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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Effects of Audience's Attitudes on Actor, Character, Movie and Product Placement on the Brand Attitude

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a shift in consumers' media consumption preferences from traditional to digital platforms. Adblocker applications used by consumers who do not want to be exposed to advertising and the digital platforms that offer ad-free content make it increasingly difficult for brands to reach audiences in a highly saturated advertising environment. In this environment, product placement remains essential in reaching the target audiences due to the advantages it offers to brands compared to traditional advertisements. The aim of this study, being distinctly different from previous research, is to test the effects of attitude toward actor and character on attitude toward movies, product placement, and brand. Furthermore, it is aimed to investigate the serial mediating effect between these attitudinal constructs. The data obtained from 300 participants were analyzed with SmartPLS 3.2.8 using partial least squares path analysis (PLS-SEM). As a result, the attitude toward the actor, character, and movie has direct and indirect effects on product placement and attitude toward the brand. Furthermore, the effect of the attitude toward movies and product placement has a serial mediating effect on the relationship between the attitude toward the actor, the character and the brand.

Keywords

Product Placement, Attitude, Actor, Brand, PLS-SEM

Introduction

Traditional advertising media and messages are skipped without being watched by consumers, therefore making it challenging to reach target consumers. Considering today's consumers, who have a low average attention span, want to access the content they want to watch quickly and smoothly, and skip what they are not interested in without watching it, product placements in videos, movies, and TV series have become more critical and preferred for brands. People can choose whether or not to consume ads, just like products (Tuchman, Wen-Ko, & Liu, 2018).

According to Deloitte's research on ad-blocking behaviors of audiences on various platforms in 2017 (Deloitte, 2017), approximately three-quarters of Americans use at least one

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ad-blocker app, while a smaller subset of about 10% – which is called “adlergic”, a combination of two words, “advertising” and “allergic” – often block ads on platforms in four or more traditional and digital media. When the findings of traditional TV advertising were examined, about 50% of the participants in the United States and Canada stated that there was a fast-forward feature on their televisions and they used it. However, those who do not have TVs with this feature stated that they changed the channel, muted it, left the room or looked at their phones, computers or tablets. When this is examined specifically with regards to Turkey, approximately more than 60% of the participants expressed that they changed the TV channel. For the sampling of all three countries, these rates indicate that the young population (aged 18-34) tends to be much more “adlergic” (Deloitte, 2017).

According to the Association of Advertising Agencies’ report on Media and Advertising Investments in Turkey, advertising and media investments increased by 2.9% to 11 Billion TL as of 2018 (Association of Advertising Agencies, 2018). Looking at these figures, particularly for the World and Turkey, it can be said that a significant proportion of these expenditures are directed to digital channels rather than traditional ads. Therefore, the changing trends in general advertising expenditure in the world has caused the change of the platforms the brands preferred to use in the product placement category. In the United States, the product placement market in live and video-on-demand (VOD) television platforms and digital videos increased by 13.7% to 8.78 Billion Dollars as of 2017 (PQ Media, 2018).

Product placement, which is defined as a combination of advertising and promotion designed to impress the audience by adding branded products without attracting attention on platforms such as movies and TV series, without being aware of the intention of persuading the audience (Balasubramanian, 1994), has continued to be seen as an attractive tool different from traditional means of communication, used in order to change the attitudes mentioned above of the audience, raise brand awareness, recall and, most importantly, affect buying behaviors positively.

The potential effects of product placement in movies and TV series, such as affecting the audience’s attitudes, increasing their awareness toward brands, enriching and differentiating brand experiences, are explained by drawing on various theories in the literature. (Balasubramanian, et al., 2016). The *Meaning Transfer Model* (McCracker, 1989), one of the theories explaining the relationship between product placement and actor and audience in films, explains the transfer of the cultural meanings from actors or celebrities to products and from products to audiences. However, the characters that actors play are just as important as the actors or actresses to explain the relationship between the audience and the products placed in movies. Horton and Whol’s (1956) *The Parasocial Interaction Theory* describes the one-way emotional relationship that the audience develops over time with famous actors or characters in movies or TV series. This relationship increases the emotionally parasocial effect of brands associated with characters represented in a positive context in movies and creates a positive

brand perception (Knoll vd., 2015: 740). Therefore, there seems to be an interaction between the actors/characters in movies and TV series and the brands placed in them.

