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Let It Rock: the Effects of Brand Name Placement in Songs on Attitudes Toward the Artist and the Brand

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Among the various types of hybrid messages, product placement appears as one of the most widely used and constitutes the object of this research. Focusing on brand placement in song lyrics, this paper analyses its particular influence over consumers' attitude toward the brand and the artist. Several factors identified in the literature for their importance were manipulated through two experiments: The congruence of the artist-brand dyad, as well as the communication strength and valence. This research delivers novel results for academics, practitioners and artists in the context of product placement in songs, and sets the basis for further research.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on a specific type of product placement, namely brand placement in song lyrics and particularly on its impact over consumers' attitudes toward the brand and the artist. Three significant factors were identified in the literature and manipulated through two experiments: Congruence of the artist-brand dyad, strength and valence. Whereas the impact of congruence on product placement has been proven (Russell, 2002), the last two elements are novel and explicitly stated as important for future research (Balasubramanian, Karrh and Patwardhan, 2006).

Congruence

Russell (2002) develops the notion of congruence as a major factor determining audiences' reactions toward product placement. Incongruent information triggers cognitive elaboration and auditors' attention, thus improving the memory of the placement. Whereas congruence enhances realism, incongruent information elicits suspicions about the reasons for the brand appearing in the show; thus triggering unfavourable effects on evaluation. Russell (2002) conceptualizes congruence as the combination of modality (visual / audio) and plot connection (lower / higher). In this research, congruence was conceptualized as the fit or match between the brand and the artist. The first study probes the proposed model in an incongruent artist-brand dyad, and the second study investigates the congruent artist-brand dyad.

Valence

In general, academic literature suggests that putting forward product advantages rather than disadvantages enhances the attitude toward it, and vice versa when communication for the product is negative (Balasubramanian, 1994). Notwithstanding that several variables are considered to moderate the effects of negative communication on attitudes toward brands (Ahluwalia, Bumkrant, and Unnava, 2000; Till and Shimp, 1998), recent studies proved that, under certain circumstances, negative communication related to products can yield positive cues (Money, Shimp and Sakano, 2006). In addition, in line with Campbell's (1995) attention-getting tactics research, placing positive brand arguments in songs may be perceived as manipulated communication by audiences.

Building on the previous arguments, the hypotheses laid out in this paper suggest that individuals will have more positive attitudes toward artists and brands when the communication valence is negative, compared to less favourable attitudes when the communication valence is positive.

Strength

The influence of the communication modality will be moderated by the strength of the relationship between the artist and the brand. In the context of product placement in movies or sitcoms, strength is operationalized by fore versus background placement or by visual only versus visual and verbal placements (Russell and Stern, 2006). As this study concerns music songs, strength was implemented by repeating a brand name as to reinforce the association with the artist. Balasubramanian et al. (2006) specifically underlined the importance of "repetition" as an operationalization mode that could have a significant influence on product placement effectiveness. Therefore, the effect of repetition is seen as a cata-

lyser of communication on attitudes, and depends on whether the product is communicated positively or negatively.

Studies

Two scenario based studies (coherent/incoherent brand-artist dyad) were designed and implemented to test the hypotheses. Eight scenarios were crafted (four scenarios per study); each of them combined the effect of communication valence (positive/negative) and strength (repeated/not repeated). One artist was chosen and remained constant across all eight scenarios. Two brands were chosen to create an incoherent artist-brand dyad (used in study one) and a coherent artist-brand dyad (used in study two). These were chosen while executing several pretests after which the appropriate stimuli were obtained. To avoid likeability, an equally liked / disliked artist and two neutrally liked brands were selected.

The studies were carried-out among a sample of undergraduate students. These were given two booklets presented as unrelated studies belonging to two different researchers. The first booklet was presented as a study on general attitudes concerning celebrities and brands; the second booklet was presented as a study on new trends in the music industry. Respondents were asked to imagine a situation in which they were invited by a music company to listen to new songs from a given artist, in order to assess the new album. It was stipulated in each scenario that the artist mentioned in his lyrics (either in a positive or negative valence) once only or several times (strength) a brand (either incongruent in study one or congruent in study two). Finally, respondents were asked about their attitudes toward the artist and the brand using a five item 7 point Likert scale (Aggarwal, 2004). Several manipulation checks were executed to ascertain the reliability of the manipulations.

Two (incongruent/congruent) 2 X 2 (valence: positive vs. negative; strength: none repeated vs. repeated) between-participant ANCOVAs were performed to measure the effect of treatments over attitudes toward the artist and the brand. The most significant results are:

Incongruent artist-brand dyad-attitudes toward the artist:

The two-way interaction between valence and strength was significant. A planned contrast revealed that if a brand is communicated negatively and for repeated times, the average attitude toward the artist is more positive compared to the attitude when the brand was communicated positively and for repeated times. In contrast, when a brand is communicated negatively but not repeatedly, no significant difference was reported compared to a brand communicated positively but not repeatedly.

Incongruent artist-brand dyad-attitudes toward the brand:

The between-participant effect of valence was significant. Participants reported more favorable attitudes toward the brand after the artist mentioned the brand negatively instead of positively. However, the two-way interaction between valence and strength was non significant.

Congruent artist-brand dyad-attitudes toward the artist:

The between-participant effect of valence was significant. Participants reported more favorable attitudes toward the artist after he mentioned the brand negatively instead of positively. However,

the two-way interaction between valence and strength was non significant.

Congruent artist-brand dyad-attitudes toward the brand:

The two-way interaction between valence and strength was significant. A planned contrast revealed that if a brand is communicated negatively and for repeated times, respondents have more positive attitudes toward the brand compared to attitudes when it is communicated positively and for repeated times. No significant difference was observed over the attitude toward the brand when this was not repeated, irrespective of the positive or negative communication modality.

Implications for marketers are considerable, since misused valence can discount individuals' attitudes over brands and artists. Finally, the research proposed several findings which could be worth considering in better law framing, due to the ethical implications that hybrid messages contain.

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