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Analysis of Prescription Drug Brand Mentions in Music: Prevalence and Consumer
Perceptions

by

Lisa A. Blake

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a concentration in Strategic Communication Management
Department of Advertising and Mass Communications
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Janelle Applequist, Ph.D.
Travis Bell, Ph.D.
Christopher Noland, Ph.D.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my children, Torey, and Clara. Thank you for being my biggest inspiration and bearing the greatest sacrifices during the pursuit of my degree. Also, in dedication to all friends, family members, professors, and colleagues who have encouraged me throughout my time pursuing my master's degree.

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Abstract

Music is not only a lucrative mass reach media (Stassen, 2021) but also a deeply personal tool for self-expression (Hallam, 2019). Music listeners are exposed to a slew of branded messages within music promoting a variety of product types such as apparel, automotive, and alcohol (Craig, Flynn & Holody, 2017). Promotion in music has been proven to be an effective vehicle for building brand awareness when listeners are interested in the music (Delattre & Colovic, 2009, Hoyer & Brown, 1990; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000; Thoma & Williams, 2013). Brands promoted within music enjoy some of the benefits of promotional tactics such as celebrity endorsement as well as the benefit of the mask product placement provides, where the existence of persuasive intent is not obvious. The extent to which branded alcohol promotion is occurring in music (Parsons, 2019) and the effects of this promotion has been explored (Primack et al., 2014). Prescription drug brand promotion in music had not received the same level of attention prior to this study. To address this, a content analysis of popular hip-hop music from 2016-2020 was conducted and found branded prescription drug mentions in an average of seven songs per year. The prescription drug brands most often promoted were Percocet and Xanax. In-depth interviews were conducted with listeners of hip-hop music to get a deep understanding of their ideas and opinions about the promotion of prescription drug brands in music and the brands being promoted. These interviews uncovered that the participants were not able to clearly define why they believed artists chose to include prescription drug brand names in their lyrics. But they did not believe the mentions were being paid for, or sponsored by, the pharmaceutical

companies. Additionally, the pharmaceutical fetishism (Applequist, 2018) of the prescription drug brand being promoted was apparent.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The mention of brand names in music has become commonplace and more widely documented by media researchers than in the previous decades. Some examples include content analysis studies comparing the frequency of brand mentions from different product categories (Baksh-Mohammed & Callison, 2014), studies on the difference in portrayal of brands by music genre (Baksh-Mohammed & Callison, 2014), and studies that show an increase in frequency of brand mentions in music lyrics (DeGregorio & Sung, 2009; Myer & Kleck, 2007). Marketer's desire to associate their products with popular music and popular music artists can be attributed to the proven belief that recall of brands mentioned in music is high, in the tangible marketing sense (Primack et. Al, 2014). On a larger-scale, music is believed to have the ability to have a lasting impact on society by shaping culture and developing subcultures centered around a particular genre of music or a particular artist or band (Kotarba et al., 2013). Marketers can reference anecdotal examples of songs featuring brands resulting in huge shifts in brand images, such as Run DMC's song "My Adidas" which switched the narrative of the German brand from athletic shoes to a hip-hop fashion staple (Thomas, 2015). These examples may motivate brands to work with artists to promote their products But, these arrangements are often not publicly announced. Consumer opinions of brands, artists, and the consumer perceived process by which brand names appear in music is a dynamic that has yet to be researched. This dynamic is important to be researched in depth, as shown by the regulations surrounding social media influencers and disclosing when posts are paid for by a brand. Social media users can now expect to be privy to whether an influencer is promoting a product purely because of their own brand preferences or if

compensation is involved (Disclosures 101 for Social Media Influencers, 2019). Evidence exists showing that arrangements have been discussed between record labels and brands to have product placement within song lyrics (Kim, 2002). However, it is unlikely that this same disclosure will ever be required when it comes to brand mentions in music. Therefore, it is important to understand what consumers think about these brand mentions.

Though all genres of music can contain branded prescription drug mentions, hip-hop music has historically contained the most brand mentions (Burkhalter & Thornton, 2012; Craig, Flynn & Holody, 2017; De Gregorio & Sung, 2009), the most alcohol brand mentions (Primack et. Al, 2011), and the most messages related to substance abuse (Primack et. Al, 2008). Though hip-hop music has been analyzed extensively in these areas, there has yet to be an analysis focused prescription drug brand mentions.

Following its rise in popularity in the late 1980s and 1990s, the hip-hop genre also came under threat of censorship (Hudson, 2009). This sparked media studies scholars to produce numerous articles looking into the effects hip-hop music and culture has on young people who engage with it (Chen et al., 2006; Herd, 2008; Wingood et al., 2003). Sometimes hip-hop culture has been gleaned in a positive light, such as Washington's (2018) research on the use of hip-hop culture and rap music in social justice counseling of Black males to help them vocalize and explore their experiences. However, historically the research covered by the media often shows rap/hip-hop music and hip-hop culture being critiqued by academia (Gordon, 2006; Herd, 2008; Kirchheimer, 2003; Olfman & West, 2009; Richardson & Scott, 2002). This coverage may have contributed to the public's negative assessment of rap music's effect on society according to Pew Research's 2008 survey. While it is important to educate the public to be media conscious of the detrimental effects of exposure to ideas such as alcohol, drug use, and risky sexual behavior on

youth (Chen et al., 2006; Wingood et al., 2003), the aim of this research study is not to call for a boycott of hip-hop music or for artists to regulate their lyrics. Instead, the discussion aims to look at the reality of branded prescription drug mentions in music and how consumers of music perceive these mentions so that strategic communications managers can be better informed when managing prescription drug brand images. The foundational purpose of this research is: to define the current situation of prescription drug brands that are being promoted in hip-hop music, and then to understand the brand opinions of consumers regarding the prescription drug brands mentioned in the music. Future research can then be done to better understand the seldom recognized dynamic of branded prescription drug promotion in music which can then lead to more informed management of prescription drug branding to find ways to take ownership of their brand image, even when unintended promotion is taking place.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Prescription Drug Misuse

Prescription drug misuse is defined by the National Institute on Drug Abuse as the use of a medication that has not been prescribed or the use of a dosage outside of what has been prescribed (NIDA, 2021). The misuse of opioids, central nervous system depressants, and stimulants make up the majority of prescription drug misuse in the United States (NIDA, 2021). The National Institute on Drug Abuse reports an estimated 18 million people in the United States have misused a prescription drug in the past year (NIDA, 2021).

Misuse of prescription drugs began to drastically increase beginning in the 1990s and continued to dramatically increase into the early 2000s (Understanding the epidemic, 2021). This escalation was largely driven by the misuse of opioids, following an increase of opioids being prescribed. The increase of prescription opioid overdoses was the beginning of what is now referred to as the opioid epidemic. Deaths caused by prescription drug opioid overdoses were the first wave of what would develop into a dramatic increase in heroin overdoses and now synthetic opioid overdoses (Understanding the epidemic, 2021). The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that more than 500,000 people have died from opioid related overdoses since 1999 (Understanding the epidemic, 2021).

Pharmaceutical companies have faced repercussions for their part in the opioid epidemic. Purdue Pharma, who produces the prescription painkiller OxyContin, pleaded guilty in November 2020 to criminal charges surrounding their marketing and sales tactics of addictive prescription painkiller drugs (Hoffman & Benner, 2020). The charges assert that Purdue Pharma

maintained that it was conducting an effective anti-diversion program, which works to assure that prescription drugs are not being diverted into illicit drug markets, while they continued to market their opioid pain killers to many providers who Purdue Pharma had evidence were diverting the medications (The United States Department of Justice, 2020). Purdue Pharma also admitted to violating the Anti-Kickback Statute, which in the healthcare setting prohibits the exchange of money or anything else of value for referrals for services paid for by Medicare (The United States Department of Justice, 2020). Purdue Pharma ultimately declared bankruptcy and is currently restructuring. The Purdue Pharma website describes the restructuring plan as beginning with a payout stemming from the charges which will be followed by the Purdue Pharma company being dissolved and operations being transferred to a new company “with the public-minded mission of addressing the opioid crisis” (Purdue Pharma, 2021). The Purdue Pharma judgments are just a fraction of the possible repercussions currently being decided for drug makers who are accused of aiding the opioid epidemic.

Central nervous system depressant brands that serve as sleeping aids are widely recognized because of traditional promotion through commonly recognized marketing efforts such as television or radio ads. Some of these brands include Lunesta and Ambien. Though these types of drugs are promoted in the same way that consumer goods are, they are often abused. Benzodiazepines are central nervous system depressants prescribed to help those with anxiety or insomnia. Benzodiazepines are a group of prescription drugs that are increasingly being misused by adolescents and young adults, particularly the brand Xanax (Xanax abuse among teens is surging, 2018).

Prescription drug misuse is most prevalent among adolescents and young adults. Though less public attention is given to the misuse of prescription stimulants and depressants, data has shown

that opioid use among adolescents and young adults is on the decline, while abuse of these other classes of prescription drugs is increasing (Johnston et al., 2015, 2016). Amphetamines, a sub class of stimulant drugs, are more likely to be misused by college students (Schulenberg et al., 2019). The most popular of these drugs is the brand Adderall which is produced by Shire LLC Pharmaceutical Industries.

