

# They're Playing My Brand

## Product Placement in Popular Music

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**ABSTRACT:** Product placement, or branded entertainment, in popular music has often been used but understudied. Whether you believe that advertising reflects or dictates society, the proliferation of brand names in songs is undeniable. But is it attention getting? Is it recalled like the song or a jingle you can't get out of your head? More important to advertisers is product placement in popular music something that should be considered as part of a nontraditional Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) strategy to supplement or even replace commercials? This study for the first time compared the unaided recall effectiveness of a familiar brand in a popular song and in a 60-second radio commercial. The results showed that the recall of a familiar brand in a song was not as effective as the recall from a radio commercial. However, the recall for the brand in the treatment for the combination of a brand in an ad and the brand in a song, while not significant, was greater than the recall for the brand in just the 60-second commercial. This study suggests that brand placement in popular music should be considered to supplement a commercial campaign as part of an Integrated Marketing Communication strategy and provides the foundation for future research on this popular yet understudied alternative.

**Key words:** IMC, Product Placement, Popular Music

### INTRODUCTION

From the Beach Boys' "Little Deuce Coup" to Prince's "Little Red Corvette," brands have been featured in popular music for decades. Whether it's a Polaroid picture in Outkast's "Hey Ya" or Apple Bottom jeans in "Low" from Flo Rida, consumers are hearing brands by bands. Music executives unapologetically say it is the future of music (Stadtmitter, 2007). The placement of brands in popular music has increased due to the active pursuit by record companies to supplement their music promotion and distribution efforts due to declining shelf space at stores like Walmart (Martens, 2009). Product placement in general is also on the rise. PQ Media reported that paid product placement grew 33.7% to \$2.90 billion in 2007 ("Branded," 2008). According to Myers Publishing, \$9 billion was spent on product placement, and it is estimated that global product placement will reach \$14 billion by the end of 2010 (Graser & Stanley, 2006).

In the case of the Beach Boys and Prince, the artists placed the brand without any prior or post payment. Today, the artist can be paid before the song is produced as was the case with Fergie (Stadtmitter, 2007) or after the fact as was the case with Busta Rhymes (Kim, 2002). Companies such as McDonald's have offered to pay hip-hop artists anywhere from \$1-5 each time a song with the featured brand was played on the radio (Graser, 2005). Allied Domeccq paid Busta Rhymes post-production for Pass the Courvoisier Part Two (Kim, 2002). In some cases, the artist is commissioned by a company not only to include the brand in the song but also to make a song for the brand, as was the case for Celine Dion's "You and I Were Meant to Fly," who was hired to record the theme song for Air Canada ("Product," 2005).

Sometimes a song is released, becomes popular, and then it is revealed that song is actually a long-form jingle as was the case for Chris Brown's "Forever" for Wrigley's Spearmint Gum (see Smith & Jargon, 2008). But brand marketers like Wrigley's run

the risk of losing credibility by deceiving their consumer base and by the unpredictable behavior of their musical endorsers (High, 2009). Endorsement theory has shown that the persuasiveness of a source in an advertising message can be negatively affected by characteristics of the source especially credibility (Kelman, 1961; Sternthal et al., 1978).

Still others view product placement in popular music as "selling out" (Allan, 2005). Anyone familiar with Neil Young's "This Note's For You" will remember that he warned about the dangers of ties between musicians and major corporations ("Ain't singing for Pepsi, ain't singing for Coke. I don't sing for nobody, makes me look like a joke"). Most popular culturalists and theorists agree that the integration of popular music with brands is a "bankruptcy of culture" (McChesney, 2001). Nonetheless, advertisers have embraced the combination of music and advertising as a marriage of commerce and art (Fowles 1996). Likewise, marketers are increasingly choosing product placement in popular music as an integration of their marketing communications strategy in response to consumer aversion to traditional commercials.

## INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

The practice of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) has seen almost as many new disciplines as it has definitions since it was first defined by the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) in cooperation with Northwestern University in 1989 as "a concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value in a program that integrates a variety of strategic disciplines (e.g., advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations) and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency, and maximum impact" (Kerr et al., 2008). The task of taking IMC and moving it from concept to process (i.e., "the process of managing all sources of information....") was done by Don Schultz, beginning in 1991 (Northwestern University brochure) and continuing in 1993 with what is widely considered the foundation of all IMC theory: *Integrated Marketing Communications: Pulling it Together and Making it Work* (Schultz et al.). In 1998, the word "business" (Schultz and Schultz, 1998) was added to suggest that IMC was not only a marketing and communications function but a business process. Since then, there have been many updates and additions, most recently Kliatchko's addition of "stake-

holders" to his definition of "concept and process of strategically managing audience-focused, channel-centered and results-driven communication programs over time" (Kliatchko, 2005, 2008). For the purposes of this product placement research, I will follow the lead of Simmers and Damron-Martinez (2009) and use the definition suggested by Peltier, Schibrowsky, and Schultz (2003) because it allows for a wider interpretation of IMC. It states that "IMC is a concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of using a comprehensive plan to evaluate the strategic roles of a variety of communication disciplines (Peltier et al., 2003). The communication discipline, or activity, in the case of this research is product placement and the integration is in popular music. IMC is truly all about "synergy" and the successful "interaction of various marketing and communication activities that come together to impact and influence consumers," and product placement in popular music is yet another one of these possible "touch-points" (Schultz, 2005).

## PRODUCT PLACEMENTS

On some occasions, brands are entertainment headliners in the form of product placements or "a paid product message aimed at influencing audiences via the planned and unobtrusive entry of a branded product" (Balasubramanian, 1994, p. 31). Product placement has been around for decades in films and is believed to have evolved from publicity efforts for cigarettes in the 1920s. Probably the most famous and familiar example of film product placement is that of Reese's Pieces in the 1982 film "E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial." In addition to films, brand product placement occurs in television, novels, computer/video games, live shows, musicals, and, of course, music. Product placements, sometimes called hybrid messages, include all paid marketing communication attempts to commercially influence consumers using communications that appear noncommercial. Audiences are typically less aware of the commercial influence attempt and therefore process such content differently than commercial messages (Balasubramanian, 1994, p. 30). A masked-art hybrid message is considered any work of art (painting, sculpture, song or literary work) that features branded products with deliberate (but usually not obvious) commercial intent (Balasubramanian, 1994, p. 32).

The use of product placements as part of the promotional mix in addition to being another "touch-

point” with the potential consumer is also financially and practically attractive to advertisers. Adversity to traditional advertising, media fragmenting, the changing media consumption of Generation Y and technology have made it easier to avoid advertisements especially on radio and television. Some suggest that consumers are actually to blame for the proliferation of product placement because of ad zapping (Steinberg, 2010). With product placement, an advertiser can place their brand in a selected, popular media vehicle of the target market with the potential of positive brand image enhancement and at the same time avoid the tune out.

Several factors encourage the research of product placements, or hybrid messages. First, hybrids raise important ethical, legal and public policy questions concerning the unaware consumer, especially in popular music. Some believe that product placement or “brand-dropping” crosses over the line (Van Buskirk, 2008). The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is even considering product placement rules requiring the advertiser to identify what it calls “embedded advertising” (Lasar 2008). Second, the use of hybrid messages in popular music is not going away. In 2002, an unidentified record executive predicted “a steady stream” of product placement in popular music deals (Kim, 2002). Moreover, the use of product placement in popular music has become another source of revenue for a music industry that is financially struggling. Third, the concept of hybrid messages has not received adequate attention in the literature (Balasubramanian, 1994, p. 31).

Product placement research with regard to recall and recognition conducted so far has primarily focused on movies (see Gupta & Lord, 1998) and television (see Law & Braun, 2000; Weaver & Oliver, 2000). Gupta and Lord (1998) observed that prominent placements resulted in higher recall than did advertisements, especially when there was an explicit mention of the product. Law and Braun (2000) and Weaver and Oliver (2000) both reported an overall enhancement of product recall due to the placement.

## RECALL

Recall is the most common and traditional method of testing advertising effectiveness (Stewart, 1989; O’Guinn et al., 2006). The direct correlation of recall on sales has arguably still to be demonstrated. The role of recall, as an objective within an IMC strategy to be measured and drive ROI, warrants further inves-

tigation. Recall involves memory retrieval and has been shown to vary by age with young adults remembering advertising better than older adults (Dubow, 1995). Recall is also considered a higher level of awareness and brand recall is preferable to other types of recall (Duncan, 2005; Singh, Rothschild, & Churchill, 1988). Unaided recall is considered superior by most advertising researchers because it measures memory more accurately without any possibility of the participant claiming they remembered an ad when they are actually uncertain (Clow & Baack, 2009). A variety of factors, primarily brand names (Keller et al., 1998; Willke, 1993), has been shown to influence the effective recall of advertising. Ad-cued, brand recall has been used successfully when testing the recall of radio advertising in low and high clutter formats (Riebe & Dawes, 2006).