Therefore, the present study aims to test the effects of consumers' attitudes toward actors and characters on their attitudes toward movies, product placement, and brands, and investigate the serial mediation effects between these attitudinal variables. To suit the purpose of the study, the relations between consumers' attitudes toward actors/actresses and the characters they play, the attitudes toward a movie, the attitudes toward product placement and brand are explained. There are numerous studies published in relation to the product placement practices in different communicational and cultural tools such as movies, TV series and literature and their effect on buying behaviors of individuals (Jin & Villegas, 2007; McKechnie & Zhou, 2003; Barnhardt, Manzano, Brito, Myrick, & Smith 2016), brand recall (Johnstone & Dodd, 2000; Argan, Velioglu, & Argan, 2007) and the attitudes of the audience (Balasubramanian, Karrh & Patwardhan, 2006; Russell & Stern, 2006; Philips, & Noble, 2007; Cowley & Barron, 2008; Sapmaz & Tolon, 2014; Kircova & Şirin, 2017). However, there seems to be a scarcity of research focusing on other attitudinal components affecting the audience's attitudes toward product placement, to the best of the authors' knowledge. This research, which was addressed within the framework of Balasubramanian, Patwardhan, Pillai, & Coker's (2014) research on the components that affect the audience's attitudes, aimed to fill the gap in the literature and explain the other attitude components behind the audience's attitudes toward the brands involved in product placement.

Literature Review

Product Placement

Product placement, which can be defined as a paid product message in which a trade-marked product, product package or logo is placed in a movie or television program in a planned and inconspicuous way to impress the audience (Balasubramanian, 1994), began in the 1930s when American tobacco companies first made payment to movie stars to show their support for their brands (McKechnie & Zhou, 2003).

Product placement, which is the inclusion of branded products and services in mass media (Newell, Salmon, & Chang, 2006), has significantly become a highly preferred practice for marketing professionals and brands in recent years, especially through the increasing diversity in television programs and digital platforms that offer the opportunity to watch movies and TV series over the Internet.

Unlike cable television platforms, Over-the-Top (OTT) viewing, which is referred to as movie or television content that is accessed through a fast Internet connection and does not require any subscription, has become popular especially with applications such as Netflix and

Apple TV as an important platform in this field. The fact that these platforms provide ad-free content is one of the most important reasons for preference for the audience, but it also eliminates the possibility of reaching the audience through television ads by marketing professionals. Therefore, the changing of the audience's media content consumption and streaming platform preferences (Ulker-Demirel, Akyol, & Gölbaşı Şimşek, 2018) has led to a significant change in the direction of the advertising content from traditional media to digital platforms. Along with these platforms offering ad-free content, developments in various media formats have led marketing professionals to prefer alternative advertising forms such as product placement rather than traditional ads. Since the transformation of the audience's habits of entertainment content consumption has changed due to developments in various media formats, marketing professionals face new challenges in the context of brand management strategies (Kim & Shin, 2017).

However, in today's saturated advertising media, hybrid messages such as product placement (Balasubramanian, 1994), may be stronger than traditional ads unless they are perceived by consumers as persuasive messages (Russell, 2002). Therefore, product placement is largely used in the promotion of products through the development / acquisition of individual attitudes of the audience (Su, Huang, Brodowsky, & Kim, 2011). Moreover, the audience, who decides whether or not to watch the ad content in traditional ads, is exposed to and unable to escape the existing content if there is product placement in a movie or TV series. This reveals the most important difference of product placement from traditional advertising tools.

There is an accumulation of literature and an increasing interest in product placement in the literature. Notwithstanding that the current research is based on the recall of the brand being placed (Scott & Craig-Less, 2010; Argan, et al., 2007), consumer attitudes toward the brand (Kırcova & Köse, 2017; Sapmaz & Tolon, 2014), consumer purchase intentions and the effectiveness of product placement (Karrh, Firth, & Callison, 2003; Williams, Petrosky, Hernandez, & Page, 2011), there are also studies on cross-cultural comparisons to examine audience attitudes (McKechnie & Zhou, 2003) and the concepts of *reverse product placement* (Muzellec, Kanitz, & Lynn 2013; Patwardhan & Parwardhan, 2016).

Balasubramanian et al. (2006; 2014) evaluated the attitudes of the audience toward product placement and the factors that could shape the effectiveness of product placement in two categories: stimulus/execution related (prominence, repetition, placement method) and individual difference related (attitude toward practice, specific placement sections, media platform in which the brand is placed, perception of the harmony of the character played by the actor/actress and the product). Since this research focuses on elements that may affect the audience's attitudes and are differentiated individually, the attitude toward the brand will be examined within the framework of the attitudes toward the actor/actress, character, movie, and product placement. Therefore, the effects of attitude toward actor and character on movies, product placement, and finally, brand attitude will be explained, and serial mediation effects between these attitudinal variables will be analyzed.

