

# DR. A.C. DANIELS CO., BAG BALM, AND SHANIA TWAIN THE “SAVIOUR”?

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## Résumé

*En novembre 1999, le Daily Telegraph de Londres publie un article dans lequel la célèbre chanteuse canadienne Shania Twain offre des conseils de beauté à son intervieweur. Elle lui confie qu'elle utilise régulièrement Bag Balm, un produit animal pour usage vétérinaire seulement, pour l'hydratation de sa peau et de ses cheveux. L'article est aussitôt repris par les presses, les chaînes de radio et de télévision du monde entier ainsi que par plusieurs sites de références Internet. Le fabricant de ce produit, la compagnie Dr. A.C. Daniels, de Stanstead, Québec, est par la suite inondé de bons de commande pour le produit Bag Balm; la compagnie doit dès lors faire face au phénomène maintenant connu sous le nom de « la crise Shania » ou « l'effet Shania ». La compagnie, le produit en question – Bag Balm – et tous les facteurs communicationnels sont à l'étude dans le présent article. L'auteur présente comment des facteurs, tels le bouche à oreille, le clavardage, la densité référentielle, l'intertextualité et les commanditaires vedettes, ont affecté une petite compagnie méconnue des Cantons de l'Est.*

## Abstract

In November 1999, London's *Daily Telegraph* ran a story, in which Canadian singing sensation Shania Twain gave a beauty tip to her interviewer. She confessed that for hair and skin conditioning she used Bag Balm, an animal product for veterinary use only. This article was immediately circulated throughout the world by print, radio, television and Internet sources. The manufacturer of the product, Dr. A.C. Daniels Co. of Stanstead, Quebec, was instantly inundated with sales orders for Bag Balm, having to face what is now known as the “Shania Crisis” or the “Shania Effect”. This paper will discuss the company, the product – Bag Balm – and numerous related and interconnected communicational variables. It will reflect how such factors as word-of-mouth, word-of-mouse, referential density, indexical meanings, intertextuality and the ways that celebrity endorsements have affected a somewhat obscure, two-person company located in Stanstead Quebec.

### The Company, Dr. A.C. Daniels

The Company started in 1878 when Albert C. Daniels, a New Hampshire veterinarian, began selling specially formulated products from his buggy. With sales success, he moved to 75 West Brookline Street, in Boston. After his death in 1897, his company continued to manufacture the animal medicines for horses, cattle, sheep, poultry, dogs and cats. With success came expansion.

The Canadian operation of Dr. A.C. Daniels, established with a capital stock of \$10,000, received its rights to manufacture and sell the U.S. product line in 1910. Part of the agreement with the American parent company allowed the Quebec operation to make and distribute the patented products to any British possession for 49 years. In return, the Boston Company received 25 shares in the new Canadian operation and retained ownership of all produce formulae.

The first meeting of the Canadian operations board of directors happened on February 11, 1911, in Knowlton, Quebec. Dr. A.C. Daniels' minute book indicates how difficult the early years of the firm were. Two of the original directors died. In 1917, sales were \$6,924.70 with a surplus of \$3,800.20 (Mayrand, 7).<sup>1</sup> Between 1921 and 1925 growth occurred, bringing assets to \$19,831.07 and liabilities to only \$1,099.15. In 1926, a fire destroyed the business premises in Knowlton, including all product inventory. In 1929, Thomas Foster, one of the original investors and participants, died and was succeeded by Percy M. Cowin. He had been with the organization since 1917 and under his guidance the growth of the firm seemed to be guaranteed. Known as the "Horse Doctor" and respected as such, he died in 1953. By that date, Dr. A.C. Daniels was continuing to successfully market a line of products for horses and had worldwide distribution on a limited scale. The American parent of Dr. A.C. Daniels took control of the Canadian firm in 1954. The new owner, Henry Van Baay, transferred all shares of the Canadian operation to Carroll Smith. An agreement reached on April 28, 1956 renewed the old agreement between Dr. A.C. Daniels, America, and Dr. A.C. Daniels, Canada. The Canadian company took ownership of 15 medicinal remedies for horses and cows. They could not, however, manufacture, nor distribute, products for cats and dogs; the major sustainable animal food lines of the U.S. operation. Territorial exclusivity for 99 years was also reaffirmed in 1956 (Mayrand, 9).<sup>2</sup>

