

# Buyer behaviour analysis changing image of fast food marketing essay



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The decision to purchase, use or consume the product of a particular brand is not simply a utilitarian decision that focuses on what goods a consumer wants, it is also a matter of the consumer's self image. The customer asks himself, perhaps subconsciously, is he "the type of person" who eats at McDonald's, or uses Bayer aspirin? From there, the customer makes a decision to use, or not use, the product. However, the answers to these questions are less than simple. They are intricately and intrinsically connected to brand image and perception. Consumers are willing to put more money and resources into things that make them feel good about themselves. Companies want to leave their customers feeling good about their purchasing decision, with a raised self-image. However, what makes a person feel good about herself changes as values and society change. More than any other industry, this may be true about food - English speakers even have an expression for it - "you are what you eat."

For the last few years - since at least 2003 - fast food providers have been in a process of trying to change consumer imagery of their brand. These brands - McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, are attempting to reposition themselves in the consumer mind as modern, and as such, adapted to the concerns of the times and their consumers. According to the trait theory in marketing, customers prefer brands that match themselves. Their customers have changed their needs and goals, and the brands must reflect this change in thinking and motivation. This data response paper will first discuss the fast food companies' attempt to change their marketing strategy from the framework of different marketing theories, then discuss how successful these

attempts have been, and what other information would be useful in evaluating their success.

## **PESTEL analysis**

The PESTEL analysis takes into account the numerous factors in the external environment. Businesses need to take a pro-active approach and be ahead of these factors and upcoming changes.

### **Political**

The political environment for change in the fast food industry is rich, especially considering the social factors noted below. Recent social changes have brought the fast food industry under fire and more regulation by government agencies.

### **Economic**

Because of the global recession, many middle class customers may be forced to downgrade their lifestyles and eat fast food. A redesign may help them feel better about these buying decisions.

### **Social**

Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal, was a book released in 2001 by Eric Schlosser, an investigative journalist who spent 3 years investigating the fast food industry. Compared to Upton Sinclair's The Jungle, which showed the corruption of the meatpacking industry during the early 20th century, Fast Food Nation examines the local and global influence of the United States fast food industry. This book, and the movie that was made of it, could even be blamed with starting this fast food revamp. In his

detailed, angry portrayal of different aspects of the fast food industry, Schlosser pointed out the connection of fast food providers with American obesity, atrocities in the quality of meat, as well as condemned fast food provider's marketing towards children. Schlosser indicts fast food with the "malling [sic] of our landscape, widened the chasm between rich and poor, fueled an epidemic of obesity and propelled the juggernaut of American cultural imperialism abroad" (Adamson 2002). The fast food industry faced a public relations disaster, and accused Schlosser of fear mongering (Sagon 2001). In 2001, Schlosser said publically that he was optimistic about changes in the fast food market, and the fast food markets ability to affect change in the meatpacking industry. Since then, the fast food market has attempted to change its image dramatically. These recent redesigns are best understood in that longer arc.

The rising and falling of nutritionism as a value is also a major factor in the food market in general, which certainly affects these major players. Nutritionism, defined by Michael Pollan as "the widely shared but unexamined assumption ... that the key to understanding food is indeed the nutrient" (2003) is big business. Compared to 50 years ago, the average consumer today is verily obsessed with the "scientific" facts about whether a food is healthy for them. Pollan argues that simply using facts about individual nutrients exploits people's reductive bias into dividing the world into good and bad. Along with anti-globalization sentiment, this focus on nutrition and health demonized the fast food companies. And now, Pollan leads an anti-food science movement, which some critics accuse of being quasi-religious. As a result of either factor - both share the idea that health is

tied to food intake - some of these restaurants have changed their menu as well as their look. Most of the fast food providers now sell salads, though they are often loaded with sugar (Marco 2007). A Wendy's Garden Sensations Mandarin Chicken Salad had more calories, more fat, more carbohydrates and more sugar than a Double Stack. The customer feels good about themselves for eating a salad, but still feels full and good from eating that many calories, and more importantly to the brand, is left with good feelings about their purchase.

## **Technologies**

Technologies are constantly evolving, making it cheaper to redesign and refurbish a set of restaurants.