Product Placement and Attitudinal Constructs

Product placement, which is considered as a form of advertising, has a commercial meaning and content (Tsai, Wen-Ko, & Liu, 2007; Balasubramanian et al., 2014). Research shows that consumers who have a positive attitude toward advertising, in general, are generally also positive to the advertised brand (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). When the audience's attitudes toward product placement were examined, it was seen that they enjoy product placements in movies and TV series because it increased realism, helped in character development, created historical subtexts, and developed familiarity (Nelson & Devanatan, 2006). It is very likely that audiences which show a positive approach to product placement in movies as well as movies where it can be realistically incorporated into the scenario and processed inconspicuously will exhibit positive attitudes toward products for specific product categories. However, this attitude may differ when it comes to products that are considered unethical and need to be restricted, such as cigarettes and alcohol (Gupta & Gould, 1997). Therefore, the attitudes of the audience toward product placement vary according to the media used, target audience and product/service type (Karrh, Mckee, & Pardun, 2001).

Movies as experiential products are considered as brands, because movie sequels are evaluated in the context of brand expansion (Sood & Dreze, 2006). Because movies -like commercial products- have a symbolic dimension, capital, and technological investment, they are released to the market, have intellectual and civil rights, differentiate themselves from other movies, have a strategic asset, and brand value within the brand portfolios of the production companies, for example, the Harry Potter series, The Lord of the Rings Trilogy, Iron Man in Marvel movies, and so on. They are also the values by which 'brand value' can be calculated with box-office returns and by-product revenues, and by which the awareness of the movie brand and recall items can be discussed (O'Reilly & Kerrigan, 2013). Based on these findings, therefore, it is possible to predict that movies as a brand have the potential to affect the attitudes of the audience toward the product placement and the brand being placed.

The attitudes of the audience toward the movie in the literature are significantly and positively related to the prominence of the placement of the brand in the movie in which it appears (Johnstone & Dodd, 2000). Besides, it is predicted that directors and actors/actresses have a significant impact on the creation of the movie brand that in turn can shape the attitude toward the movie. The reason for this is that movies are seen as a brand, which are complex experiential products where the talent and reputation of many elements such as directors, actors, producers, and movie studios come together (Balasubramanian et al., 2014).

Attitude Toward Actress / Actor

In the literature, the audience's interactions with the actor/actress and the character, which have an impact on shaping their attitudes toward the brand in product placement, are explained

within the framework of the meaning transfer model and parasocial theory (Balasubramanian, et al., 2006; Balasubramanian et al., 2014). McCracken's (1989) *meaning transfer model* has been used many times in the literature to explain the use of celebrities in advertising mediums and consumer responses to product placement (Russell, 1998; Kurthakoti, Balasubramanian, & Altobello, 2016). According to McCracken, meaning begins as an established element in the physical and social world, which is constituted with the principles of the culturally dominant culture. Along with the introduction of the generated meaning in the consumer goods, it becomes a part of the daily lives of consumers. Factors such as advertising and fashion play an important role in this transfer between culture, commercial products and consumers. The transfer process begins with deciding which cultural meanings (lifestyle, gender, and so on) or, in its simplest terms, which message should be delivered with the relevant product. It is a bidirectional model that plays a role in transferring the correct meaning both from the actor/actress/celebrity in the movie to the relevant product, and the product to the actor/actress, and thus establishing effective communication with the audience (Balasubramanian et al., 2006).

The meaning transfer model, as a method that can explain the reactions of the audience toward product placement (Srivastava, 2011), is important not only for transferring other attitudinal components that affect the attitudes of the audience toward a brand placed in the movie, but also for the audience to watch content more carefully than traditional ads, and also to be able to naturally transfer the actor/actress's relationship with the placed product by incorporating it into the scenario (Balasubramanian et al., 2014).

Attitude Toward Character

Horton and Wohl (1956) mention a unilateral interpersonal relationship that develops between the audience and the characters on television with parasocial interaction. According to the parasocial theory, the audience develops an affinity and attitude toward the character of the actor/actress in the television programs they watch, and their predictability for that character begins to increase over time (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). The audience begins to recognize and become familiar with those characters, just like their friends, through their appearance, voice, mimics and behaviors over time (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

In terms of product placement, parasocial interaction causes the audience to identify themselves with them and to use them as a model for the right product selection as they get closer to the characters (Russell & Stren, 2006). Therefore, in the light of the parasocial interaction literature, the character of the actor/actress is expected to affect the attitude toward the movie and the TV series and indirectly toward the product placement and the attitude toward the brand where the product placement takes place.

