I. Introduction

As consumers are now bombarded with numerous advertising messages, they rarely attend to the messages. In a world of advertising clutter, consumers feel tired of too many ads and express negativity toward advertising (Greenspan, 2004). Confronted with new technologies that allow consumers to skip, mute, and avoid ads, traditional advertising become much less effective than ever before (Kiley, 2006). Marketers strive to develop multiple ways to expose their products and brands unobtrusively to consumers without noise. One of the ways for fashion brands to advertise their products and brands is product placements in television shows, movies, sports games, and other entertainment shows that their target

Product–Story Congruence and Actor Attractiveness in Product Placements in Television Drama

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Abstract

As more consumers avoid ads aided by advanced technologies that conveniently block ads, traditional advertising is becoming less effective than ever before. Product placements are increasingly executed to unobtrusively expose products and brands to consumers while they watch media programs. The current study attempts to enhance our understanding of the factors that affect consumer attitude towards the brands placed in TV dramas. In particular, this study examines whether the attractiveness of actors and the congruency between the products placed and the story of the TV drama influence consumer attitudes towards the TV drama and the brand. A total of 211 male consumers in their 20s and 30s were used for data analyses. Structural equation modelling revealed that the product–story congruence had a positive impact on consumer attitude towards the TV drama as well as their attitude towards the brand. Actor attractiveness (in terms of similarity and likability) positively influenced consumer attitude towards the brand. Only the perceived likability dimension of actor attractiveness was found to affect consumer attitude towards the TV drama.

Keywords: Product placement, Story congruence, Actor attractiveness, Likability, Similarity
consumers may pay attention to (Kim & Kim, 2004).

Among various media outlets, television is a major industry for product placements (Kim & Kim, 2004; Nathanson, 2013). Since television dramas (TV dramas) are typically broadcasted in a series of episodes for months, embedded products tend to be exposed multiple times. Moreover, the narrative structure of dramas engages viewers’ eyes and minds because viewers are likely to feel familiar with stories and characters of the dramas which reflect moments of everyday life and make progress as each episode unfolds (Su, Huang, Brodowski, & Kim, 2011). Thus, product placements allow marketers advertise their products and brands to viewers in a sophisticated way (Karrh, McKee, & Pardum, 2003).

The effectiveness of product placements in TV drama are observed by the commercial success of products and brands placed in popular programs. For example, sales of products that include fashion and cosmetics products used by characters, Jun Ji-hyun (Gianna Jun) and Kim Soo-hyun, from "My Love from the Star" soared after placements (Tian, 2014). Besides, product placements in TV dramas now play a crucial role in affecting global consumers as well (Doland, 2014). For instance, the recent TV drama, "Descendants of the Sun," has been viewed more than 440 million times through streaming sites in China, which boosts the sales of products and Korean economy as well (Cho, 2016).

Then, what makes product placement advertising effective? The examples of "My Love from the Star" and "Descendants of the Sun" suggest that actors and actresses surely play a role in the success of TV drama as well as product placements (Cho, 2016; Tian, 2014). A role of actors in product placements may become more significant for fashion products than other categories of products since fashion products are displayed on the actors and actresses who affect the general image of the products and brands (Kim & Kweon, 2003).

In addition to the significant role of actors played in leading to the success of TV drama and product placements, the story of TV drama is another important factor to consider since the story is one of the main reasons why people watch a series of episodes each week. Viewers express that product placements are sometimes too excessive and obvious to get immersed in the story, venting negative feelings toward the TV program as well as the brands placed in the program (Park, 2016). In fact, casting a few highly paid actors under the limited budget of the production fee sometimes causes a poor outcome of the television drama, which may harm the success of the TV program and product placements (Park, 2016). It is because a few actors’ high paycheck tends to account for a big portion of the production fee, which makes the production companies to depend highly on product placements to cover the rest of production costs (Park, 2016). Excessive use of product placements fails to be integrated into the context of the drama story, which interrupt the flow of the stories (Park, 2016).

