Taco Bell “Live Bién” Campaign

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History

In 1946, Glen Bell established what has become one of the most well-known quick-service Mexican restaurants today: Taco Bell. As a young restauranteur, Bell opened his first businesses in San Bernardino, California which would lead to the eventual creation of the Mexican fast-food chain. He began with a hot dog stand called Bell’s Drive-In and followed with Bell’s Hamburgers and Hot Dogs shortly afterwards (Myers, 2016). Though he experienced a decent amount of success, Bell couldn’t help but notice that the taco stand across the street was booming with business. Thus, he decided to expand his opportunities and venture into the taco arena. To ensure success, Bell dined often at the competing Mexican restaurant across the street in the hopes of learning the tricks of the trade. He eventually became friends with the cooks who showed him how to make a hard-shelled taco. After spending time putting his own twist on the recipe, Bell opened a taco stand called Taco-Tia in 1952. His ventures paid off and he eventually went on to open several more taco stands. Then, in 1962, Bell opened the first Taco Bell in Downey, California (Satran, 2015). Equipped with just a small kitchen, a walk-up window, and a few tables outside, the restaurant began selling the hard-shell tacos Bell had learned to perfect and saw a considerable amount of prosperity.

After a few years, Bell opened several other Taco Bell locations and began franchising them (Satran, 2015). In 1978, he sold Taco Bell to PepsiCo Inc., which allowed the chain to expand beyond the Los Angeles region. Further, the introduction of new ideas such as 59 to 79 cent menu items, “Express” food for people on-the-go, the Mountain Dew Baja Blast and the Crunchwrap Supreme helped add to the company’s success (“Taco Bell History,” 2017). In more recent years, Taco Bell revamped their website, launched a mobile ordering and payment app,
and partnered with various food delivery services to bring Taco Bell right to hungry customer’s doorsteps.

Today, the fast-food chain offers a variety of tacos, burritos, drinks, desserts, healthy options, and breakfast and specialty items that contain their own unique twist on traditional Mexican food (“Taco Bell Food,” 2017). The company has also expanded through the establishment of several “Cantina” restaurants that serve alcohol in cities such as Las Vegas, San Francisco, New York, and Chicago (“The Feed,” 2017). Lastly, Taco Bell has made it their mission to establish themselves as a brand that not only serves food, but that supports the community including students through “Live Más” Scholarships and the Taco Bell Foundation and local and up-and-coming bands through their “Feed the Beat” campaign. Each of these initiatives has allowed the company to pursue their goal of “[feeding] people’s lives with más” and to “connect them with experiences that matter most” (“Live Más,” 2017).

Current Goals

Throughout its fifty-five-year history, Taco Bell introduced a variety of new products and campaigns to its loyal customers. Many of them have been designed with a specific target audience in mind: the 25-year-old millennial. Per Taco Bell’s Public Relations and Brand Engagement Manager Matthew Prince, this particular audience is the company’s “aspirational demographic;” reflecting the idea that “when you’re 16, you want to be 25, and when you’re 40, you want to be 25” (M. Prince, personal communication, February 22, 2017). Further, in an interview with The Daily Mail in 2013, former Taco Bell CEO Greg Creed stated that the chain is “trying to be this Millennial edgy brand” and its focus is engaging with “teens and 20-somethings currently making their passage into adulthood-via social media and other channels” (McCormack, 2013, ¶4). While Taco Bell understands their customers are people of all ages,
their marketing objective is to create content and establish a voice that keeps them “relevant” and “cool” (M. Prince, personal communication, February 22, 2017). Thus, the company enacted numerous marketing strategies to aid them in promoting their brand and resonating with their desired audience. These strategies are typically centered around ten “Experiences” comprised of “innovative and unique food items that align with current trends and keep Taco Bell cool” (M. Prince, personal communication, February 22, 2017). Determined a year and a half in advance, the “Experiences” take place over the course of a year and are created with the intention of driving sales overnight. In addition to promoting their food, the company seeks to maintain cultural relevancy through out-of-the-box ideas such as Taco Bell Weddings and a crusade to save the first Taco Bell ever built; campaigns that are not necessarily driven by money, as much as a desire to generate buzz and “build the brand over time” (M. Prince, personal communication, February 22, 2017).