Methodology

The previous studies on product placement in the literature often focused on the purchasing intentions of the audience (Karrh, Firth, & Callison, 2003; Jin & Villegas, 2007), their attitudes to product placement (Russell & Stern, 2006; Cowley & Barron, 2008), and the effect of product placement on the attitudes of the audience toward a brand (Kırcova & Köse, 2017). However, there may be some other factors influencing people’s attitudes and behaviors toward product placement. The meaning transfer model suggests that the audience’s attitudes toward brands can be influenced by the interactions between audiences, brands, and the celebrities with whom the audience interacts (McCracker, 1989). Similarly, the parasocial interaction theory posits that the audience’s attitudes toward actors and characters in movies or TV series may be influenced by the emotional relationship they develop over time. Drawing from these two theories, the celebrities in movies and TV series, the characters they play, and the audience seem to be closely linked to the audience’s attitude toward the movies because the actors and the characters they play affect the audiences’ movie preferences to a great extent (Ulker-Demirel et al., 2018). Therefore, we hypothesize that the attitudes toward actors and characters could affect the attitudes toward the movie, the product placement in the movie, and, thus, the brand.

Conceptual Model and Hypotheses Development

As a result of the current literature review, the research model and hypotheses based on the variables used in the literature in accordance with the purpose of the research are given below.

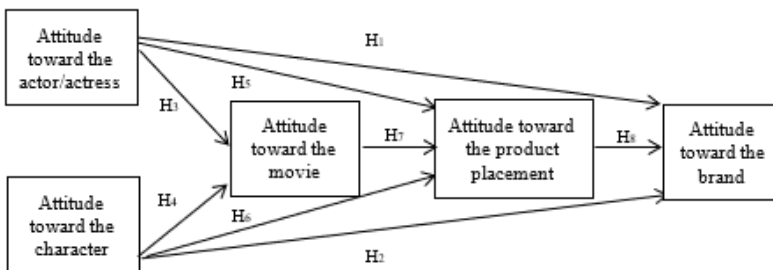


Figure 1. Research Model

H₁: Attitude toward the actor/actress has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand

H₂: Attitude toward the character has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand

H₃: Attitude toward the actor / actress has a positive effect on attitude toward the movie

H₄: Attitude toward the character has a positive effect on attitude toward the movie

H₅: Attitude toward the actor / actress has a positive effect on attitude toward the product placement

H₆: Attitude toward the character has a positive effect on attitude toward the product placement

H₇: Attitude toward the movie has a positive effect on attitude toward the product placement

H₈: Attitude toward the product placement has a positive effect on attitude toward the brand

H₉: Attitude toward the movie and attitude toward product placement have a serial mediating effect on the relationship between attitude toward the actor/actress and attitude toward the brand.

H₁₀: Attitude toward the movie and attitude toward product placement have a serial mediating effect on the relationship between attitude toward the character and attitude toward the brand.

Measurement of Constructs

Studies in the literature were used to measure the variables of the research. The attitude toward the actor was taken from Ohanian's (1990) study and measured 15 items, while the attitude toward the movie was taken from d'Astous & Touil's (1999) study and used 4 items. For attitudinal variables toward the character, brand and product placement, Balasubramanian et al.'s (2014) study was used and they were measured using 5, 4 and 4 items, respectively.

Sample and Procedure

This study aimed to connect with audiences who watch movies/TV series. Participants, who are young people watching movies/TV series at least once a week, were recruited because young audiences' subscription rates, particularly in the X and Y generations, to platforms such as online and paid channels, and the rates of movie and series watching are higher than the older groups (Iqbal, 2020; Westcott et al., 2020; Balasubramanian et al., 2014). Therefore, undergraduate and graduate students with different demographic backgrounds made up the sample of the study. Due to population size, time, and cost constraints, the research data was instantly collected using the non-probability convenience sampling technique.

A survey, which included closed-end and pre-prepared questions, was used as the data collection method in the research. The survey consisted of three sections and 40 questions. In the first section, the participants were asked to specify the name of the movie/TV series they had watched in the last week, the brand name they remember, and the sector to which the brand belongs, as well as the name of the actor/actress appearing with the brand. The reason for the limitation to the last week was to enable them to answer the questions correctly in the first section and then to answer other questions on the basis of their responses in this first section. In addition, it is not possible for individuals who have been exposed to product placement to be able to remember the brand for a long time, and therefore the data should be collected within a very short period of time after product placement (Mackay, Ewing, Newton, & Windisch, 2009; Balasubramanian et al., 2014). The second section included 32 items measuring the variables of the research. The participants were asked to evaluate the questions in the survey on the basis of the items with a 5-point semantic differential scale for the items measuring the attitude toward the actor/actress, character, brand, product placement, and the attitude toward the movie. In the last section, their age, gender, education and frequency of watching movies were asked.

