: 152). The samples include 94 males (37 in the USA, and 57 in Japan) and 180 females (82 in the USA, and 98 in Japan). In the week prior to the survey the average viewing time of participants was 10.8 hours in the US sample and 16.3 hours in the Japanese sample.

Measurement

Questions and five-point rating scales (Strongly Disagree-Disagree-Neutral-Agree-Strongly Agree) that were used in previous studies were selected to create the data collection instrument (DCI). To measure attitudes toward product placement in general, four items were adopted from Ong (2004). To measure motivations for watching TV programs, 18 items were adopted from Rubin and Perse (1987). To measure parasocial interaction, five items were adopted from Rubin and Perse (1987).

Respondents were given a slightly modified definition of the product placement definition used by Gupta and Gould (1997): *Product placement is the practice of a seller to arrange for brands or products to be used as props in recognizable form in television drama programs.*

A translation/back-translation process was used to ensure equivalence in the meaning of all parts of the Japanese and English versions of the DCI and supporting instructions. As described in Choi and Miracle (2004) the DCI was prepared first in US English. Next a bilingual native Japanese speaker translated the DCI from the original English into Japanese. Then a bilingual native English speaker translated the Japanese version back into English. The original English version and the back-translated English version were compared. When the meaning did not match perfectly in a few places, either the English version or the Japanese version was adjusted. This process was continued until both the Japanese and the US versions of the DCI and other materials were deemed to be precisely equivalent in meaning.

RESULTS

The reliability of the first four scales used to measure general attitudes toward product placement was measured by coefficient α . The check of the four items used to measure these attitudes revealed an α of .64 in the US sample and .25 in the Japanese sample. The somewhat low reliability for the US sample is considered marginally satisfactory. The low α for the Japanese sample may be due in part to the fact that many Japanese are not familiar with the phenomenon of product placement in television programs. The low α for the Japanese sample indicates that the means are not intercorrelated and that the Japanese recognition of product placement in television programs is unstable.

General Attitudes toward Product Placement

The first hypothesis was that US viewers have a more positive attitude toward product placement than Japanese viewers. From Table 1 it can be concluded that US viewers recognize more readily than Japanese viewers that brands appearing in television dramas are usually the well-known brands. Also US consumers are more likely than Japanese viewers to be aware of the brands when they are placed in television dramas. This result may be due to the fact that product placement has been more widely used in the USA than in Japan. It is possible that in the future, as more Japanese companies use product placement in television drama programs, Japanese viewers may begin to recognize and react to them. However, brand recognition and awareness of products placed in television dramas may be only an intermediate step toward favorable attitudes toward product placement. Therefore, perhaps H1 can be partially accepted, even though the other two measures do not show significant differences between US and Japanese viewers. Thus, from these results it is not clear the extent to which (if at all) brand recognition and awareness lead to a more positive attitude toward brands or products placed in television dramas. That matter requires further research.

Table 1 Comparison between US and Japanese Samples

Items	USA (n=119)		Japan (n=152)		t -value
	Means	S.D	means	S.D.	
From the product placements I have been exposed to on TV, brands were cast in a positive image.	3.95	.711	3.83	.717	1.656(n.s.)
Brands that appear in TV product placement are usually the well-known brands	3.96	.775	3.48	.830	4.419***
If there were product placements in a show, I would be aware of them	3.60	.857	3.33	.940	2.981**
Product placement enhances the reality of a scene in a TV drama	3.81	.959	3.83	.897	-.254(n.s.)

*** p<.001 ** p<.01

Motivation and Product Placement.

First, to discriminate between instrumental and ritualized usage, 18 motivation items were taken from Rubin and Perse (1987). They were examined through an exploratory factor analysis and varimax rotation to determine the number of factors to use in the regression model. The number of factors was limited to those with an eigenvalue above 1.0. A factor loading above 3.0 beyond two items were excluded. Four items that did not meet this standard were excluded. The factor analysis was repeated with satisfactory results,

leading to the 14 items shown in Table 2.

Instrumental usage (Escapist Relaxation, Information, Entertainment, and Social Utility), were discriminated from ritualized usage (i.e. the motive to pass time). Only instrumental usage was used in the regression model

Table 2 Factor analysis

Item utility	Escapist Relaxation	Pass time	Information	Entertainment	Social
It relaxes me	.856	.075	.032	.116	.167
It's a pleasant rest	.796	.066	.100	.166	.105
It allows me to unwind	.712	.122	.083	.125	.164
I can forget about work or other things	.609	.145	.167	.055	.139
I have nothing better to do	.106	.857	-.005	.024	.065
It passes the time away, especially when I am bored	.181	.771	.023	.047	.049
Just because it's on	.053	.689	.033	-.125	.267
I can learn about what might happen to me	.139	.098	.792	.035	.092
I can learn how to do things	.056	.044	.782	-.015	.039
I have not done beforeIt helps me learn things about myself and others	.106	-.092	.752	.029	-.061
Because it's entertains me	.196	-.006	.004	.864	.020
Because it's enjoyable	.149	-.031	.036	.849	-.004
Because it's something to do when friends come over	.269	.250	-.057	-.019	.782
So I can be with other members of the family or friends who are watching	.180	.079	.082	.028	.610
Eigenvalue	4.00	2.26	2.00	1.38	1.06
% of variance	17.78	13.84	13.29	11.07	8.28
Cumulative % of variance	17.78	31.62	44.92	55.99	64.28