In order to draw attention from viewers and to increase advertising revenue, actors are a major factor to consider as can be observed by many TV drama production companies that wish to use famous actors under a limited budget. At the same time, the fit between embedded products and TV drama should be taken into consideration since product placement advertising is intended to embed products and brands in media programs so that they are
unobtrusively exposed to viewers while viewers watch the programs. Thus, actors as well as products fit to the context of TV drama are important factors to consider to the success of TV drama and to the effectiveness of product placements.

The current research aims to explore whether the congruence between products placed and stories of TV drama and actor characteristics influence consumer attitudes toward the TV drama and the placed brand. This study specifically tests young male consumers in their 20s and 30s. Male consumers in their 20s and 30s, unlike previous generations, now show a great interest in fashion items (Kim, 2011). As more young male consumers care about how they dress compared to previous generations, the growth of menswear market has been faster than that of female market (Bazaiil, 2014). Moreover, young male consumers tend to be more receptive to product placements in TV programs than females their age ("Tracking young male consumers’ media habits," 2008). Nevertheless, little research on fashion product placements has been conducted on young male consumers. Thus, the current study focuses on young male consumers to explore how they respond to the fashion brands exposed through TV drama.

II. Literature Review

1. Product Placement

Product placement (also called brand placement) is the "paid inclusion of branded products or brand identifiers through audio and/or visual means, within mass media programming" (Karrh, 1998, p.33). Through mass media programs, products and brands are integrated into stories of the programs and unobtrusively exposed to consumers, which influences consumers to be aware of and to have intentions to purchase the products (Cho, 2007). As more consumers avoid ads aided by advanced technologies that conveniently block ads, product placements are increasingly executed in a more sophisticated way (Galasubramanian, Karrh, & Patwardhan, 2006).

Product placements increase viewers’ awareness of products and brands placed in media since the products are exposed to the viewers who attend to and are highly engaged in the media programs (Karrh, 1998; Nanthanson, 2013). Thus, people become familiar and possess favorable attitudes towards the products and brands placed in the media. One of the famous example is the increased sales of Reese’s Pieces after the movie, E.T., released in early 1980s (Nanthanson, 2013).

Since brands buy a scene of media programs in exchange for placing their products in the program, they expect high returns. As product placements advertising strategy seems to be more effective than other advertising strategies, marketers have become aggressive in executing product placements and seek the opportunity to take control over how they products appear in the media program (Karrh et al, 2003). But, placing products into TV drama without thoughtful considerations about context can lead to negative feelings towards the TV drama. In fact, viewers sometimes exhibit negativity towards the product placements since it interrupts the story (Park, 2016). That is, blatant placement showing a close-up detail of products out of context interrupting the story and the characters in programs possibly make viewers to feel uncomfortable (Park, 2016).
In fact, the effectiveness of product placements is related to the success of TV drama. Previous research has shown that viewers’ feelings induced by media programs positively affect their cognitive and emotional responses towards the products placed in the media programs (Davis, Hull, Young, & Warren, 1987; Goldberg & Gorn, 1987). For example, a TV program presented in a happier tone induce a viewer to stay in happy mood, which leads to the viewer to process the relevant information in a more favorable way, which, in turn, to elicit more favorable attitudes towards the brands embedded in the TV program than that in a negative tone. Thus, consumers’ feelings generated by satisfied TV drama will influence their attitudes towards the brands placed in the TV drama. If consumers exhibit negative feelings due to any interruptions of product placements, the negative feelings would then lead to negative attitudes towards the TV drama. Therefore, it is expected that viewer’s attitudes towards the TV drama will influence their attitudes towards the brand placed in the TV drama.

H1: Consumer attitude toward the TV drama will positively influence attitude toward the placed brand.

2. Product–Story Congruence

Product–story congruence in this study refers to the degree to which the product placed in TV drama is well integrated into the plot and story of the drama. Placed product–story congruence can be explained by the literature on the ad–context congruence (Myers, Royne, & Deitz, 2014; Segev, Wang, & Fernandes, 2014; Zanjani, Diamond, & Chan, 2011). The literature shows that the congruence between an ad and its contextual environments increases the recall of the ad, consumer attitudes and purchase intentions (Myers et al., 2014; Segev et al., 2014; Zanjani et al., 2011).

