

Marketing Fast Food:

A Content Analysis of McDonald's Fast Food Commercials Targeted at Children



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Abstract:

The purpose of this thesis was to research how McDonald's portrays its food in commercials by using particular marketing strategies to try and influence a child's eating habit. A content analysis of 100 McDonald's commercials, aired in the United States between January 2015 and April 2016, was conducted, in which the commercials were divided into three main categories and seven subcategories. Since there is a link between children who watch many hours of television and children who become obese, fast-food commercials can influence a child's eating habit. Children have become an important market to focus on and therefore, many commercials are aimed at children. For children it is important that they enjoy the commercials and can recognize themselves and their family and/or friends in the commercial. The findings of the content analysis show that the following marketing strategies are most effective in McDonald's commercials when trying to influence a child's eating habit: (a) the emotional appeal to fun and the theme of uniqueness and novelty, (b) the presentation of the food, and (c) the environment in which the food is presented, so that children can identify with the people shown in the commercial.

Keywords: Obesity, McDonald's, advertising, marketing strategies, children, content analysis.

Introduction

I know that when I am going to a different country, I will experience many cultural differences, but one thing will be the same in most countries: the big golden letter M high up in the air means I am approaching a McDonald's restaurant. The golden arches are a symbol of McDonald's since they are incorporated in their logo and their advertising, and today everyone knows what this symbol means. Over the past decades, McDonald's has grown drastically and is now serving their food in 119 countries worldwide. It is one of the most popular fast food restaurants and McDonald's is advertising its products worldwide and on a daily basis. The commercials either try to influence children, adults, or both. The most important thing about a good commercial is that it will eventually influence the audience in such a way that the demand for the product that it shows will increase, and this is what McDonald's tries to do.

When children watch television they view an average of 21.3 commercials per hour, with each of these commercials lasting an average of 28.6 seconds. 47.8% of these commercials are food advertisements, meaning children will see over ten commercials about food per hour. 91% of the food advertisements present food that is high in fat, sugar, and/or

salt, from which we can conclude that 91% of the food advertisements advertise food that is actually bad for your health (Taras & Gage). Many Americans like to eat in restaurants and therefore, they spend nearly half of their food budget on food that is prepared outside of their home. They consume approximately one-third of their daily calories from outside sources and mostly from fast food (Young & Nestle 239). When children see commercials about fast food restaurants that they like, they will most likely try to influence or persuade their parents to go there more often.

Nowadays, children are using more technology than children of the same age used ten years ago. They do not only watch television, but most children will learn at a young age how to use a laptop, tablet and mobile phone. Also, children will come into contact with advertisements when they are on these mediums. However, even though technology has developed over the years and other mediums have grown in popularity, the number of commercials shown on television has increased. According to MarketShare's analysis, advertisements aired on television are still the most effective compared to other mediums. Therefore, in this paper, I will only be looking at McDonald's commercials that are aired on television.

In this thesis I will research how McDonald's portrays its products in television commercials in such a way that it influences children's eating habits. I will be looking at one hundred McDonald's commercials that were aired in the United States between January 2015 and April 2016. All the commercials are sixty seconds or shorter and were aired on different channels in the United States. I will study the language and images McDonald's uses to present its products in its commercials. I will divide the commercials into three different categories based on what is shown in the commercial and how it is shown. These categories are Happiness, Health, and the American Society. By using subcategories, I will be able to analyze specific marketing strategies and I will be using particular commercials as examples. My hypothesis to the research question "How does McDonald's portray its products in television commercials to try and influence children's eating habits?" is that it depicts their food in a happy environment, often using some type of the American family in their commercials, which makes the children like the restaurant better. Also, I expect that McDonald's will adapt their commercials to how children and young adolescents live in today's society. This means that the language used in the commercials could be slang or that they show children using gadgets that they are familiar with. This way, children will be able to identify with the child or young adult shown in the commercial. Because the children are able to recognize themselves in the commercials, they will be more likely to want to have the

same experience as the person in the commercial. This will influence their opinion about McDonald's, because they will want to eat there as well and therefore, it can influence their eating habits. Ultimately, I want to find out which marketing strategies used in the commercials make the food attractive to children.

