
Review of Taylor Swift's Collaboration with Apple Music

Recently, singer/songwriter Taylor Swift has come out with a series of amusing ads in collaboration with Apple Music. The ads feature songs by Drake & Future (Jumpman), and Jimmy Eat World (The Middle), both of which saw sky rocketed sales after the Apple Music ads premiered (Simmons, 2016). Although the number of people who subscribed to Apple Music after the ads is not yet known, it is safe to say that the campaign has made its way to millions of Taylor Swift fans; 3.8 million, to be exact, and the number is almost doubled on Facebook (Swant, 2016). In this paper I argue that the implicit story and sequential quality of the ads greatly - if not solely – account for the success of the campaign. This is because of the use of normalization and a sequential strategy by the marketing team. I will cite Abbot and Berger's chapters on narrative, closure, and marketing to support my argument.

The ads' story and implicit meaning are central because of what they imply; showing a popular and respected industry figure like Taylor Swift, who has vocally rejected other music-streaming providers like Spotify, endorsing Apple Music suggests to the consumer that there is something special about Apple Music, something that makes them better (Peoples, 2015). Berger's chapter on marketing explains "we are... under the illusion that all our decisions are based on logic, rationality, need or our own notions of what is best for us" (Berger, 2004, p. 141). Though the average consumer believes they have chosen Apple Music over its competitors because of logical reasons, it is more likely that Taylor Swift's collaborative efforts with the company drew in an untapped demographic of consumers (i.e. TS fans who did not have access to her music on Spotify, but could on Apple Music). This persuasive message is conveyed subtly, giving the consumer a sense of power over their decision, which does not necessarily exist.

The implicit political message is not the only meaning conveyed through the ad's narrative. The viewer is further enticed by the depiction of Taylor Swift doing unexciting, everyday activities, like running on a treadmill. Taylor narrates her thoughts, and states in one ad "I hate cardio" ("TAYLOR vs. TREADMILL"). This general opinion resounds with consumers, and makes them feel as though they have something in common with a popular icon. Abbot explains how this type of advertising works in his chapter on narrative rhetoric; he explains normalization as follows:

... our need for narrative form is so strong that we don't really believe something is true unless we can see it as a story. Bringing a collection of events into narrative coherence can be described as a way of normalizing those events. It renders them plausible allowing one to see how they all "belong" (Abbot, 2002, p. 44).

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Let me explain this in the context of the ad campaign studied here: Abbot is explaining that the normalization of a story is strongly based on whether we, as viewers, believe the events told and can picture the events in the form of a story. Though the Taylor Swift ads do not necessarily convey a linear story line, we are exposed to the story of Taylor Swift's daily life and the part Apple Music playlists take in making these moments exciting. It is reasonably plausible that Taylor Swift works out on a treadmill, even though she does not enjoy cardio. It is reasonably plausible, as well, that she uses Apple Music playlists to help her get in the mind set for cardio. And the fact that she falls off the treadmill, in what looks to be a very painful way, further brings her down from icon to normal-human-being status. The same logic applies to the second ad, dissected below.

In "Taylor Mic Drop", she is getting ready to go out (although she already has a full face of make-up on) and listens to an oldie to make the moment more fun. The song chosen is considerably different from the song in the first ad. The significant action in the ad I would like to focus on is when Taylor says in the second ad "I used to listen to this in middle school" ("Taylor Mic Drop"). Again, Taylor Swift is normalizing herself, making the audience think of a young Taylor in middle school, before the fame, jamming out to a popular song just like us 'normal' people. The normalcy shown in the ads, especially when the subject is someone the general public considers "above average" because of her celebrity status, attracts viewers and consumers, making the ad a success for the company.

To further dissect what makes the ad successful, in terms of narrative, I will discuss the use of closure in the series, best explained by Abbott: "Closure is... best understood as something we look for in a narrative..." (57). This may sound vague, but let me explain: Abbot means that closure is best understood as the satisfaction viewers desire from the narrative's ending; whether we are satisfied or not, is a different question (Abbot, 58). In terms of the Apple Music ads studied here, we are satisfied, and therefore have closure. What is satisfying about the ads is the conclusive ending. Though we can expect or hope for more Taylor Swift ads to be added to the campaign, the individual ads that already exist possess a degree of beginning middle and end that satisfies the viewer. The first ad, for example, starts with Taylor getting ready to do cardio, though she does not enjoy it. The middle is when she finds Apple Music playlists for running, and the end is when the playlist she chooses is so good that she falls off the treadmill, and the ad closes with the appropriate tag line "distractingly good" which sums up the main message, perfectly ("TAYLOR vs. TREADMILL). The cohesive narrative told, though admittedly in a very short time, gives the audience a feeling of satisfaction which attracts them to the brand, making the ad successful.

The second ad gives the audience a sense of closure as well, though not in the same way as the first. "Taylor Mic Drop" also has a beginning middle and end, but the tag line is different ("Every song for every moment") making the message of this ad different. This prompts the

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question: is it not a serial campaign if the message of each ad is different? Not necessarily. Other serial ads, like Geico's "Unskippable" campaign, do carry the same tag line throughout, clearly classifying the campaign as a series. Though the Taylor ads do not do this, it is still a serial ad because the central message of the campaign itself is still present (i.e. Apple Music playlists can make any and every moment extraordinary, even for someone who is already as 'extraordinary' as Taylor Swift). With this in consideration, perhaps we should think of the campaign's second ad as a sequel.

Before we continue, understand that the success of the first ad is what prompted a sequel, and according to Sutherland, this is how a company should market itself. Although it can be expected that these ads were planned months in advance, it is just as plausible to suspect that had the first ad not seen the success that it did, the second ad might not have premiered so quickly, if at all. This is typical of sequential ads, as it is natural to continue building on something that has proven to work (Sutherland, 2000).

Sutherland discusses sequels in ads and how they work in his chapter in "Advertising and the Mind of the Consumer." He explains "sequels are a particular form of advertising where the character is held constant and becomes associated with the brand" (Sutherland, 2000). This applies to the Taylor Swift's relationship with Apple beyond the collaboration of Apple Music ads; but that is not the focus of this analysis. The focus is on how the sequel/serial aspect of the campaign contributes to the success of the company. This is supported further by Sutherland's conclusion of sequential ads: "If you hit on a unique style that works, then continue it in the next ad. Strive to 'own' that style in the consumer's mind" (Sutherland, 2000). This is what Apple has done; through having one central figure (Taylor Swift) as their spokesperson, and branding their unique style (providing music for all of Taylor Swift's daily activities, and yours as well!), Apple created and executed a successful sequel to the original ad, which proved to be highly successful on its own.

In conclusion, though different genres of songs are portrayed and the location changes, as well as the activity taking place, the Taylor Swift: Apple Music campaign maintains a cohesive story and utilizes the advantages of seriality to premiere incredibly successful, enjoyable and relatable ads. The cohesive narratives portrayed focus on Taylor Swift's everyday activities and sells the consumer on the story that Taylor's workouts are made more enjoyable by Apple Music songs, and enforces this idea with a sequential ad, showcasing the same character in a different setting. Through the information provided above, I hope to have effectively argued that through the use of tools like normalization and sequels, Apple Music created a successful and memorable ad campaign. There may be more to come from Taylor and Apple Music, and this will only reinforce the serial triumph of the campaign and the resulting boost in sales for their artistic partners.

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