The years between 1954 and 1956 were dormant years for Dr. A.C. Daniels. Contacts were lost, competition in horse medicines was increasing for a shrinking market and the future did not look promising. On May 16, 1956, Carroll Smith called a meeting in Rock

Island and a new five member board was formed. This new board included three Smiths, E.J. Barnes and James Williamson. In 1972, after a stay in America, Eric Smith, Carroll's son, returned to Canada to work for the company. Eric Smith bought Dr. A.C. Daniels in 1976 and continues to operate the business today (for a detailed analysis of the history of animal remedies and other Quebec/Township firms, see Mayrand, 2001, 2003).<sup>3</sup>



### The Product, Bag Balm

Bag Balm was manufactured in Lyndonville, Vermont as early as 1898/1899. As of 1908, this animal ointment was distributed in Canada by Charles Clark Hunt and Dairy Association owner. On July 2, 1941, Carroll Smith, owner of Dr. A.C. Daniels, bought all rights to the Dairy Association Company from the late Charles Clark Hunt. It was only in 1956, however, that Bag Balm became one of the products sold by Dr. A.C. Daniels and by 2004 it was the company main product.

Bag Balm is an antiseptic salve, 0.3% Hydroxyquinoline Sulfate in a Petroleum-Lanolin Base. The ointment is intended primarily for treatment of cow's udders and teats injured by calving, high feeding, bruising, sunburn, and chilling. The active ingredients in the salve include quinoline, an antiseptic derived from coal tar that keeps superficial tissue soft and provides an analgesic effect. The lanolin ointment base aids in absorbing water. The petroleum part of the base retains the water, thus providing temporary relief from drying of the epithelial tissues. The sulphate component of the ointment inhibits bacterial growth with which it comes in contact. The product's

package clearly warns that Bag Balm is for animal use *only* (Hotz, 2000).<sup>4</sup>

Schwarcz (1999) believed that the real key to Bag Balm's performance was the moisture barrier, good old petroleum, known to most consumers as Vaseline. He explained the success of American chemist, Robert Cheseborough, who discovered a waxy material that oozed out of the ground with the petroleum. Rod wax, as called by the oil drillers, had one benefit – it helped heal cuts and burns. So for ten years Cheseborough experimented to perfect a pure, odour-free effective form of rod wax. Vaseline was the eventual outcome. Although it has many uses, most people spoke of its near miraculous effects on chapped skin. Thus, when the producers of Bag Balm searched for effective ingredients, “petroleum jelly” was a natural.<sup>5</sup> It must be mentioned that although Cheseborough was the first to commercially sell the coal tar “petroleum jelly”; David Zeisberger, the Moravian missionary who explored Seneca Indian territory around the Allegheny River, reported on October 7, 1768: “They brought back some oil from the oil well...the Indians use it as a medicine (St. John, 33).”<sup>6</sup> The Seneca used the waxy ointment for headache, toothache, swelling, rheumatism, sprains, and burns. Settlers adopted the oil from the natives and named it fossil oil, Genesee bank oil, American rock oil, Barbados tar, Seneca oil, Indian oil, and Snake oil. They also swallowed it to “purify the blood.” Forerunners of “petroleum jelly products” date as far back as the late 1700s. Now, in 2004, Bag Balm which appeared as an extension of Vaseline, has spawned its own competitors such as Udder Balm and Udderly Smooth.

