Uluslararası İletişimde
Yeni Yönelimler Konferansı
Eğlence ve Ürün Yerleştirme

PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIP THEORY AND PRODUCT PLACEMENT EFFECTIVENESS

Hilal Özdemir Çakır[1]

Abstract

Advertising is an important communication vehicle that we can meet in every part of our lives. Advertising messages are mostly seen in televisions but the viewers are not pleased with the division of the programmes by ads. They either change the channel to get rid of advertisements or watch the same programme on the internet so that they can not be interrupted by advertisements. These attitudes are percieved as a disadvantage by advertisers and has led advertisers or brands to product placements in order to promote their products or services. Parasocial relationship is the one-way relationship with the viewer's favorite character and the relationship that the viewer sees himself as a real friend of the character. The balanced model of product placement effects that is firstly mentioned by Russell (2006) describes the relationship between para social relationships and the effect of product placement by the implementation of Heider's Balance Theory. This study contains a literature review and reveals the role of para social relationship in product placement effectiveness through the Balanced Model of Product Placement effects and the studies conducted by various researchers in order to examine the role of para social relationships in product placements in the context of brand attitude, buying intent nd buying behavior.
Key words: Product Placement, Parasocial Relationship, Brand Attitudes

PARASOSYAL İLİŞKİ TEORİSİ VE ÜRÜN YERLEŞTİRME ETKİNLİĞİ

Özet

Reklam gündelik hayatlarımızın bütün kısımlarında karşılaşabileceğimiz önemli bir iletişim aracıdır. Reklam mesajları sıklıkla televizyonlarda yer almaktadır fakat izleyiciler programların reklamlarla bölünmesini hoş karşılamamaktadır. Bu şekilde ya reklamlardan kurtulmak için kanalı değiştirmekte veya reklamlara maruz kalmamak için programları internetten seyretmektedirler. Bu tutumlar reklamcılar tarafından dezavantaj olarak algılanmaktadır ve ürün veya hizmetlerini tanıtmak üzere markalar veya firmalar ürün yerleştirme uygulamalarını sıklıkla kullanmaya başlamışlardır. Parasosyal ilişki izleyicinin beğendiği karakter ile olan tek tarafı ilişkisidir ve bu ilişkide izleyici kendisini karakterin arkadaşı olarak hayal etmektedir. Ürün Yerleştirmede Denge Modeli ilk defa Russell tarafından (2006) geliştirilmiştir. Bu model, parasosyal ilişkiler ile ürün yerleştirme etkinliğini, Heider'ın Denge Teorisi bağlamında ele almaktadır. Bu çalışma, Ürün Yerleştirmede Denge Modeli bağlamında parasosyal ilişkiler ile ürün yerleştirme etkinliği arasındaki ilişkiye değinen derleme bir çalışmadır. Çalışmada aynı zamanda konu ile ilgili olarak yapılan araştırmalara da yer verilmiştir. Ürün yerleştirmede etkinlik ise marka tutumları, satın alma isteği ve satın alma davranışı bağlamında ele alınmıştır.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Ürün Yerleştirme, Parasosyal İlişkiler, Marka Tutumları

Introduction

Today, consumers are overwhelmed by an increasing amount of commercial messages. To break through this advertising clutter, advertisers are forced to search for alternative ways of advertising in order to capture consumers'attention. One of these alternative advertising forms is brand placement. Brand placement, also called product placement, can be defined as "the paid inclusion of branded products or brand identifiers through audio and/or visual means within mass media programs" (Balasubramanian, Karrh & Patwardhan, 2006: 115). It is usually used in films and television programs as well as novels, videogames, music videos (Atsüren, 2014: 7).

A parasocial attachment is one-sided, mediated by media, and not a reciprocal relationship. It happens when the viewer has the illusion of a face-to-face relationship with a fictional character or a celebrity (real person) and therefore feels part of a close, intimate relationship (Dias&Dias, 2017: 126). Parasocial interaction theory, instrumental in explaining the strength of the relationships between viewers and characters (Horton and Whol, 1956) suggests that as viewers establish closer

1 Associate Prof, İstanbul Commerce University, Department of Public Relations&Advertisement, hozdemir@ticaret.edu.tr

relationships with television characters, they tend to identify with them, come to know and approve of their consumption practices, and even model their own consumption on that of the models (Russell&Stern, 2006: 7). At this point, the question of whether the viewer or the consumer that forms a parasocial relationship with the characters prefer the brand by the means of product placement.