In the opening chapter, I will first be looking at the problem of obesity in the United States. Childhood obesity is a very serious problem worldwide, but especially in the United States. Since normal restaurant food is already bringing up concerns about the effect on body weight and calories from these restaurants, regular fast-food consumption is especially associated with weight gain and obesity in both adults and children. When looking at what effect McDonald's commercials have on children, it is important to know the connection between obesity and fast food restaurants. If fast food restaurants appear to have a significant influence on childhood obesity, it is possible for the government to make laws about the fast food restaurants' food and commercials. Only then will it be possible to try and stop childhood obesity. In chapter two I will introduce the fast food restaurant McDonald's, since we will be analyzing its commercials later on in this thesis. I will research why marketers that make television commercials focus on children as consumers. A specialist in this field is James U. McNeal, a psychologist who has written the book 'Kids as Customers: A Handbook of Marketing to Children' in which he explains what makes children an interesting market to focus on. When we have found out why marketers focus on children as consumers, we will look at which marketing strategies are effective when targeting children in commercials. Dr. Gabrielle Jenkin, a sociologist who works at the University of Otago, Wellington, has written the article 'A Systematic Review of Persuasive Marketing Techniques to Promote Food to Children on Television' in which she introduces these strategies. By looking at the different strategies used by marketers to influence children, I can compare these strategies to the ones McDonald's uses in their commercials, which will eventually help me answer the research question. In the third chapter, I will analyze all the different McDonald's commercials by doing a content analysis. I will look at which of the elements mentioned in the previous chapters are visible or audible in the commercials and I will group them in three different categories. In the conclusion, I will show how the research I have done in the previous chapters have helped me answer the research question and come to a conclusion.

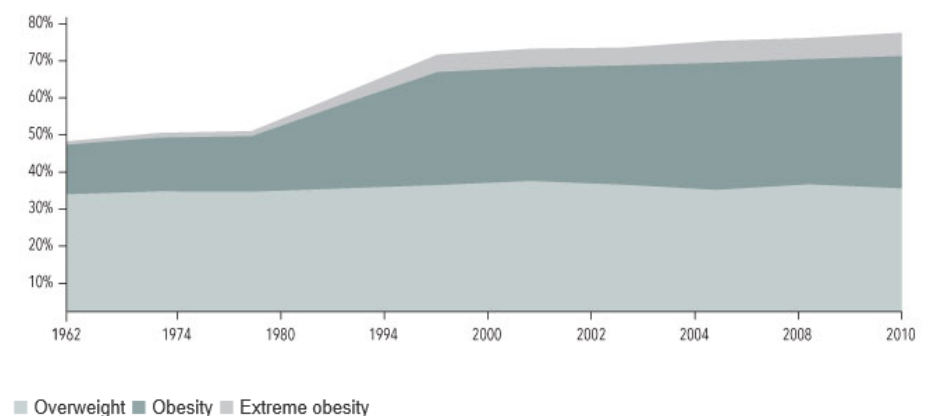
Chapter I: Obesity in the United States

In this chapter, I will briefly discuss the issue of obesity in the American society. I will explain what it means to be obese, how obesity has changed over time, what the causes and consequences are, and how this relates back to the general topic of this thesis: fast food advertising on television.

1.1 BMI

Obesity is a term that is often used in today's society. But when is a person considered obese? Generally, people can be divided into four categories based on their weight. An individual can be underweight, of healthy weight, overweight, or obese, depending on a person's body mass index (BMI). For adults aged twenty or older, the body mass index is used, since it usually correlates with the amount of fat in their body. The body mass index is a person's weight in kilograms divided by the square of height in meters. The body mass index was already used in the 1870s. An adult with a BMI of less than 18.5 is considered underweight and a person with a BMI between 18.5 and 24.9 is considered to have a healthy weight. A person is overweight when the BMI is greater than or equal to 25, while a person is considered to be obese when the BMI is greater than or equal to 30. When the BMI of a person is even higher than forty, this person is considered to be extremely obese. To see whether a child or adolescent between the ages of two and nineteen is obese, doctors look at whether the BMI is at or above a certain percentile. This has to do with the fact that children grow at different rates at different times, which makes it harder to tell if a child is overweight. BMI-charts for children therefore compare height and weight to other children of the same sex and age. When a BMI is at or above the 85th percentile, it means that the child or adolescent is overweight or obese. When the BMI is at or above the 95th percentile the child or adolescent is obese. This means that being overweight and being obese is not the same. Being overweight means that there is an excess amount of body weight that may come from muscles, bones, fat, and

Trends in Overweight and Obesity among Adults, United States, 1962–2010

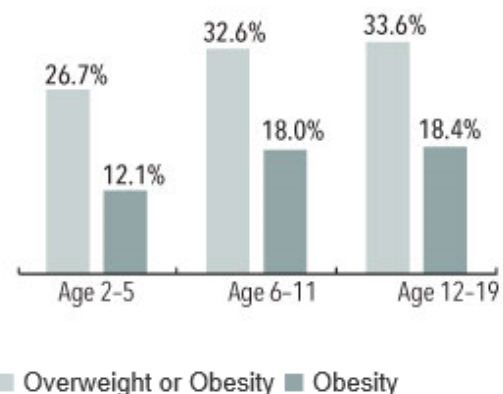


Graph 1: Trends in Overweight and Obesity among Adults, United States, 1962-2010. Source: United States Department of Health

water, while obesity means that there is an excess amount of body fat (United States Dept. of Health).