As stated earlier, Bag Balm is for veterinary uses only (a cow udder/teats ointment) but how application and uses have changed! Eric and Diane Smith believe that approximately 80% of buyers now use the product for numerous human ailments. Some of the most notably human uses include:

Scabies, burns, diaper rash, sunburns, swollen glands, cuts, wind burns, hand lotion, lip balm, ear ache, eczema, tattoo infections, rashes, hang nails, calloused hands, feet and elbows, chest poultices, dandruff, breasts and nipples cream for nursing mothers, chapping, hemorrhoids, baldness, facial and hair moisturizer, rectal cream, psoriasis and even female breast enhancement.<sup>7</sup>

In general, the animal use product crossover to human use is unusual especially to the extent and variety of uses that are claimed by users of Bag Balm. One other crossover product appears to have been Dr. Woodbury's Horse Liniment. This Frasier, Thornton and

Company (Cookshire, Quebec) product contained turpentine, cod oil, camphor and liquid ammonia. This liniment for horses was supposed to cure colds, coughs, distemper and colic, as well as to cure dry, hard, or feverish hoofs, splints, sprains, bruises and strains. The slogan of 1891, "What is Good for a Horse is Good for a Man," appeared in a company brochure and had the following testimonial:

While on a trip to the provinces I was stopping in your town for a few days and contracted a very severe cold and swollen face and ear. I was induced to try your liniment by a friend of mine, who said what is good for a horse is good for a man, and I took two doses at night before retiring. I also bathed my face, ear and chest with the same, and in less than 48 hours I was entirely relieved from all cough and soreness. I shall recommend it to all my friends and wish you every success.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst the above example was not all that uncommon in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it is difficult to find such crossover uses today. One exception, however, would be that of the famous cosmetic entrepreneur, Elizabeth Arden. On launching her famous eight hour cream, developed originally for her horses she quipped, "I judge a woman and a horse by the same criteria: legs, head, and rear end" (*Economist*, 2003).<sup>9</sup> As various individuals tried to explain why Shania Twain would mention Bag Balm, some suggested it might have been due to her folksy, small-town upbringing and her love of horses.

**FIGURE 1: EXAMPLE OF YEARLY SALES OF TEN-OUNCE TINS OF BAG BALM**

| Year      | Average sale of ten-ounce tins |
|-----------|--------------------------------|
| 1972      | 2,500                          |
| 1988      | 7,000                          |
| 1992      | 8,000                          |
| 1993      | 12,000                         |
| 1995–1998 | 22,477                         |

These figures are of yearly sales of ten-ounce tins of Bag Balm before the "Shania Crisis"; the "Shania Bomb (explosion)." Sales after the "Shania Effect" literally exploded. On November 2, 1999, Shania Twain told a reporter for London's *Daily Telegraph*:

I can't bear to see my pictures in magazines. My cheekbones are good and I have a nice smile, but I'm not one of those people who look absolutely gorgeous photographed from any angle. Asked if she had a favourite beauty tip she replied: It's Bag Balm, it's a sort of petroleum jelly that's used on cows' udders to keep

them from getting sore when they are milked in the winter. When I've been flying a lot and my skin is really dry, I'll rub it over my face and my hair and leave it there all day.<sup>11</sup>

The London comment was immediately reprinted the following day in Canada's *National Post* and subsequently the Twain endorsement became the subject of voluminous media attention, and discussion, for a number of weeks thereafter. It should be noted that over the years, there had been other occasions when Bag Balm was given "free" publicity. In 1988, Wayne Rostad of CBC's "Country Report" visited the Smiths.<sup>12</sup> The report focused more on the nature of the place and small company. Eric Smith did mention that he had been using Bag Balm for chapped hands since his youth. It was shortly after this comment that Lee Valley Tools, an Ottawa based garden-accessories catalogue company, included the product in its gardeners' line. Lee Valley promoted the ointment as a hand moisturizer.<sup>13</sup> Sales of Bag Balm slowly increased and it became the most popular product sold by Dr. A.C. Daniels.

