

“Brand placement in Web Series: Assessing consumer attitudes in India”

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BRAND PLACEMENT IN WEB SERIES: ASSESSING CONSUMER ATTITUDES IN INDIA

Abstract

Reports indicate that 49% of adults in India spend at least 2-3 hours consuming OTT media, rather than watching conventional television. With such changes in the way the general population is exposed to content, brands have also been adapting to the new patterns that this study investigates. This study was conducted to assess consumers' attitudes and acceptance towards brand placement in the novel media format of web series based on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). This study, based on a survey of 278 individuals from Urban India settings, was conducted using a self-report questionnaire adapted from F Davis's Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use and User Acceptance of TAM questionnaire (1989). The study supports TAM and recognizes that the frequency of viewing Web Series directly relates to brand recall ($R = 0.57$, $p < .001$). Product/brand placement yields brand awareness for unknown or unpopular brands and provide evidence for higher engagement with the placement when the audiences have pre-existing positive attitudes towards the brand ($t(277) = 27.11$, $p = .01$). This study also confirms that TAM as a relevant model can be applied to understand how regularity and duration of viewing affect attitudes towards brands and their placement in Web Series. Brand placement in Web Series is perceived as useful and largely determines brand name recall. Thus, marketers should strategically consider using brand placement in Web Series as a part of their marketing communication plan, especially as this media with other related forms of advertisement are important for brands to keep up with the industry's communication challenges.

Keywords

web series, brand placement, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), brand attitude, purchase intention, OTT platforms

JEL Classification

M31, M37, D91

INTRODUCTION

Advertising, promotion, and marketing are evolutionary, and this evolution is taking place with changing patterns in the economy, technology, consumer preferences, requiring immediate or substantial adaptations. Similarly, brand placement is how companies adapt to the changing technological environment as media being consumed is expanding, consumer's minds are oversaturating, and attention span is decreasing. As an innovative marketing communication tool, brand placement uniquely integrates multiple aspects of the brand compared to other promotion and advertisement forms, including signage, trademarks, ideologies, and even core philosophies. Today brand placement stands far from its initiation, which was a way to obtain funding or production material for a film or television series. However, as a result of its inclusion and effectiveness, brand placement has become very common in every mainstream media, be it any culture, country, or industry. Brand placement affects brand recall, and prominence has a positive effect on the memory of the brand, and that brand placement implicitly affects attitudes and behavior (van Reijmersdal, 2009). Another robust phenomenon that has appeared is the unprecedented rise in the digital economy of Southeast Asia. A drastic increase in data consumption, the accelerated rise predicted by

the year 2025, has already been achieved in 2020 itself (WARC, 2020a). Over the top (OTT) platforms are reigning supreme with urban India's millennials and Gen Z audiences, according to a report by The Data Sciences Division of Dentsu Aegis Network (DAN) India (WARC, 2020, September 14). The report also highlighted that nearly 49% of India's youth spend 2-3 hours per day binge-watching content, while four hours is the average time spent in consuming OTT video content in a day by millennials and Gen Z. While a large chunk of India is a single television household, affordable data and mobile technology advancements have been considerable boosts to its growing online content and gaming consumer base. The growing popularity of the choice of media based on the analysis of a week-long television shows and interviews of the advertisers revealed that brand placement has now become an integral part of the shows and that brand placement is the future of advertising (Smith et al., 2015).

Brand placement in Indian Web Series is gaining momentum and increasingly creating series-centered around the product. The brand placement has been appearing in newer media, including computer and video games and now podcasts. Given the popularity of brand placement in Web Series, this study analyzes consumer's attitude and behavior behind their broad acceptance through the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). TAM, a widely used model to predict users' acceptance of technology, identifies several determinants, including perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, as essential factors influencing the adoption of new information systems (Davis, 1989). Multiple researchers (Lin et al., 2000; Moon et al., 2001; Koufaris, 2002) have applied TAM to discuss the user acceptance of many information technology-based systems. This research specifically focuses on using the theoretical framework of TAM to assess consumer attitudes towards brand placement in India.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Establishing effective communication with the right audience is an important marketing motive that is carried out through various means and channels, and promotion serves as a link between buyers and sellers of a company and the consumers in a business setting. Through various developments in the economy, multiple communication methods have emerged that have the ability to derive marketing messages in direct or indirect manner. Moreover, research suggests that it is required for the marketing to be multi-faced, comprising of various media and means as a part of the promotional strategy in order to be effective and relative (Boone & Kurtz, 1998).

