

PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN MUSIC VIDEOS – THE LADY GAGA PHENOMENON

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ABSTRACT

One does not even have to watch today's music videos very attentively in order to recognize that brands appear in them from time to time. However, this was not always the case. The changing policies of Music Television, the introduction of VEVO (a music video channel launched on Youtube), and the widening use of product placement in general have all played a significant role in the changes of the landscape, the increasing number of product placements in music videos. The paper examines the spread of brand/product placement in music videos, also known as the Lady Gaga effect. The study focuses on two aspects of product placement: on the one hand, which music genres it is the most widely used in, and on the other hand, what its most common (classical and special) types are. The author describes the notion of product placement drawing on different definitions, then discusses several typical and unique examples of brands and artists involved in product placement in pop, electronic, rock, and more than anything else, hip-hop music videos. Through a discussion of various historical and contemporary examples (most of them visual or auditive), and their relation to business, the study proves that product placement in music videos has become an increasingly popular tool in the world of marketing.

Keywords: *Branded Entertainment, Branded Content, Product Placement, Music Videos, Marketing Communications*

1. INTRODUCTION

How can we define product placement? Although it is a new marketing communication genre, there are several definitions already:

- A product or a brand in one or more scenes of a film, in one form or another, in return for payment. (Snyder 1992)
- When a product is placed in a movie or television show in exchange for payment of money or other promotional consideration by the marketer (Gupta– Gould 1997).
- Paid product message which is aimed at influencing movie or television viewers through planned and discreet entry of a branded product into a movie or television program. (Balasubramanian 1994)
- A marketing tool where a product is put into a movie scene, or its brand name is heard. (Lehu 2008)

As the definitions suggest, product placement is usually mentioned in connection with brand placements in movies. Some definitions also add television programmes, but product placement has actually interwoven the entire entertainment industry. It is present in reality shows, talent shows, talk shows, sports coverages, and cartoons. We can find brands in console and computer games, books, and even in works of fine arts (Papp-Váry 2014). And, of course, it also appears in music videos, which forms the basis for this study. The article examines the topic focusing on two aspects:

- Which music genres have more brand appearances, and which have less?
- What are some of the examples of typical brand placements (visual, auditive, brands in song titles)?

2. PRODUCT PLACEMENT IN VARIOUS MUSIC GENRES

If we consider product placement in various music genres, the following stand out: pop (Lady Gaga also belongs here 'officially', although she might be offended by this label), electronic music, rock, and hip-hop (Csordás 2013, Bánfi – Csillag – Major 2012). Let us look at these in more detail.

2.1. Brands in pop music videos

We can find several video montages on Youtube collecting brands that appear in Lady Gaga music videos: Bwin.com (online gambling website), Campari (vermouth), Chanel (shoes), Coca-Cola Light (soft drink), Dior (ring), LG (phone), Mercedes (car), Neuro Sonic (water), Nemiroff (vodka), Nike (shoes), Parrot (music storage kit), Plenty of Fish (online dating site), Vespa (scooter), Virgin (mobile service provider), Wonder Bread (sliced bread), Polaroid (camera). In addition, Lady Gaga is also the creative director of the latter brand, Polaroid.

Several songs by the artist could be mentioned as examples, and one of these is *We love designers* featuring a lineup of designer brands such as Armani, Fendi, Valentino, Jimmy Choo, Dolce&Gabbana and Manolo.

Therefore product placement in music videos is also called the Lady Gaga effect, suggesting that the eccentric singer introduced it in the world of music. Nevertheless, the expression "revolutionize" would be more appropriate: there had been product placements before Lady Gaga, maybe just less often.



Illustration 1 – Brands in Lady Gaga music videos

Source: <http://www.x17online.com/media/images/2010/03/gagaadvert2.jpg>

On the other hand, Lady Gaga's "competitors" also use brand placement. Britney Spears even draws attention to this in one of her music videos: the Nokia's 5800 Xpress Music model appeared for 7 seconds in her 3 minute 46 seconds long song *Womanizer*. 4 seconds of this is full-screen placement, when the male main character takes a phone in his hand, and checks his calendar items. Ironically, one of these items happens to be a product placement meeting... Maybe she wanted to draw the attention of other brands to her welcoming them with open arms as she managed to get support worth 500 000 US dollars for her song *Hold it Against Me*.