Prescription Drug Advertising

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not prevent the advertisement of any prescription drug (Prescription Drug Advertising: Questions and Answers, 2015). The US Drug Enforcement Administration has stated that they strongly discourage any direct-to-consumer advertising of controlled substances and asks the drug industry to voluntarily refrain from any direct-to-consumer advertisement (Labson, 2014). The FDA does however monitor the misrepresentation of drugs in advertising and the intent to mislead consumers through direct-to-consumer promotion (Labson, 2014). The FDA's Office of Prescription Drug Promotion systematically reviews pharmaceutical promotion directed to both healthcare providers and to consumers (*The Office of Prescription Drug Promotion (OPDP)*, 2022). The key element the FDA requires when promoting prescription drugs is fair balance. This is achieved through the required presentation of both drug benefits and risks with equal emphasis. The FDA website states that all product claim ads distributed in any media must include both the brand name and generic name of the drug, one or more FDA approved use of the drug, and the drug's most significant risks (*Basics of Drug Ads*, 2015).

Though slower than other industries, pharmaceutical companies have begun to utilize social media and social media influencers to promote their prescription drugs (Willis & Delbaere, 2022). Though this is a new arena for pharmaceutical companies to promote prescription drugs

directly to consumers, it can be expected that FTC regulations for paid posts on social media (Disclosures 101 for Social Media Influencers, 2019) would make this media easy for the FDA to monitor.

Despite the existing laws and urgings government agencies may be looking at a fraction of the mass media messages consumers are exposed to by focusing only on promotion through advertising. Product placement of branded prescription drugs occurs in various media (Ta & Frosch, 2008). For example, Organon Pharmaceutical's NuvaRing, a hormonal birth control device, heavily utilized product placement in 2007 with placements occurring in multiple prime time television shows such as *Scrubs*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *King of Queens* (Simons, 2007). The line between paid placements and the natural inclusion of prescription drug brands to better emulate everyday life may never be made clear to consumers. This lack of required disclosure of product placements allows for the possibility of promotion without compliance to FDA regulations (Ta & Frosch, 2008).

This research aims to analyze the promotion of brand name prescription drugs in another form of entertainment content, music. Like other forms of product placement, the process in which brand mentions come to be within music lyrics is not often publicly disclosed. As said by Ta & Frosch (2008) in their research on pharmaceutical product placement, without explicit knowledge of whether each placement is paid for by the brand "product placement may ultimately be in the 'eye of the beholder.'" It is with this sentiment that this research asks what consumers think motivates artists to include brand name prescription drugs in their lyrics.

Hip Hop Music and Brand, Drug, and Alcohol Mentions

The influence of music on society is illustrated by hip-hop's expansion from a local expressionist movement born out of the Bronx New York in the late 1960's to a dominant

influence in essentially all aspects of today's pop culture (Price, 2006). Music has mass reach via today's technologies and great commercial value as a \$14 billion industry (Stassen, 2021). In the modern era consumers are exposed to music almost constantly throughout their everyday lives. While shopping in the supermarket, malls, or various waiting rooms music is playing in the background (Hallam, 2019). Music is woven into movies, television shows, and advertisements. In addition to this passive consumption music can be streamed on demand (Hallam, 2019). Unlike other mass media that exists solely for commercial value, music also has deep cultural and emotional roots (Mills, 2012). As described by author Mills (2012), music is "something fit for love and dancing but also has the power to move, galvanize and disseminate ideas within a society via the unstoppable force of the remembered song."

Music plays a role within interpersonal, social, and societal levels (Hallam, 2019). Interpersonally music serves purposes such as relating to one's own emotions and expressing individuality and defining oneself (Hallam, 2019). Socially music can aid in developing group identities, such as uniting fans of a sports team, school, or other organization. Music also becomes a key component in a variety of social settings such as parties or clubs, as well as in celebrations such as weddings, religious ceremonies, or holidays (Hallam, 2019). At the societal level, "Music not only serves a range of functions in societies, but its nature reflects the values, attitudes and characteristics of that society," (Hallam, 2019). Fear of societal effects of music can be seen in multiple examples of attempted censorship of music throughout history (Hallam, 2019). This includes hip-hop/rap, which saw the Federal Bureau of Investigations reach out to the rap group NWA regarding songs they believed were inciting violence against law enforcement (Hochman, 1989).

Research has proven the effectiveness of brand promotion through music lyrics when the audience is interested in the music (Delattre & Colovic, 2009). This effectiveness is measured through brand recall and recognition – factors which are considered very important when evaluating marketing or brand promotion because of their direct relationship to brand awareness (Hoyer & Brown, 1990; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000; Thoma & Williams, 2013). Hoyer and Brown’s (1990) seminal research developed the basis for how brand awareness positively affects the likelihood of consumer choice, as well as has a positive influence on perceived quality.

Hip-hop music has a reputation of including brand mentions and messages related to drug and alcohol use in lyrics. In a content analysis of the Billboard Top 20 songs from 2009 to 2013, rap had the highest percentage of songs including brand mentions in the lyrics at 73% (Craig, Flynn & Holody, 2017). After analyzing the top 25 rap songs in 2017, researchers found that 48% contained references to prescription drug use, a large increase from 12% in 2007 (Peteet et al., 2020).

There are many different forms of opioids with various levels of recognition in popular culture. Codeine is a commonly abused form of opioid that has been mentioned in numerous popular hip-hop songs. Also known as lean, a combination of codeine and soda, codeine opioid abuse was seen heavily in the 80 analgesic and opioid references found in the top 2017 rap songs (Peteet et al., 2020). The novel research done in this study looks to expand upon the important overarching findings within “‘Codeine crazy:’ a content analysis of prescription drug references in popular music” (Peteet et al., 2020) to look at the branding of prescription drugs in music. While some brand-specific mentions are notated in the findings of the 2020 study, the coding is based on drug class rather than brand names which makes it difficult to conclude on the extent of

promotion of branded prescription drugs in songs and determining which branded prescription drugs are the most promoted.

It is also established that “street” terms occur more frequently in hip-hop lyrics than true “medical” terminology (Inkster & Sule, 2015). While some street terms that refer to prescription drug misuse are not brand specific such as “lean” which could refer to any brand of codeine, there are many “street” terms that do refer to specific branded prescription drugs. Some examples of brand specific codeine cough syrup “street” terms include “Wock”, a reference to Wockhardt Ltd. (Bella, 2017), “Hi-Tech”, a reference to Hi-Tech Pharmaceuticals Inc. (Bella, 2017), and “Act”, a reference to Actavis Generics (Bella, 2017) which discontinued their codeine syrup because of the level of recreational use (Shye, 2014).

One argument for the systematic analysis of pop culture and popularly consumed media is to catch dangerous trends that may go underreported in survey research. The National Institute on Drug Abuse recognizes the limitations of self-reported drug use in surveys and that even with guaranteed confidentiality, recent drug use often gets underreported (Harrison, 1997). Many different forms of media have been researched to highlight influences on adolescents and young adults and their use of illicit substances, particularly underage drinking. A research collaboration dubbed ABRAND established a comprehensive set of information on the relationship between brand-specific alcohol promotions, advertising, and underage drinking (Stephenson & JH Bloomberg School of Public Health, 2017). Findings from a study out of this collaboration showed connections between brand recognition and brand specific alcohol consumption by underage individuals (Roberts et. al, 2015). A survey of 15- to 23-year-old participants also found an association between liking and listening to music with alcohol mentions and having completed an alcoholic beverage as well as an association with binge drinking (Primack et. al,

2014). Several content analyses have been conducted to identify the most prevalent alcohol brands mentioned in music (Parsons, 2019), as well as consistent updates every few years to see updated stats on occurrences, and genres that are most likely to include alcohol brand references. Though content analyses have been completed to establish the presence of prescription drug use messages and references in music, no brand specific study has been done. This is an important addition to the established research because of the evidence that brand mentions in music are effective at establishing brand recognition (Delattre & Colovic, 2009), and brand recognition results in a higher likelihood of consumption (Roberts et. all, 2015)

Research Question 1: What is the extent to which branded prescription drugs are mentioned in the top 50 hip-hop songs from 2016 to 2020?

Research Question 2: What are the most mentioned brand name prescription drugs in the top 50 hip-hop songs each year from 2016 to 2020?

In 2008, Owner and CEO of the Klugar Agency Adam Klugar, perhaps mistakenly, shined light on the paid promotion of brands in music when he sent an email to Jeff Crouse looking to sell a brand integration “within the actual lyrics” of an upcoming Pussycat Dolls song (Buskirk, 2008). The Klugar Agency’s website claims they are “The music industry’s leading brand partnership agency.”