Product placement or brand placement (or placement of a brand) has been repeatedly defined by numerous researchers, the most concise of which describes it as "a paid brand message aimed at persuading audiences through the planned inclusion of a branded product into a movie or television program" (Balasubramanyam, 1994). Brand placement is a more subtle and indirect way of advertising where other definitions also discuss brand placement as a major contributor to increasing the visibility of a brand (Panda, 2004). Moreover, branded entertainment is also considered to be part of an organization's

overall marketing communication and brand strategy. This fusion of advertisement into entertainment is essentially not distributed with the sole purpose of advertisement, but ultimately serves as a form of indirect advertising (Horrigan, 2009) where the said creative amalgamation is considered to be classy and discrete that has the ability to leverage the consumer's emotions well (Hudson & Hudson, 2006).

Brand placement, as seen today, has evolved through many years where initially Lumiere Films in Europe during the late 1890s, through hired props, attempted to control production costs for the entertainment content as the costs of production was high (Newell et al., 2006) and by 1930s, P&G promoted soap powders on radio channels through "soap operas" that marked the first appearance of commercials and promotion in entertainment. In this manner, the cost of production was also brought down as the companies being promoted had to pay a fee for their promotion or bear the cost of the props. However, brand placements were somewhat sluggish post-Depression due to the lack of planned usage and negative media campaigns being commercialized, but in 1960-1970, brand placement was being utilized in many other creative ways, and the operational term was coined only by the 1980s (Balasubramanian, 1994; Balasubramanian et al., 2006). Brand place-

ment has evolved since, with developments in media as well and likewise, research shifted from traditional and mainline print, television and film media to the emerging internet, digital media that includes online streaming, video games, applications for entertainment and learning, and simulation games. Such development has only been in favor of the evolving techniques as research suggests that, in comparison to traditional advertisements and commercials, brand placement received more affirmative attitudes in the consumers' minds, and also made a positive impression on those who had previously had low attitudes towards advertisements (Davtyan & Cunningham, 2017). Thus, brand placement has expanded its horizons to include the world wide web platforms (Kureshi, 2010) and become a groundbreaking advertisement resource in newer media to attract younger generations (Arjona, 2012). The virality and the short duration formats' capability to create branded entertainment "stories through fiction, social networks and online platforms are part of the increasing trend of creative advertising strategies" (Costa-Sánchez, 2014) and yielded tremendous results for advertisers in the past.

Companies are now turning to brand placement from an organizational perspective as the audience is getting more technology-empowered where skipping ads is always an option. Hence, leaving the advertisers with not much choice, making brand placement an essential for brand integration (Lehu, 2009). Studies indicate positive brand attitudes in placing brands in a newer media space (Segarra-Saavedra et al., 2017) and attitudes if the brand set creates word of mouth online (Beth et al., 2019). All the new media now operate in a different landscape where, instead of existing in a vacuum, they are interactive and value each other, and thus consumer attitudes have formed when 437 college students responded positively to brand placement in films, television shows with its lesser acceptability in songs and video games, but are not out-casting them altogether (Subg & de Gregorio, 2009)

1.1. The advent of Web Series in India

The penetration of smartphones and reduced data charges, which increases the time spent on mobile phones, has led to a digital revolution in India. According to industry reports, the digital advertising industry is growing at the rate of

33%. It has already crossed the one-billion-dollar mark with access to various digital services that have touched 220 million users through smartphones (Popli, 2019). The lockdown has caused a steep increase in the traffic on over-the-top (OTT) video streaming platforms, leading the brands to advertise and promote themselves onto these platforms in the form of content integration and sponsorship on streaming sites. Moreover, advertisers should also consider Indian OTT platforms such as Zee5, SonyLiv, Voot, MX Player, etc. There is an enormous potential for brand placement on various digital platforms. Presently, the share of Web Series in the Indian digital marketing space is less than 5%, but it is projected to grow.

