

Reimagining McDonald's

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Introduction

"The McDonald's restaurant chain got its humble beginnings in 1955 in Des Plaines, Illinois. Since that time, the chain has grown to over 36,000 restaurants in over 100 nations" (McDonald's History, 2017). Their marketing and branding strategies have changed over time to attract customers and grow with the ever-changing view of consumer perspective. Below, we will discuss package design, labeling, brand image, positioning, and repositioning of McDonald's to illustrate the effectiveness of their reimagining campaign.

Package Design and Labeling

McDonald's package design and labeling have evolved throughout the years to attract attention, convey information, and create aesthetic appeal. This demonstrates adaptation level theory: "If a stimulus doesn't change, over time we adapt or habituate to it and notice it less" (Mothersbaugh et al, 2020).

Figure 1

McDonald's changes in packaging from 1955 to 2016

<p>From 1955 to 1961, the bags featured a mascot holding signs that read "custom built hamburgers" and "I'm speedier."</p>	<p>The company opted for a much simpler design on its bags in 1961 featuring an early version of the Golden Arches. This design was used until 1968.</p>	<p>Cardboard hamburger boxes were introduced in the 1970s.</p>	<p>McDonald's switched to foam packaging from 1983 to 1990 and added more breakfast takeout packaging as its breakfast menu was expanding.</p>	<p>Brown bags were launched in 1990</p>
				

The design was updated in 1993 to feature illustrations of McDonald's food.	Another redesign was rolled out in 1995 featuring the updated Golden Arches.	The company switched to white packaging in 2003 and used world events, like The Olympics, on their packaging.	From 2008 to 2013, the company opted for a clean look with bags that featured images of whole foods, like fruits and vegetables.	McDonald's got more creative with this 2013 redesign adding not only images of the food, but taglines representing the items.	In 2016, the company made a return to brown bags.
					

(Peterson, n.d.)

McDonald's has continuously focused on changing the cognitive component of consumer perspective through its packaging, bags, and containers. "Their focus in recent years has been to accelerate solutions that reduce waste and create more sustainable packaging and toy materials" (McDonald's, 2017). "Knowing the consumers' awareness about the use of plastics and their effects on human health and for the environment can be a trigger for governmental authorities, as well as for industries, to actively promote the shift towards more sustainable packaging systems. Plastics are a part of many items present in our daily lives in many sectors, but packaging is one of the areas that highly contribute to the use of plastics, and in many cases single-use plastics" (Scholarly Community Encyclopedia, 2022).

The strategies used by McDonald's to alter the cognitive component of consumer perception are shifting importance, changing beliefs, and changing ideals.

Shifting Importance: "McDonald's food is not healthy; it is quite the opposite, as their menu items are high in calories and cholesterol" (Dominko, 2021). By showing consumers that they have shifted to sustainability and global waste awareness with their packaging, it is reasonable to believe that consumers will focus on these efforts and less on the unhealthy nature of the food items.

Changing Beliefs: In addition to their packaging, McDonald's has made some efforts to combat the negative consumer perspective of the quality of their food by using anti-biotic free chicken, using cage-free only eggs, and switching from frozen to fresh beef burger patties (Maze, 2018). Improving food perceptions is a critical element in McDonald's brand as more and more consumers desire healthier food options and transparency in food ingredients (The Marketing Society, 2012).

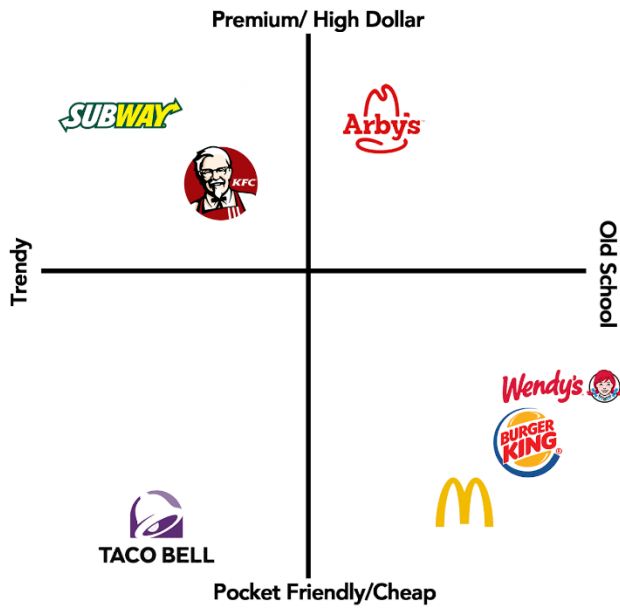
Changing Ideals: By initiating environmentally friendly packaging and increasing the quality of food items, McDonald's has positioned itself in a more valuable position with its consumers. "Customers are becoming better informed and more aware of the environmental impact of consumer products. Thus, they are demanding that industry improves the environmental performance of its products" (Butler, 2022). People have become more proactive towards environmental issues in the past decade but may not always know how they can help. McDonald's has provided a solution to this dilemma with its eco-friendly packaging materials, thus allowing consumers to feel that they are doing their small part to protect the environment.

