

Strategies for Effective Product Placements in Taiwanese Idol Dramas

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Given the extent of competition in the media today, advertisers are vying for attention from audiences. In Taiwan, the media are flooded with locally produced Idol Dramas which were once extremely popular, but now face intense competition from other media products including period dramas and variety shows. The study addresses an on-going question about the relevance of Taiwanese Idol Dramas given the extent of competition in the media today as well as their decreasing relevance. The goals of this study are to investigate the implementation strategies of product placements and examine the relationships among exposure times, plot connection and the effects of product placements in Taiwanese idol dramas. The authors designed and executed an experiment to investigate the hypothesised relationships, and following which, interviews were conducted with media experts to supplement the findings and add further depth to the findings. Based on the results, the authors conclude that Taiwanese Idol Dramas continue to have a powerful effect on the audience. Specifically, brand placements with a high number of exposures that were highly connected to plots resulted in more positive brand attitudes than those with few exposures that were loosely connected to the plots. Increasing brand exposure time and the plot connection strategies are suggested at different stages to maximise their impact.

Key Words: Product placement, mere exposure effect, plot connection, idol dramas, brand recall

Introduction

Amidst a context of media fragmentation, the impact of conventional advertising is declining, with product placements becoming one of the best marketing programs. Marketers attempt to place brand messages of all types into movies, television programs, or music videos (MV), hoping to produce effective advertising. Product placements are most successful in using methods without commercial messages to persuade consumers, relying on the situations created by media content to produce communication effects subtly and indirectly. In this approach, a unique brand image effect is planted in the consciousness of consumers merely through exposure (Russell & Stern, 2006).

Examples of these exposures include mobile phones used by the lead actors of television dramas, including idol dramas. In East Asia, particularly Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, idol dramas burst into the media more than 10 years ago and the media are increasingly flooded with these dramas. Contrary to conventional dramas, idol dramas have traditionally focused on creating a platform for up-and-coming celebrities rather than a compelling storyline. The target audience has tended to be the young and impressionable. However, in recent years, idol dramas have enhanced their storylines and quality. Along with this development, idol dramas

continued to saturate the media and have gained increasing popularity.

Research by past scholars on product placement has tended to emphasise the effects of product placements and their influence on news content. Contrary to idol dramas, news content on television faces weaker competition from comparable sources, without considering news content from the Internet. Idol dramas on the other hand, face direct competition, on television, even within the same television network. It follows that viewers will have their attention divided among these idol dramas. From an advertiser's standpoint, it becomes imperative to explore whether current advertising strategies are still relevant. For example, in the idol drama "P.S. Man," the lead male and female actors have Apple iPhones and computers. To a similar effect, products can be placed into music videos. Lady Gaga's 2009 music video "Telephone" featured LG cell phones, Coca-Cola, HP notebooks, and the social website Plenty of Fish. Scholars have also extended placement media to Broadway musicals and Internet advertising (Yaveroglu & Donthu, 2008). The primary reason product placements are widely used is premised on the belief that they can increase consumer recognition towards products, thereby increasing awareness. For example, the research of Van Reijmersdal, Jansz, Peters, and van Noort (2010)

indicated that in placing an interactive brand into a popular female role-playing game, when players come into contact with this game containing a brand, their level of awareness toward that brand is significantly higher than those who come in contact with the same game without the brand.

In addition to creating topical advertising effects, product placements are a source of income for television stations and production companies. Because filming a drama requires a great deal of funding, material resources, and investment, production companies are increasingly using product placements to increase vendors' willingness to invest in a show or contribute without cost, thereby decreasing production costs (Scott and Craig-Lees, 2010). In addition to simply presenting a brand within a scene and showing the brand multiple times to deepen the recognition of a product, product placement strategies also involve writing plots especially for the brand, or designing a drama from the beginning in consideration of the placement of a single brand. These are both extremely common placement strategies today (Gross, 2010). In addition, because dramas are apt at providing scenarios for imaginative identifications, product placements in these dramas give audiences imaginary scenarios for the use of these brands and products.

The items used and worn by actors in dramas are given a "life," thus increasing the connection between the stars of the dramas and the product (Scott and Craig-Lees, 2010). For example, the understanding and sweet personality of the female lead in the idol drama "Fated to Love You" resulted in her being called "sticky note girl," thus reflecting the characteristics of 3M's sticky note products: close, easy to tear, and disposable after use. Another example of a successful product placement is the arrangement of the professionally successful female lead of the idol drama "My Queen." In the drama, the character eats Haagen-Dazs apricot ice cream to improve her mood when depressed. In this way, it is hinted that Haagen-Dazs ice cream is the best choice for women to spoil themselves.

These examples indicate that through strategies involving the placement of brands into storylines, advertisers can avoid viewer detection of advertising, which may otherwise lead to channel switching. At the same time, by combining scenarios in the show with usage opportunities, audiences come into contact with the messages of the brand very naturally. In this way, no sense of exclusion occurs. This is because brand messages play a secondary role to stories in idol dramas.