According to the literature on context effects, context plays a role in one’s processing of information, which consequently affects his or her attitude toward the information (Tourangeau & Ransinski, 1988; Tybout, Sternthal, Malaviya, Bakamitsos, & Park, 2005). Media context, defined as the “characteristics of the content of the medium in which an ad is inserted” (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Anckaert, 2002, p.49), is important in information processing because one’s information processing is affected by his or her knowledge structure (schemas). The previous research shows that characteristics of media consistent to those of the product placed in the media stimulate accessing the relevant knowledge and associations, which facilitates information processing (De Pelsmacker et al., 2002). The literature suggests that media context should be matched to type of product categories for effective communications (De Pelsmacker et al., 2002).

The literature of contextual priming has shown that contextual factors trigger certain attributes about the ad and product information, which influences attitudes about the advertised product and the ad (Yi, 1990). Presentation of a priming object activates the relevant information in the memory, which leads to subsequent judgments and attitudes in the same direction (Fazio, Powell, & William, 1989; Yi, 1990). Since the context of an ad facilitates the retrieval of relevant information and subsequent processing of the ad, it influences product evaluations and attitudes (Tybout et al., 2005).

Advertising research has shown that an ad placed in a congruent context to the ad is more effective than the ad in an incongruent context
(Bloxham, 1998; Yi, 1990, 1993; Zanjani et al, 2011). A strong association between the product placed and the context facilitates a viewer’s cognitive elaboration, which leads to outcomes in a consistent way (Galasubramanian et al., 2006). In other words, a lack of congruence interferes consumers from engaging in the story, which leads to the negative feelings towards the ads and products placed (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989). When the viewers attend to TV advertising with high involvement, a sudden intrusion by the obvious advertising of a product during a TV program upsets viewers, which then leads to a negative attitudes toward the TV program as well as the advertising (Wang & Calder, 2006). On the contrary, viewers become engaged and have favorable attitudes when products placed are well integrated into the story (Myers et al., 2014). Products that are well integrated into the story facilitate TV drama to deliver the message and to communicate the story of TV drama. Since it facilitates viewers to engage in TV drama, the congruency lead to viewers’ favorable responses toward the TV program and the brand placed. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Product-story congruency will positively influence (a) attitude toward the TV drama and (b) attitude toward the placed brand.

3. Actor Characteristics

In any marketing communications, the source, referred to as the “person involved in communicating a marketing message, either directly or indirectly” (Belch & Belch, 2015, p.184), plays an important role in persuading receivers of the messages. Since the source can either enhance or lessen the effectiveness of communications, marketers tend to be very careful in selecting the source to send their messages to consumers (Belch & Belch, 2015). Since fashion products and brands are exposed as being worn by an actor(s) in TV drama, the actor(s) would be the source of the communication. Thus, characteristics of an actor(s) should be carefully examined for executing product placements in TV dramas.

In general, characteristics of the source, which affect effective communications and the sales, include attractiveness, credibility, and power (Belch & Belch, 2015). Kelman (1961) proposes three processes through which an individual accepts messages from the source, which are internalization, compliance, and identification. Each process is associated with different characteristic of the source: credibility, power, and attractiveness, respectively (Belch & Belch, 2015). For example, the source’s credibility facilitates the process of internalization while one’s power leads to the process of compliance. When selecting the source, source characteristics are considered according to the intended communication process (Belch & Belch, 2015). For instance, in order to facilitate one’s internalization process, marketers attempts to convey the image of credibility of the source by using company leaders and endorsers with expertise and credible image in an ad. Marketers of fashion brands attempt to persuade consumers by making their products desirable and wanted. For advertising fashionable products, marketers tend to depend on the attractiveness of the source in order to persuade consumers, who may imagine themselves on the products as they identify with the source in the ad (Belch & Belch, 2015).