1.2. Consumer attitude

Consumer attitude is considered to be a large aspect of consumer behavior that entails multiple elements. Attitudes are long-term as they are persistent and relatively permanent unless changed through external efforts. From a business perspective, people's attitudes towards a brand, product, business or organization communicated mainly through various marketing strategies could be considered consumer attitude. Additionally, attitudes can be general or specific. Amongst numerous models of attitude, the ABC model is the most widely used as its elements are inclusive of many internal and external aspects. The ABC modes stand for attitude, behavior, and cognition. Behavior refers to all the external aspects of taking action from the attitude formed, and cognition stands for the logical aspect of attitude, which decides if an attitude is right or wrong, negative or positive (Madichie, 2012) and if it should be accepted or rejected.

Attitude, from a psychological perspective, has numerous theories and explanations attached to it. Biehal et al. (1992) provide a meticulous framework of advertisements' attitudinal impact. Primarily, consumer attitudes result from information processing, exposure to advertising through various media, consumer involvement, feelings and emotions caused by the advertisements and the message creativity, eminence and relevance. In brand placement, brand choices are an essential element conveyed through advertising in different ways.

Through an experimental design, the new aspect of purchase intention is brought out. The advertisements are highly influential; that is, they directly correlate with the brand choice. However, in two other experimental conditions amongst the three tested, advertisements indirectly affected brand choice. The directionality of the relationship that advertisements and brand choice have is essential while researching consumer attitudes, which is explained in various models.

Amongst the various aspects of attitude, the functional theory of attitude discusses the function that any attitude serves, the major one being facilitating social behavior (Katz, 1960). This pragmatic approach to attitudes suggests that two or many individuals may hold similar attitudes, but can be different. Marketers must comprehend the cause of attitudes to create strategies to modify the same. Moreover, other functions that attitudes serve include intentionality, the purpose of objects, and the benefits of objects or situations. The same would apply in marketing as pragmatics make an integral part of advertising. The model operates because humans are social beings and continuously aim to minimize punishment and maximize rewards. From a marketing perspective, the communication between the brand and its consumers should always convey these purposes, that are often carried out in various ways, including brand placement. For example, attitudes can be formed for newly launched products by them being placed in entertainment content such as a series in how the characters and situations interact with the product.

In an Indian setting, cultural consideration is essential in planning for brand placement, and the context setting and brand congruence impacts customers' positive attitude towards the brand. Moreover, with India opening up as a potential consumer market, it becomes important for international brands to understand this aspect. This study's findings also suggest that a misfit in the context of Hollywood content creates more extensive and more intensive negative attitudes than in the context of Bollywood (Nagar, 2016).

Based on the associative network theory, brand placement in a film can be impacted by the movie's plot connection with the brand being placed in

the case of an unfamiliar brand. Conversely, when brand familiarity is high among the audience, the plot connection affects its attitudes. Additionally, this study also suggests that an unknown brand's prominent placement yields more positive attitudes than subtle placement (Verhellen et al., 2015). Plot connection has been found to have a deeper connection with brand placement as an experiment-based study revealed that the mode of presentation of the placement, that is, auditory, visual or both, can affect the memory of the audiences along with the ability to modulate their attitudes (Russell, 2002). Another similar study assesses the number of times the brand placement is repeated, i.e., the frequency, as it is an important variable that may lead to a relatively famous brand's prominent placement to get adversely affected and thereby on brand attitude. Whereas in cases of subtle or moderate brand placements, the attitudes are positive. Further, the study also points out the implication on brands and organizations of such findings as it may jeopardize the demand and production levels (Homer, 2009).

Another important variable is to maintain familiarity where it is essential to have the brands or products placed in generation-specific content. Kit and P'Ng (2014) investigate critical variables impacting the millennial generation's consumer attitude concerning in-film placements of brands in various broadcast media. The millennial consumer's pre-formed beliefs about the product affect their attitude towards brand placement. Hence, a positive impression will lead to a positive impact, and vice versa. A lack of information regarding the product to form a belief leads to relying on the information gathered from sources such as books and journals. Additionally, the purchase decision also stems from the functional feature of a product. As on the generation, other characteristics of the audiences also affect their attitudes towards the brand wherein pleasure, arousal, cognitive effort and star liking is not directly but indirectly impact brand recall as it establishes a relationship with the brand and the character representing it in the show. "This engagement with the content and character ultimately results in brand recall and thereby marketers, production houses and brand placement agencies may target the Indian audiences' memory of brands movies through media characters." (Natarajan et al., 2018).

