

**Burger King Marketing Strategies and Elaboration Likelihood Model
Communication Analysis**

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The Burger King marketing and advertising team have made this corporation one of the most unique and creative fast food restaurant chains in terms of advertisements. Over the years, their branding strategies have helped them recover from slumps they have encountered. From the “yodeling boy” Mason Ramsey to Shaquille O’Neal, to moldy “Whoppers”, Burger King has used unusual and somewhat strange marketing techniques over the past decade in order to ramp up sales and increase popularity.

One way to analyze the effectiveness of their advertising is through the Elaboration Likelihood Model. The Elaboration Likelihood Model attempts to explain how individuals will react to certain influences. This model is often used in advertising and sales because it can help predict how effective an advertisement might be. Richard Petty and John Cacioppo describe two basic routes of elaboration that people may take when processing given information; central and peripheral.

Central Route in Burger King Advertising Campaigns

The first route is known as the central route. This route involves message elaboration. If a person is using this route, they likely care about the given message and wish to learn more about the subject at a later time. Initiating elaboration requires cognitive effort. The best type of persuasion and advertisements try to invoke this central route of elaboration. When used in advertising, central cues involve fact-based messages and tangible features. Unfortunately, using the central route is much harder, and few people actually succeed.

However, I think that Burger King actually has a few very unique advertising strategies that promote central elaboration routes. One way is through their “Keep it Real” campaign. In 2020, this franchise permanently banned more than 120

non-essential artificial preservatives. Burger King restaurants displayed a picture of a moldy “Whopper” burger in order to show the “Beauty of No Artificial Preservatives”. While the mold-covered burger was looked at in disgust, it made people interested in preservatives and the ingredients that go into their food. According to Global Data, 38% of US consumers are influenced by healthy natural preserves. Seeing this moldy “Whopper” could encourage a central elaboration route among viewers.

Another way that Burger King has a central route of persuasion is through their “Impossible Whopper” campaign. This “burger” comes with a meat alternative patty that is made to taste just like beef. This item serves to the issues of methane emissions associated with beef production. In the commercials, “beef lovers” are seen unknowingly trying these burgers with a positive reaction. This makes people think about the benefits of switching to beef alternatives on a central level. They also show a commercial featuring the “yodeling boy” also known as Mason Ramsey. In this video, Ramsey sings about the experiment conducted by the franchise about feeding lemongrass to cows in order to reduce methane emissions. According to Burger King’s experiment, feeding just 100 grams of lemongrass to cows’ daily feed reduces methane by an average of 33%. This silly song commercial talks about real issues that could influence a consumer to become involved in the climate change battle and more interested in the problems surrounding methane release in agriculture.

Peripheral Route in Burger King Advertising Campaigns

The peripheral route of elaboration is a mental shortcut that allows the viewer to accept or reject a message. This route requires little cognitive effort and the person receiving the message is very unlikely to think about the issue in the future. Based on

cues, the receiver of the message will make a quick decision. There are six main cues that allow a listener to trigger a peripheral route of elaboration.

One great example of a “liking” cue in advertising is celebrity endorsements. In 2021, Burger King partnered with several celebrities in their freshness campaign by offering limited-edition “Keep It Real Meals”. Rap artist Nelly, social media influencer Lil Huddy, and Brazilian singer Anitta each hand-selected food from the Burger King menu in order to create these meals. Named after their real names, not their stage names, these meals were sold at several Burger King locations worldwide. Even back in 2002, Burger King partnered with Shaquille O’Neal to introduce the ‘Shaq Pack’ sourdough cheeseburger. As a consumer, when we see our favorite singers, artists, actors, and influencers using a certain product, we also want to use the same product. This is how Burger King has successfully used the peripheral “liking” cue to trigger a peripheral response and eat at their restaurant.

Another social peripheral cue used in sales is the “scarcity” cue. Many commercials and promotions offered by Burger King and other fast-food chains encourage you to quickly go buy their burger “while supplies last” and for a “limited time offer”. One such limited-time offer is Burger King’s frozen lemonades in 2012. These were advertised as summer items, and customers should act fast before summer was over. As of April 13, 2022, the \$5 Your Way Meal is back at Burger King. Only for a limited time, you can get this “amazing” deal for only \$5! When these products are advertised in this way, consumers feel the need to go out of their way to try them before they don’t get the chance.

Effectiveness of Burger King Peripheral and Central Advertisements

Burger King is a thriving company that has ramped up its advertising in the last few years. Before their introduction of the Impossible Whopper and other menu items, Burger King was critiqued for not having enough healthy menu items. Their use of central cues through the push for environmentally friendly, natural food and peripheral elaboration cues of celebrity endorsements and flash sales in order to have a diverse marketing strategy is impressive. This has changed their image and boosted sales worldwide. The creativity of the marketing team only adds to the effectiveness of their strategies. There are other factors in the Elaboration Likelihood Model that I didn't discuss such as the strength, truth, and reliability of the message. However, the Elaboration Likelihood Model can still be used to describe and analyze the effectiveness of these strategies.