The survey was conducted between 15 April and 15 June 2019. Of the 500 face-to-face and online surveys distributed, 357 were answered and returned. The rate of return was 71.4%. The participants were expected to answer the questions completely in the first section of the survey, including the name of the movie/TV series they had watched, the brand name that stuck in their mind, the sector to which the brand belongs, and the name of the actor/actress. In this section, 300 useable surveys were obtained due to the exclusion of those with missing requested information. However, the information obtained was verified from multiple sources, through both movie sites and the website available for the movie or TV series, in order to ensure the accuracy of the movie, brand, sector and actor/actress specified in the surveys for the reliability of the research (e.g. IMDB, sinemalar.com, beyazperde.com). Of the participants, 46.3% were female (N=139) and 53.7% were male (N=161), 67.7% were between the ages of 18-24 (N=203), 85% were doing an undergraduate degree (N=255), 42.3% of the subjects who participated in the research watched movies/TV series several times a week.

Results

Measurement Model

Before the analysis of the research model, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were evaluated. For internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) coefficients were examined. The average-variance-extracted (AVE) values by factor loadings were used to determine convergent validity.

Therefore, factor loadings as ≥ 0.70 , Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability coefficients as ≥ 0.70 and also average-variance-extracted value as ≥ 0.50 were expected (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006; Hair, Tomas, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results of the constructs within the scope of the research for internal consistency reliability and convergent validity are given in Table 1.

Table 1
Measurement Model Estimates

Construct	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE				
Attitude toward the Actor/ Actress	ATA6	0.737	0.894	0.912	0.511				
	ATA7	0.773							
	ATA8	0.742							
	ATA9	0.760							
	ATA10	0.778							
	ATA11	0.674							
	ATA12	0.665							
	ATA13	0.674							
	ATA14	0.709							
	ATA15	0.616							
	Attitude toward the char- acter	ATC1				0.813	0.847	0.891	0.621
		ATC2				0.807			
		ATC3				0.801			
		ATC4				0.786			
		ATC5				0.729			
Attitude toward the movie	ATM1	0.903	0.910	0.937	0.789				
	ATM2	0.810							
	ATM3	0.932							
	ATM4	0.903							
Attitude toward the product placement	ATP1	0.894	0.856	0.904	0.703				
	ATP2	0.920							
	ATP3	0.815							
	ATP4	0.711							
Attitude toward the brand	ATB1	0.912	0.916	0.941	0.799				
	ATB2	0.903							
	ATB3	0.924							
	ATB4	0.834							

According to Hair et al. (2014), factor loadings should be ≥ 0.70 . The authors suggest that items with factor loadings below 0.40 should be excluded from the measurement model and items with factor loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 should be excluded from the measurement model in cases of an increase in AVE or CR values. Therefore, items 4 and 5 of the attitudes toward the actor/actress with factor loadings below 0.40 and the items 1, 2, and 3 of AVE values with the same scale below the threshold value were excluded from the measurement model. Since the calculated AVE and CR values were higher than the threshold values after the items were removed, the other items with a factor loading below 0.708 were not excluded

from the scale. It can be stated that the internal consistency reliability of the constructs was demonstrated because the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients are between 0.847 and 0.916, and the CR coefficients are also between 0.891 and 0.941. When the values in the table were examined, it is possible to state that convergent validity was demonstrated, since the factor loadings were between 0.616 and 0.932, and the AVE values were between 0.511 and 0.799. The mean scores of constructs ranged from 3.95 (attitude toward product placement) to 4.35 (attitude toward the movie). It can be stated that the participant perceptions toward the research constructs were generally higher than the average value (according to a 5-point Likert). The descriptive statistics of constructs are illustrated in the table given in Appendix A.

The criteria proposed by Fornell & Larcker (1981) and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criteria proposed by Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt (2015) were considered in order to determine the discriminant validity. According to Fornell & Larcker's (1981) criteria, the square root of the AVE values of the constructs in the research should be greater than the correlations between the construct in the research. Therefore, Table 2 shows the analysis results according to Fornell & Larcker's (1981) criteria.

Table 2
Comparison of Square Roots of AVE's and Correlations to Assess Discriminant Validity

	ATM	ATC	ATB	ATA	ATP
ATM	(0.888)				
ATC	0.357	(0.788)			
ATB	0.225	0.469	(0.894)		
ATA	0.351	0.454	0.468	(0.715)	
ATP	0.393	0.478	0.601	0.440	(0.839)

The values in parentheses in Table 2 are the square root values of AVE. When these values were examined, the square root of average-variance-extracted of each construct was higher than its correlation with other constructs.