This study reviews the literature about the relationship between the para social interaction and relationship and the brand attitudes of the consumers by means of product placement. Among giving information about some theories, examples of basic academic researches are also given.

1. Parasocial Relationship

The theory of Parasocial Interaction was introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956) and was defined by both researchers as "simulacrum of conversational give and take" between senders and receivers of mass media messages. Horton and Strauss (1957) subsequently clarified that Parasocial Interaction is "immediate, personal, and reciprocal, but these qualities are illusory and presumably not shared by the speaker" (Hartmann and Goldhoorn 2010, 1104).

In a parasocial relationship, viewers are not just passive spectators of the program but also participate actively as if they were in a real life relationship with the characters. Namely, viewers can empathize with characters' feelings, troubles and even develop propositions of problem solving for the character in a corresponding episode situation. For example, it is possible for a viewer who watches a sitcom episode for the first time, to simply develop attitudes toward the characters which can portray the overall attitudes of the characters as designed by the producers. Nevertheless, when viewers are watching a sitcom regularly, it is high likely that they become actively bonded with the characters, follow their stories and care about their fictional lives, experience vicariously everything that the character does and feels and ultimately interact with them parasocially, as if they were real (Kavallieratou, 2013: 129).

The parasocial relationship applies both to fictional characters and real celebrities. People can connect strongly to a celebrity (real person), follow her/his career closely and join fan clubs; but may also react strongly against negative celebrity behaviors by making no parasocial link or rapidly withdrawing from it, distinguishing between reality and fiction. In contrast, it is easier for the audience to accept fictional characters with dubious moral principles, because there are no real-life consequences attached (Dias&Dias, 2017: 126).

While studying audience-celebrity interaction, it has been found that social attraction to a celebrity is a more important attribute within Parasocial Interaction than physical attraction (Rubin and McHugh 1987) and that audiences often seek a celebrity that resembles similar attitudes, appearances and backgrounds (Lueck, 2015: 94).

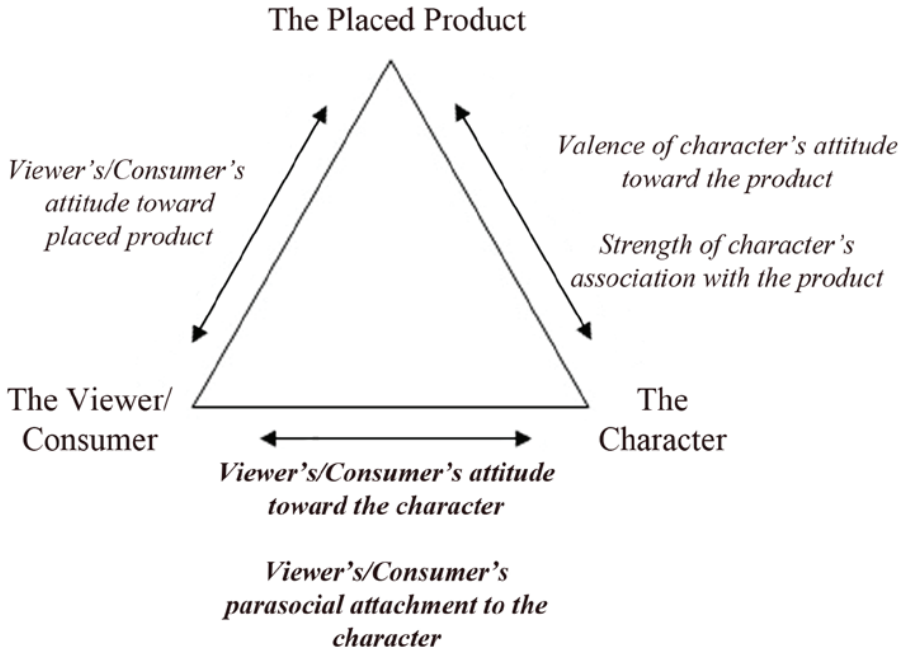
For any interaction between the two parties to even exist, and for communication to be achieved, one of them must accept and adapt to the other party's perceptions. The conventions ruling the actions of thecelebrities and the values communicated must be accepted by the audience as credible. In this way, the viewer can sympathize with the celebrities when they are facing difficulties, forgive their mistakes, accept their wisdom and their advice and more importantly, buy the products they are using or indirectly recommend (Kavallieratou, 2013: 129-130).