Brand Mentions in Music as Promotion

Brand mentions in songs is that it is a dynamic form of publicity, carrying the advantages of different promotion tactics. For instance, brand mentions in music exhibit some characteristics of celebrity endorsement or influencer marketing, unintended endorsement, and product placement. Unintended endorsement is typically used to describe all promotions that are not explicitly planned and paid for by the promoted party (Radon, 2012). Monetary relationships between

brands and artists who mention the brands in their music is sometimes public or obvious, for example hip-hop artist Jay-Z often mentions the liquor brand he partially owns, D'ussé (Bossart, 2017), in his lyrics (Part II On The Run, F.U.T.W, Legacy) and artist Post Malone has a public relationship with beer manufacturer Budweiser (Saponara, 2019) and has multiple songs that mention Bud Light by name in the lyrics (Saint-Tropez, Takin' Shots, Yours Truly Austin Post). In Post Malone's case it is unclear if the brand-artist relationship began before or after he began promoting Budweiser in his songs. However, in most cases there is no public alignment between artists and the brands they mention in their songs, making the endorsement unintended, or seemingly unintended, by the brand. For the purpose of this article the term brand mention is used in reference to all incidences of brand names appearing in music because there is no industry standard for informing the public on relationships between brands and artists that result in a brand being mentioned in a song, like there is for sponsored social media posts or sponsored video content. Brands appearing within content in which the monetary relationship is explicit would be defined as brand placements.

Though distinctly different, brand mentions in music share the characteristics of product and brand placements in other media, such as television and movies. The consistent key characteristic is that the promotion is embedded into content that is consumed by choice, or an unobtrusive intention as described by Guo et al. in their comprehensive review of product placement literature (2019). Though regular studies are being conducted on brand mentions in music, there is no resounding answer to their classification by type of brand promotion. The answer resides within the perception of consumers. Numerous content analyses have presented what the landscape of brand mentions in music is currently like, but in-depth qualitative research into how consumers perceive brand mentions in music is missing from advertising and marketing

research. This study aims to understand these perceptions by applying attribution theory to the context of prescription drug mentions in music.

Attribution theory investigates the way people perceive events and other's motivations by asking subjects to infer causation of another's behavior (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Categories for causal attribution laid out by attribution theory include person vs environment, intrinsic vs extrinsic, skill vs chance, and intentional vs unintentional (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Attribution has been applied to research on celebrity endorsements, where researchers looked to categorize subject's causal attributions for an endorser choosing to recommend a particular product. These studies focused on the person vs environment and intrinsic vs extrinsic view of attribution theory (Hsu & McDonald, 2002; Um, 2017). The research done on attribution theory and celebrity endorsement has found that extrinsic attributions such as a perceived high endorser fee negatively affects consumers perceptions of the endorser and the brand (Silvera & Austad, 2004).

Similar to celebrity endorsements is influencer marketing, defined as "the use of influential opinion leaders, celebrity or non-celebrity, with many followers on social platforms, to foster positive attitudinal and behavioral responses in their followers regarding the brand's interests by using posts shared on such platforms," (Martínez-López et al., 2020). The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) regulates social media influencer marketing stating that if an influencer is endorsing a brand on their social media the influencer is required to make it clear to consumers that there is a relationship with the brand (Disclosures 101 for Social Media Influencers, 2019). Studies applying attribution theory to how consumers perceive influencer's sponsored social media posts have shown that consumers are more skeptical of influencer's motives behind sponsored posts and recognize the intent to persuade (Aw & Chuah, 2021). Attribution theory

has not yet been applied to promotion events by public figures that are not explicitly planned by the promoted brand. To begin to fill this gap this research begins to look at the nuanced ways consumers make causal attributions to artist's mentioning brands in music.

Research Question 3: What do consumers believe the hip-hop artist's motivation is when the artist includes brand mentions in their lyrics?

Then comparing to:

Research Question 4: What do consumers believe the hip-hop artist's motivation is when the artist includes prescription drug brand mentions in their lyrics?

Healthcare Consumerism and Pharmaceutical Fetishism

Many economic theories of consumerism are centered around the concept of "emulation" in which lower classes are always working to emulate the consumption habits of the elite or higher class (Wilk, 1998). In Thorstein Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* the concept of conspicuous consumption is developed to describe the concept of consuming lavish and luxury goods for lifting one's social status, especially consuming beyond what is necessary (Veblen, 1963). In Veblen's writings, the leisure class are influencers of sorts, or those who are able to afford conspicuous consumption of lavish and luxury goods and service, while the lower classes work to emulate the leisure class (Veblen, 1963). Though Veblen's theory and many others that center on emulation of an elite upper class have begun to be critiqued as elitist, it is undeniable that this pattern can be often seen in society, even when it comes to healthcare, prescription drug use, and illicit drug use. For example, the trope of the wealthy having access to drug-fueled party lifestyles that is depicted in the media is much different than the reality of drug addictions that many Americans face.

The medicalization of society describes the phenomenon of the increased number of conditions that are deemed to be treatable by medical intervention (Conrad, 2011). Medicalization is the first step in process towards pharmaceutical fetishism (Applequist, 2018) and occurs when a problem that was not previously considered a medical problem gets redefined as a medical problem and medical treatments are developed (Conrad, 2011). Many mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and ADHD fit into the definition of medicalization, where the human conditions of excessive sadness, worry, and hyperactivity have transformed into medical diagnoses (Conrad, 2011).

The next step toward pharmaceutical fetishism is pharmaceuticalization (Applequist, 2018). Pharmaceuticalization is the increase and expansion of pharmaceutical treatments and therefore the role pharmaceuticals play in society (Abraham, 2010). The pharmaceutical industries justification for their continuous increase in profits and significantly higher median net income than non-pharmaceutical companies (Ledley et al., 2020) is constant innovation in the medical field, including more sensitive diagnostic instruments, leading to the ability to recognize and treat more diseases (Abraham, 2010). However, this argument is disputed, especially in relation to mental health disorders, where diagnostic criteria have been broadened rather than clinically pinpointed (Abraham, 2020).

In conjunction with the medicalization of society and pharmaceuticalization, the healthcare industry is currently undergoing a shift, from a physician-centric model to a consumer-centric model (Mathews, Cohen & Makary, 2020). It was under the physician-centric model that opioid manufacturers were able to persuade physicians to over-prescribe their addictive pain killers and out of which the opioid pandemic was born. Many in healthcare research advocate for the consumer-centric model which is intended to provide much more patient transparency into their

healthcare and to push practitioners to be more in tune with consumer interests, where previous evidence has shown a lack of concern in this area (Andreasen, 1979). However, the patient-centric system also includes pharmaceutical companies and medical device companies marketing directly to consumers. These companies are capitalist in nature, and in line with capitalism's nature they are consistently looking to increase profit. This leads to products and services being presented as things of value and leads to healthcare being seen as a commodity rather than a medical necessity (Christiansen, 2017). We also see mass media becoming a primary source of information and exposure to the public on medical and healthcare topics, including pharmaceuticals (Applequist, 2018; Hallin & Briggs, 2014).

Pharmaceutical fetishism is a paradigm that explains how mass media and heavy marketing have contributed to a glamorized view of highly promoted brand name prescription drugs (Applequist, 2018). Pharmaceutical fetishism describes a situation in which a brand name prescription drug has developed an image in consumer's minds that includes many more benefits than simply treating a medical condition (Applequist, 2018). The roots of the pharmaceutical fetishism framework are based on commodity fetishism (Applequist, 2015). Commodity fetishism describes how people assign meaning to products beyond their physical purpose, and value attributed to products often has nothing to do with the amount of labor that goes into production (Marx, 1976). In the process in which medicalization leads to pharmaceuticalization, pharmaceutical fetishism is the final step further in which a drug's image is thoroughly commodified (Applequist, 2018). Research into the pharmaceutical fetishism phenomenon is often focused on advertising that is explicitly paid for by the pharmaceutical brand such as TV, radio, and online advertisements. This research aims to fill the gap of unintended promotion by examining consumers attitudes toward branded prescription drugs mentioned in hip-hop lyrics.

Research Question 5: How are consumer's opinions toward a brand name pharmaceutical drug affected when that brand name pharmaceutical drug is mentioned in hip hop lyrics?

Chapter 3: Methods

Study Design

This research utilizes mixed methods to address the research questions posed. A quantitative content analysis of the top 50 hip-hop songs from each year between 2016 and 2020 was conducted as well as in-depth interviews with individuals aged 18-29 years who are familiar with hip-hop music. The in-depth interviews provided an in-depth look into how consumers think and feel after listening to a popular hip-hop song that features both a branded prescription drug mention and several other brand mentions.

Content Analysis

A human-coded quantitative content analysis of the lyrics of popular hip-hop music was conducted to address RQ1 and RQ2. Content analysis is defined as analyzing a defined characteristic of set of messages or text systematically and objectively (Neuendorf, 2017).

For the purpose of this study the operational definition for a branded prescription drug mention is the mention of a registered rights reserved prescription drug brand name, mention of an abbreviation or slang term for a specific registered rights reserved prescription drug brand name, or mention of a specific pharmaceutical drug company. For example, the use of the brand name drug Percocet would be deemed branded prescription drug mention, as would the common abbreviation for this drug “Perc.” The mention of a non-brand-specific prescription drug would not be included. For example, codeine is a type of drug, not a registered rights reserved brand name prescription drug. The mention of codeine would not be counted as a branded prescription drug mention.