Following the preceding discussion, the authors studied the methods used by marketers to successfully combine brands with plots in dramas, while displaying their brands to obtain excellent marketing communication effectiveness. In addition, because each advertising exposure is highly expensive, understanding the use of these

exposures to obtain optimal benefit is an extremely important issue in advertising. The Three Hit Theory indicates that when audiences are exposed to advertising, the first contact primarily draws their attention and curiosity; the second contact incites their interest; and the third contact further increases their purchase desire. Thus, three advertisement exposures have the greatest effect in advertising (Krugman, 1972). In this study, the authors also examined the influence of the level of connectedness between product placements and storylines as well as the number of exposures for product placement effectiveness.

However, the placement of products into dramatic programs in various forms requires the communication and cooperation of the production units and vendors to align product characteristics and storyline content. The scale of this placement requires the communication and cooperation of numerous parties. In view of the current level of competition in the media, the authors extended the literature to analyse product placement strategies and implementation processes of media companies, production companies, and investors specifically in Taiwanese idol dramas.

Literature Review

Mere exposure effect

Mere exposure effect refers to the trend of gradually developing positive attitudes to a stimulus that was originally assessed neutrally following repeated exposures (Zajonc, 2001). Zajonc (2001) showed that preferences toward meaningless words and faces improve following increased exposure and repetition. However, subsequent studies have established trends indicating that simply repeating neutral stimulations continuously is sufficient to achieve the effects of increasing preference. Four factors influence the effects of mere exposure: stimulus type (complexity, whether positive or negative), presentation type (number, order, time, and recognition), measurement methods (bipolar semantic scale, broadcast choice), and subject variables (Bornstein, 1989).

The influence of the exposure effect on advertising effectiveness includes brand attitudes, brand recall, and purchase intentions. Brand recall can be divided into implicit and explicit recall. Ho, Yang, and Lin (2011) indicated that explicit recall encompasses the conscious, intentional extractions from the scene of a previously exposed stimulus or the explicit recall of assessment information, including both spontaneous recall and recognition. Lee and Faber (2007) also noted that recall does not require external cues, revealing the spontaneous retrieval process when requesting subjects to indicate the brand names that appeared in a race. For recognition, the subjects were then provided

with 13 brand names and asked to differentiate them. In addition, mere exposure also influences the subjects' attitudes towards the brands. When exposed to specific information, subjects displayed trends of positive or negative feelings towards the continuous performance of advertisements. That is, people display a state of preference or dislike towards an object (Lutz, 1985).

Number of exposures and advertising effects

The number of exposures is an important factor influencing mere exposure. This study primarily examines the influence of the number of exposures on brand recall. The research of Wilson and Till (2011) indicated that when visual methods were used for brand placement in movies, those brands that had two or more additional aural placements generated superior brand recall than those with only one placement, or those that were not mentioned in dialog; whereas no significant difference existed between brands with a single aural placement and those without aural placement.

Yaveroglu and Donthu (2008) examined the influence of the number of brand placements and variability on brand recall in online virtual environments. Their results indicate that multiple exposures of a single brand resulted in a higher level of brand recall than single exposures. In particular, when these types of product placements were related to the content of the websites in which they were placed, levels of recall were again superior to those placed on websites with discordant content.

The research of Chatterjee (2005) indicated that when the Internet usage behaviour of subjects was exploratory (that is, when users browse randomly without specific goals), subjects had higher recognition rates as the frequency of their exposure to Internet banner advertising with similar content increased. Integrating these points, results from this study imply that as the number of brand placement exposures increases, subjects have an increasing level of brand recall. That is, they have a higher level of spontaneous brand recall and brand recognition. From the preceding discussion, the following hypotheses were advanced:

H1: *Products with a high number of exposures have superior spontaneous recall to those with few exposures.*

H2: *Products with a high number of exposures have higher recognition than those with few exposures.*

In addition, Yaveroglu et al. (2008) also discovered that in virtual online environments, as the number of brand placements increased, the behavioural intentions of those individuals who click on banner advertisements also increased. Matthes, Schemer, and Wirth (2007) used an experimental method to examine the influence of placement exposure times, the audience's sense of involvement, and persuasion knowledge on brand

attitudes and recall. Their results indicated that when viewers were highly invested in a program and did not understand the persuasive involved, even if the subjects were unable to recall the brands, brand placement frequency still formed positive effects on brand assessment. However, when viewers were not highly invested in a program and held prior knowledge on persuasion, brand placement frequency was detrimental to attitudes.

Homer (2009) examined the influence of the interaction between brand exposure and the degree of significance of product placement on brand attitudes. A 15 min clip from the G-rated film "Mac and Me" was used as the stimulus in this study. This movie was selected because it contains numerous product placements, including scenes with both obvious (McDonald's appearing both in speech and on the screen) and less obvious (McDonald's merely appearing in the field of vision) placement. In addition, this film does not include violent, provocative images, and none of the participants were familiar with it. The results of this experiment indicated that when strategies of obvious product placement were used with products that appear both visually and aurally, a moderate number of exposures caused more damage to attitudes among viewers than a low number of exposures.