Some studies concentrate on the effects of brand placement on the consumer's long-term memory. When brand placement exposure is planned for mindful processing, long-term memory is activated, resulting in long-lasting brand recalls (Balasubramanian, 1994). Brand awareness is another important facet of assessing the impact on attitude: consumer awareness and purchase intent for a brand increase when the consumer is actively engaged in branded content. Moreover, to assess the viability and recall of the content seen on television as oppose to theatres, etc., when both the mediums were evaluated, it was found that watching branded content in theatres is as effective as watching it at home, in addition to which viewing it again improves brand recall (Lehu & Bressoud, 2008).

Brand placement is evolving in hand with the development of media, and movies and television shows do not remain to be the exclusive digital content as the content available online would also count and the closest most relevant format to those would be television series. Experimental research has shown that the more episodes are watched, the higher will be the congruence between the brand agreement and the program, in line with the human associative learning. Another important finding argues that brand memory and brand image are not related making brand image stronger upon viewing without impacting the viewer's memory of the brand (van Reijmersdal et al., 2007). Web Series and OTT platforms are rising in popularity, and brand placement tie-ins also increase where some content is being created with the product as the central point of the show. Research on Web Series is currently limited while having many potentials to grow the presence in the market. There are no studies directly related to attitudes and behavior towards brand placement in Web Series. However, few research studies have delved into attitudes and purchase intentions on various video platforms' brand advertisements. Kwon (2012) studied indirect advertisements on television and established the frequency of viewing and word of mouth communication in developing attitudes and purchase intentions. Another study conducted on a Spanish show indicates positive growth in lending the brands a newer space to become visible. In line with the research done on brand placement in movies, this study also concludes that there is a positive impact on atti-

tudes if the brand links with the content (Segarra-Saavedra et al., 2017). Brand placement is also integrated into many other realms, from entertainment to information content, as it has been found that brand placement in editorial content such as weather news can positively affect the customer's attitudes, given the high quality of the content, it can also be impacted negatively if constant quality is not very good (Hwang & Jeong, 2018).

Huang et al.'s (2010) study of consumer attitudes towards video advertisements in terms of usefulness, entertainment, ease of use found that perception of usefulness influences purchase intentions. However, the perception of entertainment did not have an impact on consumers' purchase intentions. Lee et al. (2013) suggest that when advertisers capitalize on online video ads to elicit the campaign's viral power, the focus should be first on the consumers' attitude towards sharing video ads and, secondly, on the subjective norms subjective to sharing intention. Fossen and Schweidel (2019) found that prominent placement of brands online increases online engagement and traffic to the brand promoted. The research also highlights two critical areas: brand placements' role in reaching out to consumers who avoid traditional advertisements and the positive impact of a verbal product through content integration to create more profound meanings.

The degree of interaction, information trust, imagery, vividness and brand image are outlined as social media effects on consumer purchase intentions (Yeo et al., 2019).

Owing to the advancement in technology and research methodology, there are many studies revolving around brand placement for the past two decades and yet there have been inconsistencies in findings where most of them are conducted in western countries and revolve around only five issues, namely 1) analysis of the nature of brand appearance in movies or television programs; 2) empirical studies of placement effectiveness; 3) general discussion on the development and trends of product placement; 4) examination of practitioners' views; and 5) cross-cultural comparison of the interpretation and ethical acceptability of product placement (Chan, 2012). Hence, this requires research in overlooked areas.

1.3. Technology acceptance model and operational framework

The technology acceptance model (TAM) extended to consumer behavior explains the functioning of multiple variables of attitude concerning product placement or brand placement. Essentially, the theory assesses technological acceptance under different information-processing constructs (Davis, 1989). There are two factors in the model influencing behavior, viz. perceived usefulness and perceived ease. Perceived usefulness is the consumer's interpretation of how the user will impact performance. Perceived ease, as the same suggests, refers to the user's perspective on the levels of difficulty of the usage of a system. According to the theory, these two factors are affected by social, cultural and environmental stimuli (Surendran, 2012).