According to Henseler, et al.,'s (2015) criteria, HTMT expresses the ratio of the average of the correlations of items of all variables in the research (the heterotrait-hetero-method correlations) to the geometric means of the correlations of items of the same variable (the monotrait-hetero-method correlations). The authors stated that the value of HTMT should be less than 0.90, but it should be below 0.85 as content for the concepts far away from each other. HTMT values are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3
Values of discriminant validity according to HTMT Criteria

	ATM	ATC	ATB	ATA	ATP
ATM					
ATC	0.400				
ATB	0.243	0.529			
ATA	0.391	0.522	0.508		
ATP	0.450	0.551	0.666	0.481	

When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that HTMT values were below the threshold value. Based on the findings in Table 2 and Table 3, it is possible to say that the discriminant validity was determined.

Structural Model

The structural equation modeling developed to test the hypotheses of the research is shown in Figure 2.

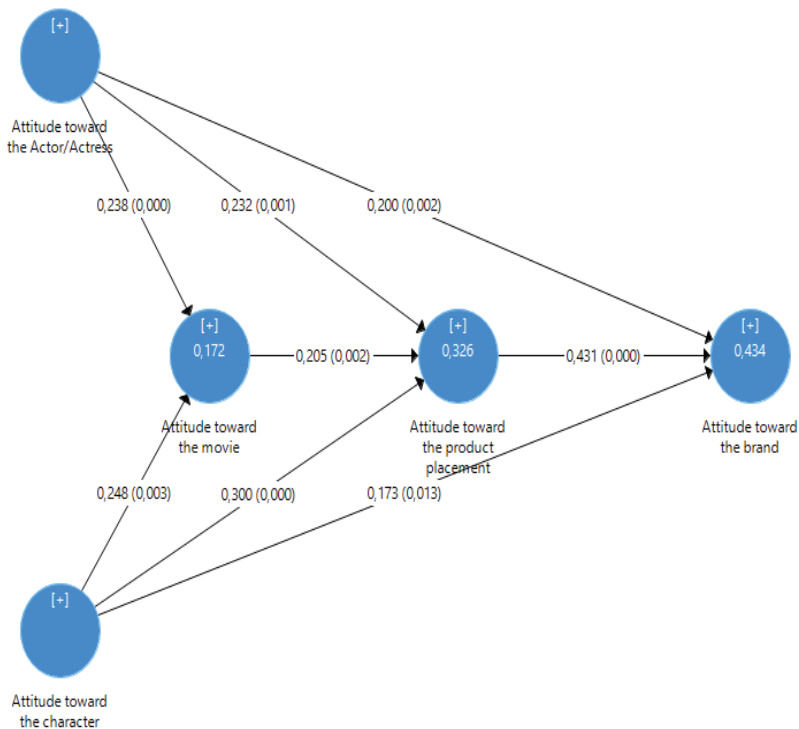


Figure 2. Structural Model

The partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the research model, and the data obtained were analyzed using SmartPLS 3.2.8 statistical program (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015). It was preferred to use PLS-SEM, as the existence of two mediator variables in the research model and the serial mediation effect were wanted to be tested. As part of the research model, the PLS algorithm was used for calculating linearity, path coefficients, R², and effect size (f²) and Blindfolding analysis for estimating power (Q²). Bootstrapping was used to assess the significance of the PLS path coefficients and to take 5000 subsamples for the sample to calculate their t-values. The R², f², Q², and VIF values of the research results are given in Table 4.

Table 4
The Results of the R², f² and Q²

Constructs		VIF	R ²	f ²	Q ²
ATA	ATM	1.260	0.172	0.054	0.122
ATC		1.260		0.059	
ATA	ATP	1.328	0.326	0.060	0.211
ATC		1.334		0.100	
ATM		1.208		0.052	
ATA	ATB	1.371	0.434	0.052	0.321
ATC		1.433		0.037	
ATP		1.410		0.233	

When the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values between variables were examined, it was seen that they had a threshold value below 5, so there was no collinearity issue among the constructs (Hair et al., 2014).