Two coders were used for this study to establish intercoder reliability. The principal researcher set up the coding documents for both their own coding as well as for the second coder. These documents consisted of the word document with the lyrics for the top 50 hip-hop songs for the years 2016-2020, and an excel document with two sheets: the first sheet for data set 1 and the second sheet for data set 2. Set 1 housed data to address Research Question 1. Set 1's excel spreadsheet had columns for song title, artist name, Billboard chart year, and presence or absence of a branded prescription drug mention. The spreadsheet was pre-populated with song titles, artist names, and Billboard chart years. It should be noted that if a song appeared on the Billboard chart in multiple years it was counted for each year it appeared. The researcher then separately reviewed the lyrics for each song and notated the presence or absence of a branded prescription drug mention with a 0 if no branded prescription drug mention was found, or a 1 if there was a branded prescription drug mention.

Data collected on the second tab of the excel spreadsheet was used to address Research Question 2. Tab 2 had rows for each of the commonly abused prescription drug brands listed by the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Coders notated every time each brand appeared in the songs containing branded prescription drug mentions. If additional branded prescription drugs were mentioned outside of the initial list those brands were added to the excel spreadsheet throughout the analysis.

Sample

The songs included for analysis were determined through the Year End Billboard Hot Rap/Hip-Hop charts for the years 2016-2020. Billboard charts are music industry standard for music ranking and are commonly used in sampling for content analysis studies done on music (Peteet et. al, 2020; Primack et. al, 2014; Siegel et al., 2013). Compiled by Nielsen, Billboard charts use

a formula of radio air play combined with sales and streaming data to rank the top 100 songs in different genres each year (Nielsen Entertainment, 2015). This is a purposive sample used to focus the study on songs that are most likely to be heard by a large audience. While other platform specific sources are available, such as iTunes charts, list such as these are limited to one source of music consumption. Billboard is the only source that take multiple forms of music consumption into account.

The Billboard charts were accessed through Billboard.com under Year-End Charts Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs. From this page, website users can choose whichever year they would like to review, through the most recent fully completed year. At the time of this study, the most recent completed year will be 2020.

Though 10 years is the period used for the most recent content analysis on hip-hop music and references to prescription drug use (Peteet et al., 2020), that study looked at only the top 25 songs in each year. Since this study is focused on the extent to which branded prescription drugs are being promoted in music and which are most often being mentioned, the researcher decided to evaluate more songs from each year for a shorter time frame.

Like the most recent content analysis done on hip-hop and the use of prescription drug references within the lyrics (Peteet et. al, 2020), this study utilized Genius.com to review the official lyrics of the songs within the sample. Lyrics for each song were transferred from Genius.com to a Word document.

Coder Training

Training of the second coder consisted of a 1 hour virtual meeting in which the principle researcher and the second coder reviewed the operational definition of a branded prescription drug mention, multiple examples of drug references that would not be included in the operational

definition, the set up of the excel spreadsheet, and the list of commonly abused prescription drug brands and commonly used street names for these drug brands. Five songs from outside of the sample were reviewed together and the competence of the second coder was demonstrated. Reviewing songs outside of the sample for training allowed the sample coding to be blind and independent.

Once both coders completed their coding of the 250 songs, the spreadsheets were compared. All discrepancies were discussed between the researcher and the second coder and a decision was reached between the two on whether the reference would be included or not.

Reliability

The independent blind coding the nominal characteristic presence or absence of a branded prescription drug mention for each song in the sample reached reliability standards with a Krippendorff's Alpha of .89. The primary researcher and the second coder then discussed each discrepancy and came to an agreement.

In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were utilized to gain insight into consumers opinions of brand name prescription drug mentions in music and what consumers believe was an artist's motivation for including the branded prescription drug names in their lyrics. In-depth interviews are a qualitative research method in which an interviewer engages in a conversation with a participant to extract information about the participants thoughts, feelings, opinions, and interpretations of their experiences (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). In-depth interviews are typically one-on-one conversations occurring in-person or through online video conferencing. This method was chosen because it allowed for an in-depth understanding of how the consumers think and feel after listening to a popular hip-hop song that includes both a branded prescription drug mention

and several other brand mentions. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained to for the interviews.

Sample

Initially, a qualifying survey was conducted to select participants for the in-depth interviews. This online survey first ensured that participants consented to participate in the research study, then checked that they were within the desired age range of 18 to 29 years and enjoyed listening to hip-hop music. Those who took the survey and met the requirements were contacted to schedule an interview via Microsoft Teams. The age range of 18 to 29 years was chosen because hip-hop music is popular among people from this age group (Statista, 2021). It was decided that it would be most beneficial to exclusively interview participants who are involved with hip-hop music because research has shown that involvement with a genre of music increases receptivity to brand mentions within the music (Primack et. al, 2014), as well as aiding with the perception of brand mentions as fitting well into the music (Ferguson, 2009).

Recruitment

Participants were first recruited through social media posts to take the qualifying survey on the researcher's personal page. Additional participants were recruited with a snowball sampling method via the recruited participants' personal contacts. Eligible participants were contacted through their provided email addresses to schedule an interview via Microsoft Teams.

Interview Process

During the online interview, participants were asked to listen to Sicko Mode by Travis Scott feat. Drake and note all brands they noticed mentioned within the song. Participants either noted the brands within the chat feature of Microsoft Teams or on their own sheet of paper. This song was number 9 on the Billboard Year-End Hot 100 Songs chart for all genres for 2019, and

number 6 on the Billboard Year-End Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart for the same year. Sicko Mode was chosen because of its high rank in the Billboard Year-End Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart for multiple years which increased the likelihood of participants having heard the song, as well it having several brand mentions in the song including a branded prescription drug mention of Xanax. Additionally, Sicko Mode was chosen because the prescription drug mention is stated clearly two times in the lyrics.

After listening to the song in full, the interviewer and participant engaged in a discussion on what brands they noticed mentioned in the song, what stood out the most to them and why, and why they thought the artist decided to mention those brands. Once discussion on the full picture of brands mentioned was completed, the interviewer prompted discussion on the prescription drug brand mention and the artist's decision to mention that brand. Lastly the interviewer asked for the participants opinion of Xanax and of the artist.

Data Analysis

To analyze the interview data open and axial coding was performed on the interview transcripts. Open and axial coding are data analysis processes derived from grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Open coding is the initial pass of analysis in which the data is open to all meaning (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During open coding the data is split into fragments and patterns are identified (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Axial coding follows open coding and is the process in which codes are categorized and defined (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

For RQ3 and RQ4, a deductive approach was used directly applying attribution theory. Answers surrounding participant's causal attribution for the artist's general brand mentions were analyzed based on intrinsic, extrinsic, personal, and environmental attributions. Answers surrounding participant's causal attribution for the artist's branded prescription drug mention

were analyzed based on the same attributions, then those attributions were compared to each other. The definitions of the attributions are:

- Intrinsic attribution – described as perceiving someone’s actions as being attributed to internal fulfillment. When used to analyze artist’s motivation, common intrinsic attributions describe artistic reasons such as their belief that the choice looks or sounds good, worked with the message the artist was going for, etc. (Kelley & Michela, 1980).
- Extrinsic attribution – described as perceiving someone’s actions as being attributed to some external reward (Kelley & Michela, 1980).
- Personal attribution – described as perceiving someone’s actions as being attributed to the characteristics of the person (Kelley & Michela, 1980).
- Environmental attribution – described as perceiving someone’s actions as being attributed to the situation they are in. Often applied to communicators who are delivering persuasive messages, communicator credibility gets questioned when motivation to present a certain message is attributed in a situation where the communicator is positioned to gain something personally (Kelley & Michela, 1980).

For RQ5, an inductive coding approach was used to garner a set of themes or ideas that describe the participants’ opinions of Xanax. These themes and ideas were then compared to ideas presented in the pharmaceutical fetishism paradigm (Applequist, 2018) and conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1963).

Chapter 4: Results

Content Analysis

Research Question 1

The results of the analysis of the extent to which branded prescription drug mentions occurred in the top 50 hip-hop songs from 2016 to 2020 showed that in total (14%, $n = 34$) of the songs included in the sample contained a branded prescription drug mention. The top 50 hip-hop songs in the year 2017 saw the highest percentage containing a branded prescription drug mention (22%, $n = 11$), and the top 50 hip-hop songs in the year 2019 saw the lowest percentage of songs containing branded prescription drug mentions at (10%, $n = 5$). The mean number of songs that contained a branded prescription drug mention within the sample for each year was ($m = 7.2$, $s = 2.28$) songs. Per Table 1, the extent to which branded prescription drug mentions occur in the top 50 hip-hop songs has been relatively consistent over the past 5 years.

