

A Rhetorical Exploration of Fast Food Marketing to Children

A Major Qualifying Project Report

submitted to the Faculty of

WORCESTER POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of Bachelor of Science

by

Jessica Stirrat

Date: August 22, 2007

Approved:

Professor John Trimbur,
Project Co-Advisor

Professor Chrysanthe Demetry
Project Co-Advisor

1. Advertising
2. Children
3. Fast Food

Abstract

This project explores the negative rhetorical aspects of children's fast food marketing. Using the McDonald's franchise as a focal point, one learns of the magnitude of children's marketing. The persuasiveness of the McDonald's Happy Meal program was investigated through multimodal analysis of several artifacts taken during a particular promotion. From the results of this analysis, a public service newsletter was developed for the purpose of educating parents on the negative effects of children's fast food advertising.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor Trimbur and Professor Demetry for their insights, suggestions and support. I would also like to thank my Mom and Mike for their continuing support throughout this project.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Marketing and Advertising: Past and Present.....	11
Advertising and Marketing as Persuasion.....	11
History of Children’s Advertising and Marketing	13
Parent’s Role in Child Consumerism.....	16
Children’s Comprehension of Advertising	17
Fast Food Marketing to Children.....	19
Conclusion	24
A Multimodal Analysis of McDonald’s Marketing to Children.....	26
The Discourse of Childhood	28
The Happy Meal	29
The Website	35
Downloads From the Website.....	39
Coloring Fun	39
Calendar	40
Play Places	42
Conclusion	43
Raising Marketing Awareness in Parents	45
Final Thoughts	48
Works Cited	50

Introduction

You've been good all week and now you can't wait. You're going with Mom for a special treat. It's Saturday, and you cannot wait to go. The toys, the colors, the bag, the place where you get to play are all exciting you beyond belief. It's what you've been waiting for especially since the toy is brand new. You know you want it. You want it all. You're going to McDonald's! The excitement is too much you're going to get the chicken nugget meal and a coke! (Your Mom doesn't let you drink soda at home.) Going to McDonald's is the best thing in the world...

Nearly every young adult in America has fond memories of going to McDonald's or Burger King with their parents. We remember the toys and the colorful bag and the food, which we only got on occasion. We remember being excited and proud of the new toy that came in the kids' meal. The feeling of belonging and of being our own unique group of kids made our visit to fast food restaurants all that more enjoyable. What we did not realize was that the fast food companies had developed their kids' meal programs to do just that. They spent countless hours researching and advertising to get the rhetoric right to generate our feelings towards them. This process is still ongoing today.

Today you see fast food advertising everywhere. McDonald's sponsors the Olympics. KFC, Taco Bell and Pizza Hut sponsor the NCAA. Fast food logos are branded on everything from educational material to toys such as Barbie. The toys in Happy Meals are now directly connected to children's movies or TV shows. Children

were always a prime advertising target for fast food restaurants. However, today, advertising is more prolific than ever, touching all areas of their lives.

Since the 1930s, advertising and marketing to children has grown into a multi-billion dollar industry, and children are now a primary marketing demographic. Marion Nestle, an expert on nutrition, food studies and public policy, claims that children's advertising became a big business when children were given more freedom of choice and more money to spend ("Fast Food" 29). Studies show that children have influence or direct spending power over billions of dollars a year making it clear why they have become a major advertising and marketing target. In the 1960s, when the fast food industry became popular, children were evolving into active consumers (Cohen 304). Since then, fast food advertising and marketing to children have grown both through advertising dollars spent and advancing effective methods. "McDonald's spends \$500 million dollars on a single campaign (Yale Rudd Center), which is directed at children during any given year. The fast food industry essentially created an advertising space for children. Today, children's advertising is everywhere from the television to the Internet to public schools. There is even advertising targeted to each age group, from preschoolers to 'tweens' and teens. The fast food industry is attempting to create life-long consumers.

When marketing to children, the fast food industry employs a variety of strategies. They do not simply use commercials but use Happy Meals, Play Places, children's clubs and educational materials to name a few. Marketing and advertising by the fast food industry have specific practices and ideas for persuading children to purchase their products.

The images that the fast food industry displays of itself in advertisements to children are fun and happiness (Nestle, "Fast Food" 33). It is hoped that these images carry on into adulthood and create life-long, loyal consumers. The images that the fast food industry presents of itself have an effect on children by creating emotional associations and attachments. Children's advertising primarily uses emotional appeal to convince children to purchase a product from a particular company.

Today, a variety of scholars are questioning the effects of the emotional appeal that the fast food restaurants create. Some scholars believe that there should be restrictions on advertising because comprehension is limited in children. They maintain that, since children are not able to fully comprehend the purpose of advertising, advertising is misleading and influencing children in a negative way (Story and French). On the other hand, many marketers claim that advertising to children is actually educational (Nestle, "Fast Food" 31). They believe that advertising teaches children how to become active and aware consumers and that; because of this, they are actually doing a public service. In addition, they claim that advertising is protected under free speech and should be left virtually unregulated.

Juliet Schor's book, Born to Buy, addresses the debate surrounding deceptive advertising. Some experts believe that the way products are presented to children is deceptive. Advertisers play on children's emotions in order to persuade them to purchase a particular product. They do not showcase a product for its merits or price as is often done in adult advertising.

The effects of advertising on children are also an ongoing debate between advertising and academia. Advertisers claim that there are no ill effects and they are

simply attempting to persuade children to the best of their abilities. Schor and other academics feel that the emotional appeal is actually detrimental to a child's well being because the child is becoming emotionally attached to objects and not to people. The result of emotional attachment to objects is an extreme materialism, which, Schor states, has a negative impact on society.

As obesity and nutritional concerns become more prominent, concerned parents are looking at fast food advertising as a likely contributor to the growing obesity problem in children. Many parents feel that the fast food industry is promoting unhealthy eating and reinforcing these bad habits into adulthood. According to Story and French, it is widely believed that the eating habits children learn will carry into adulthood and that through advertising; the fast food industry is encouraging unhealthy eating habits. For this reason, many parents' groups are calling for a ban on food advertising to children. On the other hand, Kelly Brownell reports that advertisers and companies believe that children's eating habits are parents' responsibilities and that advertising only influences brand choices (56).

As McDonald's continues to advertise to children and uses various methods of marketing to do that, many people are trying to raise awareness of these marketing practices. Eric Schlosser has written a book called *Chew On This: Everything You Don't Want to Know About Fast Food*, which he hopes will increase awareness and understanding in adolescents of the advertising done by the fast food industry (Rosenblum). But what about younger children? Studies have shown that, before the age of seven, children view advertising as unbiased, entertaining information. They are unable to comprehend that an advertisement is trying to sell a product and may be

misleading (French and Story). In addition, studies have been done showing that preteens (age 8-10) are able to critically evaluate advertisements but do not necessarily do so (French and Story). Many groups are trying to find ways to make children more aware of advertising particularly through parent awareness and involvement.