Aware of their competition for conversation and share of wallet, Taco Bell developed a marketing strategy meant to “push boundaries, separate the company from the rest, and stimulate continuous change and innovation” (M. Prince, personal communication, February 22, 2017). One of the most notable tactics mentioned by Public Relations and Brand Engagement Manager Matthew Prince was “The Logo Test” which involves visualizing another brand’s logo on a Taco Bell concept. If it makes sense, then the company scraps the idea because it conflicts with its goal of differentiating itself. Further, they practice removing their own logo from a product to see if consumers can still distinguish it as Taco Bell. If they cannot, then the idea does not work either. Some of the characteristics that the company hopes are recognizable include cleverness, wit, a voice that feels like you are talking to a friend, a fun sense of humor that isn’t “cheesy” or “gesture-y,” cultural relevancy, and authenticity (M. Prince, personal communication, February
Taco Bell established an overall brand strategy that involves “[owning] the social experience of food to fuel the cult of the brand” (“Taco Bell Marketing Strategies and Objectives,” 2017). To carry out this mission, the company developed a series of objectives for the year that encompass their goals and express their vision. These include: a) differentiate and elevate Taco Bell’s leadership; b) drive “category of one” status through unique, creative innovation; c) optimize and grow our cult (base) icon platforms; d) introduce/nurture business growth layers to habituate new brand behaviors; e) create brand moments that drive cultural topspin and restaurant traffic (“Taco Bell Marketing Strategies and Objectives,” 2017). Taco Bell’s meticulously laid out marketing strategy allowed them to establish themselves as an icon of pop culture today and make strides towards reaching their goal of being leaders of the quick-service restaurant business in the future.

**Past Methods to Achieve Goals**

Taco Bell’s drive to differentiate themselves and elevate their brand is motivated and inspired by their success in the past. After a lawsuit over the ingredients in their beef and a subsequent decrease in sales threatened to destroy their reputation in 2011, the company made the decision to revamp their image; a move that has proved advantageous. Beginning with their menu, Taco Bell started their image overhaul by introducing the Doritos Locos Taco in 2012, which sold 100 million within the first ten weeks of its launch. In addition, the company experienced an 8% increase in their sales because of this campaign (Morrison, 2013, ¶4). Per former chief marketing officer Christ Brandt, “innovating products” and “hitting on trends” were key towards bringing about this success (Lutz, 2014, ¶5-6). To keep the momentum going, Taco Bell also introduced a “Cantina Menu” that offers healthier alternatives for those seeking fresh, quality ingredients. Per Brandt, “the improvement in quality made a difference” as their sales
rose 5% shortly afterwards (Lutz, 2014, ¶5). Thus, placing the consumer at the forefront of their marketing strategies transformed Taco Bell into a brand that values creativity and foresight.

In addition to innovating products, Taco Bell has modified their marketing messages; most notably by switching taglines from “Think Outside the Bun” to the more succinct and purposeful “Live Más.” The intent behind this decision being to promote their brand as a “lifestyle” or “experience” (Morrison, 2013, ¶7). To support this new vision of “[Living] Más,” the company has moved beyond the realm of food to provide educational opportunities such as scholarships and rewards for students who pledge to graduate high school. In addition, Taco Bell supports local and up-and-coming bands through their “Feed the Beat” initiative, provides resources for indie game developers looking to make their products even better, and has created contests to make the college football experience even cooler for student fans (“Live Más,” 2017). Just recently, the company began initiating weddings at their flagship Las Vegas restaurant and cantina; adding another elevated experience to their resume. Each of these experiences have helped Taco Bell achieve their goal of being more than just a fast-food restaurant.