According to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, today, more than two-thirds of adults are either overweight or obese and more than one-third of adults are considered to be obese. This becomes clearly visible in graph 1. From graph 2 we can conclude that approximately one-third of children and adolescents between the ages of six and nineteen are considered overweight or obese and more than one in six children and adolescents aged six to nineteen are considered to be obese in the United States in 2009-2010 (United States Dept. of Health). In less than thirty years, the number of overweight children and adolescents living in the United States has more than doubled. During the 1960s, only four percent of children between the ages of six and eleven were overweight. This percentage had more than tripled by 1999, which meant that thirteen percent was overweight. The same goes for adolescents between the ages of twelve and nineteen: in the 1960s only five percent of adolescents were overweight, while this number rose to fourteen percent in 1999. In 2008, more than nine million youth between the ages of six and nineteen years old were considered to be overweight (Jordan & Robinson 119).

Percentage by Age Group, Ages 2-19



Graph 2: Trends in Overweight and Obesity among Children and Adolescents, United States, 1962-2010. Source: United States Department of Health

1.2 History of Obesity in the United States

Celebrating someone because they are fat; this is not something we would do in today's society. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century this was not uncommon, since there were not many people who were extremely fat. Doctors did not see the dangers of obesity yet and therefore, they did not worry about it much. In 1896, a nine-year-old boy from Pennsylvania became a celebrity in his town because he won the title of "Fattest Boy in the World". At the end of the nineteenth century, another child, Blanche Grey from Detroit (image 1), travelled the country to perform an act in shows where she was known as 'the fat girl'. They were both astonishing, but at the same time they were really popular and people liked their 'performances'.



Image 1: Blanche Grey, Age 17, 517 lbs.

Source: Travalanche, Wordpress

Also, these obese children and their parents would get interviewed by newspapers. Charley's parents told a newspaper that they were very proud of their son's size and his father would often tell Charley to walk up to people and let them take pictures with him.

Even though these fat children did not live a long life – Blanche died when she was only seventeen years old – not many people had medical concerns about fat children (Dawes 21). In fact, until the mid-1970s, Americans thought that children who were fatter than those in other countries showed national pride and satisfaction, since they were a confirmation of patriotic American ideals (Dawes 21). These ideals meant that the American way of life produced healthy, robust citizens. According to Charley's parents, the fact that their son was so fat only showed an abundance of good health. His body size could show others that he was living the American Dream. However, in the mid-twentieth century, obesity became something people started to worry about. The change from celebrating a fat child to worrying about its medical condition had to do with the fact that people realized that height and weight had medical significance. Also, the standards and norms for a child's body size and weight had changed (Dawes 22).

Up until the 20th century, women who were plump and voluptuous were considered to have the ideal body. In today's society, we would call these women curvy instead of plum or fat. Even though the ideal female body type changed after the 20th century, up until the 1960s, females with a curvy body were still considered very beautiful. One of the most well-known examples of a woman who was not very skinny is Marilyn Monroe. When we look at the ideal

body image standards of today's society – which is a rather skinny body – Marilyn Monroe's body would not have been called 'perfect'. Even though Marilyn Monroe remained a popular figure, for many the ideal body type changed in the 1960s. Being thin became the ideal body type for many and Audrey Hepburn was a woman who had the ideal body. During the 1990s, women became even thinner than the women of the 1960s and because it looked unhealthy this trend was called 'heroin-chic' (Bushak). The ideal body type today is very different from the ideal body type of the beginning of the twentieth century and together with the fact that people gained more knowledge about the health consequence of obesity, obesity has become a worrying issue in today's society.

Since there were already very fat children in the eighteenth century, it means that obesity has existed for many years and therefore, this condition has a long history. Today, the number of obese people is growing significantly, making it a serious problem in the American society. It is considered to be an epidemic, since it is a disease or condition with rapid spread, growth, or development that simultaneously affects many individuals in a community or a population (Morrill & Chinn 353). Childhood obesity has become an epidemic since quite recently. This has to do with the fact that the particular choices, decisions, and policies that shaped the American society in the second half of the twentieth century fostered an increase in childhood obesity. One big change that took place in the second half of the twentieth century was the arrival of color broadcasting. In 1941, the first television advertisement was aired in the United States and in the second half of the twentieth century many commercials were aired on television. Today, television advertising is a big business and millions of dollars are spent on making commercials. In chapter two, I will discuss television advertising more elaborately.