As for processing, Lynch and Srull (1982) said that information that is novel or unexpected seems to capture one’s attention, is processed more extensively, and therefore is much more likely to be recalled than information that is repetitive or expected. The “von Restorff effect” states that almost any techniques that serve to increase novelty or surprise also enhanced recall (von Restorff, 1933). Product placement, possibly due to the attention gleaned from its novelty effect, has been shown to enhance product recall, recognition, and choice (Law & Braun, 2000). Product placement has also been shown to be processed more affectively than cognitively, which suggests a viable match for popular music (Simmers and Damron-Martinez, 2009). Popular music has traditionally been evaluated and processed more affectively than cognitively (North, 1998).

## HYPOTHESES

Stephen and Coote (2005) called for a “deeper examination of [product placement] effectiveness” due to its “current growth and economic value across a variety of media (p. 29). Simmers and Damron-Martinez (2009) concurred and suggested that “alternative program types” and “nontraditional message forms” for product placement “warranted investigation”(p. 65). Product placement in music has only been casually mentioned without much insight or evaluation of its recall effectiveness (Balasubramanian, 2006; Gupta & Lord, 1998). While there has been some research done on product placement in popular music videos (Burkhalter, 2009), there is clearly a need for additional research to predict the recall effectiveness of

product placements in popular music as compared to traditional commercials. With this goal in mind, the following hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub> Is the unaided recall of a familiar brand heard in a 60-second commercial more effective than the unaided recall of a familiar brand heard in a familiar popular song?

H<sub>2</sub> Is the unaided recall of a familiar brand heard in a 60-second commercial more effective than the unaided recall of a familiar brand heard in a 60-second commercial and a familiar popular song?

Based on these hypotheses measuring the comparative unaided, brand recall effectiveness of commercials and product placements in popular music, recommendations can be made to guide the advertising industry in regard to their use.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A brand (Jimmy Choo) was initially selected from available (convenience) popular brands to represent a familiar brand. In a pilot test of 50 undergraduate students (ages 19-21; 46% Male and 54% Female; 88% White) from a Music Marketing class from a large northeastern university, a variety of popular brands including Jimmy Choo was tested for their familiarity. Familiarity for the brand was tested by asking the participants to name, among other categories, five (5) women's shoe brands (unaided) and then asking how familiar (aided) they were with Jimmy Choo (7-point semantic differential scale 1=highly unfamiliar, 7=highly familiar). The results indicated that Jimmy Choo was highly familiar (4.6).

### Stimulus materials

Three different 30-minute segments of actual Top 40 radio programming including music, disc jockey talk, and one of the three combinations of popular song (Shontelle "T-Shirt") and/or commercials (created for the experiment by a radio production professional) were arranged according to the hypotheses previously mentioned. Specifically, the first treatment contained a 60-second commercial for Jimmy Choo; the second treatment contained a popular song with Jimmy Choo (i.e. Shontelle's "T-Shirt" song 3:59); and the third treatment contained a 60-second commercial for Jimmy Choo and a popular song featuring Jimmy Choo. The choice of Top 40 was chosen and appropriate because it is the most listened-to format of the participants (Arbitron, 2009). Top 40 programming has

also been shown to be more "interesting and involving" (Bickart, 1984). In 1990, Sullivan added that "the more involving music formats [like Top 40] produce more strongly positive advertising effects than do less highly involving music formats" (p. 107).

### Participants

Eighty-two undergraduate students (ages 19-21; 52% Male and 48% Female; 89% White) from Principles of Marketing classes from the same large northeastern university were randomly assigned to hear one of the three conditions.