2.Parasocial Relationship and Product Placement

Media researchers have identified the potential for television characters and celebrities to serve as behavioral models and have found that referential influences occur via parasocial interactions. That is, the more consumers feel parasocially attached to television characters, the more these characters become referent others, resulting in their greater influence on viewers. In placement terms, as viewers become closer to characters, they tend to identify with them, accept them as models of correct product decisions, and even model personal consumption on characters' product use (Russell&Stern, 2006: 10).

Russell &Stern (2006: 8)developed a model for the effects of parasocial relationships on product placement effectiveness. (Figure 1) The balance model of product placement effects (Russell and Stern 2006) is a promising approach to integrating the audience, media characters, and brand placements on a theoretical level. Referring to Heider's (1946, 1967) balance theory, Russell and Stern's model employs a cognitive triad comprising the viewer's self-perception, his or her perception of a media character, and his or her perception of a brand placement (Knoll et al., 2015: 722).

Figure 1. Balance Model of Product Placement Effects(Russell6Stern, 2006: 8)



Per Heider's balance theory, attitudes towards the placed product will be a function of all four variables: consumers will align their attitude towards the product with attitude toward the character and parasocial attachment with the character based on the valence of the character's attitude toward the product and the strength of the character association with the product (Russell&Stern, 2006: 11).

Transferring this idea to brand placement effects, recipients will hold positive attitudes towards brand placements if their relationship to a media character and the character's relationship to the placement are both positive or both negative. Conversely, attitudes towards placements will be negative if the two relationships have oppositevalence (Knoll et al, 2015: 722).

According to balance theory, positive association between the consumer and some element of the marketing mix of the brand, translates into a positive feeling with the other elements of the marketing mix of the brand (Dalakas & Levin, 2005; Levin & Levin, 2010). Likewise, in situations of high parasocial relationship with a character that uses a brand in a television show, the existenceof a positive impact on consumers' beliefs about product placement is expected (Dias&Dias, 2014: 659).

Russell and Stern (2006) tested their assumptions in a field study surveying all three relationships after viewers' consumption of various TV series. The results show that viewers' so-called positive 'parasocial attachment' to media characters, and media characters' positive relationships to brand placements, have a positive influence on viewers' attitudes towards brand placements (Knoll et al, 2015: 722).

Kavallieratou (2013: 11) conducted a research by using Balanced Model of Product Placement Effects. The research aimed toexamine the theoretical premises underpinning the "Balance model of sitcom product placement effects" (Russell & Stern, 2006) to test the model and to extend its applicability to other contexts. The sample was drawn from a UK university student population and was recruited according to specific characteristics-; a contemporary sitcom as a stimulus and its screening on a laboratory setting; and an altered questionnaire in terms of questions' sequence.

The data collection procedure involved the exposure of 128 participants to the stimulus, which was followed by the completion of an online questionnaire (Kavallieratou, 2013: 13).

The findings of this research which showed attitudinal alignment of consumer attitude toward the product with the character's attitude toward the product according to the positive or negative character-product association, imply that the formation of attitudes toward placed products depends on the nature of the product's portrayal in the program. In particular, products which are positively portrayed by the character's relation to them are most likely to affect positively consumer

attitudes toward the product, while portrayals which are negatively associated with the character run the risk of creating negative consumer attitudes toward the product. However, thisattitudinal alignment process is most likely to be dependent on the consumer's attachment to the character. Namely, the parasocial relationships between character and consumer have a crucial role in directing consumer attitudes toward placed products (Kavallieratou, 2013: 246).

Organizations and brand managers tend to use celebrities associated with positive values as spokespersons in the belief that these positive values will transfer to the brand. Inversely, people tend to react strongly when a celebrity's behavior reveals a negative trait, and this can negatively affect the image of any brand the celebrity represents. Moreover, this negative information about celebrities is usually amplified by media, and has a dramatic public impact. Nonetheless, the negative behavior of fictional characters inmovies or television programs might not receive the same negative assessment, and viewers sometimes bond with unpleasant characters. Hugh Laurie's appeal as 'Dr. House' is an example of audience attraction to an unpleasant character and shows that a parasocial process between consumers and characters can occur regardless of their positive or negative (Pickett, 2012: 12-15).