Britney uses long brand placements quite well, which is a rare case, because music videos usually operate with quick cuts. However, in the first 14 (!) seconds of the 3-minute video for *Me Against the Music*, we see a Mazda approaching and stopping, and the driver getting out is Britney Spears. In order to get the brand imprinted on the mind of all viewers, the camera zooms in on the logo of the car at the end of the video (Kreativ.hu 2013). As Eric Spear told Advertising Age (a marketing and media magazine), the professionals of the car manufacturer had seen the screenplay of the music video before the start of the shooting, and they thought that the placement could increase brand awareness significantly, with no particular risk of featuring a Mazda RX-8. It is also interesting that Mazda executives raised no objections to lesbian scenes (Madonna appears with Britney in the music video), because the company's regulations of product placement do not prohibit such appearances. However though, they could not feature alcohol or car crashes in the music video as it would have been contrary to Mazda's support policies. News reports said that another – unnamed – brand was in competition with Mazda. As a marketing manager for the company said, the decision was made by Britney herself, being a great fan of RX-8. At the same time, Mazda refused to provide information regarding the amount that the company paid for this adoration. Rather enigmatically, the executive only said that "we have received a remarkably high offer, and paid significantly less" (Mfor.hu 2003). Jennifer Lopez also often uses product placement; for example, she features a Fiat 500 in her music video *Papi*. Moreover, the car is the main character of the video as the singer is fleeing in it, being chased by an army of men. Later they also produced a 30-second Fiat commercial out of the scenes of the video.



Illustration 2 – Fiat 500 in the music video for *Papi* by Jennifer Lopez

Source: <http://brandsandfilms.com/2011/12/the-best-of-2011/>

Avril Lavigne is also open to product placement. The most interesting aspect of her video titled *What the hell* is that product placements seem to be more important than the plot of the video itself. Right in the beginning we see an armada of Adidas and Nike shoes. This is followed by a Sony Vaio laptop, and a gigantic Sony Bravia TV set. There is a heap of baseball caps below the TV, still carrying their labels. Then a small bottle of Avril Lavigne perfume appears, alongside with her fashion brand, Abbey Dawn. We can even see a Sony Ericsson Vivaz Light Pink towards the end of the video. At the same time, they removed the Ford brand name digitally from the NYC cab that she steals in the story (Webragacs.hu 2011).

Many people had enough of the commercialization of music videos after a quick succession of Avril Lavigne and Britney videos, and it seemed that Katy Perry was one of them. The singer explained her views on the issue via Twitter: "You have to get creative with it. Some artists don't care tho, and you can tell", she wrote. In another tweet some time later, Perry elaborated on her artistic vision of product placement: "Most, if not ALL popsters welcome deals with products to offset costs of big budget vids in these recessional music industry times. I'VE used them in MY vids before & am happy to able to make a better vid because of." (Inkai 2011). Yes, she did use them: her most famous song, *I Kissed a Girl*, featured the ChapStick lip care

product that really suited the video. Every now and then product placement is also mentioned because the record label has direct shares of a product or service. For example, the Plenty of Fish dating site appears in Lady Gaga, Natasha Bedingfield, Jennifer Lopez and Britney Spears videos as well, which is no wonder considering that the site is owned by Interscope Records, where the performers listed above also belong.

2.2. Brands in electronic music videos

Some of the celebrities of today's music scene are not singers or musicians, but DJs. They have a great number of fans, and some of the fans do not even know the origin of the abbreviation, disc jockey. One of these contemporary celebrities is David Guetta. The Ice Watch brand issued a special collection inspired by the musician. The name of the series became *F*** Me I'm Famous*, which is also the title of a "song" by the star. In addition, they also invited his wife, Cathy, to be a model for the brand in the framework of a "family enterprise". Therefore it is no wonder that the watch appears in the video *Where Them Girls At* by David Guetta. A Sony Ericsson Xperia Ray and a Xperia X10 Mini mobile phone also appear in the same video. Moreover, the video for the song features the new, electronic Renault Twizy, which became the main character of another music video, *The Alphabeat*. Guetta likes and prefers to use Monster Beats Solo HD, which appears in several of his videos, and the music video that he recorded together with American singer Usher features an HP TouchPad, too (Bánfi– Csillag – Major 2012).