The advertising and marketing strategies that have been created for children by the fast food industry are of particular interest rhetorically. The goal of marketing and advertising is to persuade a consumer to purchase a particular product. Rhetoric has been applied to all aspects of children's marketing and advertising, but what that rhetoric encompasses has not been fully explored. The rhetoric involved in marketing is not just words, but colors, sounds, formats, games, and toys. In order to understand the rhetoric of marketing, a system of analysis that addresses all these aspects and more is necessary.

Multimodality, as identified by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, offers one way to analyze the complexity of advertisements. The basis of multimodality is that certain products and events cannot be analyzed through a monomodal method of inquiry. A monomodal method of inquiry is using art critique to look at illustrations and colors while using lexicography to examine word usage. Multimodal analysis looks at all aspects of an object and analyzes them as parts as well as a whole. Kress and Van Leeuwen developed a method to analyze multimodal products, which will be applied in this project

The aim of this project is to rhetorically explore the marketing objects that have been created by McDonald's for children, such as the Happy Meal and Play Places. Using multimodal discourse, children's marketing by the fast food industry will be analyzed. This analysis will show the appeal of all marketing facets to children and why

television commercials are not the only attempts at persuasion. By understanding persuasive methods of marketing, parents and children will better understand the purpose of persuasive marketing and hopefully will become more critical consumers. A public health communication piece with the objective of raising awareness of the expansiveness of fast food marketing to children concludes this project.

Marketing and Advertising: Past and Present

“In the relentless search for new markets, media corporations are increasingly recognizing and targeting youth as a profitable group of consumers” (Strasburger and Wilson 6). Today, children are considered a major demographic for marketing and advertising for all types of products such as food, clothes, toys, even everyday household items. Marketers recognize that the children of today are the adult consumers of tomorrow and that brand loyalty lasts a lifetime. In addition, according to Schor, “children are the epicenter of American consumer culture” (9). Children have become the connection between advertisers and the family purchases, which has earned them considerable clout as a demographic. In this section, we will explore why children are considered such an important demographic and the history behind children’s advertising as well as the advertising done by the fast food industry.

Advertising and Marketing as Persuasion

Marketing is the plan developed by a company to convince people to buy their particular good. One part of marketing is advertising which we are aware of in the form of television commercials. Another part of marketing is identifying a group of potential customers, such as kids. Based on research, companies determine how to best market and advertise their products to consumers.

Many different methods of persuasion are utilized in marketing. For the adult consumer, logos (logic) and data can be used to persuade a consumer to buy a car. The use of a spokesperson may also be used in commercials for both adults and children.

Marketing and advertising predominantly rely on emotions or pathos to persuade the child consumer to purchase a particular product. A variety of persuasion is inherent in all forms of marketing, from package design to television commercials.

There are two types of marketing and advertising – direct and indirect. Direct advertising is easily identifiable, such as television commercials, print advertisements and websites. Indirect advertisements include those which most people do not consider to be advertising such as educational material provided by a company, kids' clubs, and school fundraisers.

Advertising is a common means of persuasion. In the past, products were advertised based on their usefulness and appeal. Today, however, companies and brands are advertised and the actual products have taken a back seat. Advertisers know that repetition is one of the most effective ways to keep people remembering a brand and their logo (Seiter 103). Once a person knows a brand, an image of that brand is then necessary to connect to the brand. Often, the image embodies certain emotional appeals as a way of persuading consumers to purchase that brand particularly in children's products.

The ultimate goal of marketers is to create identification and association of companies and logos to the point where consumers will purchase products from them. For this reason, branding, logos, and company images are repeated and standardized so there is never any confusion about the identification of the brands and what they promise to customers. The brand creates an appeal, which ultimately persuades a person to buy their product with their logo on it. For children, the appeal differs slightly from adults but the approach is similar.

Many companies today in an effort to secure their share in the market take part in 'cradle to grave' marketing. This idea behind this notion of marketing is to begin marketing to babies and toddlers and continuing for the entire lifetime of that particular person. The goal of 'cradle to grave' marketing is to constantly cultivate recognition and attachment to a particular brand and its products. Because the children of today are the consumers of tomorrow, more and more companies are marketing and advertising their brands to children in the hopes of fostering a preference for that brand at a young age.

History of Children's Advertising and Marketing

As long as children's programming has existed, there has been advertising to children. During the 1920s and 1930s, youth started to become a consuming group in its own right (Kline 57). In the 1930s, food and household products were advertised during children's radio programs with the belief that children would influence parents' purchasing decisions (Kline 57; Strasburger and Wilson 38).

Television was the major media that created the child consumer. According to Kline, the 1950s was the decade when children became direct targets for advertisements (74). Television offered a new way to sell products, which had not been available before and, with it, a new way to market products to children (Kline 74). In a study by Alexander and colleagues, it was reported that during the early 1950s, the advertisements during children's TV shows were directed towards the entire family and not solely to children.

According to Kline, 1955 was the turning point when the toy industry aggressively moved into television and began directly marketing to children (182). The successful sales of the toys and products related to the hit show, "The Mickey Mouse

Club”, showed the benefit of tying media and toys together. Since then, the list of items that are directly advertised to children has grown to include food, clothes, video games and various other products. As Strasburger and Wilson point out, advertising methods to children have not changed much since the late 1950s (42). Prizes, premiums, and celebrity endorsement enhance the effects of advertising. These gimmicks were first used the 1930s and are still being used today.

In addition to the emergence of television in 1956, market segmentation played a significant role in expanding the idea of children as independent consumers. Market segmentation means specializing products to smaller groups instead of broadly promoting products for mass consumption. Market segmentation led to the development of specific television shows at specific times for specific groups. An example would be cartoons and children’s educational shows in the afternoon and on Saturday mornings. Market segmentation furthered market research on kids with the development of ‘target marketing, which aimed for pointed appeal to a specific demographic. All of this media and marketing focus helped to place children in a powerful position as consumers. (295-303)

Even during the 1990s, marketing to children grew by leaps and bounds. The amount of money spent on marketing to children and parents went from \$6.9 billion in 1992 to \$12.7 billion in 1997. As children became a wealthier and more influential group, the advertisements geared toward them increased. From 1998 to 1999, the kids’ TV advertisement market grew from \$750 million to \$1 billion. Part of the explanation for this expansion is the success and popularity of Nickelodeon and other kid’s channels,

which created an advertising arena for this particular demographic. (Nestle, “Fast Food” 32)

Today, “children control increasing amounts of money, and society has granted them increasing responsibility for purchasing decisions” (Nestle, “Fast Food” 29). Children are consumers with expendable income. On average, “Children under twelve spend another \$25 billion, but may influence another \$200 billion of spending per year” (French and Story). Since children have direct control and more influence over money and purchasing decisions, it is easy to see why companies work to successfully advertise to them.

