



## The impact of product placement on TV-induced tourism: Korean TV dramas and Taiwanese viewers

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the ways in which Korean TV dramas affect Taiwanese consumers' attitudes toward the locations where the dramas are filmed (onscreen locations). Previous studies have incorporated balance theory into product–character association models and have demonstrated that consumers tend to align their attitudes toward products with the valence of a character's attitudes toward the products. Unlike previous studies, this article attempts to investigate the product–character association model in a cross-cultural setting where the 'products' considered are the onscreen locations. To account for the effect of similarity between Taiwanese culture and Korean culture, the concept of perceived cultural proximity is introduced into the balance-theory-based model. The results show that consumers' parasocial relationships with a character and consumers' attitudes toward the character are related to their attitudes toward the location. However, this relationship is significant only for those viewers with high perceived cultural proximity between Taiwan and Korea.

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### 1. Introduction

The effect of onscreen locations and scenes in television dramas on the consumer (viewer) has been widely studied in tourism literature (Beeton, 2001; Connell, 2005; Frost, 2004; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Riley, Baker, & Van Doren, 1998; Tooke & Baker, 1996). However, the process by which television dramas influence the appeal of these onscreen locations among consumers has received little attention. In marketing literature, the concept of *product placement* has been used to investigate how the appearance and use of products in movies or on TV influence the appeal of those products to consumers. In the context of product placement, a tourist destination spot serving as the onscreen location backdrop for a TV program may be considered a placed 'product.' Using theory borrowed from the product placement literature, this study examined the process by which television dramas influence the appeal of onscreen locations among viewers.

However, the mere appearance of a tourist spot on the TV screen may not be the only influence on a consumer's attitude toward it.

The ways in which the characters in the program interact with the location also influence a consumer's attitude toward that location. Movie or television characters influence consumers' attitudes toward placed products in three ways: the first is through the relationship between the character and the placed product in the program; the second is through the relationship between the consumer (viewer), who is outside the program and the character in the program; and the third concerns the interaction of these first two (viewer and character) which influences the viewer's attitude toward the placed product (Russell & Stern, 2006). Based on the balance theory, Russell and Stern (2006) frame this triad of relationships among the character, the placed product (onscreen locations), and the viewer. Nonetheless, previous studies focused on the prominence of product placement and its effect (not the process) on domestic audiences.

Given the globalization of the mass media, a popular TV drama filmed in one country may be aired in several other countries. In 2004, Taiwan was the leading importer of South Korean TV dramas, and Taiwanese were the second largest group of foreign visitors to Korea (Korea National Tourism Organization, 2005). South Korean TV dramas entered Taiwan and became smash hits in Taiwan even though these TV dramas were filled with Korean culture and history (Kang, 2004). One critical factor that is thought to contribute to the success of Korean TV dramas in Taiwan is the

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cultural proximity between the two countries. According to cultural proximity theory, audiences prefer media that reflect their own culture, both regionally and nationally (Straubhaar, 1991, 1997). This study examined how Korean TV dramas affect the attitudes of Taiwanese audiences toward tourist spots (onscreen locations) in South Korea that Taiwanese viewers perceive as culturally similar.

This study departs from previous investigations on three fronts. First, it used a product placement concept to investigate the processes by which television dramas influence the appeal of onscreen locations as travel destinations. Second, unlike previous studies focusing on domestic audiences, this study modeled these processes in a cross-cultural setting. For example, Russell and Stern (2006) examined the influence of product placements in serial comedies on American television such as *Friends*, *Frasier*, and *Will and Grace* on American consumers' attitudes toward the products used or mentioned by the characters. This article focuses specifically on the effect of Korean TV dramas, filmed in Korea, on Taiwanese audiences living in Taiwan. Third, this study extended Russell and Stern's (2006) work by incorporating the cultural proximity theory into the balance theory to account for cultural factors that might moderate the effect of Korean TV dramas on Taiwanese audiences.

In summary, this study examined the influence of Korean TV dramas on the attitudes of Taiwanese consumers toward the locations where the dramas are filmed (onscreen locations). Based on Russell and Stern's (2006) study, the present study integrated theory to consider consumer–character referential relations and balance theory to address the main research question of how the character's relationship to an onscreen location and the consumer's relationship to the character in the drama affect consumer's attitude toward the onscreen location. The concept of attitude alignment in balance theory explains the link between the components of the triad, consumer, character, and onscreen location. To account for the effect of similarity between Taiwanese culture and Korean culture, the concept of perceived cultural proximity is introduced into the balance-theory-based model.