Parasocial Interaction and Product Placement

Parasocial interaction relates to the perceived relationship between the viewer and the characters on the screen in the television drama. To measure parasocial interaction five items were taken from Rubin and Perse (1987). Since parasocial interaction is related to brand and product attitudes, parasocial interaction, along with the factors in Table 2 were hypothesized to be related to attitudes toward product placement (ATTP)²⁾.

From Table 1, the measure "*From the product placements I have been exposed to on*

2) Five items of parasocial interaction were as follows :I look forward to watching my favorite TV drama character on the next episode, If my favorite TV drama character appeared on another TV program, I would watch that program, If I saw a story about my favorite TV drama character in a newspaper and magazine, I would read it, I would like to meet my favorite TV drama character in person, I find my favorite TV drama character to be attractive.

TV, brands were cast in a positive image” was positive for both the Japanese and the US samples. Even though the reliability of the Japanese sample was low with regard to the items in Table 1, the first item from Table 1 was used in Table 3 as “*Attitude toward Product Placement*.” This measure is appropriate and necessary for our research purpose because it is one the main reasons why advertisers use product placement to advertise their brands and products.

Table 3 Measures, Means, and Reliabilities

variable	N	USA (n=119)			Japan (N=152)		
		Mean	S.D.	Alpha	Mean	S.D.	Alpha
Escapist Relaxation	4	3.76	.791	.87	3.26	.770	.80
Pass time	3	3.21	.973	.82	2.75	.933	.81
Information	3	2.45	.851	.81	2.84	.864	.82
Entertainment	2	4.55	.673	.94	4.59	.522	.76
Social utility	2	3.45	.874	.70	2.27	.682	.43
Parasocial interaction	5	3.93	.701	.81	4.12	.560	.76
Attitude toward Product Placement	1	3.95	.701	-	3.83	.717	-

All reliabilities shown for each variable in Table 3 are high, except for *social Utility* in Japan. Those consistently robust reliabilities, suggest that there is no problem with the low reliability of the Japanese data reported in Table 1. The implication is that Japanese people may possibly view television in a personal way rather than as a social activity with family or friends. Perhaps this way of viewing television is a particular characteristic of the Japanese culture. This topic requires further research.

As shown in Table 4 and Figure 1, only escapist relaxation and entertainment have a significant positive relationship with ATTP in the US sample. Therefore H2 (that instrumental usage of television programs is positively related to attitudes toward product placement), is partially accepted for the US sample. Parasocial interaction is not significantly related to ATTP and therefore H3 is rejected for the US sample.

As shown in Table 4 and Figure 2, entertainment is the only instrumental variable that has a significant positive relationship with ATTP in the Japanese sample. Therefore H2 is accepted to only a limited degree in the Japanese sample. Parasocial interaction is also significantly positively related to ATTP, and therefore H3 is not rejected for the Japanese sample.

Table 4 Regression for Attitude toward to Product Placement

Independent variable	Beta	t-Value
The USA		
Escapist relaxation	.268	2.937**
Information	-.105	-1.274
Entertainment	.291	2.850**
Social Utility	.096	1.090
Parasocial interaction	.098	.934

F-value 10.933 ***, adjusted R-square .296

Independent variable		
Japan		
Escapist relaxation	-.032	-.379
Information	.148	1.808
Entertainment	.169	2.068*
Social Utility	.117	1.462
Parasocial interaction	.270	3.276**

F-value 6.835 ***, adjusted R-square .162

*** p<.001 ** p<.01 * p<.05

Figure 1 Factors Related to Product Placement in Television Dramas in the USA.