What has changed in the history of children’s advertising is the sheer proliferation of media and technology used for advertising (Strasburger and Wilson 5). The increase in hours devoted to kids’ programming, is a direct response to the increased interest in young consumers by marketers (Strasburger and Wilson 39), which illustrates the growth of children as their own consumer group. In addition, the Internet was nonexistent 20-30 years ago, and today is a major area for children’s advertising (Strasburger and Wilson 4). 25% of children ages 2-12 were online in 2000 and the percentage is expected to grow to 66% (Nestle, Food Politics 182). Therefore, websites are becoming one of the major ways to advertise to children and second only to television.

Today, children are extremely easy to reach. “Youth today spend anywhere from one-third to one-half of their waking hours with some form of mass media” (Strasburger and Wilson 8). Nestle states that mass media exposes children to countless advertisements for a variety of products (30). Children see advertisements on TV, the Internet, and through premium video games. As new media formats were developed, the

idea of the child consumer was strengthened and became a more important demographic to companies. As children became a more prominent demographic, the role of parents also changed from authoritarians to partners, which had a great effect on child consumption.

Nestle summarizes that “research indicates children respond best to commercials designed to appeal to desires for sensual gratification – play, fun, friends and nurturance (in that order)” (“Fast Food” 33). A study by Barcus found that a food advertisement’s appeal is more focused on the funness and tastiness of a product than on nutrition or other factors (Strasburger and Wilson 41). The persuasive appeal or theme in children’s fast food advertising breaks down as follows: fun/happiness 27%; taste/flavor 19%; product performance 18% (Kunkel and Gantz). Nestle determined that food advertisements are “high emotional/ low analytic” (“Fast Food” 25) meaning that the information about the food rarely occurs in food commercials. To better understand the appeals towards children used in advertising by the food industry, it is important to understand the history of marketing and advertising to children.

Parent’s Role in Child Consumerism

From the 1920s to the 1960s, the parents’ role followed the ‘gatekeeper model’. Companies had to work to convince parents that products were good for their children (Schor 16). Today the parents’ role in child consumption has changed. According to Schor, “the new norm is that kids and marketers join forces to convince adults to spend money” (16).

Part of this shift came from the child development experts and advice columns that stated children needed stimulation in order to grow into healthy, well-balanced kids.

Children were no longer expected to work and had time to play. At the same time, a mother's work increased drastically. It was during this time that the television and children's toys became prominent in every household. (Seiter 21-33)

Children now view advertising in isolation, away from parents, and very few parents control children's exposure to advertising. Families today follow a different structure than before. Seiter states that there is an encouragement of indulgence by parents, rights of children in the family, and deferral of conflict through bribery which have all contributed to the greater freedom children have from parents when participating in the consumer culture (33).

Children's Comprehension of Advertising

The question of whether children understand the intent of advertising is an ongoing debate. The importance of this question lies in this basic fact - if children are unable to comprehend the intent of advertising, then they are being manipulated by companies, and these companies do not have the best interests of the children at heart. On one extreme, some parents and child development experts claim that children do not understand advertising until they are at least eight years old and even then are still manipulated by it. On the other extreme, are advertisers who believe that children of all ages understand the intent of advertising and are extremely critical of advertising. (Schor 65-67) There are no clear sides to this debate as there is a wide variety of opinion between the two views presented above.

Various studies have looked at different aspects of comprehension of advertising in children ranging from understanding the intent behind commercials to understanding that advertisements are fiction. Studies have also shown that this demographic is

accepting of advertising and actually enjoys watching commercials (Seiter 108).

Children understand differences in brands, which can turn into lifetime buying preferences (Nestle, "Fast Food" 29).

It is a common assumption among all age groups that advertising provides information about a product. In an empirical study, "the most sophisticated response includes an awareness that advertisements are intended to persuade but none of the 6 year olds, only a quarter of the 8 year olds, and a third of the 10 year olds referred to the persuasive nature of advertising." The persuasive nature of advertising was targeted during an interview about the intent of advertising. (Oates, Blades and Gunter 243)

In addition, it has been documented that children under seven lack the analytical skills necessary to understand the purpose of advertisements and to question its believability (French and Story). Children's response to advertising in general tends to be more emotional and visual than analytical (Kline 188). Older children are able to understand the purpose of advertisements, but companies often count on peer pressure to keep kids loyal to their brand (Klein 68).

In contrast, Seiter claims that children are aware consumers because they make or break television shows and toys and add their own meaning to goods (9-10). Her argument states that if children were easily manipulated then they would accept all shows and toys that were placed in front of them.

Children's comprehension of advertising is still an area that is vastly unclear. What has been determined is that children are able to differentiate between commercials and programs, yet the understanding of the purpose of advertising does not appear to occur until much later in childhood. Until we are better able to understand child

development in relation to comprehension of advertising, it is best to say that the age of comprehension most likely varies among individual children and no specific age norm is available at this time.

Fast Food Marketing to Children

The fast food industry's advertising to children has also grown over the years. Originally, the fast food restaurants' primary demographic was families. McDonald's founder, Ray Kroc, decided that McDonald's should be children oriented. Kroc wanted a place for children to bring their parents and grandparents, thereby, getting three customers by advertising to one. For this reason, he began advertising McDonald's to children. (Schlosser 40-41)

In 1963, Ronald McDonald made his television debut (Collins 7). He starred in two commercials. Because of his success, in 1965, Ronald McDonald's became the official spokesperson for McDonald's (7). Ronald McDonald is one of the most successful advertising icons. Adage.com named Ronald McDonald the 2nd biggest advertising icon of the 20th century after the Marlboro Man (7). Soon the commercials evolved to include other characters as well as McDonaldland thus expanding the image of McDonald's and its appeal to toddlers and other children (Schlosser 42).

During the 1960s, Play Places and McDonaldland parks were developed for the restaurants so that they became more than just a restaurant in the eyes of children. The goal was to create another reason to go to McDonald's aside from food for children and parents alike. Play Places created a space just for kids within McDonald's restaurants. Today, there are over 8000 McDonald's Play Places and over 2000 Burger King parks

(Schlosser 47). The number of playgrounds in fast food restaurants is clear evidence of their success in attracting children.

McDonald's began their direct advertising to children with the introduction of Ronald McDonald on television commercials, followed by the Happy Meal and the Mighty Kids' meal. They have continuously worked to expand their advertising into new media and incorporate new technology into their marketing plans. Worldwide McDonald's spends \$500 million per year on advertisements with approximately 40% targeting kids (Strasburger and Wilson 241).

The first McDonald's Happy Meal program was created in 1977 and launched in 1979. The Happy Meal was created based on a children's meal concept by Dick Brams and his advertising agencies (McDonald's). The boxes were designed based on the popularity of children's cereal boxes (Crister 113). The first national Happy Meal had a Circus Wagon Train theme. The premiums included "the decorative boxes, McDoodles stencil, puzzle lock, McWrist Wallet, ID bracelet, spinning top and McDonaldland character erasers" (McDonald's). Since then, while continuing the use of Ronald McDonald, McDonald's has partnered with various toy, movie, and television companies for the premiums offered.