To meet their objective of staying current, the company has utilized social media to reach their target audience of millennials and have paid careful attention to the trends that influence them. CEO Brian Niccol has mentioned using platforms such as Snapchat and Vine as the company recognized that millennials in college may not have access to TV’s; one of their major marketing mediums (Morrison, 2013). Head of social media, Nick Tran stated in an interview with CMO.com that “the main difference in strategy now vs. before is that what we are doing today in social media is real-time, and we listen and engage all the time” (Abramovich, 2013, para. 6). Thus, paying attention to the environments, needs, and interests of their audience has been essential towards successfully marketing their products. In addition, the company allows its
customers to be heavily involved in its campaigns. For example, ahead of its most recent product release, the Quesalupa, Taco Bell tested the product among customers in Toledo, Ohio, urging the rest of the world to reach out to their Taco Bell lovers so they could also enjoy this new product (Bergado, 2016). Hence, placing this responsibility upon their customers, allows them to feel included and essential towards expanding its reach and increasing its success.

Other notable trends Taco Bell has picked up on include breakfast and value items. The former has become increasingly popular as competitors such as McDonald’s and Jack in the Box have begun selling all-day breakfast; most likely providing inspiration for Taco Bell to do the same. Former chief marketing officer Christ Brandt stated in 2014 that "consumers wanted more options at different hours than the traditional fast-food experience. By adjusting to their changing tastes, we’ve been able to get even more customers” (Lutz, 2014, ¶6). Thus, Taco Bell’s marketing strategy of staying on top of trends, continuously innovating products and ideas, and offering experiences have been key towards the company’s success in the past and may be instrumental towards sustaining it in the future.

**Overview of Current Goals**

As time passed, “junk food” became more and more accessible, with a plethora of fast-food restaurants conveniently located at every corner you turn on. While this industry has enjoyed increasing popularity throughout its time, health-conscious alternatives have begun to pick up steam among many millennials and adults. Picking up on this trend, Taco Bell developed their own spin on “better-for-you” food by creating a “Fresco” menu that offers lighter fare for those who are seeking more nutritious meals. After scrutiny of the marketing surrounding this menu, I realized that it wasn’t as highly promoted as the company’s other products. Thus, their “Fresco” menu marketing needs a facelift so that consumers will be more aware of its existence.
To do this, I will create a campaign for the company called “Live Bién.”

The goal of this project is to increase awareness of Taco Bell’s healthy menu alternatives to expand their audience reach. This is important because if more individuals are given the opportunity to eat at Taco Bell, the company may see an increase in sales and conversation; which supports their goals of “driving sales overnight, generating buzz, and building the brand over time” (M. Prince, personal communication, February 22, 2017). Research done by Jamie Gailewicz in 2014 posits that the interests of millennials often dictate the success of brands because this audience has increasingly become more influential among social, cultural, and economic sectors of society (“Marketing to Millennials: The consumers to change the market landscape,” ¶3). In addition, millennials are continuing to develop higher purchasing power and drive consumer demand (Gailewicz, 2014, ¶2). Finally, because of their technology use, they can quickly spread the word about new products and trends they care about with their peers; which generates more buzz and business for brands. Thus, being able to properly engage with the millennial is vital towards keeping them interested and feeling like Taco Bell adds value to their lives.

To execute this campaign, I will create advertisements that showcase the products in a way that meets the company’s goals of being current and cool. This will include appealing to the millennial audience and the trends they are following, utilizing social media platforms, promoting the menu as a lifestyle and an experience, and incorporating the company’s signature style of humor and wit. Creating a campaign titled “Live Bién” falls in line with Taco Bell’s target audience of millennials because it addresses active lifestyles, specific health needs and dietary restrictions, and the current trend of easily accessible nutritious food. In addition, this specific campaign name is like the company’s current motto “Live Más;” thus, staying true to
Taco Bell’s brand. In terms of promoting a lifestyle or experience, “Live Bién” builds upon the “Live Más” motto by suggesting that consumers not only elevate their food experience and live life to the fullest, but that they be their best self with the help of Taco Bell. This can include having more energy, being more productive, and looking and feeling good. It also demonstrates that Taco Bell is more than just fast-food; it is a lifestyle brand that cares about the consumer and the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that drive them. Focusing on quality and creativity has resulted in major success for the company in the past and continuing to do so carries the possibility of even more.