In 1995, a synergistic impact within the media occurred. A number of media comments, discussions, and presentations caused an increase in attention and sales. A dermatologist recommended the product on the "Oprah" television show. It also had shelf exposure (product placement) on the widely-watched television series "Northern Exposure", and television personality Regis Philbin made a few jokes about it on his morning talk show. These events were taking place in American media watched also by Canadians. In Canada, Montreal's "News Watch" did a segment on Dr. A.C. Daniels and Bag Balm. CBC's national television show, "Midday", had Brent Bambury discuss the product's human uses with owner, Eric Smith. Montreal's Carol Kilkenny acknowledged that farmers had been using the product for humans across numerous generations. She went on to say:

Girls, have we got something for you, the latest treatment for cuts, scraps, dry skin, whatever.... Now people are finding it irresistible.<sup>14</sup>

With media exposure, word-of-mouth communication and eventually Internet discussions, sales of Bag Balm were averaging approximately 22,000 ten-ounce tins throughout the mid-to-later 1990s. (See *figure 1*.) Then along came Shania Twain's casual comments in *The Daily Telegraph* (Bag Balm was misspelled as Bag "Bomb"). An explosion of immediate attention followed and it created a supply crisis within Dr. A.C. Daniels. Local French and English newspapers, as well as regional, provincial, and national

**The Royal Canadian Air Farce, “English as a Second Language” News Skit said:**

**Roger Abbot:** Singer Shania Twain revealed that to keep her complexion smooth she used Bag Balm, a lotion normally rubbed on a cow’s udder. She has since stopped after a dairy farmer tried to milk her face. How does it feel Svetlana?

**Svetlana (Luba Goy):** Smoooooth.

**Male:** (applying Bag Balm to his face) And that’s the news.

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**This Hour Has 22 minutes Minutes.**

*Anchor: Greg Thomey, Guest: Cathy Jones as Darlene Star.*

*Only excerpts are shown below:*

**GT:** You grew up with Shania Twain did you not?

**DS:** We were practically sisters then she talked fancy and started using the Bag Balm magic cream.

**GT:** Now you say the cream is magic?

**DS:** Must be, one minute she’s in Timmins, the next minute poof, she’s a millionaire.

**GT:** So you use the cream as well?

**DS:** Use it? Why I used to be a two-timing, no good, low down, eagle picking, lazy bellied, gutter sniping, foul mouthed, unattractive person until I rubbed the magic cream upon my face, now I’m beautiful and talented.<sup>15</sup>

*Text box 1.*

papers, radio and television picked up the story and each headline, each story, reinforced Shania’s beauty tip. Canada’s two top CBC comedy television shows featured skits on Bag Balm. (See text box 1.)

The Bag Balm beauty tip endorsement was also repeated in the widely popular *People* magazine.<sup>16</sup> The quote and picture of Ms. Twain was six months after her London comment. For six months, media stories, in various forms, were weaving together and reinforcing her Bag Balm beauty tip to literally millions of people mainly in the United States and Canada. Eric and Diane Smith were overwhelmed by and with the attention and found it almost impossible to fulfill the demand for Bag Balm. Eighty percent of the sales of this veterinary

FIGURE 2: SALES OF TEN-OUNCE TINS OF BAG BALM.

|      |       |               |      |                |
|------|-------|---------------|------|----------------|
| 1999 | Jan.  | 1,296         | 2000 | 9,857          |
|      | Feb.  | 1,746         |      | 19,705         |
|      | Mar.  | 3,918         |      | 28,419         |
|      | Apr.  | 1,572         |      | 17,460         |
|      | May   | 1,428         |      | 21,300         |
|      | June  | 2,736         |      | 16,668         |
|      | July  | 1,596         |      | 13,238         |
|      | Aug.  | 684           |      | 4,764          |
|      | Sept. | 612           |      | 4,128          |
|      | Oct.  | 3,339         |      | 12,552         |
|      | Nov.  | 7,332         |      | 4,872          |
|      | Dec.  | 22,068        |      | 6,960          |
|      |       | <b>48,327</b> |      | <b>159,923</b> |

product were now for eventual human use (even if this product was clearly not recommended for human use).