Table 1

Number and percentage of branded prescription drug mentions in the top 50 hip-hop songs from each year

Year	Number of Songs with Branded Prescription Drug Mentions	Percentage of Songs with Branded Prescription Drug Mentions
2016	6	12%
2017	11	22%
2018	7	14%
2019	5	10%
2020	7	14%

Among the songs found to have branded prescription drug mentions the mean number of mentions per song was ($m = 2.8$). This mean includes one outlier song that included a much

higher count of branded prescription drug mentions. “Mask Off” by artist Future had almost 3x the average number of branded prescription drug mentions at (n = 21). The mean number of brands mentioned per song was (m = 1.4).

Table 2

Number of branded prescription drug mentions per song and number of prescription drug brands mentioned per song

Song Title (Artist)	Total number of branded prescription drug mentions	Number of prescription drug brands mentioned
Panda (Desiigner)	5	2
Jumpman (Drake & Future)	1	1
Low Life (Future)	2	2
Wicked (Future)	2	2
No Problem (Chance the Rapper)	1	1
Money Longer (Lil Uzi Vert)	7	1
Bad and Boujee (Migos)	2	1
Mask Off (Future)	22	2
XO TOUR LIF3 (Lil Uzi Vert)	2	1
Bad Things (Machine Gun Kelly x Camilla Cabello)	1	1
T-Shirt (Migos)	2	1
Drowning (A Boogie Wit Da Hoodie)	1	1
Love Galore (SZA)	1	1
Slippery (Migos)	11	5
Magnolia (Playboi Carti)	1	1
Do Re Mi (blackbear)	1	1
I Get The Bag (Gucci Mane)	3	2
Taste (Tyga)	1	1
MotorSport (Migos, Nicki Minaj & Cardi B)	5	2
Gucci Gang (Lil Pump)	1	1
Sicko Mode (Travis Scott)	2	1
I Fall Apart (Post Malone)	1	1
Outside Today (YoungBoy Never Broke Again)	6	2
Wake Up In The Sky (Gucci Mane X Bruno Mars X Kodak Black)	2	2
Leave Me Alone (Flipp Dinero)	1	1
Shotta Flow (NLE Choppa)	2	2
Mixed Personalities (YNW Melly Featuring Kanye West)	1	1
Life Is Good (Future)	1	1
We Paid (Lil Baby & 42 Dugg)	1	1
Bandit (Juice WRLD & YoungBoy Never Broke Again)	1	1

Table 2 (Continued)

Suicidal (YNW Melly & Juice WRLD)	1	1
Hot (Young Thug)	1	1
Wishing Well (Juice WRLD)	1	1
Said Sum (Moneybagg Yo)	1	1

Research Question 2

Analysis of the branded prescription drugs most often mentioned within the sample showed that Percocet was the most frequently mentioned (n = 43) and was mentioned in the greatest number of songs (n = 12). Over 50% of the mentions of Percocet came from the outlier song “Mask Off” by Future. Without this song, Percocet would have seen the same number of mentions as Xanax at (n = 22) but still would have been mentioned in the greatest number of songs at (n = 11).

Table 3

Prescription drug brands mentioned in the top 50 hip-hop songs from 2016-2020 and frequency

Prescription Drug Brand	Total number of mentions	Number of songs mentioned in
Percocet	43	12
Xanax	22	10
Actavis	11	7
Adderall	6	6
Hi-Tech	5	3
Novocain	2	2
Wockhardt	2	2
Lortab	1	1
OxyContin	1	1
Roxicodone	1	1
Theo-Dur	1	1
Valium	1	1

In-Depth Interviews**Research Questions 3 and 4**

The key difference that emerged from the conversations with the participants regarding their causal attributions for the artist’s general brand mentions in their songs versus the causal attribution for the artist’s mention of brand name prescription drugs was the possibility of a

financial benefit. About 70% of participants acknowledged the possibility that at least one of the brand mentions they noticed in the lyrics was likely motivated by a financial partnership of some kind with the brand. For example, when asked why he thought the artist mentioned brand names that occurred within the song Participant #5 detailed a variety of brand connections, saying *“For Nike specifically I know he has a big endorsement contract with Nike slash the Jordan brand,”* and then *“He probably has a deal with a jewelry store. I’m not sure. They mentioned ice which could also be Ice box, which is in I think Atlanta, so that could be one. I’m trying to think of what else, maybe Louis Vuitton and/or Jamba Juice or even Ferrari, they’ve probably sent him stuff that we assumed that he paid for.”* Another quote that demonstrates these beliefs of a financial relationship resulting in the brand mentions included one participant who said, *“Yeah definitely. Probably a monetary relationship or if they’re not getting paid for it they get a lot of giveaways,”* when asked what the artists relationship may be with the brands mentioned. Participants most commonly believed that financial benefits were a component of a larger dynamic that resulted in the brand being mentioned in the lyrics. This dynamic typically included some intrinsic attribution as well such as the artist being a consumer of the brand. Only one participant was convinced that financial benefits were the most likely and primary reason for including brand names in song lyrics. This participant said *“I don’t think a brand would be mentioned by a celebrity or an artist without some sort of financial compensation.”*

The mix of internal and external attributions was also common in discussions of how the prescription drug brand came to be mentioned in the lyrics. However, the main difference between the attributions that participants assigned to the general brand mentions and the prescription drug brand mention was that almost no participants believed that cause of the prescription drug brand mention could be attributed to a financial relationship with the brand.

Only one participant suggested that the mention of Xanax may be motivated by a brand partnership. More commonly participants expressed an explicit disbelief that such a relationship could exist. For example, Participant # 1 said “*Well that’s the thing, I feel like a lot of the clothing stuff they’re paid to promote it, but I wouldn’t think like Xanax is paying them to promote that.*” Similarly Participant # 4 said “*They might have sponsorships wit them (in reference to the brands mentioned). I mean probably not Xanax.*”

Apart from the extrinsic financial attribution many of the participant’s beliefs about why the artist decided to include particular brand names in the lyrics tended to persist when asked specifically about the prescription drug mention. These themes are detailed in the following sections.

Perpetuating an Image, an Extrinsic or Intrinsic Attribution? Through analysis of interview transcripts this overarching theme of perpetuating an image came to be defined as a participant’s belief that artists use brand mentions in their music as a tool to depict an image of power, wealth, or influence. This was a common theme that pervaded between both the attributions assigned to general brand mentions and the mention of the brand name prescription drug. Often the participants that held beliefs within this theme described the use of brand mentions in lyrics as helping the artist illustrate an image of a desired lifestyle, or the lifestyle they would like their listeners to believe they have. Participants’ description of this lifestyle often included the use of high-end products, an abundance of money, and frequent partying. Participants’ ideas about this image they believed the artist was looking to create often was expressed during some of the first discussions post listening to the song. Participant #8 described the reasoning behind mentioning the brands as to “*demonstrate wealth.*” They went on to generalize this motivation beyond this specific artist and song by saying “*I feel like that’s what*

rappers try to display is wealth.” Participant #4 expressed that they believed “*in the hip-hop culture, you almost have to flaunt your money on your music.*” Although these two participants share a similar sentiment that the purpose of the mentions is to create an image of wealth, when digging deeper into why the artist may want to perpetuate this image, their thoughts differed. Participant #8 thought that “*Usually most rappers come from not that much so once they get it they kind of want to show that they do have it.*” This sentiment alludes to an intrinsic or personal attribution. The artist is using brands names in their songs to portray an image of wealth to fulfill an internal desire. In contrast, Participant #4 described the reasoning behind faulting money through mentioning brand names in their music as a means for the artist to “*sell themselves.*” Participant #4’s beliefs lean more extrinsic or environmental because the concept of selling oneself suggests that the artist is portraying this image of wealth to gain something externally such as more fans listening to their music or more fans attending their concerts.

A total of 77% of the participants included portraying an image as a reason for mentioning either the general brands, the prescription drug brand, or both. Of this group, 2 participants only attributed portraying an image to the motivation behind the prescription drug brand mention, only one participant attributed portraying an image to the motivation behind the general brand mentions, and the remaining participants included portraying an image as motivation for both the prescription drug brand mentions and general brand mentions.

The two participants who considered portraying an image as the motivation for only the prescription drug brand mention suggested that the mention of the prescription drug brand helped the artist in building an image of having a lifestyle that included recreational drug use or partying. For example, one participant described the artist as wanting to show that “*I’m going out to the club, I have all this money, I can afford to party like this,*” as the reason for mentioning

Xanax in his lyrics. Both participants also gave external benefits as why the artist may want to portray this type of lifestyle. The same participant from the above quote described the artist's benefit for portraying such a lifestyle as having their music played in clubs and other party scenes. The other participant said "*I feel like it's just being used (in reference to the prescription drug mention) as a part of their lifestyle...I mean the lifestyle they're trying to portray. They know that's what sells and gets the streams.*" This participant later reasoned, when asked explicitly why they thought the artist would want to depict a lifestyle of recreational drug use, saying "*I think someone probably in the beginning either did it and it sold, the material sold, so they continue to propagate it.*" Another similarity between these two participants was that they primarily discussed a financial benefit as the reasoning behind the general brand mentions.

