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St. Vincent's "Equal-Opportunity" Guitar

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ST. VINCENT'S "EQUAL-OPPORTUNITY" GUITAR

ANALYZING ERNIE BALL MUSIC MAN'S MARKETING MATERIALS FOR THE ST. VINCENT SIGNATURE GUITAR THROUGH A THIRD-WAVE FEMINIST LENS



To add to her dynamic career, St. Vincent (Annie Clark) released a customized signature guitar in 2016, in collaboration with legendary California-based instrument manufacturer Ernie Ball Music Man. Clark is the first female musician to release her own customized signature electric guitar that she had a lead role in designing and engineering. She recently released 4 additional colors, complementing the color scheme of her latest album, MassEducation.

<https://www.music-man.com/instruments/guitars/st-vincent>

INQUIRY QUESTION:

In what ways did Ernie Ball music man use a third-wave feminist framework in its media materials surrounding the release of St. Vincent's guitar?

Sub - questions:
- Was the messaging regarding feminist/gendered topics inferred or explicit?
-What is the criteria for "feminist advertising"?
- What does this indicate for the cultural ideology surrounding the electric guitar?

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METHODS

Qualitative content analysis is coded by **inferred** and **explicit** communication.

Main Claim: Ernie Ball Music Man's Signature St. Vincent guitar filled a need for an inclusive guitar in the music industry and their promotional materials reflected this.

Third-Wave feminist criteria in advertising:
1.) Promotes positive representations of women and feminism
2.) Embraces multiplicity and contradiction
3.) Advocates a prosex feminist stance
4.) Embraces multiple femininities

Population of content: 18 promotional videos/text on Ernie Ball Music Man's website. Only 5 of the videos could be coded for content analysis. The other 13 videos only demoed and talked about the design and technical features of the guitar.

Coding Strategy:
How did the videos meet the third-wave feminist criteria through both inferred and explicit communication?

Subcategories: mention/use of term "women in music", mention/use of term guitar heroes (How does that reflect the masculinized identity of the guitar? How does St. Vincent challenge the implicit ideologies through verbal & visual communication?)

FINDINGS:

Factors meeting third-wave feminist criteria:
1.) Positive representation

Overall implication: St. Vincent was in charge of disseminating the desired message around her intent for inclusivity with the guitar. Her musical talent and expert technical knowledge was placed at the forefront of the campaign. Less focus on her sex appeal and performative persona & more focus on connection with the instrument and creative sound.

2.) Embraces multiplicity and contradictions:

Overall implication: The predominance of male idols mentioned and used in the inspiration for design/naming of the various guitar models signifies the ways in which St. Vincent applies masculine influence with her own feminine/queer influence to create a unique instrument. This is an example of multiplicity.

3.) Advocates a pro-feminist and sex-positive stance

Overall implication: Rejects stereotype of female guitarists using sexuality to market themselves. St. Vincent asserts her sexuality in the Guitar World interview in a way that signals asserting the collective power for the female (or non-binary) musician.

4.) Embraces multiple femininities

Overall implication - The discussion of femininity in the interviews presents the heteronormative cultural ideology surrounding what a "woman's guitar" is perceived as, and the way in which the design features are implemented and discussed creates space for femininity to co-exist in a male-dominated landscape. St. Vincent "debunked" the myth.

LIT REVIEW

Main claim: Ernie Ball Music Man's Signature St. Vincent Guitar filled a need for a gender-inclusive guitar and their promotional videos reflected this.

SUB-CLAIMS

- Original engineering of the electric guitar historically excluded women, and also did not account for the female body or smaller physical frames.
- "Technophallus" describes the phallic association with the electric guitar that is signified through its performative nature. Think Jimi Hendrix, David Bowie, and Prince.
- The term "guitar hero" has mostly been associated with men, and in semiotics is considered a **cultural ideology**.
- Discussing female guitarists under the umbrella of "women in music" puts them in an 'othered' category

SEMIOTICS & FEMINIST THEORY IN ADVERTISING

IDEOLOGY SURROUNDING THE ELECTRIC GUITAR: (TOPICS LATER VISITED IN CONTENT ANALYSIS)

HISTORICALLY THERE HAVE BEEN INSTITUTIONALIZED BARRIERS TO WOMEN PLAYING THE ELECTRIC GUITAR:

- LACK OF FEMALE ROLE MODELS, MALE DOMINATED-INDUSTRY, MASCULINIZATION OF TECHNOLOGIES (BOURDAGE, 2010)

CONTENT ANALYSIS IN SEMIOTICS(STOKES):

- DISCOVERING "IDEOLOGY" OR SYSTEM OF BELIEF - UNDERLYING MESSAGE
- INFERRED/EXPLICIT COMMUNICATION

FEMINIST THEORY IN ADVERTISING:

- ADVERTISING HAS CHANGED TO REFLECT THE INFLUENCE OF FEMINISM ON MAINSTREAM CULTURE: LIFESTYLE, ATTITUDES, AND CONSUMERISM
- WOMEN HAVE GROWN INCREASINGLY ANGRY WITH BEING BOMBARDED BY UNREALISTIC BEAUTY STANDARDS AND SEXIST STEREOTYPES
- THIRD-WAVE FEMINISM SEEKS OUT POSITIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND FEMINISM WITHIN MAINSTREAM MEDIA