Illustration 3 – Renault Twizy electric car in the music video for *Alphabeat* by David Guetta
Source: <http://fr.ubergizmo.com/2012/04/16/twizy-dans-le-dernier-clip-de-david-guetta.html>

2.3. Brands in rock music videos

It is interesting that we see less brands and product categories in this genre, or at least we see other kinds of them. In rock videos we do not see luxury cars, mobile phones or perfumes.

At the same time, instruments are very often highlighted. For example, Airbourne "advertises" Marshall amplifiers in their music video *Runnin' Wild*. The Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Can't Stop* features the Pearl drum brand, and it appears clearly several times.

We could also mention another interesting case involving H-Blockx – the band had a European tour sponsored, and they also produced a music video on it. In *Countdown to Insanity*, the band hits the road by bus, and their destination is Air Race in Istanbul. It is perhaps not surprising that Red Bull was their sponsor.

2.4. Brands in hip-hop music videos

Regarding brand placement, hip-hop is the other leading music genre besides pop, and in some respects it even overtakes pop (Tuza 2013, Nagy – Spiegel – Buzás 2012).

Experts usually say that the first rap song was *Rapper's Delight* by Sugar Hill Gang, released in 1979 – and rap is the same as hip-hop in a certain sense, although some people consider rap

as a part of hip-hop (Papp-Váry 2006). This is also the first brand placement, as the lyrics say "everybody go, hotel motel Holiday Inn".

Then, in 1986, Run DMC wrote their hit song *My Adidas*. "We travel on gravel, dirt road or street, I wear my Adidas when I rock the beat, on stage front page every show I go, it's Adidas on my feet high top or low", the lyrics said.

After a while Russel Simmons, the president of Def Jam Records (Run DMC's label at the time) realized that the guys should be getting paid for this advertisement. Therefore he contacted the German company to request financial support for their 1987 Together Forever tour. According to the story, the management of Adidas was not very enthusiastic about the idea of establishing relations with rap music, because at that time they considered it a fad serving as a call to riot. In order to convince Adidas bigwigs, Simmons took some of them to a Run DMC show. While the band was performing the song, one of the members yelled "Okay, everybody in the house, rock your Adidas!" – and several thousand sneakers kicked in the air. The Adidas executives could not reach for their checkbooks fast enough (Klein 2004). It is also interesting that Adidas issued limited series "Superstar 80s" shoes in 2011, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the concert on 11 November 1986. As a reference to the band, the number 1986 is stitched on the heel, and a small gold-plated chain is placed on the front. In addition, "Me and my Adidas" is appears on the tongue, and the name Run DMC is also used on the shoe.



Illustration 4 – In 1986, Run DMC wrote their hit song My Adidas

Source: <http://lifestylesdefined.com/adidas-aka-the-old-school-favorite-for-the-new-school/>

Some time later brand placements in hip-hop songs became a synonym of 'cool' (Kerner – Pressman 2007). Brands that could follow this trend (most of the time free of charge) were able to reach a new and aspiring young target group. There was a time when special lists were compiled with the brands appearing in hip-hop lyrics. For example, the 2004 rankings of the so-called American Brandstand showed that the most popular product categories were cars, fashion products, and beverages. In 2004, the artist with the most brands in his songs was Kanye West, followed by Twista, Lil' Jon, Chingy, and Ludacris. If we examine brands, we can see that Cadillac appeared 70 times and Hennessy cognac appeared 69 times in the lyrics of hip-hop hit songs. They were followed by Mercedes (63 mentions), Rolls-Royce (62), Gucci (49),

Jaguar (32), Chevrolet (28), and Cristal champagne (28). Two card brands took the 9th and 10th places: Bentley had 26 mentions and Maybach got 25. (Brandchannel.com 2004, BBC Money Programme 2006). Of course, not all luxury brands were happy about this. When a journalist of the Economist asked Frederic Rouzaud, the managing director of the company producing Cristal, a champagne brand that had been originally popular among more conservative, older white people: "Do you think your brand is hurt by its association with the 'bling lifestyle'?" Rouzeau said, "That's a good question, but what can we do? We can't forbid people from buying it."

