



TACO BELL LIVE MÁS

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## Business Situation and Campaign Objectives

Once considered a cool brand in the '90s, the same research now indicated that Taco Bell was considered as a cultural laggard (BrandAsset Valuator, 2010).<sup>1</sup> The brand's frat-boy "Jester" image and depiction across American culture in the '90s synced up with the influences and mindset of Generation X. For over a decade Taco Bell enjoyed success as the Mexican-American inspired alternative to a burger-heavy world. However, in the past three years, Taco Bell's sales experienced ups and downs which left sales essentially flat.<sup>2</sup> The brand hit a low point in 2011, both in sales and relevance among its core millennial target.<sup>3</sup>

Our *Quantitative Culture* research convinced Taco Bell to shed the "Jester" image of *Think Outside The Bun* and change its archetype to that of an "Explorer" brand. As a result, Taco Bell rebranded with *Live Más* which moved them from being a *food-as-fuel* to a *food-experience* restaurant.

There were three main business objectives for the *Live Más* campaign:

1. Revive the brand's stagnant same-store sales by 4% in Q2
2. Create a brand idea that reinvigorates Taco Bell's place in culture
3. Promote Taco Bell's lagging brand relevance on two key dimensions
  - o Increase "Overall Brand" rating in Q2 from Q1
  - o Increase "Brand I Love" rating in Q2 from Q1

## Research Story

There are two major ways our research helped create the *Live Más* campaign:

- An analysis into popular culture unearthed the changing cultural code of food from *fuel* to *experience*
- An evaluation of Taco Bell's existing archetype enabled us to advocate repositioning the brand from "Jester" to "Explorer"

This approach proved invaluable when suggesting a rebranding strategy to the client as it enabled us to leverage these trends as quantitative evidence; not conjecture.

### The Impact of Cross-Culturalism

Something dramatic has changed in this country. This is not simply another generational gap, this is a radical shift in the way Americans see things, and it comes from a powerful demographic change. In 1950 the US was only 20% non-White, while today, Generation Y, is 44% non-White. As a matter of fact,

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<sup>1</sup> BrandAsset Valuator, 2010

<sup>2</sup> Taco Bell Internal Sales, 2012

<sup>3</sup> Taco Bell Research Brand Tracker - Q2 2012

51% of babies born in the US in 2011 were non-white. Although it's astounding, that's not what's truly industry changing. What changes the game for everyone, is how culture is created today. What the Drafftcb Strategic Analytics and Planning teams did was to quantify popular culture trends from 1950 to today. They did an extensive deep dive report called *Quantitative Culture* which focused on trends in the cultural landscape, particularly music, language, television, and cuisine.

### Music

By looking through 60-years of Billboard music charts we quantified the percentage of artists in the top 10 that were African American, Hispanic, White, and cross-cultural collaborators. In 1950, 100% of artists in the top 10 were White, but as years move forward things change dramatically. Eighty percent of the top-ten Billboard Hot 100 entries over the past ten years have featured multi-cultural or cross-cultural artists. We found the majority of Justin Bieber's charting songs are when he features African American artists.

### Language

We took a look at The Oxford English Dictionary and categorized the new words that have been added to it recently. In the last ten years as the Internet, Green movement, politics, and medicine have created new phrases and words, one source of language additions towers above the rest. More than any other single source cross-culturally inspired words like "telenovela" and "boo" account for a third of all recently added dictionary words.

### Television

Here's where it gets interesting to advertisers. This trend hasn't gone unnoticed. TV producers have been quick to catch on to the changing tastes of Americans and are reaping the benefits with large audiences.

In 1950 an overwhelming majority of the top TV shows were White. As the years move forward we start to see shows with token inclusions of multi-cultural actors – a mostly all-White cast, but with an African American, Asian, or Hispanic face thrown in gratuitously. In the '70s, on the heels of the success of Motown, a number of TV shows experimented with "token-casting" but this quickly fizzled out. In the '90s, an interesting trend emerges. A new wave of shows draws inspiration from other cultures, and over the next 15 years this trend grows to a point where over 90% of the shows that saw success drew their inspiration from another culture.<sup>4</sup>

Today, successful writers and producers draw inspiration from other sources. Culture is now created from the inspirations of African American, Asian, and Hispanic influences.

