

This assignment was for my Ad and PR Research course. I worked with a team of four to answer research questions based on Taco Bell.

My responsibilities included, writing section *ii*, assisting in determining our research questions, goals and objectives, interview questions, and conducting interviews.

In-Depth Interview

Friday, October 26, 2018

Taco Bell

Research Questions:

- I. What media channels should Taco Bell use to attract the occasional fast food eater?
- II. What qualities do occasional fast food eaters look for when they choose to eat out?
- III. Which new products are most attractive to the occasional fast food eater?

Goals and Objectives of the In-Depth Interview:

- To determine which media channels and what type of content Taco Bell consumers favor most.
- To gain insight into what features draw consumers to choose Taco Bell.
- To learn whether or not the Taco Bell Cantinas are profitable and what types of products consumers want Taco Bell to implement in the future.

In-Depth Interview Questions:

1. What comes to mind when you think about fast food?
2. Do you ever eat fast food? Why?
3. How often do you eat fast food?
4. What is most important to you when picking a fast food restaurant?

5. What is your favorite fast food restaurant? Why?
6. Have you ever eaten at Taco Bell?
7. Why do you choose Taco Bell over competitors? (For those that do not eat Taco Bell— why do you choose competitors over Taco Bell?)
8. Which Taco Bell products have you tried?
9. Which Taco Bell products do you like/dislike?
10. What new product would you like to see on Taco Bell's menu?
11. Can you remember an advertisement for a specific Taco Bell product?
12. On which platforms do you see Taco Bell advertisements most?
13. What qualities of Taco Bell's advertisements do you like? Dislike?
14. Would a Taco Bell advertisement for a new product persuade you to try it?
15. Have you ever seen any advertisements for Taco Bell's new style of restaurants?
16. Do you know what a Taco Bell Cantina is? (Inform if they are unaware)
17. Would you be willing to try a Taco Bell Cantina? Why?

Data Analysis and Key Findings

i. Consumers find video advertisements that embody Taco Bell's brand to be attractive and memorable.

While our focus group research showed that consumers are not attracted to the confusing nature of Taco Bell's advertisements, our in-depth interviews resulted in conflicting information. Participants in the in-depth interviews were overall attracted to Taco Bell's "weird" advertisements, particularly their video advertising. Rather than perceiving the advertisements as disturbing, participants found them funny and memorable. Participants expressed that Taco Bell

has a unique brand that is attractive to customers. A young male said that Taco Bell's brand is "cool" and "a lot of fun." Overall, participants explained Taco Bell's brand as "unexpected." One young female said that Taco Bell is known for releasing products and campaigns that are out of the ordinary. Participants expressed that television advertisements capturing Taco Bell's unique brand are more memorable than other forms of advertising. Out of all eight participants, six mentioned Taco Bell's recent advertising campaign for their nacho fries. This campaign, called "Web of Fries," featured a trailer for a made-up movie about a Taco Bell conspiracy theory. Participants said the advertisement was "dark" and "serious." While this advertisement was different from Taco Bell's typical advertisements, it aligned with the brand due to the unexpected nature of the television commercial. Participants said that advertising campaigns such as "Web of Fries" are memorable and entice consumers to go to the restaurant. The lasting memory of these commercials can lead consumers to choose Taco Bell over other fast food restaurants. A young male said that while Taco Bell is not normally his fast food restaurant of choice, advertisements he has seen on television would lead him to choose Taco Bell over McDonald's on a road trip.

Taco Bell may be able to better capture its "unexpected" and "fun" brand through video advertisements, specifically through television and YouTube. Participants recalled multiple television and YouTube advertisements, but no one mentioned advertisements seen on social media. This shows that television advertisement may generally be more memorable and effective than mobile advertising. Similar to the participants in the focus group, in-depth interview participants found mobile advertising to be annoying and not attractive. Participants said that television advertisements are unavoidable, and therefore not as frustrating as mobile advertising.

Participants also mentioned that television advertisements are more enjoyable when they are interesting and not just informative.

Research from the in-depth interviews shows that Taco Bell may benefit from more video advertisements, like the ones in the “Web of Fries” campaign. Video advertisements that are in line with Taco Bell’s brand have the potential to leave a lasting memory of the restaurant that could lead a consumer to choose Taco Bell over another fast food restaurant. While participants said that Taco Bell’s video advertisements positively influence their decision to eat at the restaurant, it is impossible to know if this is the case for the average fast food consumer without conducting further research. Moving forward, it will be helpful to ask consumers more specifically about how Taco Bell’s video advertisements influence their decision to eat at the restaurant. It will also be beneficial to conduct research using a larger and more diverse group of people.

ii. While consumers indicate that health is important to them, most consumers’ focus on price suggests otherwise.

By conducting in-depth interviews, we were able to determine how much consumers value health, quality, and price and how that is reflected in their decision to eat at Taco Bell. Each of the participants seemed to value a different aspect of what Taco Bell offers and each participant valued the health and quality of Taco Bell menu items to a different degree.