Examining in greater details sales (*see figure 2*) of Bag Balm following Ms. Twains' comments, it is evident that the causality of her statement is most remarkable. Remembering that it was early to mid-November 1999 that her comments were internationally disseminated. It should be noted, however, that the focus of the presentation and the sales figures are strictly Canadian.

From mid-November until the end of December 1999, 29,400 ten-ounce tins were sold. In six weeks, 51.0% of 1999's sales occurred and more product was sold than in any previous year. The following year (2000), 159,923 ten-ounce tins were sold. This remarkable sales figure represented 53.6% of the previous six years of sales. Because of the "Shania Effect", the company saw annual sales increase from an average of about 22,400 tins to 189,323 tins in a 14-month period, well over a 700% increase. In 2003–2004, sales decreased to approximately 75,000 tins – still a 300% increase over the 1990s. It appears, however, that after the frenzied year 2000, things quieted somewhat.

The present sales figures do clearly indicate that many more people tried the product and once having used Bag Balm continued to buy the ointment. Most of the increases and continuing success of Bag Balm may be attributable to the beauty tip offered freely by the Canadian singing sensation, Shania Twain.

With the dramatic increase in production and Federal government's new hygiene and sanitation guidelines unveiled in December 2001, Mr. Smith, owner of Dr. A.C. Daniels, had to invest



in new machinery. The total cost for the new equipment was in the six-digit range but the small town, family-run business was saved; "Thank heavens for Shania, otherwise we'd have been finished for sure," said Diane Smith in 2003.<sup>17</sup> "I'm sure she doesn't know what she did, but I'd like to tell her *Thanks a million!*"<sup>18</sup>

### **Culture and Consumption.**

Did Shania Twain cause the Bag Balm sales crisis and was she the saviour of the Dr. A.C. Daniels Company, of Stanstead, Quebec? Yes, no, and maybe! The year 2000 sales phenomenon, was due, perhaps, to many factors. The author (2000) conducted an informal convenience survey on the campus of Bishop's University, Lennoxville, Quebec. Three support staffs and a group of administrative assistant, all used Bag Balm, especially in the winter to moisten their hands. All women had known about the human curative properties of the product since childhood. A tin of Bag Balm is publicly displayed in their office for everyone's use. Eight female library staff members were also interviewed. All had heard of Bag Balm and had used the product, and four were currently users. These four women had grown up on farms where the ointment was readily available, not only for animal use but for numerous human purposes. As well, one informant went into considerable detail to tell the interviewer how the salve had helped her father's and daughter's psoriasis (more on this use later). During this time period (2000) the author ran an article in a local newspaper asking readers to forward any of their experiences with Bag Balm.<sup>19</sup>

Ms. Elaine Laraway, of Georgeville, Quebec, kindly sent a single-spaced, 1,000 words, typed letter. This letter was like an encyclopedia of uses for the product both for human and animal purposes. Only the salient points of the letter will be given:

[I] grew up on a farm, [and my] parents were homesteaders, they worked hard, bought only the basics, and doctors were called upon only in dire circumstances. Bag Balm was considered a miracle cure for most anything. The product was bought in bulk, repackaged into smaller containers and placed throughout the house and farm buildings. It was used for cows' udders as instructed and also used for animal infections, cuts, and sprains. In the summer time, the cows and the horses had the ointment around their eyes and rear ends to keep the flies at bay. If this wasn't done the animals would become wild and crazy just tearing through the woods and often the animals would end up hurt. Bag Balm was used to prevent an accident before it happened.

Mother applied Bag Balm to scrapes and cuts, the cuts seemed to heal overnight and it prevented infections. At the first sign of a snuffle we were rubbed with Bag Balm. It was great to reduce swollen glands and to cure earaches. The ointment was used to relieve congested chests from colds. I was rubbed with Bag Balm, my chest covered with a flannel and put to bed. By morning the rattle in the chest had cleared.