In contrast, when products were more subtly placed in the visual field, the frequency of product placement exposure did not result in a significant influence on brand attitudes. In other words, Homer's (2009) study indicated that because obvious product placements easily decreased the level of involvement that viewers had with the program, continuous, repeat exposure was actually detrimental to the formation of positive brand attitudes. Synthesising the above, this study hypothesises that when audiences have similar levels of involvement with programs, as the number of brand exposures increases, viewers' brand attitudes tend to become increasingly positive. The following hypotheses were advanced:

H3: *Products with a high number of exposures generate more positive brand attitudes than those with few exposures.*

Additionally, the number of exposures also influences the purchase intentions of viewers. Lee and Cho (2010) used an experimental method to examine the influence of the interaction between the number of Internet advertising exposures and degree of familiarity with brands on advertising effectiveness. Their results indicated that the number of exposures and brand familiarity had a significant influence on the purchase intentions of viewers. Specifically, this study indicated that first exposures to unfamiliar brands had a greater influence on advertising effectiveness than second and third exposures. However, in conventional media, the advertising effects formed by second and third exposures were greater than those of the first exposure.

Majeed and Razzak (2011) investigated the factors influencing the purchase intentions of Palestinian detergent products, with results indicating that as the number of advertising exposures increased, consumer purchase intention also increased. They explained that consumers perceived large companies had the only ones with a sufficiently large capital to engage in advertising campaigns with multiple exposures, and they connected large companies with quality products and the profits from the sale of quality products were used to engage in even more advertising exposures. Synthesising the above, this study holds that as the amount of brand placement exposures increases, the purchase intention of consumers also increases. Thus, the following hypothesis were advanced:

H4: *Products with a high number of exposures induce higher purchase intentions in consumers than those with few exposures.*

Plot connection and advertising effectiveness

When adding advertising messages and marketing brands into the plots of dramas, the intimacy of the connection between brand placement and plot influences whether the brand placement can leech the charm of the drama to achieve persuasive effects. Product placement strategies can be divided into several according to the level of their connection with plots. Ho, Yang, and Lin (2011) divided product placement into three types: associative, explanatory, and demonstrative. Associative placement involves placing products into the background of a game; explanatory placement involves making a product one of the clear features of a game; and demonstrative placement is the most integrative placement method, involving placing products into their most natural contexts and allowing interaction between the players and the products. Different plot connections also influence the advertising effectiveness of placements.

Sabherwal, Pokrywczynski, and Griffin (1994) studied the influence of plot connection on brand recall. They indicated that when the trademark of a fast food restaurant was mentioned by the lead actors of a film, it brought higher product recall than those formed by mere placement. Bressoud, Lehu, and Russell (2010) interviewed 3,532 people who had watched a rented DVD the day before the experiment. Their results indicated that better integration of product placements with plots was beneficial to improving product recall. This verified that high levels of connection between placements and plots were beneficial to brand recall, because they drew on deeper levels of viewer information processing.

Yang and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2007) further researched the influence of placement on brand recognition. Their study divided levels of product placement into three types, from high to low: story-

integrated placements, lead actor usage, and mere background placements. Their results indicated though no difference existed in recognition rates between brands used by lead actors and those integrated into the story, they both had significantly higher recognition rates than mere background placements. Synthesising the above, this study infers that when a high degree of integrated connection exists between product placements and plots, the usage of product placements by lead actors results in superior brand recall and higher recognition rates than mere background placements. Thus, the following hypotheses were advanced:

H5: *Placements that are highly connected to plots result in superior levels of brand recall to those that are only loosely connected to plots.*

H6: *Placements that are highly connected to plots result in superior levels of brand recognition to those that are only loosely connected to plots.*

In addition, plot integration also influences attitudes toward the placed brands. Yoon, Choi, and Song (2011) indicated that when audiences were viewers of single tasks – that is, when they did not engage in multiple tasks simultaneously but instead simply watched programs – placements that were loosely integrated with movie plots increased negative feelings toward the placed brand, and increased positive feelings toward competing brands. Russell (2002) also indicated that when the visual and aural methods of product presentation in plots that involved unnatural situations inconsistent with the story, they harmed attitudes among viewers toward the placed brands. Synthesising the above, this study infers that when a high level of integration exists between product placements and plots, product placements used by lead actors form more positive brand attitudes than mere background placements. Thus, the following hypotheses were advanced:

H7: *Placements that are highly connected to plots result in superior brand attitudes to those that are only loosely connected to plots.*

Jung, Min, and Kellaris (2011) studied detergent brands, comparing the influence of brand placement into situations in which players completed jigsaw puzzles, and the static placement of brands in banner advertisements on the top of popular music websites on the purchase behaviours of players toward the brands. Their results indicated that when the brand messages were the primary target information processed by players in online games (that is, when the placements were integrated with game content), the purchase intentions of the players towards the brands were higher than those formed by mere visual placement into website content. Therefore, this study holds that when levels of connection between brands and plots are higher, higher levels of purchase intention are formed. Thus, the following hypothesis were advanced:

H8: *Placements that are highly connected to plots result in superior purchase intentions for the product to those only loosely connected to plots.*

Number of exposures, plot connection, and advertising effectiveness

In the past, some researchers have discovered that the interaction between the number of exposures and plot connection influences the advertising effectiveness of brand placements. If Internet television is seen as a type of new medium for two-way communication with viewers, information in Internet television becomes the primary processing target for viewers, while simultaneously allowing for the possibility of viewers to have multiple exposures to a single advertisement, therefore resulting in advertising effects superior to exposure in conventional media (Varan, 2005). More specifically, the brand attitudes, advertising attitudes, and purchase intentions formed by Internet television advertisements were significantly stronger than that of advertising in conventional media (Varan, 2005).