**Campaign Strategies**

Per research, the Elaboration Likelihood Model is effective in persuasive campaigns because it provides a framework for how individuals process a message and determines what components of communication will be the most effective in changing attitudes or behaviors (Petty, Cacioppo, & Abraham, 1986). This model operates through two routes of persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route. The former is characterized by the careful evaluation of messages and implications and is usually chosen when an individual feels highly involved about an issue. The latter is distinguished using mental shortcuts when individuals lack the ability or motivation to process a message (Petty et al., 1986). Further, ELM posits that when a message is processed centrally, they generally produce more persistent attitudes which can lead to attitudes that are more resistant to change (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992). Using the Elaboration Likelihood Model may also prove effective in the Taco Bell campaign.

To implement this strategy, I developed an Instagram advertisement highlighting the company’s efforts to provide healthy alternatives. The design includes my hand-drawn images of various produce accompanied by nutritional facts in bold face, the title of my campaign and the
TACO BELL “LIVE BIÉN” CAMPAIGN

name of the menu, as well as a caption underneath that states: “Taste you can feel good about” (see Appendix A). Given the effectiveness of appealing to the central route of persuasion in previous persuasive attempts, I used nutritional information in my ad because it conveys Taco Bell’s credibility. In addition, it causes audience members to think deeply about their health and the decisions that surround it because it is an issue that is personally relevant and impacts their lives. To accomplish these goals, I used the following facts: 1. “Zero Trans Fat” 2. “7 Signature Items, Under 350 Calories, and 10g of Fat” and 3. “No Artificial Colors or Flavors” (“The Food for All Journey,” 2017). Highlighting these nutritional facts is effective because not only will they push consumers to seriously consider the ingredients they are putting inside their bodies, but they will build or reinforce trust in Taco Bell due to the company’s transparency which, per research, is a key component of millennial’s loyalty to brands (Tyson, 2017). If millennials feel that they are being given the necessary and relevant information to decide regarding a personally important issue, then they will be more likely to change their attitudes and behavior; which in this case, would be to turn to Taco Bell for their health and lifestyle needs.

In addition to being persuasive, this ad coincides with Taco Bell’s desire to be “relevant” and “cool” because the hand-drawn images display a creative flair that appeals to the consumer eye. This is effective because per research, “creative messages get more attention and lead to positive attitudes about the products being marketed” (Reinartz & Saffert, 2013, ¶2). In addition, referencing the healthy alternatives Taco Bell offers showcases their efforts to stay relevant by following the trend of “better-for-you” food. Per an article titled, “What Better-For-You Millennial Consumers Want from Healthy Lifestyle Brands,” this category of food has grown significantly in popularity with 88% of consumers willing to pay more for healthy options (Barrel Admin, 2015). Further, the article states that “millennials are driving the demand for
healthy choices and healthy lifestyle, making them the key players in this consumer segment” (Barrel Admin, 2015, ¶2). Thus, millennials are likely to appreciate having options that suit their changing lifestyles and respond positively to this ad because of its relevancy, creativity, and transparency.

Additional communication persuasion techniques that I incorporated in this ad are trustworthiness and goodwill. Per research, trustworthiness is a core credibility component that “refers to [a] communicator’s perceived honesty, character, and safety. A speaker may lack expertise, but can be an individual of integrity and character. This can work wonders in persuasion” (Perloff, 1993, p. 242). Further, research conducted by Abramson, Aldrich, and Rodhe in 1994 found that billionaire businessman-turned-politician Ross Perot garnered a significant amount of support during a 1992 presidential race despite having no political background. This was because his supporters perceived him as a man of integrity that meant what he said; therefore, he led in the polls for quite some time. Thus, using trustworthiness may also prove effective in the Taco Bell campaign. To implement this strategy, I specifically included the caption, “Taste you can feel good about” (see Appendix A) to show that the company has put consumer health concerns at the forefront of their business directives. In addition, capitalizing upon Taco Bell’s openness and honesty about the ingredients they are feeding to their customers establishes them as a brand that can be trusted and that adds value to their customer’s lives.