Spring, sugar camp, washing sap buckets was a cold job. Bag Balm healed the chapping and soreness quickly.

Relatives and friends who visited the farm usually left with a small container of salve. Many of them returned to find out what kind of ointment my mother had given them as it worked so well. It was worth a buck to see the look on their faces when my mother told them it was Bag Balm and that it was indeed for use on cows' teats.

An elderly neighbour had hemorrhoids and asked for the magic ointment. He wanted mother to apply it but mother drew the line.

My mother had a Singer sewing machine. She made most of our clothes from clothes she picked up from a rummage sale or what people would pass on to us. She had problems with the machine. She smeared all the gears with Bag Balm and the sewing machine ran like new.

My dad used Bag Balm on the harnesses for the horses; it softened the leather and the harness didn't chafe the horses and the leather did not crack or break. He used it on his leather mitts and boots, it softened them, helped waterproof the work items and they stayed flexible and lasted much longer.<sup>20</sup>

This form of narrative is rich in details of the most varied uses of Bag Balm. Since the farming homesteaders appeared poor they had to determine, look after, and fulfill many of their almost daily and seasonal medical needs. This letter neatly dovetails into many other forms of documentation of similar uses in other parts of North America. Beach Conger, a Vermont country doctor, wrote a book called *Bag Balm and Duct Tape*. He had to treat a badly cut leg wound of a local farmer. The farmer had tried to take care of the wound by using the available medical aids on the farm, Bag Balm and Duct Tape, those widely used multi-purpose ubiquitous farm-found products.<sup>21</sup> In 2000, Mr. Smith received a testimonial letter recommending Bag Balm as an excellent substitute for WD-40 for gears and bearings in household appliances<sup>22</sup> – a similar use as that of Ms. Laraway's mother "Bag Balming" her sewing machines so many years before.

The final narrative is from P.T. of London, Ontario. P.T.'s story deals with Bag Balm's partial curative impact on psoriasis. He states:

I have had psoriasis since I was 17 years old. It became so bad that it covered 80% of my body from head to toe. By the time I was 48 years old, I had to quit my job as a pharmacy technician in a local London hospital. I am now 51.

A friend at work told my wife that she had an aunt who had psoriasis and she used a product called Bag Balm. She said she could purchase it at Lee Valley Tools. After traveling thousands of miles in pursuits to aid my psoriasis, and spending lots of money on other products, I thought I had nothing to lose.

I must emphasize one important point – Bag Balm is not a cure for psoriasis. However, it has made a 100% difference in my daily life, dealing with and controlling my psoriasis. My skin used to be really scaly, was very dry and would crack and bleed. Since I have been using Bag Balm my scales have lessened and my skin is supple and smooth. I'm not saying Bag Balm will work for everyone, but it is sure worth a try. It has made a big difference in my life.<sup>23</sup>

This testimonial is interesting from several perspectives. Psoriasis is a skin disease that is extremely difficult to treat and control even with the best dermatological advice. Yet, P.T., in his later years, had found Bag Balm, which had changed his life. Also, the reader may recall the informant at Bishop's University library who told the author that her father continued to use the ointment to control his lifelong battle with psoriasis. In an interview with the author, in February 2004, she confirmed that her father's continued to use Bag Balm for his psoriasis. She also had a painful hang nail smothered with the salve as we talked. What these narratives clearly indicate is the changing network of social communications. Ms. Laraway's mother appeared as an opinion leader in the domain of folkloric forms of medicine. She freely used the veterinary ointment for many family health problems. She was consulted by neighbours, she frequently dispersed the product to friends, neighbours, and visitors to her farm. Her children, like Ms. Laraway, grew up surrounded by stories, humour, uses and cures all related to Bag Balm. The evidence, the trials of the product's curative properties of the ointment were circulated and passed on by word-of-mouth, society's most powerful form of communication. Mahoney's testimonial, as well as that of P.T., is a most recent form of networking, dissemination of product information. Internet usage and word-of-mouth have now become an extremely powerful