Viewers must come into contact with conventional advertisements three times to achieve an advertising effect equal to coming in contact with Internet advertisements just once. In other words, clicking behaviour can be used to increase levels of integration between Internet television advertising and content, matching different amounts of exposure to have differing influences on brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Varan, 2005). Therefore, the interaction between the number of exposures and plot integration influences the brand attitudes and purchase intentions of subjects. Thus, the following hypotheses were advanced:

H9: *Brand placements with a high number of exposures that are highly connected to plots result in more positive brand attitudes than those with few exposures that are loosely connected to plots.*

H10: *Brand placements with a high number of exposures that are highly connected to plots result in more positive purchase intentions than those with few exposures that are loosely connected to plots.*

Brand attitude and purchase intention

In the past, numerous studies have indicated that a positive relationship exists between the two variables of brand attitude and purchase intention. Hwang, Yoon, and Park (2011) used face-to-face interviews to examine the relationship between website attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. Their results indicated that cognitive and emotional responses to the website advertising of casual dining restaurants increased positive attitudes toward these websites. These positive attitudes then improved the attitudes of the subjects toward the casual dining brands, thereby increasing

their consumption intention. Synthesising the above, this study implies that brand attitudes improve purchase intentions. Thus, the following hypothesis was advanced:

H11: *A positive relationship exists between brand attitudes and purchase intention.*

Research Method

Experiment design and participants

In this study, the authors sought to verify their hypotheses in regards to the effectiveness of product placements in idol dramas. Specifically, the authors examined the influence of the number of exposures to product placements and their connection with the plot on placement effectiveness. To reduce interference from external variables, the experimental method involving a two (number of exposures: high/low) by two (plot connection: high/low) group design was implemented. The number of exposures was distinguished three times, whereas plot connections were categorised by whether the product placements were used by lead actors or merely in the background. The subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental scenarios of one of these four groups. This study used subjects who were 18 to 34 years of age and who had received college or graduate school educations. This age group is the primary viewer group for Taiwanese idol dramas, and they are also the targets of product placement (Hall, 2004). The homogeneity of the subjects also ensured that this study had internal validity.

Stimulus selection

The placement scenarios in this study were chosen based on entertainment television ratings. Ultimately, the idol drama with the highest ratings in 2006, "Hanazakarino Kimitachihe," was selected. This idol drama had 15 episodes with diverse product placements. The three hit theory indicates that advertising effectiveness is greatest when audiences come into contact with an advertisement three times. Thus, when dividing the groups by number of exposures, the high exposure group had three exposures, whereas the low exposure group had fewer than three (Krugman, 1972). Yang and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2007) indicated that mere background placements are the method of placement least connected to plots.

Thus, because no significant differences in brand recall exist between product placements used by lead actors and those integrated into the story, this study selected lead actor-usage as the group highly connected to plots, with mere background placement as the group with low connection to the plot. Using the content of the previous three sets, this study requested two coders who had studied

communication research methods to judge whether product placements were highly or loosely connected to the plots. In addition, a graduate student of journalism was asked to act as a coding notary. The validity between the coders was 0.92. The placement product types and number of placements are shown in Appendix A.

The food and beverage product placements that the subjects most frequently encountered in their daily lives were ultimately chosen to serve as the objects of investigation. In addition, contents in which the names, symbols, and exteriors of the products could be clearly distinguished were used as the objects of editing. There were four videos: (1) High exposure and high plot placement: Demisoda Lemon, with a duration of 1m 6s; (2) high exposure and low plot placement: Demisoda Lemon, with a duration of 1m 2s; (3) low exposure and high plot placement: Demisoda Lemon, with a duration of 59s and (4) low exposure and low plot placement: Demisoda Lemon, with a duration of 1m 1s;.