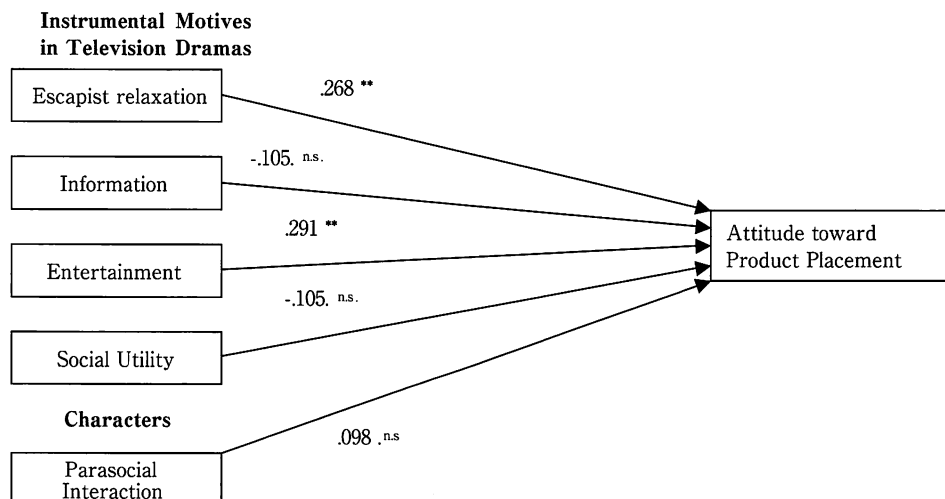
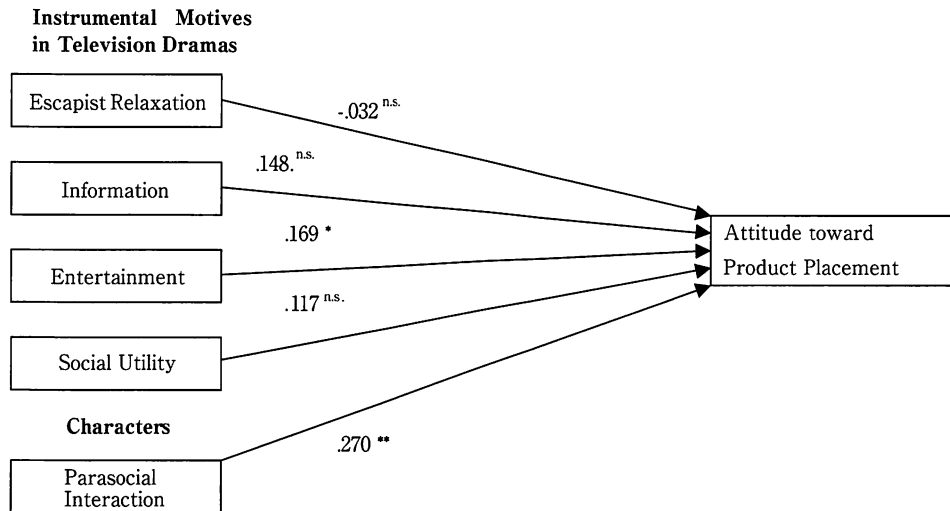


Figure 2 Factors Related to Product Placement in Television Dramas in Japan



DISCUSSION

US viewers recognize well-known brands placed in television dramas more readily than Japanese viewers. US viewers also are relatively more aware of product placements in television dramas. Therefore advertisers are likely to find that it is more desirable to use product placements in television in the USA than in Japan. However, with increasing use of product placement in Japan that conclusion may not be valid in the future.

In the USA two of the instrumental usage variables (escapist relaxation and entertainment) were significantly positively related to ATTP. Thus, H2 is partially supported for US consumers. In Japan only one instrumental usage variable (entertainment) was significantly positively related to ATTP. Thus H2 is only weakly supported for Japanese consumers. However, since entertainment was positive for both samples, it can be concluded that advertisers in both Japan and the USA should tend to favor product placements in those television drama programs that have audiences that watch them primarily for entertainment rather than for one of the other motives. It also seems sensible for such product placements to be inserted in parts of the programs that are most entertaining. US advertisers may also be well advised to insert product placements in television dramas to satisfy the need for escapist relaxation, when indeed the dramas have audiences with that motive.

In Japan, parasocial interaction is also significantly and positively related to ATTP. This finding is consonant with the already well established practice in Japan of using well known actors or other public figures in television commercials. The use of product placements by such characters is likely to influence Japanese consumer attitudes toward such products favorably. Interestingly, Rubin and Perse (1987) found (in a US sample) that there is a positive relationship between escapist relaxation and parasocial interaction. They point out that people with the need for escapist relaxation are likely to identify with the character (a parasocial interaction). However, in the Japanese sample, escapist relaxation is not significantly and positively related to parasocial interaction. This finding suggests that the positive relationship found in the USA does not seem to exist in Japan. Instead, Japanese consumers tend to think of the character as an ideal consumer (Kishiya 2005), which is a strong Japanese motive for purchasing the brand or product. This aspect of theory is therefore different in the USA and Japan. More research needs to be done to discover the precise reasons why theory in the USA is different from theory in Japan.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This exploratory study has many limitations. Samples need to be selected not only from students but also from other consumers. Path analysis can probably be used to explore more effectively the causal relationships between variables. There may also be differences among product groups, especially those in different stages of the product life cycle, and so future research should deal with them. Segmentation by gender and other viewing and purchasing categories should also be explored. Better measures for the variables need to be developed.

CONCLUSIONS

Product placement in television is of growing importance in many countries, especially Japan. This form of advertising should be understood better by advertisers so that it can be integrated with other forms of marketing communication into cohesive promotional programs. It is important to develop cross-cultural communication theory to guide advertising practice.

In spite of its limitations, this study makes a modest contribution to advertising practice and to theory. In addition it points the way to future research that is likely to be productive, especially in the use of individual-level variables as opposed to using countries

as a proxy for culture.

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