In such ads for consumer goods, model attractiveness also serves as a halo effect. That is, consumers use a heuristic rule in information
processing (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991). The notion of ‘what is beautiful is good’ is used when consumers evaluate models of ads as well as the products that are associated with the models (DeBono & Harnish, 1988).

Best known factors contributing to consumers’ perceived attractiveness of the actor are similarity, likability, and familiarity (Belch & Belch, 2015). Since attractiveness is the eye of the beholder, the viewer’s perceived attractiveness is determined by the perceived similarity with the viewer, perceived likability, and the perceived familiarity of the source (Lorenzo, Biesanz, & Human, 2010). In TV drama, the famous actor is likely to be selected as a main character. Most viewers tend to be familiar with the actors of TV drama in the beginning. While the degree of a viewer’s perceived familiarity is relatively high, the viewer’s degree of likability and of similarity would be the main factors that accounts for the perceived attractiveness of actors in TV drama.

Source attractiveness leads to viewers’ development of attitudes toward TV drama and product placements. Consumer attitudes are developed through peripheral routes when they are under low involvement with the information of the story, products or brands (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). While watching TV drama, viewers are not intentionally processing the information about the TV drama as well as the products embedded in the program. Especially under such a low elaboration situation, attractiveness of the source serves as a heuristic cue in their judgements of the ad and the advertised product (Kang & Herr, 2006). Therefore, source attractiveness will influence consumer attitudes toward the program and the brand.

Similarity is the best known factor that contributes to liking. The literature on psychology has shown that we tend to like someone when he or she is more similar to us (Montoya, Horton, & Kirchner, 2008). Individuals show a favorable attitude not only toward people but also toward objects and brands (Till & Busler, 2000). The thesis of similarity-based liking suggests that the source (the actor in TV drama) is not necessarily beautiful and physically attractive. Instead, a degree of perceived similarity induces positive responses toward the source and the objects associated with the source (Montoya et al., 2008). Based on the previous research, it is reasonable to expect that a viewer’s perceived similarity with the actor generates positive attitudes toward the TV drama and the placed brand.

Previous research suggests that viewers’ attitudes towards the brand were strongly influenced by their attitudes towards the characters (Kim & Kweon, 2003; Kweon, 2002). When the character was personally likable than when the character was personally dislikable, their attitudes toward the placed brand were found to be higher (Schemer, Matthes, Wirth, & Textor, 2008). Another study shows that, when being worn by a disliked artist, the brand attitude was negative (Schemer et al., 2008). Thus, it is expected that the degree of liking toward the actor leads to viewer’s attitudes toward the TV drama and the placed brand.

H3: The perceived similarity will positively influence (a) attitude toward the TV drama and (b) attitude toward the placed brand.

H4: The perceived likability will positively influence (a) attitude toward the TV drama and (b) attitude toward the placed brand.

A hypothesized model is presented in Figure 1.
III. Method

1. Research Procedure

The online survey was conducted to collect the data administered by a Korean online market research firm. The firm distributed an invitation to the survey’s URL to the set of consumer panel. Participants who agreed to participate in the survey and met the following criteria responded to the survey: male consumers who aged from 20 to 39.

In order to reduce an idiosyncratic effect caused by their previous exposure to particular TV programs, male consumers who had watched two Korean TV drama selected by the researchers participated in the survey. The Korean TV drama were [The Heirs] and [I can hear your voices], which were selected based on the fact that both of them were popular in 2013 and that male actors in the drama received great attention from viewers. Two versions of survey was developed based on two TV dramas used for this research. Each survey contains the same questions but directing either of the two TV drama. That is, each participant was directed to one of the surveys about one of the TV dramas that they had watched.

The procedure was as follows: Once each participant was directed one of the surveys for one of the TV drama, a brief explanation about the TV drama was provided. Then, he was exposed to four different clips in a sequence that were selected from the TV drama. The product placed in the four clips was outdoor jacket. Then, the participant was asked to finish the questionnaire.