From the onset of the kids' meal, the fast food industry has been offering toys with kids' meal to entice more children and parents to purchase kids' meals. These toys are a major part of the marketing and advertising to children. The fast food companies have had agreements with Disney, Nickelodeon and other media companies to link the toys with popular children's movies or television shows (Brownell and Horgen 113). The use of recognizable characters is well planned. Brownwell and Horgen explain, "the

hope is that children will transfer the emotional attachment they feel about a character to a product” (103). For example, both Burger King and McDonald’s sponsored the show Teletubbies, and McDonald’s also made Teletubbies toys available (Nestle, Food Politics 181).

Today McDonald’s and other fast food companies engage in ‘cradle to grave’ marketing to cultivate consumer allegiance (McNeal). McDonald’s carries toys that are suitable for toddlers as well as toys for older children thus making it a place for all children. The Happy Meal is geared towards children ages 3-9 (Schlosser 47-48) while the Mighty Kid’s Meal is geared towards the ‘twens’ ages 10-13. In part, the fast food industry’s success lies in its awareness of the developmental differences within different age groups and its ability to market accordingly. The practice of segmentation and marketing to children within specific age and gender groups is practiced by every company that advertises to children (Kline 242).

Television remains the largest avenue for advertising by the fast food industry. 6% of TV advertisements are for fast food during children’s programming (Kunkel and Gantz). Since the average American child sees 40,000 TV commercials a year, the focus on commercials by the fast food industry makes sense (Kunkel and Gantz). Obviously, “television is the leading means of persuasion for the food industry” (Brownell and Horgen 100). Taco Bell has also had success with commercials. According to the CME KidCom Ad Traction Study II in 1999, the Taco Bell talking Chihuahua was the most popular fast food commercial (Schlosser 43). McDonald’s has expanded in this media by creating a video collection called “The Wacky Adventures of Ronald McDonald” as well as a McDonaldland video game (Schlosser 48).

The fast food industry and others are utilizing the Internet to advertise to children and older consumers. One particular example of this is the McDonald's children website which is an advertisement and identified as such. In addition, McDonald's has expanded their general website and children's website to have more games, information, and a place for parents. Other fast food companies are also creating specific sites or links that are directed at children and which advertise their kids' meal.

Kids' clubs are another method of advertising to children and collecting data about them. The majority of kids' clubs are simply filling out an information card and then receiving a membership card as well as special incentives for the particular company. As Schlosser explains, "the clubs appeal to a child's fundamental need for status and belonging". These kids' clubs are an indirect method of advertising, which uses incentives and prizes to get children to join and then return repeatedly to a particular restaurant. If run successfully, they can greatly increase sales of children's meals.

(Schlosser 45)

The fast food industry has spent considerable time and money advertising in schools through direct and indirect ways. Several types of advertising in schools will be discussed. Strasburger and Wilson explain that the benefit of advertising in schools is the captive audience; children are required to spend 20% of their time in schools therefore allowing guaranteed exposure for companies and products. Schools first allowed advertising to help increase their budgets. (62)

The first type of advertising is direct advertising through the use of billboards and posters in schools. Companies will also stamp their logos on books covers and other materials, which the schools receive for free. Another type of advertising done in schools

is free incentives. Both McDonald's and Pizza Hut offer coupons for teachers to distribute to children as rewards for reaching reading goals. This gives teachers free incentives, while at the same time, exposing children to the brand names and encouraging children to visit those establishments. Corporations will also sponsor fundraisers to help raise money for schools while promoting their brand name heavily. (Brownell and Horgen 130-139)

One of the most controversial ways of promotion in schools is the educational materials given to schools. These materials again have the logos and brand names imprinted all over the material, but an evaluation of this material by the Consumers Union Education Services in 1995 found that 80% is biased or incomplete (Strasburger and Wilson 63). Some examples of these materials are nutrition curriculum from McDonald's; math lessons using Domino's wheel graphics; reading texts for 1st graders with Pizza Hut logos (Crister 170). More interesting is that Brownell and Horgen claim that children do not see these materials as advertisement and believe that the school is actually endorsing the company and its products (138).

Another controversy is Channel One, which offers newscasts for middle school and high schools. During a Channel One broadcast, there are two minutes of commercials which students are required to watch. Because of the conditions of the Channel One contracts, it was determined to cost taxpayers millions of dollars in lost school time. (Brand and Greenburg)

McDonald's has always blended the kid and parent aspect of advertising especially when they were just starting out. However, now McDonald's is moving away from that stance towards one that is becoming easily more anti-adult in theme (Schor 59-

61). In the past, the toy premiums were non-thematic toys featuring Ronald McDonald and the McDonald Land characters, which were parent-approved. Now one finds Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles in Kid's Meals. Because of the extremeness of the TV show story line, these TV characters are considered to be anti-adult by advertisers and parents (Schor 54). Anti-adult themes are new to advertising and the result of an effort to further convince kids that a particular product was made just for them. The toys are more likely to appeal to children because of the association with movies and TV show characters that only children can identify with.

On the other hand, the food in the Happy Meal is marketed to parents because of the present day concerns over child obesity and the bad publicity that McDonald's has received over this issue. As society becomes more concerned about what children are eating, McDonald's is responding accordingly and selling their positive actions to parents, while, at the same time, taking the stance that a child's health is the parents' responsibility. McDonald's is constantly balancing on that fine line between being kid approved and parent friendly like many other companies are doing today.

Conclusion

The fast food industry has created a unique marketing space for children. Portions of their marketing programs have been analyzed by academic experts, but much of their programs have been left unexplored because of the discreet ways in which they advertise. Children's television commercials have been assessed in regards to themes and methods of persuasion. However, the other aspects that are central to fast food marketing such as Play Places, kids' meals, and websites have not been rhetorically analyzed.

Because of the importance of branding and company recognition by children and adults, many objects that are not considered advertisements have actually become ones. All of these objects are designed to constantly create an association between the brand and the consumer. Even the logo of a company carries an inherent message and persuasiveness, with the hope of creating a preference for that company and that particular brand. All aspects of marketing and advertising are designed to work together to persuade a consumer to purchase a product. This can be called the rhetorical space. Rhetorical space describes the marketing objects and ideals that companies have created. This rhetorical space is constantly working both physically and conceptually to persuade a person to purchase a product. In the following section, this rhetorical space will be analyzed through its parts and as a whole.

A Multimodal Analysis of McDonald's Marketing to Children

Marketing today employ a variety of modes and media to persuade consumers. The rhetorical space that marketers use is far reaching and works on multiple levels of persuasion. One way to examine the rhetorical space in these artifacts is through multimodality. Multimodality is the way that a variety of modes and media make up an object or artifact.

For example, a magazine advertisement has text, pictures, and color utilizing a variety of modes and media to inform the reader about a new product. Kress and Van Leeuwen define modes as semiotic resources which realize discourses and interactions and can cross production media. Narratives and colors are types of modes, which can be seen in a variety of media. Media are the material resources such as instruments, paints, and cameras. They produce semiotic products such as print, television, and radio.