Pretest

To confirm that significant differences existed in the manipulation of the experimental stimuli in the 2 dimensions of exposure and plot connection, this study first used an internal electronic bulletin board from a national university in northern Taiwan to recruit 40 subjects (22 male, 18 female) to perform a pre-test. This study used the SPSS 10.0 statistical software to perform an independent sample *t*-test. The mean among the group with a high number of exposures was higher than that of the group with a low number of exposures ($M = 5.41$ vs. $M = 3.37$, $t(93) = 5.51$, $p < .001$). The mean of the group with high plot connection was higher than that of the group with low plot connection ($M = 5.12$ vs. $M = 2.32$, $t(93) = 8.37$, $p < .001$). This indicates that significant differences existed in this study in the manipulation of these two dimensions. The manipulation results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of exposures and plot connection – independent samples *t*-test results

	Number of Exposures			Plot Connection		
	High Group	Low Group	<i>t</i> -value	High Group	Low Group	<i>t</i> -value
Mean	5.41	3.37	5.51***	5.12	2.32	8.37***

Note: *** $p \leq .001$

Main Experiment

To measure the influence of product placement, subjects were first requested the subjects to sign a consent form. Following this, they watched videos with product placement content and were then asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire measurements were in the following order: subject preference toward this idol drama, brand recall, brand recognition, brand attitude, purchase intention, and finally the basic personal information of the subjects. This study used brand recall, brand attitude, and purchase intention as the dependent variables influenced by the manipulation of the experimental independent variables. Related measurements are shown below.

Brand Recall

This study primarily measured the explicit recall of the subjects in the area of brand recall. More specifically, their ability to remember and recognise the placed brands after watching the experimental stimuli was measured. In addition, to avoid the influence of cues provided by recognition on the true scores for brand recall, this study measured brand recall before measuring brand recognition. This study referenced past research by not providing the subjects with any information during the product recall section. An open

questionnaire method was used to measure the brand recall of the subjects. Correct answers were coded with 1s, with mistakes coded as 2s. A series of product names and pictures were provided for the product recognition section. The subjects only had to recognise the product that had appeared in the video. Correct identifications were coded as 1s, with mistakes coded as 2s (Lee & Faber, 2007; Gross, 2010).

Brand attitude

In examining the influence of the experimental stimuli on brand attitudes, this study used and revised the questionnaire developed by Mitchell and Olson (1981) to measure subject brand attitudes. The subjects were asked to use a 7-point Likert scale for assessment. Higher scores indicated higher brand evaluations. Performing validity analysis on this section revealed that the Cronbach's α of the questionnaire items was 0.86, which is an acceptable value by conventional standards.

Purchase intention

In testing the influence of the stimuli on the purchase intention of subjects, this study used and revised the questionnaire developed by Sawer and Haward (1991). The subjects were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale. Higher scores indicated higher

brand purchase intention. Validity analysis on this section revealed that the Cronbach's α of the questionnaire items was 0.84, which was acceptable.

This study recruited subjects from two well-known Taiwanese bulletin board systems. The targets were those who had received college or graduate school educations between the ages of 18 and 34. Ultimately, a total of 95 subjects participated in the experiment. These subjects were randomly distributed among the four scenarios, ensuring that the number of subjects in each scenario was over 20.

Results

Number of Exposures and Brand Recall

A series of investigations into brand placement

effects was performed for this study. A chi-square test was run to examine the influence of the number of exposures on brand recall. The results indicated that among the subjects who had observed several exposures, 38 were correct on brand recall, whereas among the subjects who had observed few exposures, 23 were correct on brand recall. A statistically significant difference was reached between the two groups in correct recall ($\chi^2 (1, N = 95) = 7.84, p < .01$). Thus, H1 was supported by the evidence. In addition, among subjects who had watched several exposures, 44 were correct on brand recognition, whereas among those who had watched few exposures, 28 were correct on brand recall. A statistically significant difference was reached between the groups in correct recognition ($\chi^2 (1, N = 95) = 10.82, p < .01$). Thus, H2 was also supported by the evidence. The results for this section are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of exposures, brand recall, brand recognition – chi-square test results.

	Brand Recall		χ^2	Brand Recognition		χ^2
	High Exposure	Low Exposure		High Exposure	Low Exposure	
Number Correct	38	23	7.84**	44	28	10.82**
% Correct	62.3%	37.7%		61.1	38.9	

Note: ** $p \leq .01$

Plot Connection and Brand Recall

Another chi-square test was run to examine the influence of plot connection on brand recall. The results indicated that among the subjects who had watched placements with high plot connection, 39 were correct on brand recall, whereas among those who had watched placements with low plot connection, 22 were correct on brand recall. A statistically significant difference was reached between the groups in correct recall ($\chi^2 (1, N = 95)$

$= 12.26, p < .001$). Thus, H5 was supported.

Among the subjects who had seen placements with high plot connection, 41 were correct on brand recognition, whereas those subjects who had seen placements with low plot connection, 31 were correct on brand recall. A statistically significant difference was reached between the two groups in correct recall ($\chi^2 (1, N = 95) = 4.90, p < .05$). Thus, H6 was supported. The results for this section are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Plot connection, brand recall, brand recognition – chi-square test results

	Brand Recall		χ^2	Brand Recognition		χ^2
	High Connection	Low Connection		High Connection	Low Connection	
Number Correct	39	22	12.26**	41	31	4.90*
% Correct	63.9	36.1		56.9	43.1	

Note: ** $p \leq .01, *p \leq .05$

Number of exposures, plot connection, brand attitude, and purchase intention

A MANOVA was run to examine the influence of the number of exposures and plot connection on brand attitude and purchase intention. The results indicated that both the number of exposures and plot connection attained a significant main effect

(Wilks' $\Lambda = .81, F(2,90) = 10.83, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = .19$; Wilks' $\Lambda = .86, F(2,90) = 7.15, p < 0.01$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.14$). In addition, the interaction between the two also reached a level of significance (Wilks' $\Lambda = .91, F(2,90) = 4.58, p < 0.05$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.09$).