The seven participants, who included portraying an image as contributing to the artist's motivation for both the general brand mentions and the prescription drug mentions, discussed mainly external benefits to portraying the images they described. The concept of "*building clout*" came up frequently which refers to being seen as popular or having influence (Dictionary.com, 2019). The term "*showcase*" was also used by many participants in the context of using the brand mentions to showcase a lifestyle they would like listeners to believe they have. Some additional quotes that demonstrate this external attribution within the portraying a lifestyle theme include: "*It's mostly high end or expensive stuff to boost their popularity or make people think that they are hip to all the expensive brands.*" This participant described the motivation of the artist as being attributed outward to what the artist wants people to believe about them and what they think will be popular with listeners, rather than wanting to share what they genuinely feel. Another example is from Participant #7 who described the artist's motivation for mentioning the brands as "*I would say two reasons: The first to perpetuate their brand by keeping relevant*

mentions in pop culture. The second being to appeal to what most people think of as brands of the rich and famous and create a vision of a desired lifestyle.” Participant #7’s reasoning for the mention of Xanax was similar, saying *“It is a way to establish credibility of recreational drug use, like the double cup Styrofoam trend. I think it gets referenced to seem like you’re part of the in crowd, like how lean gets referenced. Not everyone is out here sipping lean and taking Xanax all the time. The whole thing with hip-hop is to make people believe you really live the lifestyle you portray of yourself in your songs.”*

Overall, most participants who included portraying an image as a reason for the artist including brand names in their lyrics described this motivation as being driven by extrinsic or environmental rewards. The results of the transcript analysis suggest that this type of attribution is pervasive among hip-hop fans and typically extrinsic in nature.

Relating to Listeners, an Extrinsic/Environmental Attribution This theme is defined as a participant’s belief that an artist will mention a brand because it is popular with their listeners. This theme was assigned to participants who described brand mentions in music as a tool to help the artist get listeners more involved with their music by encouraging them to think they use similar products to ones their listeners use. A total of 38% of the participants included relating to listeners as part of the dynamic they believed led to the artist deciding to use either the general brand mentions, or the prescription drug brand mentions in their lyrics. A single participant described this theme for the general brand mentions only, three participants described this theme in relation to only the prescription drug brand mention, and 1 participant described relating to listeners as a reason for both types of brand mentions.

Participant #10 who only thought of relating to listeners as a causal attribution for the general brand mentions described how Nike is a popular brand with Black consumers, and how

they thought that since they believed that to be a primary audience for hip-hop artists that may be why the artist decided to mention that brand. Participant #12 expressed the belief that Xanax was mentioned to relate to a younger audience. They said *“He mentions drugs to sell his music. A lot of younger people are addicted to drugs, so they love something that will defend their actions”*

Peer Pressure, an Extrinsic/Environmental Attribution The theme of peer pressure is defined by participant’s believing that another artist or someone else within the music industry or the development of the song influenced the artist to mention a brand. This is an external or environmental attribution that was unique to the prescription drug brand mention with just one participant saying so. This participant expressed the idea that Travis Scott, the main artist of the song listened to during the interview, influenced Drake, the artist who mentioned Xanax, to include drug use in his lyrics. Participant #3 said *“I think he got with the other artist, and this is Travis Scott’s song that he was featured on, so I think sometimes when the artists get together it’s like ‘This is the vibe we are going for.’”* This theme was related to the participant’s belief that Drake does not participate in regular recreational drug use. The participant said *“People who are successful aren’t doing that 24/7. I mean some are, some can get away with it. Some are who they are because they are always messed up, but I don’t think Drake is one of those artists. So, I think if he uses it it’s very rare.”*

Brand use, an Intrinsic/Personal Attribution The intrinsic/personal attribution that was most discussed for both the general and the prescription drug brand mention was the assumption that the artist used the brands or drug, and therefore was artistically expressing his genuine life experiences. This theme was defined by participant’s beliefs that familiarity of brands because of frequent exposure or preference of the mentioned brand may explain the use of the brand name within the artist’s lyrics. A total of 85% of participants included this notion as reasoning for

either the general brand mentions, the prescription drug brand mention, or both. Referring to the repeated mention of Jamba Juice in the song, Participant #5 said “*I believe he likes Jamba Juice, or I think Kylie Jenner (girlfriend at time of the song being written) likes Jamba Juice.*” When describing why he believed Drake may have mentioned Xanax Participant #5 said “*maybe they take it to help calm themselves with all the added pressure in their lives*”. Among the 84%, four participants attributed brand use to the general brand mentions only, three attributed brand use to the prescription drug brand mentions only, and four attributed brand use to both types of mentions. One example that illustrates a disconnect between beliefs of brand use motivating an artist’s use of brand names in lyrics is participant #6 who said, “*I would think they are consumers of any brands that they are speaking of in a positive way.*” But when asked if they believe the artist used Xanax they said “*I personally have never heard of him in relation to Xanax. I mean, I don’t know Drake’s life but I think he may be just hopping on that train of this is what’s going on, this is what people are rapping about.*”

Lyrical Motivation, an Intrinsic/Personal Attribution This was the only additional intrinsic/personal attribution. It was the possibility that the brands were being used as analogies or to add linguistic elements to the song. Nearly a quarter (23%) of the participants included this as a possible motive for the artist including a brand name in their lyrics. This theme was assigned to participants who discussed the artist including a mention because it “*fit,*” “*sounded good,*” or added some additional meaning to the song. Participant #3 said “*Sometimes I think it’s cutesy rhyme stuff, then otherwise the meaningfulness is to draw an analogy. That is raps version of comparing and contrasting.*” Another example is from Participant #10 who said “*I think it just sounded good or the flow was there*” in reference to Travis Scott’s mention of Jamba Juice. Two participants included lyrical motivation for general brand mentions only and one included lyrical

motivation for the prescription drug brand mentions only. No participants described lyrical motivation as attributing to both the general brand mentions and the prescription drug brand mentions.

Table 4

Number of participants describing each artist attribution for general brand mentions

Participant Reasoning for Artist's General Brand Mentions in Lyrics	Number of Participants
Extrinsic or Environmental	
Financial Benefit/Free Product	9
Perpetuate an Image to Listeners	8
Relate More to Listeners	2
Peer Pressure within Music Industry	0
Intrinsic or Personal	
Brand Use	8
Lyrical Purposes	2

Table 5

Number of participants describing each artist attribution for prescription drug brand mention

Possible Reasons for Artist's Prescription Drug Brand Mention in Lyrics	Number of Participants
Extrinsic or Environmental	
Financial Benefit/Free Product	1
Perpetuate an Image to Listeners	9
Relate More to Listeners	4
Peer Pressure within Music Industry	1
Intrinsic or Personal	

Table 5 (Continued)

Brand Use	7
Lyrical Purposes	1

Research Question 5

All participants in this study notated the reference to Xanax as a brand mention while listening to the song. This may have been because of the necessary disclosures for participants needing to include information on the purpose of the study to receive IRB approval. These disclosures did detail that the study was related to prescription drug brands. One participant did notate the mention, then later asked the interviewer if the mention of Xanax should be counted. Cognitive dissonance toward Xanax was prominent among the participants, with very different views occurring from question to question or even evolving within the same answer. For example, Participant #1 initially described the mention of Xanax as *“It is definitely that it’s a party drug because he’s saying he just popped a Xanny. Like ‘I’m going out to the club, I have money, I can afford to party, if you want to be cool like me this is what you do,’”* then later acknowledged friends who had been prescribed Xanax and had very positive experiences, then later still described having witnessed Xanax being used as a date rape drug. Another example was from Participant #3, who’s initial description of Xanax was *“Usually Xanax is the thing to chill you out, and it’s like ‘I’m just having a good time’”* and later recounted a scary experience with a family member misusing the drug. Though fetishism of Xanax use as an anti-anxiety treatment was present among some select participants, the most widespread fetishism was attached to the recreational abuse of Xanax.

Personal experience with Xanax was relatively common among participants, with 46% having had used the drug themselves or had a friend or family member who had used or abused the drug. Two of the participants interviewed described experiences with family members who had misused Xanax to the point of anterograde amnesia or “blacking out” (Segura et al., 2020) on a regular basis. Both participants mentioned strong feelings of dislike for the drug and still described Xanax as a “*party drug*” used by others to relax or have fun in a social setting. Other participants described less traumatic experiences such as a family member who had a prescription to Xanax because of career stress induced anxiety and was able to successfully wean off the drug once retired, or friends who currently have a prescription to Xanax and seem to function well and are even able to joke frequently about their anti-anxiety medication. All these participants however used the term “*party drug*” at some point during their interview and when asked how they believed Xanax is typically used described recreational misuse.