The basic elements of advertisements are packaging, design, typefaces, pictures and content (Nestle, "Fast Food" 31). Commercials have music, color, actors, and animation. Print advertisements have illustrations, photos, color and text. Today, it is impossible to simply look at newspapers using linguistics or posters using just art critiques. The different modes, such as, art, language, color, animation, music are all coming together in various artifacts on a constant basis. For this reason, Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen in Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication created a set of terminology that is applicable to all semiotic modes such as art, text, music and modes that incorporate all three.

“We want to sketch a multimodal theory of communication based... on an analysis of the specificities and common traits of semiotic modes which takes account of their social, cultural and historical production, of when and how the modes of production are specialized or multi-skilled, hierarchical or team-based, of when and how technologies are specialized or multi-purpose, and so on.” (4)

Because advertising to children by the fast food industry uses multiple modes with varying themes and approaches, it is important to look at each piece of advertising through multimodal discourse to generate a bigger picture of the marketing effort that is constantly ongoing. Kress and Van Leeuwen define four domains of practice for a multimodal inquiry, which are discourse, design, production and distribution.

The first domain of practice is discourse. “Discourses are socially constructed knowledge of (some aspect of) reality.” (4) Discourses embody the social and culture knowledge and views. For example, the idea that blue is a color for boys and pink is a color for girls is a social discourse expressed through a mode - color. Modes are often incorporated into the expression of various discourses. The idea of color reflecting gender will often be present in design, which is the next practice. Design is the realization of discourse through different modes. In addition, design provides the connection between discourse and social interaction which discourse cannot achieve on its own.

The third practice of multimodality is production. Production refers to the “actual material articulation” of the semiotic event or artifact (6). Depending on circumstances, the production can realize design and contribute nothing to the semiotic piece, or the design can be altered because of production restrictions. For example, available building

materials may alter the blueprint of a building. The final practice is distribution.

Distribution is the creation of a copy of the product. It is the technical re-articulation in material form such as a CD.

The analysis will include terms set up by Kress and van Leeuwen discussed above to explore McDonald's Happy Meal marketing to children. The parts of the Happy Meal marketing that will be examined are the bag, toys, website, several downloads from the website, and Play Places. All of these objects possess a vast multimodal discourse, design, production and distribution to understand how they work separately and as a unit to persuade children to purchase Happy Meals. In addition, the common themes of children's advertising will be evaluated in these objects.

The Discourse of Childhood

Childhood has become a time of fun and learning. Although it is important for children to learn, they also need to play and have fun. The discourses of childhood and fun are both expressed through various modes such as fictional characters and bright colors. The discourse of fun is an integral part of the discourse of childhood although it is also able to stand independently. The discourse of childhood is much more complex since it includes ideas of fun, learning, happiness, and play. McDonald's, like many others who market to children, understands the discourses of childhood and fun and works to incorporate them into their identity continuously.

McDonald's uses bright colors, snappy jingles, and Play Places to help its image be one of fun and happiness to kids. Because of these discourses of childhood, most advertising themes are funness and play since they are so strongly associated with childhood and children partake in them wholeheartedly. All aspects of the Happy Meal

revolve around these discourses and in the follow sections the specific examples of them will be given.

The Happy Meal



Figures 1 and 2. Madame Alexander Doll Toy and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Action Figure Toy for McDonald's Happy Meals on April 1, 2007

The first part of the Happy Meal as a multimodal product is the discourse. It is a common assumption in our society that kids need to be entertained and to have fun. This idea is particularly evident in the feeling of advertisers that food needs be fun and interactive to hold a child's attention (Strasburger and Wilson 239). For this reason, Happy Meals offer fun and food to children simultaneously. Toy premiums and colorful bags with games on them are the two ways that fun food is communicated.

The second part of the discourse is that the toys are gender specific. Depending on the promotion, McDonald's is often forced to carry two toys because toys, in general, are often gender specific (Seiter 49; Kline 251). For boys, there are Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (TMNT) toys, which tie in with the movie that opened March 22, 2007. For girls, Wizard of Oz, Madam Alexander, doll toys are available. Madam Alexander

doll toys are a recurring promotion for McDonald's (Schor 27). The discourse in the toy selection is that girls enjoy playing with dolls while boys like TMNT action figures. The discourses of childhood, fun, and gender division carry throughout the entire Happy Meal.

Toys are often tied into movies or TV shows or other toys (beanie babies) in the hopes that the child will transfer the emotional attachment he has for the character to the food (Kline 178). To children imaginary play is a major part of their lives, and often the characters involved in pretend are the characters that they see on TV. Characters become very real to children and the attachment that is created motivates them to want anything that is associated with a particular character. For McDonald's, the attraction and appeal of the kids' toys permeates every part of their children's marketing from the Happy Meal bag to the website to the games on the website. The toys are the primary draw of the Happy Meal for kids.

The toys are designed primarily to associate feelings for the child and are not usually high quality toys. Both toys are made primarily out of plastic and are limited to three or four different colors. The design of each toy is immediate recognition and activity. The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle was designed as an action figure, which throws punches when you squeeze his legs together. The Madame Alexander toy is a doll with eyes that open and close and a cloth skirt. Both toys realize their discourse of either action figure or doll. This is an important part of the marketing scheme because it plays an important role in creating association and recognition between the McDonald's toys and the actual characters. The Happy Meal bag assists in creating this association.

The Happy Meal bag has various games on it to keep a child occupied while eating the meal. This is not a new idea. Part of the way that the Happy Meal was developed was taken from the realization that children enjoyed reading the cereal box while eating breakfast (Crister 113). The attitude among marketers is that children expect to be entertained while eating because, as seen in commercials, food is supposed to be fun (Strasburger and Wilson 239).



Figure 3. Happy Meal Bag. Purchased at McDonald's on April 1, 2007

The design of the bag – its colors, pictures, formatting -- is important to its success. The design of the bag is split into two parts. One part works with the TMNT promotion while the other deals with the Madame Alexander promotion. The first thing

that catches a person's eye on the Madame Alexander side is the Happy Meal logo which is in pink thus realizing the discourse of girls through the use of color. The logo is circled and contains the McDonald's arches as well as the address for the Happy Meal website in it.

The second noticeable part of this side is a drawing of Dorothy. She is in the same plane as the Happy Meal logo on the side. In the background, are illustrations of Tin Man, Lion, and Scarecrow as well as the yellow brick road and "The Wizard of Oz" logo and the words "We're off to see the Wizard!". The entire side works to provoke associations of the Happy Meal with "The Wizard of Oz".

Both sides of the Happy Meal bag have bright, active colors. Bright vibrant colors are associated with childhood and fun as a mode. It is interesting to note that the girls' side of the bag uses more primary, bright colors and is more colorful overall than the boys' side which uses secondary, muted colors. The colors that can be used, however, are often restricted because of the limiting inks available for production. Regardless, McDonalds attempts to make the bag as eye-catching as possible in terms of its colors.