Specifically examining the main effects, this study first investigated the influence of the number

of exposures on brand attitude. The results indicate that the brand attitudes of subjects who had watched placement clips with a high number of exposures were higher than those who had watched clips with few exposures ($M = 4.95, SE = 0.15$ vs. $M = 4.19, SE = 0.15; t(95) = 3.48, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .12$) (See Table 4). This indicated that the number of exposures improves brand attitudes. Thus, H3 was supported.

When analysing the influence of plot connection on brand attitude, the results indicated that the brand attitudes of the subjects who had observed clips with several exposures were higher than those who had watched videos with few exposures ($M = 4.92, SE = 0.15$ vs. $M = 4.22, SE$

$= .16; t(95) = 3.22, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .10$) (See Table 4). This indicated that plot connection improved brand attitudes. Thus, H7 was supported.

Analysing the interaction effect, the results indicated that, regardless of the number of exposures, brand attitudes were higher when observing clips with high plot connection than when observing clips with low plot connection. In addition, regardless of the level of plot connection, brand attitudes were higher when watching clips with a high number of exposures than when watching clips with a low number of exposures. Thus, H9 was supported. These results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Plot connection, number of exposures, brand attitude –MANOVA results

Variable	Group	Mean	SE	F Value
Number of Exposures	High	4.95	0.15	12.14**
	Low	4.19	0.15	
Plot Connection	High	4.92	0.15	10.38**
	Low	4.22	0.16	
High Exposure	Plot Connection	High	5.03	6.30*
	Low	4.88	.22	
Low Exposure	Plot Connection	High	4.82	.23
	Low	3.56	.23	

Note: ** $p \leq .01, *p \leq .05$

The results for main effects in purchase intention indicated that the purchase intentions of subjects who observed the placement video with many exposures were higher than those of the subjects who had watched the video with fewer exposures ($M = 4.31, SE = .17$ vs. $M = 3.33, SE = .17; t(95) = 4.11, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .10$) (See Table), indicating that the number of exposures increased purchase intention. Thus, H4 was supported.

In examining the influence of plot connection on purchase intention, the results indicated that the purchase intention of subjects who had observed the placement videos with high plot connection was

higher than those of the subjects who had watched videos with low plot connection, indicating that plot connection increased purchase intention ($M = 4.22, SE = .17$ vs. $M = 3.47, SE = .17; t(95) = 2.98, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .09$) (See Table 5). Thus, H8 was supported. However, in examining interaction, the results indicated that the number of exposures and plot connection did not reach a level of significance in purchase intention ($F(1, 91) = .61, p = .44, \eta^2 = .01$). Thus, there was insufficient evidence to support H10..

Table 5. Plot connection, number of exposures, purchase intentions –MANOVA results

Variable	Group	Mean	SE	F Value
Number of Exposures	High	4.31	.17	16.89***
	Low	3.33	.17	
Plot Connection	High	4.22	.16	8.9**
	Low	3.47	.16	
High Exposure	Plot Connection	High	4.76	.61
	Low	3.87	.24	
Low Exposure	Plot Connection	High	3.60	.23
	Low	3.01	1.6	

Note: *** $p \leq .001, **p \leq .01, *p \leq .05$

Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention

A Spearman correlation analysis was run to examine the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention. The results indicated that a significant positive relationship existed between the

two. As brand attitudes increased, purchase intention increased; whereas when brand attitudes decreased, purchase intention also fell ($r = .44; p < .001$) (See Table 6). Thus, H11 was supported. However, the causal relationship between the two cannot be solely determined by correlation analysis.

Table 6. Brand attitude, purchase intentions – Spearman correlation analysis results

	Number	Spearman Correlation Coefficient
Brand Attitude	95	0.44***
Purchase intentions		

Note: *** $p \leq .001$

Discussions and Conclusions

Following the findings, the authors sought to understand the effectiveness of placement strategies further by interviewing a few experts from the integrated marketing and business departments, producers, and investors of each Taiwanese television station. The purpose of the interviews was to help us better understand better how Taiwanese idol dramas used product placements at different levels of production as well as explain some of the findings.

Number of exposures and brand placement effectiveness

This study used (1) the mere exposure effect as a foundation to examine brand placement methods with differing numbers of exposures and (2) varied plot connection to determine their influence on brand recall, brand attitude, and purchase intention among viewers of Taiwanese idol dramas. The results indicated that as the number of exposures increased, viewers exhibited superior recognition and spontaneous recall, echoing research results from Yaveroglu and Donthu (2008). In addition, because viewing idol dramas is itself a type of enjoyment and is not a goal-oriented search for information, the results of this study further conform with Chatterjee's (2005) viewpoint: when the acceptance of content is not characterised by goal-oriented information seeking, increasing the number of advertising exposures of identical content is beneficial to brand recognition. Additionally, this study also revealed that increases in the number of exposures had a positive influence on the brand attitudes of viewers, supporting the findings in Matthes, Schemer and Wirth's (2007) study.