## 2. Literature review

This section begins with an overview of the concept of product placement that sets the stage for the entire study. This is followed by a review of the literature concerning the theoretical foundations upon which the model rests: balance theory, parasocial theory, and cultural proximity theory.

### 2.1. TV-induced tourism and product placement

As defined by Beeton (2005), *movie-induced tourism* is “on-location tourism that follows the success of a movie made (or set) in a particular region. The term ‘*film-induced tourism*’ can be expanded to include television, video and DVD (p. 18).” In general, movies tend to be a one-off or limited experiences, whereas television series have a longer screening and filming period. Despite methodological difficulties in accurately measuring the impact of film- or television-induced tourism (Busby & Klug, 2001), several researchers have found that certain motion pictures successfully increased the awareness of the places they depicted and had tourist inducing effects (Riley et al., 1998; Riley & Van Doren, 1992; Tooke & Baker, 1996). For example, a survey conducted in the Stirling, Scotland area depicted in the film *Braveheart* found that the film had a considerable influence on tourists' decisions to come to the Stirling area (Stewart, 1997). Similarly, British television programs have stimulated much tourism activity in showcased locations. In addition to the positive economic impact and increased tourist visitations, previous film-induced tourism studies also discussed

the issues of symbolic meaning (e.g., Beeton, 2005; Connell, 2005; Frost, 2004; McIntosh, 2004; Riley & Van Doren, 1992) and the negative impact of film-induced tourism such as the adverse impact on the environment, increased traffic and crowding (Hudson & Ritchie, 2006). Riley et al. (1998) as well as Hudson and Ritchie (2006) provide comprehensive reviews of empirical studies in this area.

The diminishing effectiveness of traditional advertising techniques (Kaikati & Kaikati, 2004) has prompted marketers to place their products in a more sophisticated, more targeted, and more widely seen manner (Karrh, McKee, & Pardun, 2003). Product placements are considered more effective than traditional advertisements because consumers do not perceive them as persuasive messages (Russell, 2002). Therefore, product placements are being used widely to promote products by cultivating individual attitudes (Avery & Ferraro, 2000).

Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Patwardhan (2006) proposed an integrative conceptual model that captures the ways in which product placement generates audience outcomes. Their model includes four components: execution factors, individual difference factors, processing depth, and the outcomes of the product placement. Execution factors include the variables that are under the control of the sponsor or the program creators while the individual difference factors refer to the idiosyncrasies of each viewer. According to their model, the first two variables (execution factors and individual difference factors) collectively influence the third variable (degree of processing depth). Together, the first three components shape the fourth component: outcome of product placement.

Product placement can be characterized according to its prominence. At the high end of the prominence spectrum is the ‘on-set’ placement, where the product is conspicuously paired with a character. ‘Creative placement’ lies at the other end of the prominence spectrum. In that case, the branded product appears in the background (Brennan, Dubas, & Babin, 1999). The ‘creative placement’ is more subtle and thus less likely to result in negative shifts in brand attitude than a prominent ‘on-set’ placement (Cowley & Barron, 2008). It has been considered one of the best strategies in tourism product placement (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). Korean TV dramas have successfully promoted on-location tourist spots such as Incheon International Airport, Korean architecture and street scenes, historic sites, memorials and cultural landscapes such as Changdokgung and Sarawak (Lin & Huang, 2006).

As subtle as the ‘creative placement’ is, its implementation alone may not be enough to ensure a positive response from an audience in a cross-national setting. The judgment of placement fit and relatedness between an individual and the elements in the TV drama, such as the story line, characters, editorial content/story, vehicle, and medium all play an important role in the effectiveness of product placement (Balasubramanian, 1994). In a cross-national setting, the perceived cultural similarity between Taiwan and Korea is expected to influence the judgment of placement fit and the relatedness between an individual and the aforementioned elements in a TV drama. The sense of fit and relatedness induce the viewers to direct the message through the peripheral route rather than through the central route to persuasion (Cacioppo, Petty, Kao, & Rodriguez, 1986) and, therefore, attract less counterargument. Consequently, perceived judgments of fit are most likely to produce positive affective outcomes (d'Astous & Chartier, 2000).

### 2.2. The relationship between viewers and characters

Television series that air regularly provide a possible environment where interpersonal relationships between viewers and

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