The texts on the bag are in varying colors and fonts, which essentially connect nothing together and allow each text to be seen as separate from all the others. The varying designs do not require standard left to right reading and allows the entire side and entire bag to be taken in at a glance with no forced reading path. The TMNT side is much more unified since the names of the Ninja Turtles are all connected in the same font; however, the names can still be read in any particular order.

At the top of the side is the basic nutrition information for the items offered with the Happy Meal. This box is in black standard print, forms a grid, and looks like every other nutrition label except that this one is not as complete as the standard nutrition label found on other food products. This is a new addition to the Happy Meal bag and may address the desire of parents to know the nutritional value of the contents as well as FDA requirements.

The second half of the bag is about Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. The Happy Meal logo is the same design except it is in blue instead of pink. There is a definite loss of perspective on this side of the bag where there is not foreground or background. The reason for the difference in perspective may be the belief that girls are more mature than boys. Society believes that girls mature faster than boys. The design of the bag reflects this discourse.

Both sides of the bags highlight and promote the toy. It is clear that the toys, as mentioned above, are the primary focus for the Happy Meal. It is interesting to note the definite separation of the TMNT and Madam Alexander on the bag. Seiter's work shows that the separation of the different toys shows how gender is strictly defined and separated in children's culture. The bag is designed to be extremely colorful. Again, this mode emphasizes the discourses of childhood. The bag itself is the same as the ones produced for adults. In a way, the use of the same bag allows an easy transition mentally from the Happy Meal to the adult meals for children in the future.

The distribution of the bags to children with the purchase of the Happy Meal obviously helps develop the entity of the bag as the Happy Meal bag. The bag and toy are presented only with the Happy Meal or Mighty Kids' meal order. However, it is

important to note that the change from the Happy Meal to the Mighty Kids' meal is only in the amount of food available and that the toys and bag do not change. Each toy and its corresponding bag are only available for a limited time and the variety of available toys entices customers to come back to collect more toys. The changing of the toys and promotions emphasizes McDonald's goal of constant repeat customers. The uniqueness of the kid's bag helps create the feeling that kids are the main focus of McDonald's and that they are the most important customers.

McDonald's Happy Meal program is also using the Internet, and the idea of funness and the Internet. The Happy Meal website is written out four different times on the bag and once in the smaller bags that hold the toys. The Madame Alexander website and the TMNT website are also written out on the Happy Meal bag. McDonald's is trying to expand the discourse and idea of the Happy Meal to the Internet as well. The website is a major means of advertising McDonald's and the Happy Meal because children are on the Internet when they are not at a McDonald's restaurant; thereby reinforcing McDonald's at home or school where the Internet is accessible.

The Website



Figure 4. Happy Meal Website. Retrieved April 1, 2007 from happymeal.com

The McDonald's Happy Meal website is highly integrated and continuous, offering multiple pages with different information and activities on each. The website combines sounds, games, log-ins, colors, and other activities and downloads to create an entire experience of fun and enjoyment for a child. The website is highly interactive and is greatly concerned with its production and distribution in order to create a common emphasis between all its parts.

The website emphasizes the Happy Meal and the toy premiums that are available at the present time. The primary focus of the website is the toys which are further advertised through a variety of activities that are available on the website. In a way, the website is a continuation of the Happy Meal bag offering bright colors and toy related activities and giving kids a 'special' place. The Happy Meal website is an important part

of McDonald's marketing scheme because it is one aspect that is experienced outside of the restaurant.

McDonald's new Happy Meal website has only one identifier stating that it is advertising, that is at the top of the page in white against a red background. The images are the primary emphasis on the homepage. The text on the page is limited, which makes sense visually since children prefer pictures to text. The visual speaks to kids so why would kids even bother to read the text? Because of the colors and images on the page the disclaimer of advertising is most likely overlooked by children.

The use of color on the homepage is extremely interesting. Red and yellow are the two primary colors used throughout the page. The two colors tie back to Ronald McDonald since he is primarily red and yellow as well. The use of color reinforces the discourse of childhood as well as the colors of McDonald's. The massive use of color is a definitive discourse and design element. The discourse of childhood is filled with bright vibrant colors and the design of this page uses the idea of color and childhood. The images on the page are the primary focus, and children do not necessarily need to know how to read to be able to differentiate the various links and sections of the webpage.

Color is also a major part of the production and distribution. As soon as the homepage opens, children know that they are in a space marked for them because of the colors and images within it. As a result of screen pixels in the website production, the colors are much more vibrant and brighter than on the Happy Meal bag. The colors used serve as an additional way to connect the website to the Happy Meal bag ensuring that the distribution of each is connected in a way aside from the brand.

The website has no definitive reading path. Since the website is image based the size of the image and its framing helps determine what one is more likely to click on first. Additional pages are available through multiple links on the homepage which makes the website an enclosed system.

The page is highly interactive. Clicking on the little McDonald's restaurant at the top shoots stars out of it. The colored blocks below the sound icon will change the background to the color selected though the primary background when entering the site is red. The links are Learn, Play, Create, and Toys, which give a child control over the activities that he or she participates in. The links also embody the discourse of childhood where children are expected to learn, play, create and engage with toys. The entire design of the website is one where children have the control to choose what they do; this control is a major part of marketing to children since it hypothetically creates a space that excludes parents from participation.

Most important in the interaction is the sign in. By signing-in, a child can play games and get his or her high scores posted as well as give shout outs to friends on the website. By signing in, a child can achieve a sense of belonging to a special group. Since group belonging is particularly important to children (Seiter 9; Kline 172), a sign-in furthers creates positive feelings between the Happy Meal and the child. In addition, the shout outs through the sign-in allows the child to post messages to friends making the site a place for communication between friends as well. The posting of high scorers makes a child's accomplishments available to his peers, which furthers socialization.

The interactiveness of the website is a major part of its design and production. If the website were not as interactive, one of its major attractions would be lacking. The

website was produced to be highly interactive and to promote the toy premiums in a way that encourages children to begin making active associations with them. Through the production of the webpage, McDonald's has become animate, fun, and immediately accessible without a ride from Mom and Dad.

Under "Learn" is a TMNT crossword puzzle dealing directly with the movie, screen savers, a Happy Meal calendar telling when new games are coming out for the website, and a trivia game relating to a previous toy promotion. The idea of learning becomes fun and somewhat frivolous on the website. Children are actually learning something from their entire experience at the website, which McDonald's hopes is a positive feeling towards the Happy Meal and McDonald's.

The distribution of this page under the Learn link carries a very under-handed message. The primary focus of the "Learn" page is the promotion of the toy premium; in fact, this is the focus of the entire website. The goal of the "Learn" page is to learn about the toys available and to magnify a child's desire to own the toys. Children learn that to enjoy these pages they need to own the toys. At the website, children are learning that commercialism and the acquisition of items is extremely important. Furthermore, the website constantly works to reinforce the emotional attachment to the toys and characters while creating a new emotional tie to McDonald's. McDonald's does not present learning as a cognitive, intellectual process, but rather as an emotional neediness, which will create stronger bonds between children and McDonald's products.