The TAM serves to explain many aspects of consumer behavior. Research that extends the TAM to consumer behavior demonstrates its applicability to predict consumer behavior (Galib et al., 2018). The edited TAM model with the inclusion of perceived risk, user satisfaction, and perceived enjoyment is operationalized in the form of a closed-ended survey questionnaire to assess how it can be used to predict customers' participation in social customer relationship management. Galib et al. (2018) reported strong correlations between CRM (customer relationship management) and customer intention to participate in Social CRM. Additionally, participating in social CRM (ACTRM) is the only variable that showed statistical significance. The study concludes by questioning the model's robustness to predict the customer's intentions for usage efficiently.

Marketing and psychology theories are also brought in as part of the research's theoretical framework, as there are emotional and cognitive responses to buying that affect consumers attitudes. The findings suggest consumer buying behavior and intention to return specifically depend on the variability of perceived control, online shopping enjoyment and concentration. The unplanned buying behavior, which remains statistically insignificant, is investigated (Koufaris, 2002).

The past researchers interpret the application of the TAM to various aspects of consumer attitudes.

The penetration of technology in advertising is rising and disrupting the industry in all forms of strategy and communication. Brand placement in Web Series, an integral part of the marketing plan for brands, is technology-dependent and branded technological content consumed by the consumers affects consumer attitude. Thus, this study used the TAM model in the context of brand placement in Web Series in a developing country.

2. AIMS AND HYPOTHESES

The objectives of this study are:

- To assess the role of brand placement in creating brand awareness.
- To study the effects of brand attitude towards brand placement on purchase intention or referring the brand to others.
- To understand the mediating effect of brand familiarity on brand attitude.

2.1. Hypotheses

- H1:* Brand placement in Web Series leads to brand name recall.
- H2:* Watching Web Series regularly creates brand awareness for new and unpopular brands.
- H3:* Attitude toward brand placement has an association with the intention to buy or refer the promoted brand to others.
- H4:* There will be a higher positive attitude toward a familiar or established brand than an unfamiliar or new brand in Web Series based on product or brand placement.
- H5:* Brand attitude has no association with the intention to buy.

3. METHODS

The methodology of this study follows a self-report survey method to understand the attitudes

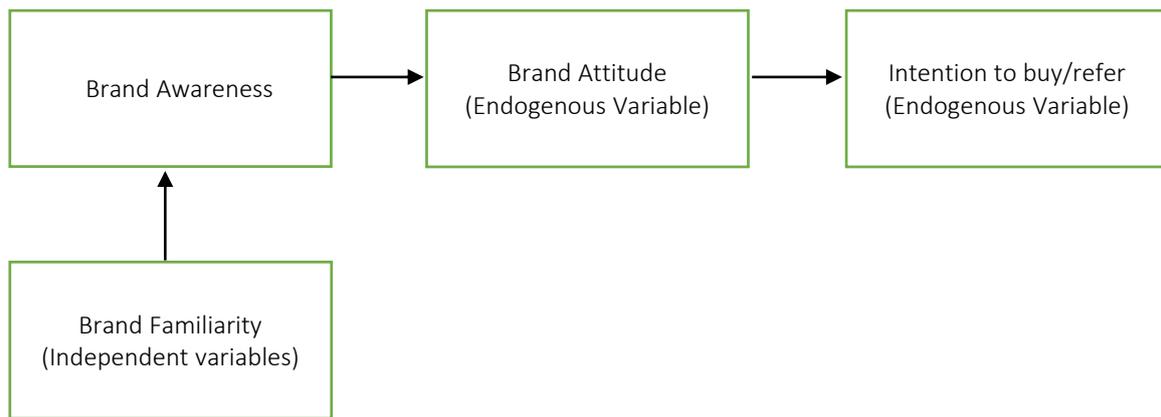


Figure 1. Operational model used for the purpose of the study

of participants. The research study finally included 278 individuals ($n = 278$, response rate of 75%, totally contacted 367), with no control exerted over participant gender. The sampling was done on a non-probability basis. All the participants were from Pune city in Maharashtra, which has a high urban population, as the Web Series being assessed also revolved around characters in such a setting. Additionally, this sample set was explicitly selected, as it represents the population with high purchasing power.