Previous research has shown that in isolated situations (e.g., a movie), characters that viewers perceive to be negative do not lead to positive parasocial interaction. For example, Schemer et al. (2008) and- Knoll et al. (2015) manipulated the attitude toward the characters, describing themas bad guys before respondents watched the communicational stimuli. It appears that viewers need many episodes (e.g., of a soap opera) to establish a sense of familiarity and intimacy with characters before they develop a parasocial relationship with them. When this happens, viewersmay engage in a parasocial relationship regardless of the characters' valence or may even prefer negative characters in the case ofstrong viewer involvement. It is not a rule that positive characters' impact is positive and negative characters' impact is negative. When the consumer establishes relationships and interacts with a negative character, he/she recognizes some attractive and rewarding elements that transform the valence of the stimulus. Therefore, a positive effect is expected, regardless of the type of character. So the type of the character (positive or negative) affects the para social relationship and the consumer's attitude toward the placed product (Dias&Dias, 2017: 127).

Previous studies on brand placement in a movie or serial context show that brand prominence affect both brand recall and brand attitude. The impact of brand prominence on the effectiveness of brand placement can be moderated by the viewers 'connectedness to the characters or celebrities. Personal connectedness appears when the viewer feels strongly associated with the main character/artist. The artist/character can be the central character with whom viewers may be strongly or weakly connected on a parasocial level (Hudders, etc., 2012: 3).

Gupta and Lord (1998) define prominence as the way in which the brand placement is integrated in the media content, in terms of drawing the viewers" attention. There exists levels of prominence and the degree of prominence a brand can achieve can be catagorized into two components: low or high prominence. Low prominece also referred as subtle placement is when visual representations of a brands are small in size and located in the background or when verbal brand cues are not mentioned prominently. High prominece or prominent placement occurs when dialoguereferring to the placement is emphasized and repeated and can also include a centrally placed visual component (Gunawardena, 2013: 18).

Dias&Dias (2014: 660-661) set an experimental design to test the effect of parasocial relationship on consumers' attitude towards the product and overall attitude towards product placement. Each respondent watched a video segment from a primetime soap opera that had been aired on aerial television, showing a character interacting with the product (sun protector). The video segments (average length: 2min 22sec) were uploaded on Youtube. The questionnaire started with general questions about the program and tested spontaneous memory recall of brands of sun protectors. Then, each participant was requested to watch the video segment on YouTube, after which they continued to answer the questionnaire.

Three hundred and nine individuals from a specialized online research company database, participated in this study. Subjects' age ranged from 18 to 56 years, and overlaps the audience of television show and consumers of the product category (sun protectors) used in this study. The results of the study showed that parasocial relationship has a positive effect on consumer's attitude towards placed product and parasocial relationship has a positive effect on consumer's overall attitude towards product placement.

Dias &Dias (2017:128) conducted a study in order to discover if there is a relationship with the positive or negative characters, para social relationships of the viewers with those characters and the effect of these relationships to the brand attitude. The study sets out an experimental design to test the model. The stimuli used in this test were original product placement clips includedin a soap opera broadcast in prime time free-to-air television. All situations of product placement showed a positive relationship between the character and the brand. The setting was a prime time television soap opera in which four characters (two negative and two positive) used the same brand (Ambre Solaire sun protector by Garnier) in different product placements. They found that negative characters can also be used in product placement as long as viewers meet two conditions: they manifest general product placement acceptance and have a parasocial attachment to the character.

The first and only study about this topic in Turkey belongs to Akıcı and Çakır. (2017: 217-223). This study is based on the hypothesis that " Parasocial relationships that viewers develope with the tv series characters is determinent on the success of the product placements in tv series". Sample is 406 people from Uşak. It investigates the effect of product placement on buying behavior and buying intent, on brand attitudes and on brand awareness. The results Show that the increase on the level of parasocial relationship increases the level of buying behavior, buying intent and brand attitude that is the favorability of the brand. There were no reasonable difference between the parasocial relationship level and the level of the awareness of the product placement. Finally the awareness of the brand placement does not affect the intent of buying behavior. That is if people are not aware of brand placement, they have more tendency for buying intent.