Downloads From the Website

Coloring Fun



Figure 5. Coloring Fun Page downloaded April 1, 2007 from happymeal.com

After following the link to “Create”, there are downloads available. Two of these downloads are Coloring Fun, one for Madam Alexander and one for Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Both are extremely similar in set up and only vary in the characters displayed. The coloring fun page for Madam Alexander dolls consists of the new Happy Meal logo with the web address in color at the top right of the page. At the top are

outlines of two of the dolls that are available at McDonald's and can be colored in. What is interesting to note is that the coloring outlines do not even take up half the page. Instead a colored block with pictures of all the dolls available as well as the question "Which one did you get?" dominates the page in color and size.

The domination of the doll pictures on the page obviously emphasizes that the focus is to reinforce to the child's need to acquire the Happy Meal toys. The page is an indirect advertisement for the Happy Meal toys and conveys that the toys are more important than coloring. The idea that this page is an advertisement unto itself is enhanced by the way that the outlines of the characters are drawn. They are extremely elementary whereas the Happy Meal logo is shadowed and the toys are all detailed photographic images. In addition, the box overlaps the coloring outlines, which emphasize the doll pictures first and the coloring outlines second. Therefore, the design and production both work to emphasize the need to acquire toys instead of the learning to color, which is claimed to be the emphasis.

Calendar





Figures 6. Happy Meal Calendar. Retrieved April 1, 2007 from happymeal.com

The calendar is found under the “Learn” link. The calendar is two pages. The first page contains Ronald McDonald and the month. The second page is the actual calendar. The calendar lists when the toys are changing, when new games are available on the website and other general information.

The calendar works as an advertisement by promoting the new toys coming soon to the restaurants and by announcing changes that will occur on the website such as a new game. It encourages children to continuously log onto the website to see what changes have been made, and it alerts them ahead of time when a new toy is coming out. This alert makes the child begin wanting the new toy and be more likely to remember to go to McDonald’s and purchase it when it comes out. The calendar is an effective means of increasing the number of times a child logs onto the Happy Meal website thus increasing exposure to the advertising present on the pages.

Ronald McDonald’s position on the first page of the calendar illustrates that he is still a very important figure in children’s advertising. His pose is taken as funny, which

is exactly the idea behind the calendar. New games are released every Friday. The reason behind the Friday release date is to have kids thinking about McDonald's on the weekends so they will be more likely to convince their parents to take them. Weekends are special and McDonald's constantly works to emphasize that point in their calendar.

Play Places

Play Places are currently in flux at McDonald's restaurants. Some are being eliminated because of land costs while others are being expanded to promote a more active lifestyle for kids. In this section, Play Places, in general, are being analyzed.

The discourse of Play Places mimics that of playgrounds. It is an area for children to play, explore, and have fun. The discourse of playgrounds is one of a kid-only zone. Parents are present but only on the fringes and are not able to fully experience the area. The design of the Play Places works to further enforce the idea of a kid-only zone. Usually, the Play Places have a maximum height restriction. The Play Places, like many other marketing objects, use color, by aligning bright colors to child preferences, in order to enhance its appeal to children.

The production and distribution of Play Places in McDonald's restaurants are designed to deliver the message that McDonald's restaurants are a place where children can go to have fun. The indoor Play Places hold an even greater appeal because, even in severe weather, they offer an area where parents can take their children to play. Of course, this also means increased visits to McDonald's restaurants. The restaurants as well as the Play Places are kid-friendly and designed specifically for children. By association, this makes all the products sold inside McDonald's appear to be primarily for children.

Conclusion

The analyzed objects are all different and are all utilized in different ways to achieve McDonald's marketing and advertising goals. The Happy Meal toy premiums work to create feelings of attachment to the Happy Meal. The attachment to the toy premium being offered lures children to be connected to McDonald's as well. Although the toys are actually just cheap plastic, they carry a more symbolic meaning and a representation of fun and of positive feelings of which McDonald's hopes to partake. Also the toys are the main theme of the rest of McDonald's advertising programs. Since they are already familiar to children through television shows, children's movies, or commercials, the toys already hold an emotional meaning for children.

The Happy Meal bag works to reinforce the toy premium as well as to give children something to read and do while they are eating their meal. The bag uses both images and texts to create a fun appeal for children. The games force children to actually know information about the characters being presented, thus subtly advertising the movie and/or story being presented which the toys cannot do alone. The toy premium is the obvious focus. In addition, the bag reinforces many of the ideas about childhood, gender, and fun that are prominent in our society. The bag also brings attention to the website.

The website uses all of its capabilities to reinforce the toy as well as further the association of the Happy Meal with fun and enjoyment. The website, like the Happy Meal and toy, allows interaction, but to a greater degree. The website creates a community of peers which is essential to children. The website is able to more fully use colors and give the toys much more meaning than the Happy Meal bag is able to. It is essentially the Happy Meal on the web. Because of its distribution into the home, it

serves to reinforce the images and association of McDonald's, thus providing free advertisements every time a child logs on.

Overall, all of the marketing strategies in the Happy Meal program work to create a rhetorical space that will be receptive to children. McDonald's works to create a space just for kids which advertisers believe is the best way to advertise to this young consumer group as Schor found in her research. The advertising is subtle in many ways; however, the overall theme of McDonald's is present in every article that has been examined. The Happy Meal ideas and feelings are particularly directed at kids whose positive rapport advertisers hope will continue through adulthood. Every aspect of the marketing and advertising done by McDonald's is meant to persuade kids to want McDonald's above all other food choices.

Raising Marketing Awareness in Parents

The aim of this project was to analyze fast food advertising to children and to implement this analysis into a public health communication piece for parents and children. The goal of the piece was to inform about the effects of advertising and encourage critical thinking about advertising.

Parents are a major part of children's lives; therefore, including parents as a target audience was a logical choice in regards to child education. Parents have great control over their children's exposure to marketing, advertising and commercialism. The ultimate objective of the public health piece was to share the information I found in my background and analysis sections with parents so that they are better informed about marketing aimed at children. The message was to raise awareness about marketing by the fast food industry to children so that parents would be better able to help their children navigate marketing hype and make healthy food choices.

As I pondered on how to present the information for my piece several issues arose which required decisions that shaped it. The first was that in child development research, there was not a clear age where a child became aware that the purpose of advertising was persuasive. Because of the inability to determine the age at which children would understand the purpose of advertising, I had no specific age group to whom to address my piece. Because of this debate, I chose to direct my piece at parents who would be in a better position to judge how much information their children would be able to understand. In addition, parents of children of all ages would benefit by a piece about marketing and advertising. Parents, as the audience of the piece, allow the assumption to

be made that all parents understand the intent of advertising and marketing. In addition, parents' knowledge about advertising will most likely affect their children in a positive way both now and into the future.