Finally, this study also indicated that increases in the number of exposures were beneficial to the formation of greater purchase intention. It can be inferred that this was because the idol drama selected for this study was the most highly rated drama in Taiwan. Therefore, the majority of the subjects were familiar with the content of the show. This result accords with Lee and Cho's (2010) indication that purchase intention formed by a single exposure can only be higher than those of second and third exposures in situations where brands are unfamiliar. Overall, this study revealed that increasing the number of exposures has a strong positive influence on the advertising effectiveness of brand placement. Therefore, in the future, when

marketing firms are placing products in dramas, a suggestion is to increase the number of visual brand exposures by a reasonable amount to achieve a better advertising effect. When firms control the number of exposures, they employ visual placements more frequently, using still-life presentation methods to display brand messages.

In this regard, some interviewees indicated that auditory placements are used with extreme caution. If producers and directors do not implement auditory placements carefully, they may be punished. By contrast, visual placement strategies are more indirect and the most commonly adopted forms of product placement. One director believed that auditory placements should be employed in conjunction with visual placements to achieve an implicit advertising effect. A producer indicated that he avoided using close-up methods to present brand messages as much as possible because obvious placement frequently led to punishment. Another director indicated that close-ups were not the only method employed to present brand messages. He maintained that medium shots and plot placements could also lead to the product publicity vendors were hoping for.

Plot connection and brand placement

When measuring the brand recall effect, this study revealed that significant differences existed in spontaneous recall and recognition effects between subjects who had watched drama clips where brands were highly connected to plots, and those who had watched clips with only loose connections. As plot connection increased, the spontaneous recall and recognition effects of viewers improved. This verified Bressoud et al.'s (2010) viewpoint that story connection leads the deep information processing of viewers, therefore aiding in improving brand recall. In addition, this study revealed that placements highly connected to plots formed superior brand attitudes in viewers, according with Russell's (2002) perspective that as the visual and aural methods of product presentation in dramas and plots are increasingly consistent, they are better able to increase the positive attitudes of viewers have toward the placement brands.

Finally, this study also revealed that placements highly connected to plots result in higher purchase intention, conforming to the discoveries of Jung et al. (2011). Overall, this study revealed that high levels of plot connection had an entirely positive influence on the advertising effectiveness of brand

placements. It is therefore useful for businesses to manipulate brands to be directly used by the lead actors; making the brand not just a background prop, but also capable of moulding the personality traits of the lead actors in the drama.

In short, because of product placement, people think of brands more easily and identify them without prompting. Product placement can also produce more positive attitudes toward brands and greater purchasing intentions. When implementing product placements involving a high level of connection between a product and a plot, one director indicated that vendors would want to ascertain whether the personalities of characters who used the product in the drama corresponded with the spirit of the brand. Another director also indicated that vendors marketing jewellery as a token of love hoped to design stories related to this goal as a part of placing products. Some producers indicated that sponsors marketing food and daily use products frequently employed low-plot placement and scene placement to publicise their brands.

From the results, when company brands are placed in shows, they should be further manipulated to become brands directly used by main characters in the show. Brands are not simple props; they are also capable of shaping the personalities and traits of the leading characters in a drama. In addition, vendors adopt different placement methods and product placement to demonstrate different levels of effectiveness based on product attributes and involvement. The spirit of a brand can be communicated to audiences through product placement, and, if implemented properly, the advertising effect engendered by these placements will become even more impressive.

Placement strategy

When analysing the effect exposure numbers and plot connections – two independent variables – had on brand attitudes and purchase intentions, it was discovered that different numbers of exposures influenced the effect exercised by plot connection. When the number of exposures for a product reached a certain level, audience recognition of the product could be established, but, if brand exposures were repeated too frequently, viewers would feel that their viewing experience had been disrupted. Increasing the connection between the plot and the product is considered one approach for resolving this problem. In addition, when products use placements involving a high level of connection to the plot, the interaction between the characters in the drama and the product can improve the level to which audiences process the product's message. Therefore, high-plot connection strategies are established during the early phases of writing plot synopses. If the main thrust of a story and the traits of the characters in this story are confirmed first, the connection between a product

and the plot can be increased effectively, allowing the product to appear reasonably and naturally in the show. From the interviews, it was found out that the majority of placements in idol dramas are discussed and determined during the early period of synopsis development (the first phase). When writing scripts, screenwriters are already aware of their primary sponsors and design plots in which products are used naturally by male and female leads. For example, in one scene of *Hanazakarino Kimitachihe*, the male lead wanted to apologise and show his good will to the female lead. He purchased a specific brand of fruit juice to communicate his good intentions.

The results of the experiment conducted in this study demonstrated that using numerous pure-scene placements to improve the connection between a plot and a product led to positive product attitudes on the part of audiences, but brand placements with a high-level connection to the plot also required careful planning and scheduling. The majority of interviewees explained that vendors generally provide sponsorship spontaneously, and screenwriters then include the product marketed by these vendors in the plot. This is a primary factor affecting the quality of dramas. When screenwriters write plots including product placements, they find it extremely difficult to write suitable storylines. Producers and screenwriters both indicated that the earlier placements are confirmed, the more time screenwriters have to develop plots.