2. Measures

All multi-item measures were adapted from previous studies. To measure product–context congruency, measure items were adapted from Choi & Kim (2012). Actor attractiveness was measured using items from Park (2008). Measure items for attitudes were adapted from Song (2015). All items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale with anchors of “strongly disagree” as 1 to “strongly agree” as 7.
3. Sample Characteristics

A total of 211 male consumers in their 20s and 30s who expressed that they had watched either of the TV dramas were used for the data analysis. As can be seen in Table 1, our consumers aged ranging from 20 to 39. By occupation, office workers(41.2%) were predominant, followed by students(29.0%).

Majority of the respondents are college students or college graduates(74.9%). By household monthly income, 25.6% of the respondents reported their average monthly income to be between 2,000,000 won and 3,000,000 won, 18.5% of the respondents to be less than 1,000,000 won, and 17.1% between 3,000,00 won and 4,000,000 won.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

| Characteristic                      | n   | %   |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| **Age range**                       |     |     |
| 20–29                               | 102 | 48.3|
| 30–39                               | 109 | 51.7|
| **Occupation**                      |     |     |
| Self-employed                       | 12  | 5.7 |
| Sales and service work              | 11  | 5.2 |
| Manufacturing work                  | 13  | 6.2 |
| Office work                         | 87  | 41.2|
| Business and management             | 4   | 1.9 |
| Professional                        | 13  | 6.2 |
| Student                             | 59  | 28.0|
| Others                              | 12  | 5.7 |
| **Education**                       |     |     |
| Highschool or below                 | 21  | 10.0|
| Bachelor’s or college students      | 158 | 74.9|
| Postgraduates or graduate students  | 32  | 15.2|
| **Household monthly income**        |     |     |
| Less than 1,000,000                 | 39  | 18.5|
| 1,000,000 – less than 2,000,000     | 25  | 11.8|
| 2,000,000 – less than 3,000,000     | 54  | 25.6|
| 3,000,000 – less than 4,000,000     | 36  | 17.1|
| 4,000,000 – less than 5,000,000     | 30  | 14.2|
| More than 5,000,000                 | 27  | 12.8|
| **Average frequency of shopping per month** | | |
| 0                                   | 5   | 2.4 |
| 1                                   | 44  | 20.9|
| 2                                   | 79  | 37.4|
| 4                                   | 47  | 22.3|
| more than 4 times                   | 36  | 17.1|
| **Average money spent on clothes**  |     |     |
| Less than 50,000                     | 28  | 13.3|
| 50,000 – less than 100,000           | 52  | 24.6|
| 100,000 – less than 200,000          | 83  | 39.3|
| 200,000 – less than 300,000          | 30  | 14.2|
| More than 300,000                    | 18  | 8.5 |
IV. Results

1. Measurement Model

Using AMOS 23, a measurement model was developed by conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the maximum likelihood estimation method to test reliability and validity of all the multi-item constructs of our research model. After deleting problematic items, the acceptable fit was achieved ($\chi^2=137.692$, $df=81$, $p<.001$. CMIN/DF=1.700, SRMR=.034, CFI=.979, TLI=.973, RMSEA=.058). As can be seen in Table 2, convergent validity was confirmed with significant factor loadings of each item above .793, composite reliability (C.R.) above .846, and average variance extracted (AVE) above .703. Also, CFA revealed that AVE estimates are larger than the corresponding squared correlation estimates between paired constructs, showing discriminant validity (Table 3).