As Jay-Z says in his book *Decoded*, "That was like a slap in the face. You can argue all you want about Rouzaud's statements and try to justify them or whatever, but the tone is clear. When asked about an influential segment of his market, his response was, essentially, well, we can't stop them from drinking it. That was it for me. I released a statement saying that I would never drink Cristal or promote it in any way or serve it at my clubs ever again. I felt like this was the bullshit I'd been dealing with forever, this kind of offhanded, patronizing disrespect for the culture of hip-hop.

Why not just say thank you and keep it moving? You would think the person who runs the company would be most interested in selling his product, not in criticizing—or accepting criticisms—of the people buying it. (...) What a lot of people—including, obviously, The Economist, Cristal, and Iceberg—think is that rappers define themselves by dropping the names of luxury brands. They can't believe that it might actually work the other way around.

Cristal, before hip-hop, had a nice story attached to it: It was a quality, premium, luxury brand known to connoisseurs. But hip-hop gave it a deeper meaning. Suddenly, Cristal didn't just signify the good life, but the good life laced with hip-hop's values: subversive, self-made, audacious, even a little dangerous. The word itself—Cristal—took on a new dimension. It wasn't just a premium champagne anymore—it was a prop in an exciting story, a portal into a whole world. Just by drinking it, we infused their product with our story, an ingredient that they could never bottle on their own. When people all over started drinking Cristal at clubs—when Cristal became a household name among young consumers—it wasn't because of anything Cristal had done. It was because of what we'd done." (Jay-Z 2011)

In order to "avoid" the above, and, of course, earn significantly more, most of today's hip-hop stars present their own product collection, which they also display in their music videos.

Let us consider, for example, the abovementioned Jay-Z, that is, Shawn Carter. We get up in the morning, we can hear his latest hit in the radio, spray some of his perfume on ourselves after having a shower, put on a piece of his RocaWear fashion brand, wear his S. Carter training shoes distributed in cooperation with Reebok, go to a game of his NBA team, Brooklyn Nets, have a dinner in his restaurant called Spotted Pig, and we may get to Broadway just in time to watch the play *Fela!*, produced by him. Then we can spend the night in the 40/40 Club, also co-owned by him. He has been listed on the Forbes Top 100 celebrity list several times. But he just says, "I am not a businessman. I am a business, man" (Papp-Váry – Tuza 2014)

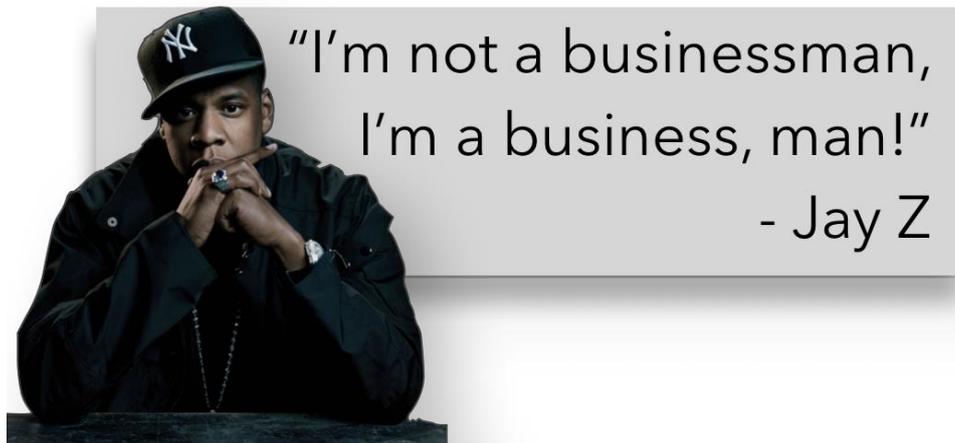


Illustration 5 – Jay-Z has been listed on the Forbes Top 100 celebrity list several times

Source: <https://media.licdn.com/mpr/mpr/p/8/005/09a/204/08af1c3.png>

We can also mention 50 Cent, another celebrity featured on the same list by Forbes. An example from the lyrics of his song *PIMP* proves that he also often uses brand placement: „She in the club, She dancing for dollars, She got a thing for that Gucci, that Fendi, that Prada, that BCBG, Burberry, Dolce and Gabbana...”