One participant said she generally prefers Chick-Fil-A because “even though Chick-Fil-A products have a lot of sodium, they still seem healthier.” She also enjoys Jersey Mike's because she believes that their ingredients are fresh and describes them as, “better for you.” She has never been to Taco Bell and when asked what she thinks of the Taco Bell chain, she responded with

“Yuck!” However, the same participant also said that if healthier options were added to the menu she would be more willing to try Taco Bell. While this participant is an advocate for healthy fast food, the majority of those interviewed were not.

Several participants stated that the addition of healthier options would not change their decision on whether or not they would purchase food from Taco Bell. One participant, a young male who reported consuming fast food about twice a week, was not concerned with what kind of food Taco Bell offered in regards to quality and health. He said “quantity for price, cravings and speed” is what draws him to fast food. Other participants had similar values. When asked if they preferred a healthy option over a low price they said, “cheaper is better” and “I would eat unhealthy fast food if the price was worth it.” Another participant stated that the most important factor for him when picking a fast food restaurant is “saving money.” During the interview he said, “If I’m going to Taco Bell, I’m going to eat their food, not to be healthy.”

All of the participants acknowledged that health and quality are important to them when making everyday food consumption decisions. However, their values wavered when it came to fast food. Most perceive Taco Bell as a restaurant where they can only buy unhealthy food. The majority of participants acknowledge that price is the most important factor to them when choosing a fast-food restaurant. Moving forward a survey should be conducted to retrieve specific numbers on how many people would choose price over health and quality.

iii. Fast food consumers do not seek out Taco Bell restaurants to try their new products, but they are willing to try a Cantina style restaurant.

Research reveals that fast food consumers are not interested in Taco Bell’s new products since they are released frequently. One participant said, “[they] release new products all the time,

so they're not special anymore." This indicates that because Taco Bell releases new products so often, consumers are not likely to rush out the door to try them anymore. However, one interviewee described an experience when their favorite fast food restaurant, Chick-Fil-A, released new chicken sliders for a limited time. The participant described them as "glorified chicken minis" which are only available on the breakfast menu. This particular fast food consumer indicates that because of the exclusivity of Chick-Fil-A's breakfast items, adding a similar product to their daily menu caused great excitement for Chick-Fil-A lovers. While consumers are enthusiastic about trying new products at other fast food restaurants, they are not as interested in trying Taco Bell's. Based on this finding, consumers may be more interested in menu items when they are perceived as exclusive. When Taco Bell releases new products frequently, the anticipation decreases, and consumers no longer feel as if they must try their new menu items.

While the consumers interviewed are not intrigued by Taco Bell's new products, they do seem to be willing to try Taco Bell Cantinas. For those interviewed, the selling point of these new Cantina style restaurants appears to be the addition of alcoholic beverages to the menu. Because our participants are all between the ages of 19 and 21, alcohol culture seems to be very important to their age demographic. Although interview participants responded favorably to the Cantina's spiked beverages, they did not distinguish whether or not they would also be willing to try the new tapas-style appetizers. Research conducted from the focus group indicates that Cantina style restaurants would make Taco Bell feel artificially fancy, but those interviewed in-depth say they would be interested in "try[ing] a Cantina once." This presents the Taco Bell

Cantina concept as a one-time experience. Interview participants said that after they try the Cantina restaurant once, they most likely will not return.

Some aspects of the in-depth interview research match the findings from the focus group. For instance, both participants in the in-depth interviews and the focus group have a similar reaction to Taco Bell's new products. While their new products are eccentric and often memorable, consumers are not likely to go out of their way to try them. However, other components of the in-depth interviews contradict that of the information collected from the focus group. The focus group collectively thought that the Taco Bell Cantinas were an attempt to recreate the Taco Bell brand into a sit-down, and therefore classier experience that was not of interest to them. However, when students were asked individually about whether they would like to try a Taco Bell Cantina, the majority said yes. Moving forward, it is important to specifically ask those interested in trying a Taco Bell Cantina if they might also order the new tapas-style appetizers, or if they are only interested in these concepts for the alcoholic beverages.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Restructuring our questions and diversity in participant responses

We learned from our focus group assignment that "leading questions" can influence a participant to answer in a certain way. Due to this insight, we reconstructed our questions to be more open-ended and follow a more natural progression of thought in order to avoid jumping around to different subjects. We also implemented a laddering structure in our questions to guide our participants from general questions to more specific topics such as Taco Bell's advertisements. Another strength of our interviews was the diversity of connection that our

participants have with Taco Bell. One participant said he loves Taco Bell and visits the restaurant several times a week and another participant said she has never eaten a product from Taco Bell before. The wide range of perspectives regarding Taco Bell was crucial in order to gain various insights from our interviews.

Limited responses and prior bias

One of the weaknesses of our in-depth interviews was the limited number of responses we were able to collect due to the structure of the class. Each member of our group conducted two different interviews which resulted in eight total participant responses. Although eight different responses resulted in a wealth of information, we concluded that additional perspectives will be helpful as we move forward. Another weakness of our in-depth interviews was the prior knowledge that every participant had of our research client. Every student in the class was aware that our client was Taco Bell, therefore every person we interviewed had heard the brand name recently. Since our participants had prior knowledge of our brand, they had time to form opinions rather than answering questions on the spot. Although our participants had prior knowledge of our client, they did not see the questions before the interview, thus there was still an element of honesty and immediate response during the interview.