### Cuisine

We dug deep into food culture. We watched cooking shows from the '80s and '90s and compared them to the ones today. We looked at the evolution of lunches. We even analyzed the changing tastes of Americans by quantifying the types of spices that were being imported into the US over time, which we dubbed the *Cinnamindex*. What we found was pretty momentous for the brand.

Food in the US, during the '80s and '90s, was perceived at its most basic level, *fuel*. That is, the focus on food was for its functional value: it filled you up so you could continue with your day. Simple, tasty, easy and filling were what Americans were looking for in food – and not much else.<sup>5</sup> But as Millennials grew up, tastes changed. Food stopped being simply about *fuel*, and had actually become an *experience* to be

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<sup>4</sup> Nielsen TV Ratings

<sup>5</sup> The Culture Code, [Clotaire Rapaille](#), 2006

explored, enjoyed and shared. On TV, food shows had gone from Julia Childs walking audiences through a pot roast recipe, to featuring intense, passionate challenges of “Rock Star” chefs creating the next cool dish with cross-cultural influences. School lunches were no longer relegated to burgers and pizza, but hummus and chimichangas, as all sorts of ethnic cuisine became mainstays in most school cafeterias.<sup>6</sup>

In 2011, people “Facebook Liked” twice as many food brands/groups as fashion brands/groups.<sup>7</sup> Documenting food through photos, tweets, and instagrams of their meals, lattes, and snacks, for example, now commonly populated Facebook news feeds. Food had become, quite literally, the new status symbol.

Our research showed that the cultural code for food had changed, but Taco Bell hadn’t. Food TV shows had shifted from practical to passionate. Food choices had gone from standard to novel. There were 1,500 new food SKUs in 1980, and over 19,000 last year. For instance, today you can choose JACKED™ Enchilada Supreme as one of 18 Doritos flavor choices compared to the standard two choices in 1980. Food menus have gone from American to ethnic. Our *Cinnamindex* revealed rises in US imports of ethnic foods like avocados, chickpeas, and ginger.

#### From “Jester” to “Explorer”: Exploring Brand Archetypes

Based on Margaret Mark’s “The Hero and the Outlaw”, we found the Taco Bell brand voice was acting like a “Jester” brand. Not only was that out of sync with Millennials when it came to food, it also did not align with what Taco Bell is really about. See, at its core, Taco Bell was really an “Explorer” brand that not only pioneered the first Mexican-American fast food concept, but also created the first crunchy taco, the first fast food value menu, the first Chalupa, and many other fast food “firsts.” As an “Explorer” brand, its purpose was to get people to venture out of the norm and try new food and experiences – a purpose that was perfectly in line with modern food culture. *Live Más* was a perfect fit for the explorer DNA of the Taco Bell brand.

#### **Campaign Description**

Taco Bell launched a new TV brand campaign – integrated across PR, Digital, Social and In-Store – that celebrated *Live Más* moments in a more relevant way. The brand re-evaluated its approach to product development to ensure that every new product exemplified “food as experience,” because Taco Bell couldn’t merely say that they *Live Más*; they needed to *prove* that they *Live Más* to validate their place in culture. So, within weeks of the new brand launch, they strategically timed the launch of their most innovative product – the Doritos Locos Tacos (a crunchy taco made out of a Nacho Cheese Doritos shell). Shortly thereafter, they launched the Cantina Bell Menu - a new “fresh Mex” platform developed with celebrity chef Lorena Garcia. To the world, this reinforced the new positioning, stating that unequivocally we’re all about exploring new food experiences. To the company, it became a rallying cry.