The Competition through Repositioning

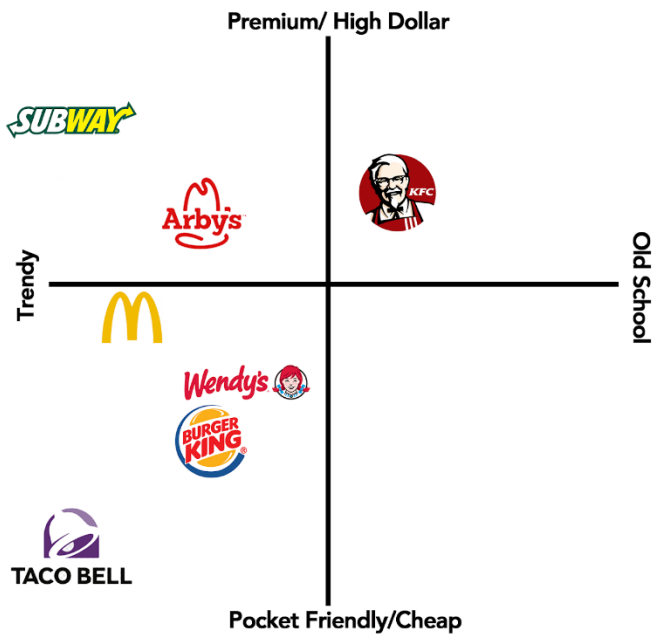
The following three images show McDonald's competition and perceptual maps on how they compared before and after their repositioning efforts.



Perceptual Map of McDonalds Prior to Repositioning Versus it's Competitors



Perceptual Map of McDonalds After Repositioning Versus it's Competitors



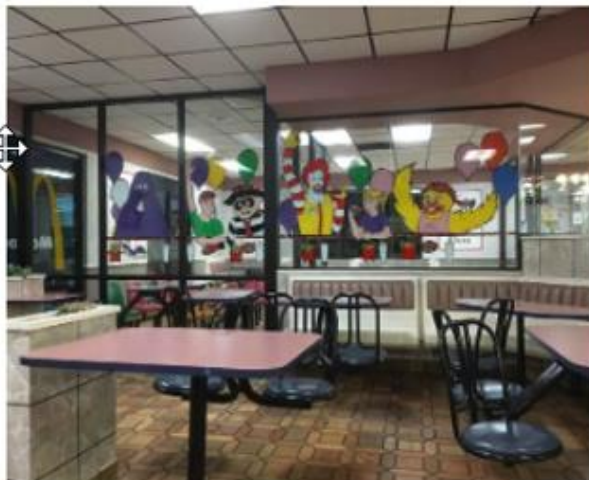
Repositioning Effectiveness

The changes McDonald's has adapted over the past ten years or so would be enough to constitute a significant change in public perception of McDonald's. As the case study states regarding the physical changes to McDonald's restaurants, "We've moved away from a cafeteria feel to a more comfortable and, in some ways, more intimate restaurant" (Mothersbaugh et al., 2020). Also, "Franchise locations are in the process of updating the interior designs to one of several new modernized styles. The colors of the new styles are more muted than the former bright primary colors" (Mothersbaugh et al., 2020). Additionally, each franchise can pick from a catalog of options for tabletops, wall patterns, and lighting fixtures. "The expectation is that these design changes will create a more welcoming environment and have a positive effect on sales" (Mothersbaugh et al., 2020).

The physical environment changes alone are enough to alter the public's perception of McDonald's significantly. In the early 2000s, it was a place where children could be entertained with the bright colors, images of Ronald McDonald on the walls, and the enclosed play area. The parents could enjoy their food in the retro dining area with a view of the play area. Now, McDonald's has adopted a sleek, modern look that suits mostly adults only. The bright colors and character images have been replaced with shades of brown, black, and wood tones. "The competitive environment has changed with the likes of Chipotle and Panera Bread entering the marketplace" (Mothersbaugh et al., 2020).

Figure 2 and Figure 3

McDonald's interior design 2020 vs. 2022



(Uptas, 2020)



(T, 2020)

Aside from the interior aesthetic of McDonald's drastically changing, the customer service has as well. "McDonald's is increasingly implementing the 'Experience the Future' at its restaurant locations. In these restaurants, rather than ordering food from an employee at the counter, customers can skip the counter altogether. Instead, they approach a digital video kiosk with a touchscreen to select and customize their food order. Then, customers proceed to their table, where their food is delivered" (Mothersbaugh et al., 2020). Also, an increasingly popular option that McDonald's utilizes is the mobile order and pay function in the McDonald's app. Customers can purchase their food order from the app on their smartphone and have it delivered to their car on the curbside of a McDonald's restaurant. Additionally, McDonald's has partnered with organizations such as UberEATS, DoorDash, and GrubHub to provide customers with food delivery made possible directly to their doorstep.

McDonald's clearly takes 'Experience the Future' as an opportunistic and serious endeavor to stay on top of the ever-changing times and provide convenience to their customers. If one is craving a McDonald's BigMac, they would not even have to drive to or enter a McDonald's restaurant to get one. Compared to the 1990s or early 2000s, none of this technology existed, and one would have to drive to a McDonald's restaurant, enter the establishment, order at the counter, and wait for their food. With technology being considered a significant development within the fast food industry, it is enough to change public perception of McDonald's substantially. McDonald's is simply **not** the same as it used to be.

Conclusion

Over the years, McDonald's has adjusted to better connect with its customers. As their consumer's behaviors shift, a more modern approach is needed to compete with other fast food chains and solidify the brand as a leader in their industry. Their reimagining efforts have helped the company shift from its traditional model and build a better reputation with its target market.

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