According to the TAM operationalized to assess consumer attitudes towards brand placement, the following factors were studied:

1. Perceived usefulness.
2. Peer group information.
3. Perceived playfulness.

4. RESULTS

The data were first analyzed through tabulation of all the responses, descriptive and statistical analysis. Inferences were drawn from conducting regression analysis, chi-square and Phi coefficient tests of different variables. The results of the study is presented in the following Tables 1-8.

Table 3 shows that there is a significant positive correlation between Web Series watched and brand name recall ($R = 0.568, p = .01$). The result shows that respondents who watched a greater number of Web Series recalled a greater number of brand names. In other words, the frequency of Web Series watched has a direct positive influence on the recall of brand and product names.

Table 4 shows that brand name recall and Web Series viewed have a significant positive correla-

Table 1. Frequency table

	Age	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	18 to 30 years	212	76.3	76.3	76.3
	31 to 60 years	66	23.7	23.7	100.0
	Total	278	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Gender

	Gender	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	Male	141	50.7	50.9	50.9
	Female	136	48.9	49.1	100.0
	Total	277	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.4		
Total		278	100.0		

Table 3. Correlations between the number of Web Series watched and the number of brand name recall

Variables	Web Series watched	Brand name recall
Web Series watched	1	–
Brand name recall	0.568**	1

Note: ** $p < .001$ level.

Table 4. Regression analysis of the predictability of brand name recall by Web Series watched

Variables	B	T	F ratio	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²
Brand name recall	0.57	11.43**	130.71**	0.57	0.32	0.32

Note: ** $p < .001$ level.

tion ($R = 0.57, p < .001$). The result of the independent t-test between the variables shows a significant difference ($t(276) = 11.43, p < .001$). The extent of Web Series viewed explains 32% of the variance in the recall of brand name. The result indicates that watching Web Series increases recall of brand name due to product or brand placement, thus the first hypothesis is accepted.

Table 5 suggests a significant difference between regular and irregular viewers of Web Series in their recall of new brands ($t(276) = -2.55, p = .01$). Here, regular web viewers ($M = 27.47$) recalled higher new brands than irregular Web Series viewers ($M = 30.57$). It can be concluded that regular watching Web Series leads to an increase in awareness for new or unpopular brands, and thus the second hypothesis is accepted.

Table 6 indicates that the attitude toward brand/brand placement and intention to buy or refer the brand promoted to others ($\chi^2 = 26.93, p = .01$) is significant. The maximum respondents held positive attitudes toward brand placement ($n = 119$).

Following it, some show a negative attitude towards the same ($n = 91$). Some respondents indicated a positive attitude towards the placement of brands and their intention to buy or refer the brand promoted to others ($n = 62$). The least number of responses showed a negative attitude towards intention to buy or refer to the brand being promoted based on its placement in Web Series ($n = 6$). There is a significantly positive relationship between attitude toward brand placement and intention to buy or refer the brand promoted to others ($R = 0.31, p = .01$). Therefore, respondents with positive attitudes toward brand placement have greater intentions to buy or refer the promoted brand to others. It can be concluded that positive attitudes toward brand placement in Web Series leads to a higher intention to buy or refer the brand promoted to others and thus the third hypothesis is accepted.

Table 7 shows a significant difference in attitudes toward familiar and established brands ($M = 47.38$) as compared to unfamiliar and new brands ($M = 28.62$) in Web Series related brand placement ($t(277) = 27.11, p = .01$). It can be concluded that brand place-

Table 5. Differences in responses of Web Series viewers in the recall of new brand names

Dimension	Web Series watched	N	Mean	SD	T	DF	Sig. (2-tailed)
New/Not very familiar brands	Irregular	175	27.47	9.24	-2.55	276	0.01
	Regular	103	30.57	10.67			

Table 6. Chi-square and phi coefficient tests for intention to buy and attitude towards brand placement in Web Series

Intention to buy or refer the promoted brand to others	Category attitude toward brand/Product placement		Chi-Square (χ^2)	DF	Sig.	Phi correlation
	Negative attitude	Positive attitude				
Maybe, not sure	91	119	26.93	1	0.01	0.31** Significant at 0.01
Yes	6	62				

Table 7. Attitudes toward familiar and established brands compared to unfamiliar and new brands in Web Series brand placement

Variables	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Established and familiar brands	47.38	11.80	27.11	277	0.01
New and not very well familiar brands	28.62	9.89			

Note: n = 278.