## **Environmental**

Pollan's work reflects a current growing trend within the food buying public - a care for the environment. There is a growing emphasis on local food, on whole foods, and on vegetables. The growing consensus is that more natural is healthier, so fast food providers are faced with the hard task of selling a product that is highly processed to a customer who wants to believe that they are eating something that is healthy.

## **Legal**

The numerous lawsuits against fast food restaurants, accusing them of contributing to American obesity, create a great opportunity for brand redesign.

## **Customer motivation**

Some of the articles about this phenomenon suggest that the brands are adapting to meet the needs of their original consumer base, who have now has gotten older as time has gone by. As these customers have gotten older, they have updated their perception of themselves as they have gotten more of a taste for more dignified consumption, and want their consumption of the same fast food to fit in with their new perception of themselves and new preferences. So what has changed? Specifically, these fast food chains have changed their menus, their interiors, and exteriors. McDonald's has allocated \$2.4 billion to redo their stores in the U. S. and abroad (Paynter 2010).

This theory for the redesign – the aging consumer market – also explains the possibility that other articles suggest – that the fast casual market has elbowed itself in to the fast food market. Now Burger King, McDonald's, and Wendy's must compete with Panera's and Chipotle, and must adapt itself in order to compete. The fast casual market offers a slightly more formal environment and consumers perceive it as a healthier choice.

## **Consumer imagery**

Specifically, fast food brands are trying to break out of their perceived place in the market as a food of last resort that is wholly bad for oneself. They want to be a food that is not only acceptable to eat in an emergency, that is considered comfortable, that a consumer would not be ashamed to be seen at. As Schlosser points out (2010), this reflects a certain cultural perception and construction of what fast food is, and what consumers the companies wish to seek out. Though there is a dearth of available research in this area,

the companies are inevitably choosing one culture's construction of fast food consumption over others.

The new concept is revolving around the idea of a community centre, a place for young people to hang out, changing the consumer perception of the brand personality itself. In order to have McDonald's go along with the trend of slow-food, they had to start paying more attention to showcasing and the eating experience" (<http://www.designwoo.com/2010/10/mcdonalds-redesign-a-new-era-for-fast-food-restaurants/>). To that end, the brands are changing some very concrete things about the consumer experience. The restaurants are changing their design. They are shifting from bright florescent lights to softer, more modern lights, a more home-like feel. Ironically, the fluorescent lights and bright colors that the brands that were first emblematic of these brands were initially considered to be the scientific, modern colours of their day. They are going from red and yellow to terra cotta, olive and sage green. Colour schemes, in particular are highly variable and very emotion laden. Fast food providers are now shifting from bright, garish colours to more sleekly designed exteriors and interiors. One McDonald's in Manhattan even has a grand piano visible from the street. This marketing technique may well fit into the psychoanalytic theories of personality, appealing to both the id - delicious fast food, and the superego - it is something you should do.

The companies are also dividing the interior of the restaurants themselves up into different zones. This allows the company to divide their market and serve them somewhat independently. It allows them to serve customers bringing their laptops in during a break between meetings separately from <https://assignbuster.com/buyer-behaviour-analysis-changing-image-of-fast-food-marketing-essay/>

mothers bringing in their loud and rambunctious children. Market segmentation, based on differing demographics or traits of consumers, allows these companies to make the experiences of these consumer groups more attuned to what they specifically want, maximizing the consumer value for each consumer. This allows companies to more carefully target advertising and the consumer experience to a particular demographic.

## **Learning Theories**

### **Behavioural and cognitive learning**

Burger King is beginning to sell alcohol at some locations. This places it outside the norm of what it has meant to be a fast food chain, forcing consumers to reassess how they fit the Burger King brand into their schema. This change also forces the consumer to pay attention to Burger King. There are several dangers in making big changes to a brand. First, the brand can lose a loyal client base. Some customers may be enjoying what qualities are already present about a brand, and if those things change, the customers may simply take their business elsewhere. Second, the brand may confuse customers by changing too much, too frequently, creating an information processing problem. Customers can only undergo a certain amount of learning about a brand; too much changing information about a brand may cause customers to simply go with a purchasing decision that feels easy, not fraught with multiple ideas. Third, it may be better for a brand to be divisive – to either inspire hate or love, rather than milder emotions. Controversy can drum up interest about a brand, causing people to try the product.