### Table 2. Characteristics of Measure Items

| Construct              | Items                                                                 | Std. Estimate | C.R. | AVE  |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------|------|
| Story–product           | The outdoor jacket you just saw on the show plays an important role to unfold the story. | .867***       |      |      |
|                        | The outdoor jacket you just saw on the show fits in as the story unfolds. | .904***       | 946  | .777 |
|                        | The outdoor jacket you just saw on the show the character of the main actor of the show. | .841***       |      |      |
|                        | The outdoor jacket you just saw on the show seems to carry a similar image with the drama itself. | .898***       |      |      |
|                        | The outdoor jacket you just saw on the show has a connection with the drama’s general story. | .895***       |      |      |
| Perceived similarity   | The actor looks similar with me.                                       | .948***       |      |      |
|                        | The actor in the show seems to have similar ideas with me.             | .863***       | .902 | .822 |
| Perceived likability   | The actor in the show looks fancy.                                     | .793***       |      |      |
|                        | The actor in the show has a good look.                                 | .882***       | .919 | .703 |
|                        | The actor in the show has active and liveliness.                       | .917***       |      |      |
| Attitudes toward the   | It was interesting to see the show.                                    | .810***       |      |      |
| drama                  | I enjoyed watching the show.                                           | .901***       | .846 | .734 |
| Attitudes toward the   | I am interested in the placed brand I saw in the show                  | .872***       |      |      |
| brand                  | I felt positive about the placed brand I saw in the show.              | .867***       | .900 | .749 |
|                        | The brand placed in the show triggers my curiosity.                    | .858***       |      |      |

Note. *** $p<.001$
Table 3. Convergent and Discriminant Validity

| Construct                        | (1)  | (2)  | (3)  | (4)  | (5)  |
|----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Story–product congruence (1)     | .777 |      |      |      |      |
| Perceived likability (2)         |      | .391 | .703 |      |      |
| Perceived similarity (3)         |      |      | .554 | .430 | .822 |
| Attitudes toward the drama (4)   |      | .112 | .138 | .090 | .734 |
| Attitudes toward the brand (5)   |      | .507 | .588 | .564 | .212 |

Note. Diagonal entries are AVE for each construct. Off-diagonal entries are the squared correlation coefficients between constructs.

2. Structural Model

A structural equation model (SEM) was developed to test all hypotheses. SEM analysis revealed that the model fits the data well ($\chi^2=133.051$, df=80, $p<.001$, CMIN/DF=1.663, SRMR=.031, TLI=.974, CFI=.980, RMSEA=.056). The first hypothesis predicts a positive impact of consumers’ attitude toward the TV drama on their attitude toward the brand placed in the TV drama. The results show that the impact is significantly positive (b=.137, t=2.828, p<.01), supporting the hypothesis 1. That is, as consumers like the TV drama they watch, their favorable attitudes lead to their attitudes toward the brand products exposed to them. The examination of the second hypotheses showed the significant and positive effect of product–story congruence on consumer attitudes toward the TV drama (b=.233, t=2.128, p<.05) and attitude toward the brand placed (b=.169, t=2.284, p<.05), supporting the hypotheses H2a and H2b. This shows that as viewers feel that the product placed in TV drama is more congruent and well integrated into the story of the drama, they are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward the drama as well as the brand. The third hypothesis was about the effect of viewers’ perceived similarity with the actor on their attitudes toward the drama and the brand. The analysis revealed that the perceived similarity significantly influences viewer’s attitude toward the brand (b=.303, t=3.858, p<.001), supporting hypothesis H3b. However, the positive relationship between the similarity and attitude toward the drama was not found. Thus, hypothesis H3a was not supported. The examination of testing the fourth hypothesis revealed the significant and positive effect of viewers’ perceived likability on their attitude toward the drama (b=.258, t=2.433, p<.05) and attitude toward the brand (b=.416, t=2.284, p<.05), supporting hypothesis H4a and H4b. The results suggest that as viewers like the actor in TV drama, their positive feelings are extended to their attitudes toward the drama as well as toward the brand exposed to the viewers. Table 4 summarizes the results of hypotheses testing.

V. Conclusions

This study reports on results which affects the effectiveness of product placements in TV drama. The present study proposes and examines whether the product–story congruence...
Table 4. Results of Hypothesis Testing

| Hypotheses                                      | Estimate | Std. Estimate | S.E. | C.R. |
|------------------------------------------------|----------|---------------|------|------|
| H1: Attitude toward the drama -> Attitude toward the brand | .137     | .149          | .049 | 2.828** |
| H2a: Congruence -> Attitude toward the drama    | .233     | .225          | .109 | 2.128*  |
| H2b: Congruence -> Attitude toward the brand    | .169     | .177          | .074 | 2.284*  |
| H3a: Similarity -> Attitude toward the drama   | -.056    | -.055         | .114 | -4.489 (n.s.) |
| H3b: Similarity -> Attitude toward the brand    | .303     | .321          | .079 | 3.858*** |
| H4a: Likability -> Attitude toward the drama    | .258     | .227          | .106 | 2.433*  |
| H4b: Likability -> Attitude toward the brand    | .416     | .397          | .074 | 2.284*  |