Or we can consider P. Diddy (original name: Sean John Combs), who also entered into a cooperation with a lot of brands. Just an example: Diageo, an alcoholic drink producer and distributor giant placed him into the chief marketing officer/brand manager position of the Ciroc vodka brand, and all this with a 50-50 percent allocation of the profit.

Diddy described the concept and the insight in an interview by Advertising Age: "There's no vodka out there that spoke my language. It was the same with my records and with Sean John. Nobody was speaking to the fashion community like I was. I didn't think there was a vodka whose marketing spoke to my lifestyle, that made me feel like I want to feel. I've branded myself as the king of celebration, and that's what this alliance is about." (AdAge.com 2007). And he did it just the same way he did earlier in the case of the Courvoisier, Patron and Cristal brands through his music videos, songs and parties – just this time it was on purpose. It was planned. For money. Intertwining them with music, placing products in videos, organizing VIP events, entering celebrity endorsement agreements.

First of all, he changed the basic brand strategy in order to differentiate it. Before him, Ciroc said that it was the only vodka made of grapes. But consumers did not care too much about this. Diddy provided a story and content for the brand. He made it a lifestyle.

"I'm a rapstar, not a rock star but don't get it twisted I'm a Ciroc star" Jadakiss raps in his song *Ciroc star*. Yes, in addition to appearances in the lyrics of numerous musicians contracted or not contracted to the brand – such as Diddy, Meek Mill, French Montana or even the song *Ciroc & Roll* by Let's Get It – they also produced an official club anthem for the product. "I don't know about any drink brands having their own anthems", Diddy said. "This is the way we insinuate ourselves into night life."

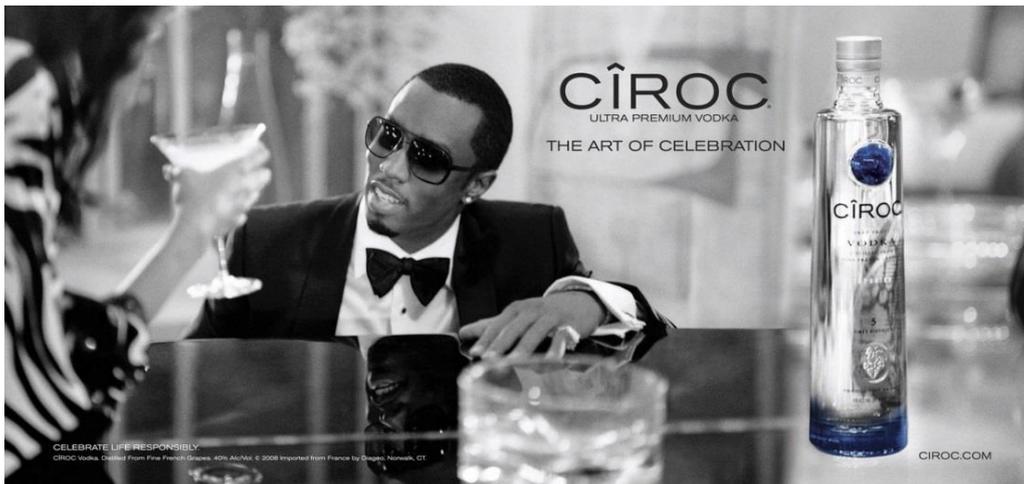


Illustration 6 – P. Diddy is the chief marketing officer of the Cîroc vodka brand
 Source: <http://media1.mfilomeno.com/image/archive/528835/129214/1200/800/2>

In 2010, Diageo, the world's biggest alcohol distributor announced that Cîroc Ultra Premium Vodka was awarded the „Spirits Brand of the Year” prize by the prestigious Market Watch magazine. Each year, the award is voted by the executives of the greatest wholesaler companies. As for the sales figures: on the whole, Cîroc sales increased by 552% between 2007 and 2010, and the brand knocked Belvedere from the second position in the market of ultra-premium vodkas (Blackenterprise.com 2010).