When the R² values of the model were examined, it was found that the attitude toward the movie was explained as 17%, the attitude toward product placement as 33%, and the attitude toward the brand as 43%. For the effect size coefficient (f²), ≥ 0.02 was considered as low, ≥ 0.15 as medium and ≥ 0.35 as high (Cohen, 1988). Sarstedt, Ringle, & Hair (2017) also stated that there was an effect in cases where the coefficient was less than 0.02. When the effect size coefficient (f²) was examined, it was found that the attitude toward the actor/actress and character had a low effect on the attitude toward the movie, the attitude toward the actor/actress, character and movie had a low effect on the attitude toward product placement, the attitude toward the actor/actress and character had a low effect on the attitude toward the brand, and the attitude toward product placement had a medium effect on the attitude toward the brand.

When the calculated estimating power coefficients of the endogenous variables (Q²) are greater than 0, it shows that the research model has an estimating power for the endogenous variables (Hair et al., 2014). As the Q² values in Table 4 are greater than 0, it can be stated that

the research model has the estimating power for the attitudinal variables toward the movie, product placement and brand.

Table 5 shows the results of hypothesis testing and structural relationships. The model was tested by excluding the mediating variables from it to calculate the total effect of the attitude toward the actor/actress and character on the attitude toward the brand. As a result of the test, it was found that there was an effect of the attitude toward the actor/actress on the attitude toward the brand ($\beta=0.327$; $p<0.01$) and the attitude toward the character on the attitude toward the brand ($\beta=0.324$; $p<0.01$). Based on this result, hypotheses H₁ and H₂ of the research were supported.

In the second stage, the mediating variables were included in the model to test the significance of the path coefficients. It was seen that there were significant effects of the attitude toward the actor/actress ($\beta=0.238$; $p<0.01$) and character ($\beta=0.248$; $p<0.01$) on the attitude toward the movie, the attitude toward the actor/actress ($\beta=0.232$; $p<0.01$), character ($\beta=0.300$; $p<0.01$) and movie ($\beta=0.205$; $p<0.01$) on the attitude toward product placement, and the attitude toward product placement on the attitude toward the brand ($\beta=0.431$; $p<0.01$). In the light of these findings, hypotheses H₃, H₄, H₅, H₆, H₇, and H₈ of the research were supported.

Table 5
The Results of Hypothesis Testing and Structural Relationships

Constructs	Standardize β	Std. Deviation	t Value	p	%95 Confidence Int.
H ₁ : ATA ATB	0.327	0.066	4.978	0.000	0.186; 0.445
H ₂ : ATC ATB	0.324	0.069	4.700	0.000	0.189; 0.455
H ₃ : ATA ATM	0.238	0.059	4.014	0.000	0.114; 0.347
H ₄ : ATC ATM	0.248	0.082	3.020	0.003	0.075; 0.402
H ₅ : ATA ATP	0.232	0.072	3.213	0.001	0.077; 0.360
H ₆ : ATC ATP	0.300	0.080	3.730	0.000	0.135; 0.448
H ₇ : ATM ATP	0.205	0.067	3.044	0.002	0.076; 0.343
H ₈ : ATP ATB	0.431	0.067	6.465	0.000	0.301; 0.560

Baron and Kenny's procedures for mediation analyses, which Zhao et al. (2010) proposed, were used. The results for the serial mediation effect are presented in Table 6. When the findings of the table were examined, the total indirect effects were found to be significant between the attitudes toward the actor/actress and the brand ($\beta=0.121$; $p<0.01$), as well as the attitudes toward the character and the brand ($\beta=0.151$; $p<0.01$). According to Zhao et al. (2010), the relationship between the attitude toward the actor and character, and the attitude toward the brand, has a complementary mediating effect. The Variance-Accounted-For (VAF) coefficients were calculated for the total indirect effects because indirect effects were detected (Dogan, 2018). As the calculated VAF coefficients between the attitudes toward the actor/actress and the brand were 0.27, and 0.32 between the attitudes toward the character and the brand, it can be stated that the attitude toward the movie and product placement has a serial

mediating effect on the relationship between the attitude toward the actor/actress and the character and the attitude toward the brand. For the model without any mediating variable, R² of the attitude toward the brand was 31%, while there was an increase of 43% in R² for the model with mediating variables, which could be considered as proof of the mediating role of the attitude toward the movie and product placement. In line with these findings, hypotheses H₉ and H₁₀ of the research were supported.