However, the restaurants seem to be walking along the right side of overwhelming their customers with new information. Interestingly, one of the McDonald's executives notes that, "when McDonald's puts enough refurbished stores in a market, customers alter their perception of the brand: The new look even makes them more likely to try new menu items" (Paynter 2010). This fits well into the concept of consumer learning. The new look opens up consumer perceptions of the fast food chains, so they are able to take in new information about menu items, trying new things and developing a new or initial positive attitude about the brand.

### **Attitude formation**

McDonald's executive Proud said the redesign was intended "to give our customers more of a reason to make McDonald's a destination" ([http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34019334/ns/business-us\\_business/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34019334/ns/business-us_business/)). Many factors influence customers' attitude formation towards brands and companies. Customers' personal experience with the company affects their attitude, as well as close family and friends of the customer. Advertisements can also influence the customers' attitude toward fast food.

Sometimes behaviour can precede a change in attitude, as consumers struggle to bring their attitude in line with their behaviour. The cognitive dissonance theory within psychology, brought into marketing theory suggests that discomfort results when people hold two conflicting thoughts in their mind at the same time. In other words, they have to overcome the approach-avoidance conflict in motive arousal. Here, consumers are faced with the one idea that they are cool, that they are concerned about their health, but they are enjoying fast food. They are forced with aligning their <https://assignbuster.com/buyer-behaviour-analysis-changing-image-of-fast-food-marketing-essay/>

actual, ideal, and social self-images. They can thus try to bring those thoughts into alignment with each other, and it is easier to accept the idea that fast food may, in fact, be healthy. The new redesign, bringing McDonald's appearance up to date with other aspects of their customers' lives, also makes it easier to form new attitudes about fast food. The customers are already motivated to want to change their attitude toward fast food, to justify their purchases, and the redesign provides them for the "reason" they can attribute toward the attitude change.

This idea is also reflected by the quote by McDonald's executive Don Thompson, "People eat with their eyes first. If you have a restaurant that is appealing, contemporary, and relevant both from the street and interior, the food tastes better" (Paynter 2010). This may literally be true, given recent research into how brand perceptions affect people's enjoyment of consumption (Gino, Norton & Ariely, 2010). The redesign is thus both intended to bring new customers into McDonald's, but also to continue appealing to their old client base.

### **Success of the attempts to change the image of fast food**

How successful have the attempts to change consumer thinking been so far?

In general, it is much easier to change consumer perceptions of established products and brands towards the worst. One only has to note the ferocity by which brands protect their image to understand just how important this is. However, some brands have gone against the wisdom of the market experts and shown turn-around in consumer attitudes toward their brand.

Some articles report an increase in sales by fast food providers who are attempting to change their image. McDonald's reports a 6-7% sales increase at US stores that have been redesigned; in the last year they have tested stores in Manhattan, Los Angeles, and Kearney, Missouri (Paynter 2010). Stock prices have gone up 437% since 2003, when McDonald's "Plan To Win" growth strategy was initiated. This may reflect some level of success in their endeavour. Certainly the cheerful tone of these articles indicates that the restaurants believe in their own success. The restaurants attribute the change, first initiated in McDonald's European and Asian branches and McDonald's, as beginning to see success. McDonald's attributes a 5.2% rise in second-quarter sales to the redesign of these restaurants. Burger King also plans to redesign its 12,000 locations with a more modern, industrial design ([http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34019334/ns/business-us\\_business/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34019334/ns/business-us_business/)). The articles about the fast-food redesign do not mention an important factor in evaluating the efficacy of the redesign. The effects of the global recession are myriad. Many families and individuals have less disposable income than before. Fast food sales may simply go up because eating fast food is a simple way of rewarding oneself, instead of buying another consumable or going out to eat at a pricier restaurant. The redesign of the restaurants may in fact help ameliorate the conflicted feelings of middle class consumers who must now eat at the places that they would not before.

To more deeply understand the actual effect of the redesign, more information and statistics would be needed - getting a sense of the fast food market over the last few years, as well as other markets, to see how they

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were affected by the global recession, as well as the increase since the redesign (and the concurrent recession).