Even among participants who held strong negative views toward Xanax, those views typically did not transfer to the artist after hearing them mention the brand name in their song. Most participants also did not believe that if they were prescribed Xanax and took it as intended they would feel offended or hurt by the artist promoting the drug in their music, but instead believed they would feel neutral or even more positive about the mention if they were prescribed Xanax. For example, when prompted with the question participant #2 said “*I would probably relate more to the song, because it’s a drug I would be taking and they’re using it. It’s like how I wear a lot of Nike and he mentions Nike so it’s like ‘Oh cool I use that.’*” Among the participants who believed they would have a problem with the mention of Xanax in the song if they were using it under prescription, described feelings of worry, jealousy, or overall “*ickiness.*” Participant #6 who is diagnosed with general anxiety disorder described their feelings on the subject by saying

“Back to your question about if it would bother me, I think it would. Because something that people rely on for an everyday sense of calm is being used like ‘hey this is cool.’”

Xanax as a Party Drug/Popular Drug The view of Xanax as a party drug was a consistent theme among participants and far outnumbered the acknowledgements of medical uses for the drug. Participant #4 described his worry of what people would think of him if he were prescribed Xanax as *“He’s probably using it because it makes him feel better or whatever. He’s using it trying to be cool, maybe using it more to party.”* All but two participants described their opinion of Xanax use as more often used recreationally than with a prescription. Along with the direct term *“party drug”* that was used by multiple participants, many participants also referred to Xanax as a *“popular”* drug. This theme of popularity is emphasized by the participant’s idea of Xanax being used for enjoyment. This view was in all cases projected onto another group of people. Also contributing to the theme of Xanax as a popular drug was the concept of Xanax or even prescription drugs in general as a high-end alternative to street drugs. Participants who held this view suggested that needing a prescription made recreational use of Xanax seem safer than drugs such as heroine or meth. Participant #10 said *“I guess I also just don’t think of Xanax, even if people are using it recreationally, I don’t really think of it as that bad. When you asked what I thought about Drake mentioning Xanax my first thought was it’s not like he said ‘I’m going to do a line of coke’. I don’t know if that’s because it’s so commonplace or because it’s a prescription, even if it’s not prescribed to them. I know they shouldn’t take medicine that is not prescribed to them but again its kind of like it doesn’t seem as extreme. Maybe because it’s a prescription it feels safer.”*

Xanax as “Dangerous” When referring directly to what they believe about Xanax, the theme of danger became apparent among participants, and the danger of addiction was often

addressed. Participant #3 said *“What I know about Drake is that I think he is a very motivated artist that works his butt off, and I just don’t think he has the time nor the ability to be jacked up on Xanax, because I know Xanax can be very highly addictive.”*

Xanax as a Medication Xanax.com, the drug’s official website, describes the intended use of Xanax *“for the management of anxiety disorders and the short-term relief of symptoms of anxiety in adults.”* While expressing their opinions about Xanax many participants expressed what they believed to be the intended use of Xanax when prescribed by medical professionals. Ideas included: being helpful to people with anxiety, for use as a sleeping aid, and beneficial because of its calming effects. A total of 23% of the participants also mentioned the topic of flight anxiety as what they believed was a primary use for Xanax. Participant # 9 said *“I think it’s just a well-known medication for what he was mentioning, to sleep on a flight,”* then later continued *“I think it’s really helpful to some people. I’ve taken it, but I didn’t feel any intended effects from it. Because I also have flight anxiety so it’s really funny that I recognized the meaning of why they used it in the song.”* Participant #6 had been diagnosed with general anxiety disorder since childhood and was one of the only participants who described having first heard of Xanax as a medication used to help people with anxiety.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This research was conducted to understand the extent in which brand name prescription drugs are being promoted in popular hip-hop music, find which brand name prescription drugs are being promoted in popular hip-hop music, and to explore hip-hop listener's thoughts and opinions on this promotion and the brands being promoted. Key findings from the content analysis showed that over the past five years an average of seven songs per year contained branded prescription drug promotion. The branded prescription drugs most often promoted were Percocet and Xanax. Listeners of hip-hop music and parents of adolescents who enjoy hip-hop music should be aware of how exposure to this promotion of brand name prescription drugs can lead to brand recall, recognition, and then brand awareness of these prescription drugs (Hoyer & Brown, 1990; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000; Thoma & Williams, 2013). Brand awareness then results in a higher likelihood of consumer choice and higher perceived quality (Hoyer & Brown, 1990). Higher perceived quality of brand name prescription drugs mentioned in music was seen among participants, with many describing Xanax as a high-end alternative to street drugs.

Key findings from the in-depth interviews were that consumers assign nuanced and complex attributions to why artists include brand mentions in their songs. This suggests that consumers don't have clearly defined ideas about why this phenomenon occurs. It was apparent from the analysis that the participants recognized some level of persuasive messaging occurring through music. This is made evident by how all participants considered an external attribution for one or more type of lyrical brand mention. But, that persuasive intent is not clearly defined in minds of listeners, and the possibility of an intrinsic attribution almost always existed as well. Most

listeners are not able to form a clear and direct idea of what they are being persuaded of, or what the motivation behind that persuasive intent is. The persuasion knowledge model states that when a consumer recognizes a persuasive message, they use their persuasion knowledge to decide if they want to be persuaded or resist the message (Friestad & Wright, 1994). When researcher Nam-Hyun Um applied attribution theory to celebrity endorsement an intrinsic attribution was a significant factor in determining whether the consumer was successfully persuaded, measured by purchase intention (2017). The results of this study however pose the question of what occurs when consumers recognize the possibility of persuasive intent but are unable to precisely discern what they are being persuaded of or what the motivation is for the persuasive intent. It is unclear whether this recognition of persuasive intent is unique to hip-hop songs that include brand mentions.

These nuances and complex beliefs were also present concerning participants' beliefs and opinions of the prescription drug brand studied, Xanax. It was apparent however, that fetishism of the drug pervaded among participants. Novel findings of this study include that when participants discussed Xanax as it is intended to be used, they did not typically assign additional meaning to the drug or "fetishize" it (Applequist, 2018). It was when participants discussed the use of Xanax as a recreational drug that the fetishism was apparent. Some of these transcending benefits assigned to Xanax included: to enhance one's image, to enhance a party experience, and to flaunt a lavish lifestyle that includes regular partying and drug use. This supports the pharmaceutical fetishism paradigm's assertion that the commercial promotion of prescription drugs leads to consumers assigning benefits to the medications beyond their intended uses (Applequist, 2018). Furthermore, this study emphasizes how consumers assign benefits to the prescription drugs in the context in which they are often exposed. In Dr. Applequist's textual

analysis of Viagra's advertising campaigns, it was asserted that Viagra's advertising messaging messages depicted Viagra as a tool to enhance sexual performance rather than alleviate symptoms of a medical disorder (2018). We see this mirrored in this study in the participant's fetishism of recreational Xanax use. They assert that they are typically learning about Xanax through mass media messages that depict Xanax being used in a recreational way to enhance social experiences. While pharmaceutical fetishism describes assigning inordinate meaning to the use of a prescription drug, the results of this study further propound the idea that an additional layer or subset of pharmaceutical fetishism be investigated on the fetishism of the abuse of certain prescription drugs.

The commodification of Xanax by participants was seen in how participants regarded the artist's possible motivation for mentioning the prescription drug similarly to their possible motivation for mentioning other types of brands in their music. Perpetuating an image was the most pervasive attribution for the artist's mention of Xanax, and the second most pervasive attribution for brand mentions in general which in this song included clothing, car, and food service brands. This image participants believed the artist was creating through brand mentions was the same in both cases. They believed that the mention of expensive clothing brands, luxury car brands, and brand name prescription drugs all contributed to an image of wealth and power.

Both Xanax and Percocet's popularity as not only prescription medications but also as brands is illustrated by their continued popularity and presence as household names despite the generic alprazolam and oxycodone HCl/acetaminophen becoming available in 2006 (Waknine, 2006). Xanax generated over \$185 million in net sales in 2021 (Viatris, 2022), and Percocet generated over \$103 million (Endo International plc, 2022). Pharmaceutical companies typically do not invest in advertising for branded drugs that the FDA has approved generic equivalents for (Bulik,

2018). Therefore, it is likely that Percocet and Xanax have not had paid media presences in the last 16 years, if ever. In the case of Xanax, participants still referenced mass media as the way they remember first hearing of the brand. But, rather than advertisements they believed product placements in tv, music, and other entertainment content were their first and most frequent exposures. The results of this study would support expanding the pharmaceutical fetishism paradigm beyond traditional advertising promotion to other types of pharmaceutical promotion, such as the unintended promotion in music analyzed here.

Managerial Applications

The opioid epidemic showed us how important it is for pharmaceutical companies to manage the promotion of their medications with consumers health and well-being in mind. All the brands this study found promoted in popular hip-hop music from 2016-2020 pose great threats to individuals who misuse them. For example, the official brand website of Xanax states that consuming it with alcohol, opioids, and other depressants “can cause severe drowsiness, breathing problems, coma, and death.” These only encompass the short-term risks of overdosing by mixing substances. The Xanax brand website also details that even when taken as prescribed, addiction to Xanax can develop and lead to an overdose or delirium and suicidal thoughts and actions. These risks and side effects affirm that the stakes are incredibly high when it comes to managing the brand image of prescription drugs of this nature. Actavis, the prescription drug brand with the third highest number of mentions, discontinued their promethazine with codeine product in 2014 because of its popularity of recreational use (Shye, 2014). Though discontinued, Actavis was still mentioned in top 50 hip-hop songs in 2018. This discontinuation may point to future expectations of pharmaceutical companies when abuse of a brand name drug becomes too prevalent. If this does become the norm, the consequence of the unmanaged brand images that

stem from the pharmaceutical fetishism of the abuse of some brand name prescription drugs would be lost revenue to pharmaceutical companies.

