

Study shows product placement, branding growing in popular music

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As branding and advertising creep into almost every facet of life, a new study from the University of Colorado Denver shows it's now making substantial inroads into popular music.

The study examined in detail the yearly top 30 Billboard songs from 1960 to 2013 - a total of 1,583 - and found a steep increase in 'advertainment' or the use of product placement, branding and name dropping among the most [popular music](#) in the nation.

In 2006 alone, 20 of the top 30 songs, or two out of three, included at least one reference to a person, place or product, the study said.

"As a professor of [music business](#) and a fan I recognized that this was happening. Now, as a researcher, I have the data to prove it," said study author Storm Gloor, associate professor of music business at CU Denver's College of Arts & Media. "I don't necessarily lament it or abhor it but I was surprised by the clarity of the trend."

Gloor found a total of 1,544 product references in the five decades of songs he analyzed with more than half occurring between 2000 and 2010. Automobiles were favorites with Mercedes-Benz, Bentley, Corvette, Cadillac and Chevrolet among the most popular products mentioned.

The study also showed a direct link between product placement and brand awareness. For example, Gloor said that after the 2002 Busta

Rhymes hit single 'Pass the Courvoisier,' sales of the cognac jumped 10 to 20 percent that year. Run DMC's [song](#) 'My Adidas,' Gloor said, had a similar impact on those sneakers.

Place names also increased dramatically since 1960. Aside from famous seaside towns mentioned in hits like the Beach Boys' 'Surfin' USA,' there were few locations mentioned in the 1960s and 70s. That grew steadily in the 80s and 90s. In 2006, some 9 percent of Billboard's top songs referenced specific place names.

Another trend is the artist dropping their own name. There was only one name reference in 1964, four in 1974, one in 1984, 39 in 1994 and 130 in 2004. One potential reason for this is that many radio deejays no longer identify the songs or artists they play, so singers must do it themselves, Gloor said.

According to Gloor, all this is also happening due to seismic changes in the music industry.

"In today's music business, artists and their stakeholders have had to take non-traditional approaches in navigating the marketplace," he said. "It has become increasingly important to emphasize marketing the artist as a brand rather than focusing so much on the sale of recordings."

The study noted that singer CeeLo Green had revenues of over \$20 million in 2011 with the smallest amount of that coming from music sales. The rest were derived from marketing and branding opportunities.

"Artist and music business mogul Jay-Z has been specifically pointed out as someone who uses mentions of brand names 'as a way of marking his authenticity as a self-made businessman,'" the study said.

Gloor said that referring to products, places and people might cause fans

to relate to the music and keep listening rather than clicking past.

Another finding showed that pop songs have become much longer since the 1960s and 70s when Top 40 radio stations favored shorter songs. The average number of words in a song from 1960 was 185, while in 2010 it was 489 or a 164 percent increase.

The increased length appeals to businesses like Pandora, a free Internet music provider, which can lower their licensing fees by playing longer songs during a consumer's listening time, since they pay a per-song fee, Gloor said.

"Many people thought music was the last bastion free of marketing but that train has left the station. Many musicians these days make less money from their recorded work so they must become marketing entities since the music doesn't entirely pay the bills," Gloor said. "People could get sick of it and there could be a backlash but for now this is the new reality."

More information: *Journal of the Music & Entertainment Industry Education Association*: [www.meiea.org/Journal/Vol.14/G ...
14_no_1_2014-p39.pdf](http://www.meiea.org/Journal/Vol.14/G...14_no_1_2014-p39.pdf).

Provided by University of Colorado Denver

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