Table 6
Results of the Serial Mediation Effect

Constructs	Standardize β	Standard Dvt.	t Value	p	95% Confidence Interval
ATA ATB (Total Indirect Effect)	0.121	0.039	3.110	0.002	0.051; 0.202
ATA ATP ATB	0.100	0.036	2.764	0.006	0.036; 0.175
ATA ATM ATP ATB	0.021	0.010	2.142	0.032	0.007; 0.048
ATC ATB (Total Indirect Effect)	0.151	0.037	4.072	0.000	0.088; 0.238
ATC ATP ATB	0.129	0.038	3.410	0.001	0.063; 0.215
ATC ATM ATP ATB	0.022	0.011	1.920	0.055	0.007; 0.055

Conclusions and Future Directions

This study, which addressed the attitude toward the actor, character, and movie as attitudinal components that may affect the attitude toward product placement and brand, aimed to explain the effect of the variables that shape the attitudes of the audience toward the brand being placed. Nowadays, consumers’ preferences for a movie and TV series viewing platform are shifting toward digital media and service providers that offer ad-free content, so product placement becomes much more critical for brands, as it is a practice that maintains this advantage. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the attitudes of the audience toward product placement and brand and to consider the factors shaping these attitudes in order to create a competitive advantage.

Actors/Actresses can be considered as one of the main variables shaping the audience’s attitude toward a movie, as they are an essential element of its box office success (Elberse, 2007). This is an important finding for both production companies and brands because it can be predicted that besides the effect of the actor/actress on the box-office return, its interaction with the brand being placed can indirectly affect the attitude toward the movie and thus the attitude toward the product placement and the brand. For marketers, actors and actresses not only influence the box office success but also shape the audience. Actors and actresses are effective in shaping the attitudes of the audience, recalling, as well as creating a buzz. The audience cannot judge a movie without seeing it; however, the actors may successfully shape

perceptions of the audience and contribute to the formation of a marketing buzz acting as “connector” between the audience and the movie (Mohr, 2007). Therefore, influential placements, prolonged air-time and visibility often lead to higher levels of brand recall (Brennan et al., 1999; Wilson & Till, 2011: 394).

The attitude toward the character has a direct effect on the attitude toward the movie, and an indirect effect on the attitude toward the brand. The characteristics of the character in the watched movie or TV series and its relationship with the brand or product being placed affect the attitudes of the audience toward the brand. Especially if the character’s attitude toward the product being placed is positive, the character affects the audience’s attitude toward the relevant product (Russell & Stern, 2006). Identifying brands with actors/actresses and characters in movies plays an essential role in increasing credibility for viewers (Morton & Friedman, 2002). Therefore, a product placement compatible with the character has the potential to create awareness for the relevant brand, and positively affect the brand image. However, the critical point that should be considered for marketing managers is that the image and values created by the characters in the movie or series must be fitted with the brand’s values.

Consistent with the findings of Balasubramanian et al. (2014), the general attitudes of the audience toward the movie affect the attitudes toward product placement and thus to the brand. When the audience enjoys a movie or TV series, has a positive approach, or follows a movie series or TV series, their attitudes toward product placement in that movie or TV series are generally affected, thereby causing them to exhibit a similar assessment for the brand.

When the findings of the research were examined, product placement in movies and TV series, as supported by the literature, has an impact on the attitude toward the brand being placed (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989; Balasubramanian, 2014). Therefore, in today’s intense advertising and competitive environment, it is possible to predict that a brand that is correctly and inconspicuously incorporated into the scenario will create audience awareness and shape their attitudes toward the brand. However, it should be taken into consideration that an audience who has a negative attitude toward product placement can also reason out the relevant brand in this manner. Thus, it is essential to implement a strategic plan for the process. In the light of the aim of the communication strategy, product placements need to be integrated into the overall communications strategy, and integrated into the media plan as a new medium (Russell & Belch, 2005). Besides, importance should be placed on the fit of actors or characters’ images with the brand’s image and the meaning transfer between them.

One of the most critical limitations of this research was that the participants were asked to recall and specify information about the movie they have watched in the last week, the brand being placed, the actor/actress, the character and the sector to which the brand belongs. This situation corresponds to a significant limitation for the research, as well as correctly answering specific questions about variables and contributing to finding reliable results for the

research. The exclusion of surveys with missing information led to the fact that a significant portion of these surveys was also not addressed in this context, although many of them were obtained. Therefore, limited data were studied. Longer time intervals in future research may contribute to a study with more surveys.

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Appendix A.

Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Att. Actor	300	1,00	5,00	4,0090	,79918	-,804	,141	,326	,281
Att. Character	300	1,00	5,00	4,1880	,77563	-1,291	,141	2,193	,281
Att. Movie	300	1,00	5,00	4,3542	,85496	-1,598	,141	2,465	,281
Att. Placement	300	1,00	5,00	3,9475	,96031	-,969	,141	,516	,281
Att. Brand	300	1,00	5,00	3,9808	,99762	-1,097	,141	,920	,281
Valid N (listwise)	300								