Table 8. Chi-square and Phi coefficient for intention to buy and total attitude towards the brand

Intention to buy or refer the promoted brand to others	Total attitude category related to a brand or a product		Chi-Square (χ^2)	DF	Sig.	Phi correlation
	Negative attitude	Positive attitude				
Maybe, not sure	77	133	1.20	1	0.27	-0.06 (Not significant)
Yes	30	38				

ment develops greater positive attitudes toward familiar and established brands than unfamiliar and new brands. The fourth hypothesis is thus accepted.

Table 8 suggests that there is no significant association between the variable total attitude categories related to brand or product and the intention to buy or refer to the brand promoted to others ($\chi^2=1.20, p = .27$). Therefore, the positive or negative attitude has no effect on the intention to buy or refer to the brand promoted to others. Most respondents have a positive attitude, yet they are not sure about purchasing and referring to others ($n = 133$). Few respondents have a negative attitude and are not sure about purchasing or referring to others about the brand ($n = 77$). Hence, brand attitude does not influence the intention to buy a product or brand and thus the fifth hypothesis is rejected.

The result of this study support studies by Kwon (2012) and Segarra-Saavedra et al. (2017) that establish the role of frequency of viewing and positive growth prospects for newer brand through brand placements. In line with them, this study also showcases positive linkages between brand placements, attitudes, and higher intention to buy or refer the brand promoted to others. The analyses are in line with other results (Verhellen et al., 2015) that suggest that an unknown brand's prominent placement yields more positive attitudes than subtle placement. Unlike the TAM hypothesized by Davis (1989), the attitude is positive or negative, there is no effect on the intention to buy or refer the brand promoted to others. This mirrors the limitations of TAM's applicability concerning the use of online technology platforms for brand promotions.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to extend the technology acceptance model (TAM) for brand placements in Web Series, one of the fastest-growing media in developing countries like India. The data collected from 278 adults showed that brand placement in Web Series is perceived as useful and significantly predicts brand name recall. Regular watching Web Series leads to increased awareness of new or unpopular brands. An explanation might be that young adults are willing to adopt Web Series as an attractive brand placement option. Respondents with positive attitudes towards a brand or a product interact more with it and the series as well. Thus, marketers need to work on content and creativity to engage the audience. Furthermore, since brand placement helps develop higher favorable attitudes toward familiar/established brands than unfamiliar/new brands, marketers should essentially consider using brand placement in Web Series as part of the overall integrated strategy for promotions.

This study also confirms TAM as a relevant model that can be applied to understand how the regularity and amount of time spent viewing affect attitude towards brand placement and attitude towards a brand in response to brand placements in Web Series. Brand placement in Web Series needs to focus primarily

on how the technology can help create the frequency of watching to improve brand awareness and attitude effectiveness. Positive attitudes towards the brand or product will help the audience interact more with the Web Series and the brand. Placement in Web Series should be strategically planned to generate word of mouth advertising, leading to sharing, strong peer communication and positive attitudes towards a Web Series. Marketers should target the younger generation through Web Series and the older age through OTT content that is more focused and tailor-made to each generation, it is the way forward. Thus, in the Web Series context, the element of building positive attitudes towards the placed brands should receive focus through appropriate content and creativity.

However, the study needs to be expanded beyond the urban settings in India to include a sample of study for tier-two cities in India, and cultural replication to different Asian cultures is also required. This study only explores a few aspects of consumer attitudes and other variables such as celebrity endorsements, group consumer behavior, and how different marketing campaigns affect consumer attitudes concerning brand placement also need to be researched. External factors such as the spectator's mood state and viewing conditions are also essential along with the type of movies they are being incorporated in Bressoud and Lehu (2008). Other factors worth investigating include types of brand involvement (low, high involvement), the impact of branded title, effects of content appeal (rational, emotional), and consumer irritation, which can influence attitudes and purchase intentions in different ways. The role of social media in creating peer communication viral effect can also be explored. Further research is needed to understand the role of audiovisual creativity in order to evaluate the totality of Web Series's impact on consumers and investigate additional factors studied based on the original TAM, such as past experience, user experience, and user characteristics.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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 Formal analysis: Anupam Siddhartha.
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