However, although the majority of advertisers hope that brand exposures for their products appear in dramas as soon as possible, the results of the experiment conducted in this study indicated that the product-related messages most capable of infiltrating viewer memory and influencing brand attitudes were those crucial to the main thread of the story. According to the interviewed screenwriters and producers, product placements that exhibit a high level of connection to the plot and influence the main story in a drama must be confirmed by the early planning period to be perfected. A consensus among scriptwriters, producers, and television stations must be reached so that the texture of a drama is not negatively influenced and publicity is achieved. Therefore, when engaging in brand placement operations, both the quantity of brand placement messages and the quality of these placements must be emphasised. This method will ensure that positive placement effects are obtained after brand placement strategies are implemented. To summarise, this study combined theory and practice to offer academia in-depth research into the implementation and effectiveness of product placement strategies. The study can also serve as a reference for the industry concerning the adoption of these strategies. When engaging in product placement, businesses can increase the number of brand exposures to improve consumer recognition of the brand and influence attitudes and purchase

intentions. However, while increasing the number of brand exposures, brand connection to the plot must also be strengthened so that brands can be displayed naturally as those used by main characters. For example, advertising in which the main characters of a show drink a certain brand of beverage is more effective than advertisements that use various designs and displays. This continues to be powerful in idol dramas that are highly popular today. The study also suggests that idol dramas are likely to continue to be dominant in the media given their effectiveness as a platform for advertising.

However, when brands are used by the main characters in a drama, they become more than just scene props. They are characters in the story as well. When brand connection to the plot is strengthened and stories used to market brands, the number of brand exposures may increase but audiences will not complain that their viewing experience has been disrupted. By allowing plots to speak for products, a connection can develop between brands and the direct experiences of consumers, which will give brands meaning, allow brands to establish long-term relationships with consumers, and provide for a complete development of the brand. The placement strategies and processes organised for this study can serve as a reference for marketing professionals who are engaged in product placements.

In addition, the results of this study indicated that in addition to the main effect hypotheses of the number of exposures and plot connection being established, an interaction also existed in the influence of the number of exposures and plot connection on brand attitude, which is consistent with the discoveries of Varan (2005). However, the interaction of the two did not have a significant influence on purchase intention, which conflicts with Varan's (2005) study. It is plausible that this could be due to the experimental videos in this study, where the high brand exposure and highly connected placements were excessively obvious, causing viewers to feel that their viewing was being interfered with, therefore decreasing their intention to purchase the brand.

Regarding the theoretical and practical implications, among previous studies on product placement marketing, only a small number of them used exposure effects and plot connection to explain the effectiveness of placement. Studies on placement effectiveness that adopted plot connection as a research variable commonly used visual and auditory presentation methods as additional independent variables to investigate the communicative effect of placement (Russell, 2002). In addition, few studies have conducted research on production; scholars are primarily limited by the industry's unwillingness to discuss "placement marketing," a sensitive topic, which leads to difficulty arranging interviews. Consequently, in addition to using an experimental method to verify the effects of product placement on

audiences, this study also adopted qualitative, in-depth interviews to investigate how marketing personnel, producers, investors, and screenwriters formulated placement strategies and to perform in-depth analyses of design, planning, and implementation processes. The study examined recordings of in-depth interviews with professionals in the television production industry to supplement the dimensions of product message placement that quantitative data were unable to reflect, offering academia another possible feature of the television industry for their consideration.

This study has its fair share of limitations. First, this study only used a single stimulus to verify the advertising effectiveness of brand placement. In the future, multiple stimuli should be used in each testing situation group to verify advertising effectiveness and improve the internal validity of this study. Second, this study used clips actually broadcast in Taiwan as the experimental videos, rather than creating experimental videos specifically for this experiment. With a highly rated idol drama like this, it is difficult to ensure that the scores given by the subjects in each dimension of advertising effectiveness are entirely due to the manipulation of the experiment. Future researchers can use original videos to improve the internal validity of the study. Third, in studying the effects of product placements in idol dramas, it would be interesting to control for the type of dramas. Subsequent studies can extend the method and experiment to compare idol versus non-idol dramas, and even idol dramas from different countries for comparison. Finally, this study utilised a convenience sample of subjects. This limited the external validity of the results of this study. Furthermore, the authors were not able to gain access to a larger sample of media experts. However, the subjects recruited in this study still had demographic characteristics similar to those of actual viewers of Taiwanese idol dramas and the interviews constituted a supplementary discussion to gain a deeper understanding of the findings. These can minimise and mitigate the insufficiencies in external validity.

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Appendix A. Experimental stimulus

High exposure and high plot connection
(placement brand: Demisoda)



Low exposure and high plot connection
(placement brand: Demisoda)



High exposure and low plot connection
(placement brand: Demisoda)



Low exposure and low plot connection
(placement brand: Demisoda)