With regards to goodwill, research has shown that this core communication component of putting audience interests first, can “gain our trust and inspire us” (Perloff, 1993, p. 243). Further, research conducted by McBane in 1995 shows that goodwill is useful towards achieving success on the job because being able to understand a client’s needs will lead to being able to
better serve them. Thus, given the effectiveness of goodwill in the past, I chose to incorporate it into my ad using nutritional facts such as “Zero Trans Fat,” “No Artificial Colors or Flavors,” and “7 Signature Items, under 350 Calories, and 10g of Fat” (see Appendix A). I believe it demonstrates that the company is listening and aware of the issues that are important to their customers and making subsequent changes because they care about the values that drive them. In doing so, Taco Bell will more than likely experience positive feedback and results as research has shown that “the best thing your business can do to prove your authenticity is to care—not just about millennials, but about you and your work” (Tyson, 2017, para. 31).

For my second advertisement, I chose to incorporate the communication persuasion technique of association. Per research, this strategy involves associating good feelings with a product (Perloff, 1993, p. 401). Further, Perloff found that association frequently leads to persuasion because individuals often “prefer emotion to syllogistic logic” (p. 401). An example of this strategy put into action is a McDonald’s ad that was shown on TV a few years ago. It associated the good feelings of football with their burgers and fries. While the company made no cogent argument about why consumers should purchase their products, they employed emotion and storytelling to create pleasant images “that are peripheral to the purchase decision” (Perloff, 1993, p. 401). Thus, given the effectiveness of association in the past, I chose to create an Instagram ad using this strategy.

My advertisement includes a picture of a “Fresco-style” burrito accompanied by the title of my campaign and the name of the menu, as well as the caption, “Go Ahead… Eat it Despacito” (see Appendix B). The use of the word, “Despacito” plays on the recent release of the popular song of the same name by Luis Fonsi and Justin Bieber. Per People Magazine, the song “is now a major hit becoming the first Spanish-language song to rank in the top 10 of the Hot
100 list for the first time in 20 years since the remix to Los Del Rios’ “Macarena” by the Bayside Boys” (Diaz, 2017, ¶1). Further, it became the Spanish language video with the most views in 24 hours on Vevo, has dominated three Billboard charts, has reached the top 5 in the global list on Spotify, and has become the fastest video to reach 300 million views on on YouTube (Fernandez, 2017, ¶2). Because of the song’s massive success, I chose to incorporate it into my ad; I wanted consumers to associate the positive feelings they have towards the song with Taco Bell’s healthy menu. While the ad doesn’t explicitly put forth an argument as to why the Fresco menu is the best option for customers, I believe the fun and upbeat tone the song conveys will put customers in a good mood and cause them to believe the product will elicit similar sentiments.

In addition to its persuasive appeal, referencing the song “Despacito” in my ad coincides with Taco Bell’s goal to be “relevant” and “cool” because it is a current Millennial obsession that has dominated pop culture in the recent months. It shows that the company is observant of the trends that their customers are passionate about and makes them relatable. In addition, suggesting that consumers “Eat it Despacito” promotes an experience to be enjoyed; which falls in line with the company’s mantra “Live Más” and their desire to provide experiences that enrich their customer’s lives. Thus, I believe combining previously successful Taco Bell marketing strategies with proven communication persuasion techniques can not only increase awareness of the Fresco Menu, but to garner a significant amount of support and sales for it.

**Conclusion**

While I cannot physically see the impact my marketing campaign will have on consumers, I believe that implementing the communication persuasion techniques of the Elaboration Likelihood Model, trustworthiness, goodwill, and association are effective towards producing
changes in attitudes and behaviors. Per research, individuals that are highly involved in an issue, tend to think more deeply about a message and are more likely to develop attitudes that are more resistant to change if the message aligns with their values. Because health is such an important topic to millennials currently, it was vital to include this persuasion technique in my campaign.

Further, research has shown that trustworthiness and goodwill often elicit persuasion because when customers feel that a brand cares, is credible, and adds value to their lives, they are more likely to be influenced. Thus, conveying Taco Bell’s commitment to making changes to their menu that support their customers’ needs was key towards maximizing the ad’s persuasive capabilities. Lastly, association has been proven to elicit positive feelings about a product when it is associated with another object or idea that an individual already has positive feelings about. Thus, associating Taco Bell with a popular and current trend is likely to produce positive images about the company. I believe each of these techniques in combination with Taco Bell’s signature and previously successful marketing strategies of relevancy, humor, and being “cool” have resulted in a compelling final product that possesses the ability to bring the company further success.
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Appendix B

Live Bién.
Fresco style.

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