communication tool. Here you witness market Internet networking between companies and individuals who have no traditional interpersonal ties. Today, it is believed that these weak-tie communications, like the Internet, have more total impact on behaviour than strong-tie (close friend, etc.) communications.<sup>24</sup> Word-of-mouth communications remain very important where individuals share information on a face-to-face basis, with other individuals – like Bishop’s library staff. We talk, people listen, interact, interpret the stories, and in some of the salient and vivid points agree with one and other. Recent studies on word-of-mouth have shown that two factors – vividness and saliency of the discussion – are critical to the success of this form of interpersonal communication. Vivid information and results are easier to remember. Saliency refers to the recommendation from someone who knows something about you, the recipient of the information. Mother-to-child, to friend, to neighbour, to colleague exemplifies saliency like the author’s interaction with the informants, and Ms. Laraway’s mother. The ‘magical cure’, the before and after effects could not be more vivid (red nose, chapped, bleeding lips, and skin, apply the Bag Balm, and a noticeable positive outcome ensues).<sup>25</sup> Other researchers have emphasized the importance of life stories that involve brands, brand usage situations, and brands as symbols of personal life stories. Bag Balm Web sites now number in the thousands, and many of them tell personal stories; they are narratives to discern self-identity. The stories and the brand serve as referents or give indexical meaning to individuals and their brand use narratives.<sup>26</sup> Thompson, Howard and Pollio (1994) have argued that our behaviour as consumers occurs within a multifaceted, complex network of cultural influences, social settings, cultural ideals, gender roles, rituals, religious and ethnic traditions that exert systematic influences on the experiences of individual consumers. Cultural narratives convey meaning by our interactions and these socially personalized meanings which are constructed in social situations. Living together on a farm in Georgeville, Quebec provided Ms. Laraway with culturally framed experiences and shared frames of reference when using and applying Bag Balm. Her life experiences with the ointment, the trustworthiness of her mother, should assist us in understanding how the product Bag Balm took on so many different symbolic meanings and usage factors.<sup>27</sup>

McCracken (1986) has extensively researched how products, as signifiers, have the ability to carry, to project and to communicate cultural meanings on an individualized or group basis. Dreyfuss and

Rabinow (1982) discussed how meanings are shared and handed down intergenerationally in culturally bound situations. Lastly, Miller (1988) researched how we not only socialize a product, such as Bag Balm, into an immediate social setting, but how the product perhaps might be resocialized in another person's lifestyle situation and communal contexts. Ms. Laraway of Georgeville lived within a multi-use environment for Bag Balm. The samples of the ointment may have been used for different usages by her mother's friends and visitors, however. A resocializing process is apparent when the elderly neighbour wanted the salve for his hemorrhoids, a use unknown at that point in time to the opinion leader. On a very personal level, she would not cross the interpersonal, moral or action lines by applying the ointment on her neighbour.<sup>28</sup>

Shania Twain made the casual statement about Bag Balm during an interview in early November 1999. She was not paid to endorse the product although by her statement, and because of her international status, it was an implied endorsement. She was eventually seen as the company's saviour. What has also been shown, however, is that there were numerous other texts already forming and weaving different narratives forms supporting human uses of Bag Balm. Ms. Twain's comment appeared to take the product out of the multi-use medicinal environment and catapult the salve in the beauty treatment area. Why? One has to ask what are the interconnected meanings, the layers of symbolic meanings that would appear to have persuaded many thousands of female consumers to buy a veterinary product for the treatment of cows' teats and udders. A product sold mainly through hardware, gardening and animal shops. A product that was never advertised and a tin that has never changed in almost one hundred years. Some of Shania Twain's personal characteristics and properties might help explain the "Shania Effect." Born poor, she left Windsor, Ontario for Timmins, after her mother divorced her father. Her mother then remarried J. Twain, an Ojibway forest worker. Ms. Twain continued to be poor, started performing at eight years of age and has been performing ever since. Her hit "Come on Over" album sold over 28 million copies, the greatest ever for a female vocalist. She is also the only female artist to have three albums sell more than 10 million copies each.<sup>29</sup>