### Procedure

After listening to the tape, each group was asked to complete a questionnaire that began with a diversion of standard radio research questions regarding familiarity, likeability, and intent to listen to the radio station they heard on the tape. Unaided brand recall was assessed by asking subjects to list each product or company they recalled having heard referenced in song, advertisement, or both, similar to previous research of product placement (Gupta & Lord, 1998). Aided testing was done by giving the participants a list of brands (including Jimmy Choo) and asking if they recalled hearing the brand in a song, commercial, or not at all. All were then measured dichotomously. Familiarity (aided) for the brand (Jimmy Choo) and the song (Shontelle "T-Shirt") were tested by asking "How familiar are you with Jimmy Choo?" and "How familiar are you with the song 'T-Shirt' by Shontelle?" using a 7-point semantic differential scale (1=highly unfamiliar, 7=highly familiar). The brand (Jimmy Choo) was found to be highly familiar (4.0). The popular song ("T-Shirt" by Shontelle) was also found (aided) to be highly familiar (5.1).

## RESULTS

A crosstab analysis was conducted to answer the research questions if the unaided recall of a familiar brand heard in a 60-second commercial was more effective than the brand recall of a familiar brand heard in a familiar popular song and/or a 60-second commercial. The independent variable was placement (60-second commercial, popular song, or 60-second plus popular song). The dependent variable was brand recall. A Pearson Chi-Square analysis showed a significant difference in the unaided brand recall between the three treatments ( $F(1,82)=27.322, p<.00$ ).

H<sub>1</sub> asked if the unaided recall of a familiar brand

heard in a 60-second commercial is more effective than the brand recall of a familiar brand heard in a familiar popular song; 84% of the participants recalled the familiar brand in the 60-second commercial, while only 28% recalled the familiar brand in the popular song.

H<sub>2</sub> asked if the brand recall of a familiar brand heard in a 60-second commercial is more effective than the brand recall of a familiar brand heard in a familiar popular song and a 60-second commercial; 84% recalled the familiar brand in the 60-second commercial, while 87% recalled the familiar brand in the 60-second commercial and the popular song. While not significant, the recall for the combination of ad and song was slightly higher than just for the ad. This does not enable generalizability that supplementing a commercial campaign with a song will increase its recall. It does, however, suggest that this type of integration measure might have a better overall effect than a traditional ad campaign.

Based on these results for the comparative brand recall effectiveness of advertisements and product placements, it is recommended that product placement in popular music not be used in place of 60-second commercials. Brands advertisers should, however, consider maximizing their exposure by encouraging and/or arranging for product-placed songs be aired as part of an integrated campaign.

As for the implications of this study for IMC strategy, product placement in popular music is the perfect marriage of culture and commerce if IMC is truly all about “synergy” and the successful “interaction of various marketing and communication activities that come together to impact and influence consumers” (Schultz, 2005). The integration of brands in songs is yet another option for marketers to consider when trying to extend the reach of their advertising campaigns. And while this research showed that it is not a replacement for commercials, the placement of brands by bands in their songs is yet another viable opportunity for a “touchpoint” (Schultz, 2005).

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study presents only a snapshot of the brand recall effectiveness of product placement in popular songs, it provides a foundation for future research. Limitations include the artificial setting of a controlled experiment, which increases its internal validity but decreases its generalizability. In addition, the immediate recall testing decreases the study’s external validity.

Future research should compare immediate recall testing with day after recall as well as examine the interaction of brand recall effectiveness of 60-second commercials and popular music and frequency. Inclusion of additional demographics and their corresponding genres of music would further expand the knowledge base on this topic, although a student sample in this case seems entirely appropriate due to the nature of the stimulus material of popular music and in general (Basil, 1996). Increased test volume should also be considered in the future to be able to reduce the confidence interval in order to achieve a significant recall differential and thus derive an also significant and general recommendation for IMC campaign planners regarding their recall objectives. Additional research is needed to consider attitude change related to product placement in music both positively and negatively. Finally, future research could compare product placement in popular music to other media forms like television and movies

## CONCLUSION

IMC has certainly come a long way since the early days at Northwestern University, but it will definitely have to continue to evolve in the current “customer-driven marketplace” (Schultz and Patti, 2009). One such evolution is the branding of a product in popular music. This study compared the recall effectiveness of a familiar brand in a popular song to a radio commercial. The results indicated that brand recall in popular music, while not quite as effective as in a 60-second commercial, can extend and supplement the exposure of the brand beyond traditional radio advertising and provide yet another opportunity to brand with the consumer. As marketers continue to search for new integrations for their Marketing Communications strategy, brand placement in popular music should remain a viable alternative. It is hoped that this study will not only enable but encourage additional research into this “popular” yet neglected area of product placement.

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