However, P. Diddy is not the only one person with such an agreement: Voli Vodka appears in five music videos by Pitbull, a popular rapper also active in the genres of hip-hop, electronic and pop. The placement is no surprise as Pitbull is a spokesperson for the Voli brand, in which he also holds a majority equity stake.

3. TYPES OF BRAND PLACEMENT: CLASSICAL AND SPECIAL SOLUTIONS

Product placements in music videos can also be grouped by another aspect: just as in movies, there are some merely visual placements, and we can also see auditive ones, especially in the genre of hip-hop. In fact, there are also cases where the brand is included in the title of the song.

3.1. Visual brand placement in videos

This is the most common case. The abovementioned Lady Gaga videos are excellent examples: we see the brands in the videos, but their name is not mentioned in the lyrics. For example, in *Bad Romance*, the following brands appear: iPod Classic music player, Parrot music storage device, Heartbeat earphones, Lex Nemiroff vodka, Wii controller, Dr. Dre speakers, HP Envy laptop, Carrera sunglasses. Research has also found that 56% of viewers were able to recall at least one brand spontaneously (Quirk's 2011).

3.2. Auditive brand placement in videos

To put it simply, this means that the brand name is stated in the video. As it was mentioned above, Music Television used to refuse to air videos including product placement for a long time. In this light it especially interesting that the most played song of the channel is *Money for Nothing* by Dire Straits (Lehu 2009), as the first four lines of the lyrics say "I want my MTV. I want my MTV. Now look at them yo-yo's that's the way you do it, You play the guitar on the MTV". We have got so much used to this kind of placement that it is not at all surprising that Sean Kingston sings "It's like my iPod stuck on a replay" to describe the situation that he can not get a woman out of his mind. Ke\$ha sings "Before I leave, I brush my teeth with a bottle of Jack", referring to Jack Daniels whiskey. Research by Gaylord Fields found that there are 13

well-known songs with lyrics mentioning Coca-Cola – the list includes country, rock, and swing songs (Fields 2012).

However, the mentioning of brand names is mostly popular in hip-hop. It is interesting that these performers originally wanted to improve their image mentioning brands in their songs (for free), but nowadays many brands pay great amounts of money to get included in lyrics.

Of course the best examples include lyrics that also communicate the characteristics of the brand – for example, in the song *Hey Yo* by Outcast they rap "Shake it Suga' shake it like a Polaroid Picture", referring to the way these cameras are used: we shoot with the camera, it prints the picture immediately, then we have to 'shake' the picture to make the paint dry faster.

3.3. Brands in song titles

This is not a new thing either. Let us start our list of examples with a recording by Janis Joplin that has been reworked several times. The title of the song is the brand itself: *Mercedes Benz*, and the first four lines say "Oh lord won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz. My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends. Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends. So oh lord won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz."

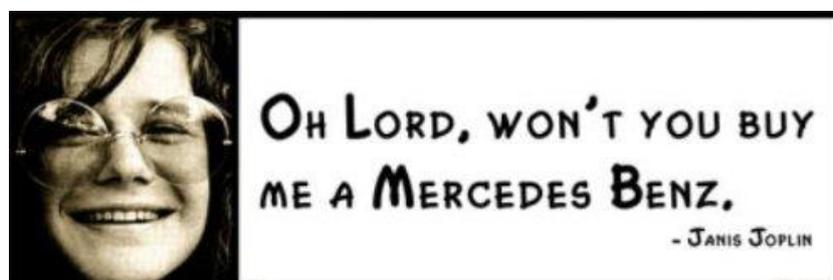


Illustration 7 – In some cases, the brand name appears in the title (and refrain) of the song

Source: <http://ecx.images-amazon.com/images/I/41VVm4nKeVL.jpg>

Then there is the title of a Paul Simon album, *Kodachrome*. Moreover, the lyrics do not only mention the film to be loaded in the camera, but the advantages of the product, too: "Kodachrome, You give us those nice bright colors, You give us the greens of summers, Makes you think all the world's a sunny day, oh yeah!, I got a Nikon camera, I love to take a photograph, So Mama, don't take my Kodachrome away."