From a brand management perspective, strategic communications professionals working for pharmaceutical brands such as Xanax can rest assured that evidence from this study, though limited, shows that consumers of hip-hop music do not believe that pharmaceutical companies are purposefully promoting their drugs within music lyrics through paid partnerships or by giving free product to hip-hop artists. Such practices would not only be unethical as many of the contexts in which the prescription drug brands were mentioned suggested recreational abuse but could also be deemed illegal because of the requirement that direct-to-consumer promotion of pharmaceutical drugs include risk statements (Connors, 2009).

What should be worrisome for brand managers of these highly addictive drugs and the strategic communications executives of the parent pharmaceutical companies, is that not only are brand name prescription drugs receiving consistent unintended promotion through popular hip hop music, the perception of the artists mentioning the drugs can be like brand influencers, and most worryingly the brand images formed in consumers minds stray far away from the intended use. Among the hip-hop listeners who participated in interviews for this study, Xanax was seen as “*a party drug*,” “*trendy*,” and even “*fun*.” All of this suggests that although the promotion of brand name prescription drugs through music is seen by listeners as unintended promotion by the brands, it still may be aiding in forming these dangerous brand images and consequently the commodification of these controlled substances.

Through the content analysis it was found that the branded prescription drug mentions tended to be concentrated to a few artists acting as prescription drug brand influencers. For example, artist Future had six songs included in the top 50 hip-hop songs for the years 2016-2020, five of

those songs included a branded prescription drug mention. Future's songs made up 15% of the total songs from the sample containing branded prescription drug mentions. The group Migos had seven songs included and of those, four contained branded prescription drug mentions, and the late artist Juice WRLD had five songs that reached the charts three of which had branded prescription drug mentions. For comparison, Drake was the artist who had the most songs included in the top 50 hip-hop songs for the years 2016-2020 at 19; one of those songs included a branded prescription drug mention and that song also had Future as a named artist. Influencers is a concept addressed in Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* and we can see these artists becoming the influencer leisure class to hip-hop listeners and their depictions of brand name prescription drugs in their music being seen as conspicuous consumption by the participants.

Juice WRLD, who mentioned Percocet in all three of his songs containing branded prescription drug mentions, died of an accidental overdose in December of 2019 (Romo, 2020). Oxycodone and codeine toxicity were determined as the cause of the artist's overdose and death (Romo, 2020). Percocet is a brand name combination medication that contains oxycodone and acetaminophen (Durbin, 2021). To the knowledge of the researchers, no campaigns were initiated by Endo Pharmaceuticals, the manufacturer of Percocet, to discourage abuse of the drug following this event.

One area that could be more carefully managed is how consumers are being introduced to brand name prescription drugs. A total of 84% of participants recounted being introduced to the brand Xanax through either peers or through some type of product placement in media such as music, television shows, or movies. All these introductions to Xanax were described as recreational use rather than appropriate medical use. The only participant who was introduced to Xanax by a medical professional was Participant #6 who was diagnosed with general anxiety

disorder at a young age and recounted discussing possible prescription medications with their psychiatrist as their first time hearing the brand name Xanax.

In a profound quote, De Chernatony said on branding, “Brands are complex entities that are conceived in planning documents, but ultimately they reside in consumer’s minds” (De Chernatony, 1993). Before social media, managing brand image consisted largely of managing major gatekeepers such as media outlets and possible celebrity endorsers. The reality of managing brand images now is that brands have significantly less control over who endorses their brands publicly. In some cases, a dangerous trend can go viral on social media that includes a brand name. The Tide Pod Challenge for example, where teenagers posted videos of themselves ingesting the product, is often categorized under brand crisis management. However, it can also be seen as viral promotion and endorsement by teens on social media. Word of mouth surrounding Tide Pods showed a significant increase following the Tide Pod Challenge (Marzilli, 2018) according to consumer survey companies. This viral challenge is considered a brand crisis because the promotion was unintended and encouraged dangerous behavior and product usage (John, 2018). Unintended promotion that encourages dangerous behavior directly relates to the promotion the prescription drug brands found to be mentioned in popular hip-hop music are receiving. Procter and Gamble, the parent company of Tide, employed a large-scale crisis management campaign to combat the unintended promotion that resulted from the Tide Pod Challenge (John, 2018). A parallel can be drawn between the promotion of illicit prescription drug use by music artists, however the evidence of crisis management campaigns being deployed to combat this promotion is hard to find. A study on unintended brand endorsement has shown that even if there is no explicit relationship between a brand and a brand endorser, that endorsement still has a marked effect on the brand image in consumer’s minds. (Radón, 2012).

Chapter 6: Research Limitations

The primary limitation for both portions of this research is sample size. For the content analysis the researcher chose to go deeper into a more limited lookback period to get a better understanding of the extent of which branded prescription drugs are being promoted within popular hip-hop music, but a wider period would give more confidence into whether this extent of promotion is consistent. Saturation was reached through the interviews done for this study; however, the younger portion of the 18-29 age group was under-represented resulting in possible gaps. Additionally, the format of the interviews lead to a focus on one prescription drug brand, Xanax. This makes overarching conclusions on consumer opinions on prescription drug brands promoted in hip-hop music difficult.

Chapter 7: Future Research Directions

With this research being exploratory in nature, several doors to future research become available as a result. From a content analysis standpoint, looking into branded prescription drug mentions in additional genres as well as continuous monitoring of the hip-hop genre in upcoming years would bring valuable insight. A thematic analysis of the various contexts in which branded prescription drug mentions occur in music would also be an area for future research.

The in-depth interviews uncovered that the participants considered many different possibilities for causal attributions of artists deciding to include both general and branded prescription drug mentions in their lyrics, sometimes possible attributions described by one participant were opposite in nature. A quantitative study that takes all these possibilities and requires participants to choose the one that they most believe is the reason for artists including brand mentions in their lyrics would be the next step in developing this research. Studies on relationship management and message testing with hip-hop listeners to change the perception of prescription drugs receiving unintended promotion through music would be a valuable strategic communications management direction for research.

To address the limitation of this study with the focus of consumer opinions being on Xanax, additional series of interviews in which songs that feature other frequently promoted prescription drug brands in hip hop can be conducted. This would show whether the findings are isolated to Xanax or exist further.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The content analysis portion of this study concluded that from 2016-2020 there was a relatively consistent number of songs with branded prescription drug mentions in the top 50 hip-hop charts. It would be expected that the same level, and average of seven songs per year, will persist in the future within the standard deviation of about two songs. The branded prescription drugs most often promoted in hip-hop song lyrics during these years were Percocet and Xanax. Percocet and Xanax saw the highest number of total mentions within the analyzed lyrics and were also in the highest number of songs. Of the 12 brand name prescription drugs that were mentioned in the sample of songs, 10 are controlled substances that contain a high risk for addiction and/or overdose. These results suggests that regular listeners of popular hip-hop music are consistently exposed to the promotion of brand name prescription drugs through music lyrics, and that the branded prescription drug mentions listeners are being exposed to are for drugs that carry significant risks when abused. This exposure is likely to result in brand recall and recognition (Delattre & Colovic, 2009) which have a direct relationship with brand awareness and can lead to consumer choice and perceived quality (Hoyer & Brown, 1990).

The consumers interviewed had dynamic and nuanced attributions for both why artists may have decided to include general brand mentions and why artists may have decided to include prescription drug brand mentions in their lyrics. This exploratory research found that participants often included both intrinsic and extrinsic attributions in their reasoning for the general brand mentions and the prescription drug brand mentions. Overall, participants believed that financial compensation may be the motivation for general brand mentions but is not likely a motivation

for prescription drug brand mentions. This leads to the conclusion that listeners of popular hip-hop music are being exposed to the promotion of brand name prescription drugs without the persuasion resistance that results from knowing they are being advertised to (Fransen et al., 2015). Other common reasoning among participants was the idea of artists perpetuating an image through brand mentions, and the idea that artists are likely consumers of the brands they mention in songs and therefore depicting their lives through music. It is significant that the consumers interviewed often considered that they may be being exposed to persuasive messaging when consuming music, but the type of product being promoted influences where the consumer believes the persuasion is originating from. In the case of apparel, car, and alcohol brand mentions in music consumers recognize that corporations may be behind the persuasion. In the case of prescription drug mentions consumers recognize a persuasive intent behind the mention, but they believe that persuasive intent is to improve the artist's status rather than promote prescription drug brands as products. This perceived conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1963) of brand name prescription drugs to increase social status speaks to the pharmaceutical fetishism (Applequist, 2018) that was also apparent in the participants opinion of Xanax as a "*party drug*".

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