The Taco Bell *Live Más* campaign operated on the insight that the cultural code for food had transitioned from fuel to experience and that Taco Bell was out of step with Millennials. To test our strategic hypothesis and gauge consumer perceptions of Taco Bell we conducted 34 one-on-one, in-depth Skype interviews with Millennials ages 18-29 across the country. We exposed them to a concept video with the new *Live Más* tagline to see if the new “Explorer” positioning resonated with their core target. We also

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<sup>6</sup> Agency Secondary Research

<sup>7</sup> Likester.com 2011 (Food Brands/Groups: 665,317,466; Fashion Brands/Groups: 298,476,021)

tested the concept with three industry experts on Millennials from Tru-Insights, Mintel, and J.D. Power and Associates.

The campaign launched at the end of February 2012 with a broadcast spot airing on TNT's NBA All-Star Saturday Night. These spots emphasized the *Live Más* tagline – and the lengths some will go to embody it. “*Road Trip*” recounts the story of superfan Matt Christiano traveling 965 miles to the closest Taco Bell test market, all to try the new Doritos Locos Tacos. The spot concluded with a voice-over declaring: “The new Doritos Locos Tacos – now at Taco Bells everywhere. Sometimes you gotta *Live Más*.” However, not everyone had to travel as far as Matt to get their hands on some Doritos Locos Tacos. In one case we brought Doritos Locos Tacos to them. In a spot documenting an actual PR event, a Taco Bell *Live Más* food truck carrying 10,000 Doritos Locos Tacos was airlifted to the tiny town of Bethel, Alaska.

The launch of the *Live Más* campaign was supported by heavy media placement in national television and had digital support. Based upon consumer pre-launch testing, we felt confident in jumping straight to a national launch. Given that the new creative and tagline leaned heavily into our knowledge of cross-culturalism, we were able to engage consumers of varied audiences with a single idea and therefore did not pursue any multicultural-specific media placements. *Live Más* now represents Taco Bell - in their stores, in their training, and in their thinking.

## Business results

- Taco Bell's sales shot up
  - While we set out to revive Taco Bell's same-store sales with a 4% increase in Q2, we beat our goal with a whopping 13% same-store sales increase.<sup>8</sup>
- Taco Bell reinvigorated its role as a leader in culture
  - Taco Bell became the talk of real and fake news alike, with segments and skits dedicated to Taco Bell on *SNL*, *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, *South Park*, and more.<sup>6</sup> Culture was taking note of what Time magazine called Taco Bell's “transformation [sic].”<sup>9</sup>
  - Owned Social Media for *Live Más* resulted in immediate and exponential engagement. Incredibly, typical posts – which previously received total monthly Facebook Likes in the 150K range – were now receiving closer to 600k Likes.<sup>10</sup> Engagement also carried through to comments which were displayed on product packaging and via in-store augmented reality smartphone apps. This complemented the food as experience brand promise.
  - Taco Bell brand mentions across Social Media increased three-fold during the campaign launch, reaching over 6 million mentions.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Yum! Q2 2012 Results (7/19/12)

<sup>9</sup> Time.com, Taco Bell, Transformed: Major Revamp of the Menu, Slogan Restaurant Vibe (2/21/12)

<sup>10</sup> Facebook.com/TacoBell. Data based on activity pre- and post-February 2012

<sup>11</sup> Mentions include SM posts (Twitter, Blogs, Forums, and Online News) comparing periods 10/15/11-2/22/12 against 2/23/12-8/30/12

- People were flocking to Taco Bell's Social Media pages at an impressively faster pace. We saw the Taco Bell Twitter growth rate increase by 35%, from 170K followers to 230K followers in just 6 months. Also noteworthy was the 33% increase in Taco Bell's Facebook fan base, growing from 8MM fans to 9MM fans in just 6 months.<sup>12</sup>
- Taco Bell's relevance bounced back, and then some.
  - Taco Bell saw an immediate, positive turnaround of its brand image. It achieved the highest brand ratings in seven quarters including "Overall Brand," and "A Brand I Love." The brand also created a positive halo for other measures, like "Quality of Food."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Facebook.com/TacoBell and Twitter.com/TacoBell. Data based on fans/followers pre- and post-February 2012

<sup>13</sup> [Taco Bell Research Brand Tracker - Q2 2012](#)