The title of a song by Chicago singer Ron Carroll is *Walking down with my Nikes on*. What is more, the sentence appears several times in the lyrics as it is also the refrain of the song.

And we have not even mentioned the world of hip-hop, where the phenomenon is probably the most common. Busta Rhymes' *Pass the Courvoisier* has become one of the anthems of the genre: "We gon' tell that brotha, pass the Courvoisier; We gon' tell that brotha, pass the Courvoisier; Everybody sings it now, pass the Courvoisier; Everybody sings it now, pass the Courvoisier." (Kerner – Pressman 2007, Wipperfürth 2005)

It may come as a surprise, but there is a Hungarian brand that is featured in the title of an international hit – moreover, the whole song and its music video are focused around it. The song is *Hey Jasmin* by Flo Rida, referring to the live erotic videochat service LiveJasmin, and the video makes no secret of this fact, so the LiveJasmin caption appears, too. In addition, a handsome man wearing glasses and a suit appears in the video, greeting Flo Rida – he is none other than the owner of the company, György Gattyán.

3.4. Famous performers in branded advertisements

Is advertisement different from product placement? Yes, it is. However, such cases belong to branded entertainment in several respects. We see a performer singing, drawing attention to a brand. Although this is an advertisement, it may well be that we link the two the next time we see the original video.

An excellent example is the case of Pepsi and Michael Jackson. As Phil Dusenberry, former Chairman of the BBDO advertising agency wrote in his book *Then We Set His Hair on Fire* (Dusenberry 2005), they approached the pop star to ask him to provide them with a song for one of their advertisements, with lyrics custom written for Pepsi. Much to their surprise, Jackson offered them his coolest hit at the time, *Billie Jean*. The original lyrics said, "Billie Jean is not my lover. She's just a girl who claims that I am the one. But the kid is not my son". In the Pepsi spot, however, Michael Jackson was already singing, "You're the Pepsi Generation. Guzzle down and Taste the thrill of the day. And feel the Pepsi way." It is especially interesting that the hair of Michael Jackson accidentally caught fire during the shoot (and the book title *Then We Set His Hair on Fire* refers to this), which was a hot topic for the press, and of course Pepsi was also mentioned as part of the story.



Illustration 8 – In a Pepsi spot, Michael Jackson was singing "You're the Pepsi Generation. Guzzle down and Taste the thrill of the day. And feel the Pepsi way."

Source: <https://media.licdn.com/mpr/mpr/p/6/005/086/1dc/1e2ea67.jpg>

Similar solutions (not someone's hair catching fire, but singers appearing in advertisements) are also popular today: the Levi's jeans brand usually chooses famous songs for his commercials, then sells these songs in compilations titled "Levi's Hits".

Lenny Kravitz concluded an agreement with Absolut Vodka in order to publish "Absolut Kravitz" posters as part of the famous advertising campaign series of the brand. The songs could be downloaded from the absoluttracks.com website.

Eminem appeared in a spot for the Chrysler car brand, also promoting the city of Detroit. The spot was one of the advertisements aired during Super Bowl in 2011 – the final of the National Football League (NFL) is not only important because of the game itself, but also it is the biggest "orgy of advertising".

4. CONCLUSION

Although product placement in music videos is often mentioned as the Lady Gaga effect, suggesting that the singer created this tool, it is more appropriate to use the word "revolutionize" as there had been product placements before Lady Gaga, although those were forbidden by the regulations of MTV. However, almost all contemporary genres of popular music feature brands, especially pop music and electronica, and more than anything else, hip-hop. Besides visual placement, that is, brands appearing in some part of the music video, auditive placement, that is, brand names being mentioned is also quite common. A special case of the latter is when brands appear right in the title of songs. In any case, it can be stated that the number of product placements in music videos has been increasing in recent years, and the trend will continue in the future. Brands and artists alike will increasingly need this as traditional record sales and royalty revenues have dwindled, therefore they have to find new sources of income. However, product placements can be helpful in many other ways: they can make music videos more realistic, and raise the image of artists.

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