She's a cross-over miracle, radio and television formats, pop, contemporary, country, dance charts all feature her music. She has a massive mixed audience appeal – music tastes and age groups. Shania Twain's folksy ordinariness comes through to the audience in many ways. She is seen as the dutiful daughter who struck it rich and still

comes home for holidays. She has never forgotten her roots and she's an expert in making people happy. She recycles dresses. She's been called the "WOMAN of the PEOPLE" and she believes that she is a down to earth, low maintenance and approachable person. She keeps in touch with her Timmins school, she is home focused, she gives to charities such as Second Harvest Food Bank and Kids' Café and she's constantly in touch with her siblings that she personally reared after her parents were killed. Shania Twain, as a superstar, retains many of the qualities that many women in society identify with and appreciate; she's seen as credible, trustworthy and beautiful.<sup>30</sup>

Hall (1980) believed social interpretations of celebrities, such as Shania Twain, follow a cultural logic. Reading and interpreting celebrities, we need to see that they embody the meanings and the traits deemed most desirable by society.<sup>31</sup> The celebrity stands as an archetypal representation of cultural ideals to which non-celebrities can aspire (Fiske, 1992).<sup>32</sup> We, as consumers, create with the celebrity self-referential relationships; we focus on specific aspects, factors, traits of the celebrity that seem quite plausible in our own self, in our own lifestyles.

## CONCLUSION

Shania Twain was seen as a saviour for Dr. A.C. Daniels Company of Canada. This may well be, since demand rose immediately following her London *Daily Telegraph* comment about using Bag Balm as a beauty product. We have referred to this leap in sales as the "Shania Effect". This paper has tried to indicate other numerous factors that were in a sense wide-ranging forms of referential density and substantial forms of intertextuality occurring since 1988 and probably much longer on an informal word-of-mouth basis. Beginning in the late 1980s the product was discussed on CBC television, the Regis Philbin show, and the Oprah Winfrey show. In the mid 1990s Bag Balm appeared on the airwaves again. Discussions, comments and humour seemed to have been focused more on human use but not as a beauty product. The Internet started playing a product informational dissemination role throughout the nineties. Irons (1999) in her book *911 Beauty Secrets* suggested the following tip for winter-hand:

Once a week, sleep with Bag Balm (available at drugstores) slathered on hands, covered by cotton gloves. Bag Balm (also called udder balm to treat cows' udders).<sup>33</sup>

Then, with the “Shania Crisis” the demand exploded. Cartoons, calendars and stories appeared. Shania Twain’s music had taken off since the mid 1990s, she had numerous television specials and won many prestigious top music awards. Many of her songs appealed to women in particular. Her life story was repeated continuously in print media. Finally, a ground swell of attention was given to her beauty tip, in French and in English print and broadcast media, nationally and internationally disseminated. The referential density and media intertextuality all coalesced to help create what we have termed the “Shania Effect”. Thus, the *Daily Telegraph* article was merely one, albeit important, source of this effect.

Finally, all the communications synergy created a degree of “buzz” that marketers and companies can only dream about. This “buzz” is capable of catapulting products from relative obscurity into runaway commercial success. In late 1999, Dr. A.C. Daniels Co., of Stanstead, Quebec, was operating more or less as a hobby by the Smiths. It was rumoured locally that the firm was for sale. Sales of Bag Balm had flattened out to approximately 22,000 ten-ounce tins per year. Out of the blue came Shania Twain’s beauty tip and, as they say, the rest is history.

## NOTES

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