Note. ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, n.s.=non-significant

and actor attractiveness (perceived similarity and perceived likability) influence consumer attitudes toward the TV drama and their attitudes towards the placed brand. The results demonstrated that the product-story congruence had a positive impact on consumer attitudes toward the TV drama and their attitudes toward the brand. Two factors of actor attractiveness, the perceived similarity and likability, positively influenced consumer attitude toward the brand. However, consumer attitudes toward the TV drama was affected only by the perceived likability dimension of actor attractiveness.

The findings of the study indicate that as fashion products are exposed to viewers by the actor in TV drama, the likability of the actor was found to enhance positive attitudes toward the TV drama and the placed brand. This demonstrates that the favoritism on an actor in TV drama evokes preference on dram itself and brands that the actor uses. However, the perceived similarity with the actor in TV drama was not found relevant in promoting preference on TV drama itself, suggesting viewer’s perceived similarity with the actor only promotes product placements not a preference on a drama itself. This may explain that whether the actor is similar to viewers or not may not be a main factor to make the viewers to engage and like the TV drama. Viewers may cognitively acknowledge that the drama simply belong to a breed of hyper realistic story telling, and the similarity may not be important to attract the viewers.

In addition to the positive impact of actor attractiveness found, another important factor to the effectiveness of product placements found was the congruence between the product placed and the story of TV drama. The current study supports the hypothesis that the strong association between products placed and the story of TV drama increases viewers’ attitudes toward the TV program as well as the brand placed. As can be seen in the criticisms about some Korean television dramas due to the blatant product placements caused by abrupt and unfit presence in the program (Park, 2016), the study shows that product placements that are not integrated into the story and thereby hamper the flow of the story lead to a negative outcome of the product placements. As in the advertising, the product placements should be executed under the right context of the advertising. If products placed in TV drama are
well aligned and flow with the story of TV drama, placed products and brands find proper fit and escalate viewers’ preference on the drama itself, which in turn, influences the placed brands. Since messages are communicated within a certain context, product should be placed in the appropriate context for effective communications to occur.

It is also important to note that the positive attitude toward the TV drama promotes the effectiveness of product placements. This suggests that the effectiveness of product placements comes from the success of television dramas. When marketers seek prominent placements such as showing a close-up detail of products in order to gain viewers’ attention into their products, consumers’ feelings toward the TV drama caused by the product placements should be carefully considered since uncomfortable feelings and negative attitudes toward the TV drama will reduces viewers’ attitudes toward the brand.

The present study has several limitations to note. First of all, the current study employed the online survey and depended on participants’ retrospective views on the TV drama they had watched almost a year ago. Although photo-clips of the TV drama were presented, they were not realistic and different from how actual product placements in TV drama expose products and brands to viewers. Thus, it requires a caution to ascertain the results reported here. This limitation may be minimized if the future research incorporates real TV programs and placements to measure the effectiveness of product placements. Second, the current study did not factor consumers’ level of needs on products. Preexisting needs change how viewers are influenced by the product placements. If a viewer was in need of an outdoor jacket when he was watching TV drama, the jacket was more easily noticed and evaluated than the viewer who did not need the jacket at the moment. Consumer needs guide the degree of involvement in the TV drama as well as the information processing of the products placed in the TV drama. Thus, the future research is encouraged to factor consumer needs in modelling the effectiveness of product placements. Third, the life span of brands in the market was not considered in this study. Where the brand is located on a life span in the market directs communications strategies. Impact of product placements may also depend on the fact how the brand has been successful in the market prior to the exposure in TV programs. Future research might consider these characteristics of brands for product placements strategies.

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