The second issue that became apparent was how to approach and discuss marketing and advertising. When exploring that issue, I did not want to make the assumption that all parents would know that advertising is just a part of marketing. Therefore, I decided that my piece would begin with what marketing and advertising are, as well as the ways in which they are used to persuade children to prefer specific products. I would focus on the means of marketing and advertising by the fast food industry since they are considered to be marketing an unhealthy product for children. The final part of my message was what parents can do to protect and educate their children about marketing.

I decided that the communication piece should be in newsletter format. The newsletter would most likely be available at doctors' offices, schools and other places where a parent's focus would be on his or her child. By having a newsletter form, parents would be able to read the articles that apply to them and their children. In addition, a newsletter allows a chance for visuals to be used to demonstrate the points being made as well as allow flexibility in presentation that makes reading easier.

When determining the rhetorical stance of the newsletter, I chose to focus on raising parental awareness and offering suggestions to help parents teach their children about consumer culture. Although parents are now spectators when it comes to child consumer culture, I felt that my topic focusing specifically on fast food was one where parents are becoming more authoritative and concerned. In my newsletter, I made the

assumption that this was a topic where parents would want to be actively involved and I geared all my arguments towards that assumption. Parents are becoming more involved in their children's diet, therefore stating that marketing and advertising influence diet includes parents in child consumerism. My rhetorical stance towards parents will hopefully show them the persuasiveness of marketing of which they may not presently be aware and show them how it is affecting their children. To view the Newsletter, see Appendix 1.

Final Thoughts

The fast food industry employs a variety of marketing strategies to entice children to purchase their particular products. The fast food industry hopes to create lifelong loyal consumers who will prefer their brand over others and exercise brand loyalty. However, fast food is considered to be one of the reasons for the growing concern over childhood nutrition such as obesity and deficiencies and its marketing to children is considered to be one of the contributing factors in the popularity of fast food with children.

Children are a primary demographic for companies and, through the years, the way they advertise to children has changed. Children are considered a strong consumer market controlling billions of dollars a year both directly and indirectly. Parents' role in child consumerism has changed through the years with a shift from the gatekeeper model to one of partnership in all consumer purchases. However, there is an ongoing debate as to whether children are able to understand the purpose of advertising and whether they should be targets of advertising at all. However, marketing to children is still prevalent in multiple industries.

Since the beginning, the fast food industry has always viewed children as a primary demographic. The creation of the Happy Meal in the 1970s was a major point for marketing to children. Today, McDonald's markets to children through their Happy Meal, toy premiums, website, Play Places, and a variety of other ways. Their marketing strategy for children is integral and combines a variety of elements to create the emotional appeal and images that speak the most to children.

Through my multimodal analysis of McDonald's Happy Meal program I was able to explore the various ways that McDonald's works to persuade children to purchase Happy Meals and to develop brand loyalty to McDonald's through the use of rhetorical space. The typeface, colors, illustrations all play a major part in the creation of the bag, toys, website, and downloads to make Happy Meals appear to be fun loving, kid friendly, and of course, to make McDonald's the preferred brand for children. My multimodal analysis illustrated how persuasion is not just words or slogans but every element utilized in a particular marketing object.

Through previous research as well as the analysis, it was found that emotional appeal and attachment is the primary method of persuasion for marketing to children. McDonald's uses the toy premiums to create a link between the children's favorite characters and the McDonald's brand. This type of persuasion is extremely subtle yet extremely effect in children.

As a culmination of my research and analysis on fast food marketing to children I created a health communication piece addressed towards parents to help raise marketing awareness and literacy. My communication piece is in the form of a newsletter meant to be distributed to parents at health centers and schools. Parental awareness is the first step in teaching children awareness about marketing.

Today the marketing of unhealthy foods to children is being scrutinized. It is my hope that my MQP shows how expansive that marketing is. By understanding the way that marketing works, parents will be better equipped to help their children understand marketing and advertising as well as to make healthy lifestyle choices. Hopefully, those choices will not be influenced by a clown in a red and yellow suit.

Works Cited

- Alexander, Alison, et al. "'We'll be Back in a Moment': A Content Analysis of Advertisements in Children's Television in the 1950's." Journal of Advertising XXVII.3 (1998)
- Brownell, Kelly D. "The Fast Food Industry Uses Various Tactics to Improve Its Image". Fast Food. Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2005. 50-63
- Brownell, Kelly D. and Horgen, Katherine B. Food Fight: The Inside Story of the Food Industry, America's Obesity Crisis, and what we can do about it. Chicago: Contemporary Books, 2004.
- Brand, Jeffrey E., and Greenberg, Bradley S. "Commercials in the Classroom: The Impact of Channel One Advertising." Journal of Advertising Research 34 Jan/Feb (1994)
- Cohen, Lizabeth. A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America. 1st ed. New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 2003.
- Collins, Tracy Brown. Introduction. Fast Food. Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2005. 7-9.
- Klein, Naomi. No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies. New York: Picador, 2002.
- Kline, Stephen. Out of the Garden: Toys, TV, and Children's Culture in the Age of Marketing. London; New York: Verso, 1993.
- Kress, Gunther and Van Leeuwen, Theo. Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication. London: Arnold, 2001.

Kunkel, Dale and Gantz, Walter "Children's Television Advertising in the Multichannel Environment" Journal of Communication 42.3 (1992).

McDonald's Corporation "McDonald's Happy Meal – A History of Fun" The McDonald's Electronic Press Kit. Retrieved January 26, 2007.
http://www.mcdepk.com/happybirthdayhappymeal/downloads/happy_meal_history.pdf

McNeal, James U. "Tapping the three kids' markets." American Demographics 36.6 (April 1998)

Nestle, Marion. Food Politics. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.

---. "The Fast Food Industry Intentionally Markets Unhealthy Food to Children." Fast Food. Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2005. 28-38

Oates, Caroline, Blades, Mark and Gunter Barrie. "Children and television advertising: When do they understand persuasive intent?" Journal of Consumer Behavior. 1.3 (2001) 238-245.

Rosenblum, Jonathan. "Fast Food Nation Interview: Eric Schlosser on Obesity, Kids, and Fast Food PR." Center for Media and Democracy. 17 November 2006. 24 January 2007. <http://www.prwatch.org/node/5488>.

Schlosser, Eric. Fast Food Nation: the Dark Side of the all-American Meal. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

Schor, Juliet. Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture. New York: Scribner, 2004.

Seiter, Ellen. Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993.

Sokol, Ronald J. "The Chronic Disease of Childhood Obesity: The Sleeping Giant has Awakened." The Journal of Pediatrics 136.6 (2000): 711-713. .

Story, M., and S. French. "Food Advertising and Marketing Directed at Children and Adolescents in the US." Int.J.Behav.Nutr.Phys.Act. 1.1 (2004)

Strasburger, Victor C., and Barbara J. Wilson. Children, Adolescents, and the Media. Thousand Oaks Calif.: Sage Publications, 2002.

Yale University: Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity. "Food Advertising and Children." 2005. Changing the World's Diet Through Science, Policy and Dialogue. 23 January 2007 <http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/default.aspx?id=37>