Result and Discussion

Product placement is a marketing practice in which a firm pays for inclusion of its products in various mass communication tools, especially in television series and in films and it is a popular practice that can capture the cunsumers that can escape from the advertisements.

The products that can not be paid attention in classic advertisement processes can be atrractive when seen on a favorite character or a celebrity. The reason of this might be that first of all, the message may not be perceived as an advertisement. Another reason might be that the individual can pretend because he or she saw that product is used by his or her favorite character. Parasocial relationship theory indicates that viewer can form a relationship with his or her favorite character. The viewer can make an observation about the behaviors, the discourses and the products that he or she can use.

Russell(2006) proposed a model that is named" Balance Model of Product Placement Effects". Russell and Stern's model employs a cognitive triad comprising the viewer's self-perception, his or her perception of a media character, and his or her perception of a brand placemet. Consumer's attitude toward the character, that is consumer's parasocial attachment with the character and strength and valence of character's association with the product effects the consumer's attitude towards the placed products. The parasocial relationship can affect what consumers think about or feel about the brand, the buying intent and the buying behavior.

There are many studies about the effect of parasocial relationships on brand attitudes in the context of product placements. Some propose that if association with the characters is positive, than brand attitude can be positive. Conversely if the relationship is negative, than brand attitude can be negative. But there are some researches that propose that there can be some cases that brand attitude can be positive when association with the characters are negative.

As a result the literature review shows that parasocial interaction levels can effect the intent of buying behavior, buying behavior and brand attitude ın the context of product placement.

References

Akıncı, S. & Çakır V. (2017). Para-Sosyal İlişki Teorisi Perspektifinden Ürün Yerleştirme Etkiliği. İNİF E-dergi, 2(2), 210-228.

Atsüren, G. (2014) Sinema Filmlerinde Ürün Yerleştirme Uygulamalarının Etkinliğinin Film Türlerine Göre Karşılaştırılması, Yayımlanmamış yüksek lisans tezi, Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi İşletme Yönetimi Yüksek Lisans Programı

Balasubramanian, S.K., Karrh, J.A., & Patwardhan, H. (2006). Audience response to product placements, an integrative framework and future research agenda. Journal of Advertising, 35(3), 115-141.

Dias, J.A & Dias J. (2014). Direct and Indirect Effects of Parasocial Relationship in Product Placement. 2nd&International&Conference&on&Contemporary&Marketing&Issues!(ICCMI,

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282353736_Direct_and_Indirect_Effects_of_Parasocial_Relationship_in_Product_Placement

Dias J. A. & Dias, J.G. (2017). Can Negative Characters in Soap Operas be Positive for Product Placement?, Journal of Business Research, 71, 125-132.

Gunawardena, A. (2013). When Subtle is the Most Effective. An Analysis of Product Placement Effectiveness in Multitasking Environments, unpublished masters thesis, Auckland University of Technology.

Hudders, L., Cauberge V., Panic K., Faseur T., Zimmerman, E. (2012). Brand Placements in Music Videos. The Effect of Brand Prominence and Artist Connectedness on Brand Recall and Brand Attitude, https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/2950819/file/2956208

Hartmann, Tilo and Charlotte Goldhoorn. 2010. Horton and Wohl revisited: Exploring viewers' experience of parasocial interactions. Paper presented at the annual meeting for the International Communication Association, June 22-26, in Singapore.

Kavallieratou, A. (2013). Utilizing Balance Theory, Parasocial Interaction Theory and Genre Theory in Evaluating Product Placement Effects on Consumer Attitudes, Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Cardiff UniversityMarketing and Strategy Department of Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, England.

Knoll, J. , Schramm, H., Schallhorn, C. & Wynistorf , S. (2015) Good Guy vs. Bad Guy: The Influence of Parasocial Interactions with Media Characters on Brand Placement Effects, International Journal of Advertising, 34:5, 720-743

Lueck,J.A, (2015) Friend-zone with Benefits: The Parasocial Advertising of Kim Kardashian, Journal of Marketing Communications, 21:2, 91-109,

Pickett, R. (2012).Confict Management on the TV Show House, Physician Exee, 38(3), 12-15.

Russell, C.A& Stern, B. (2006). Consumers, Characters and Products. A Balance Model of Sitcom Product Placement Effects, Journal of Advertising, 35, 1; 7-21.