1.3 Causes and Consequences

There are many causes for obesity, such as genetics, culture, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, friends' behavior and neighborhood layout, but simply stated, obesity is caused by an energy imbalance. This means that the energy input is higher than the energy output over a long period of time. This is the result when a child consumes too many calories and does not get enough physical exercise (Chou, Rashad & Grossman 600). It is very important for children to have a healthy diet, exercise regularly and continue to live this lifestyle. When children start eating fast food, they are consuming food that is relatively high in calories. Often, these foods and beverages contain added sugars or it displaces more nutritious foods in a child's diet. Research has proven that fruits and vegetables, which is food that contains few calories and is bulky, reduce the risk of obesity and it helps children and adults lose weight, since the body's sense of fullness at meals is partly regulated by volume. Therefore, when a child eats fast food or food that is high in calories, the chances of becoming obese increase. When trying to maintain a healthy weight, it is important that a person does not have a lot of stress in their lives. Stress contributes to becoming overweight and obese, since chronic stress negatively affects blood pressure and cholesterol and it may lead to an increase in calorie intake. Also, stress can limit a person's motivation and ability to live a healthy lifestyle, which means working out regularly and eating food that is not too high in calories. Another cause for obesity is television. The amount of time a child spends watching television is associated with childhood obesity. The same is true for adults ("The Surgeon General's Vision").

All of this can cause obesity, but obesity itself can also cause many different things. Obesity brings along many health consequences and it is especially alarming when children are obese. Obesity can cause an increased risk of chronic disease, disability, decreased productivity and quality of life, and even death. Individuals who are obese or overweight have an increased risk of a variety of medical conditions, including type II diabetes, coronary artery disease, pregnancy complications, and psychological disorders, such as depression and low self-esteem (Morrill & Chinn 355). Type II diabetes is a serious condition, since it increases, among others, the risk of a stroke, kidney diseases, and blindness. More than seventy-five percent of children and adolescents who have type II diabetes are obese. This means that obesity can cause many different health problems, especially in a child's life, since the effects childhood obesity have can carry on into adulthood ("The Surgeon General's Vision").

1.4 Television and Obesity

Research has been done about the connection between watching television and obesity among children. Often, when children are watching television there is no energy output, but there is energy input. While watching television, the child is very unlikely to be active, but it is very likely to eat. Several studies have shown that elementary school children consume seventeen to thirty-five percent of their total daily calories while they are watching television (Jordan & Robinson 122). According to national surveys conducted among families in the United States, children start watching television regularly at a very young age. Seventy-five percent of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers watch television for more than one hour per day.

Approximately a third live in households where the television is switched on most, if not all of the time and an additional thirty percent live in households where the television is on during dinner. The AAP, which is the American Academy of Pediatrics, recommends that children of two years and older spend less than two hours per day with screen media. In reality, this is not the case for most children (Jordan & Robinson 120). Cross-sectional surveys have shown that when the hours of screen time rise, so too does the body fat percentage and the risk of becoming overweight. Prospective studies indicate that childhood television viewing is a risk factor when it comes to gaining weight and becoming obese (Jordan & Robinson 121). According to research, children who are in kindergarten that watch more than one hour of television per day are more likely to become overweight or obese than children who watch significantly less television per day. When a child watches more than one hour of television per day, they will be thirty-nine percent more likely to become overweight and eighty-six percent more likely to become obese by the time they are in first grade. These data were presented in 2015 at the Pediatric Academic Societies annual meeting in San Diego (Olsen).

But besides the fact that children are consuming calories while watching television and are not being active, there is also the marketing aspect of television commercials that might have an influence on obesity among children. In 2006, the Institute of Medicine in the United States reported “Food and beverage marketing influences the preferences and purchase requests of children, influences consumption at least in the short term, is a likely contributor to less healthful diets, and may contribute to negative diet-related health outcomes and risks” (quoted in Jordan & Robinson 122). Many people are in disagreement about whether or not fast food advertising causes obesity among children. Health care institutions say that the commercials negatively affect a child’s body weight. There are several studies that show that when children are watching television, especially with food commercials, they are primed to

eat more. One study even showed that when a child watches television programs that also show food commercials, the child eats forty-five percent more Goldfish crackers compared to children watching the same program but without the food commercials (Soechtig 1.03). However, fast food businesses say this is not the case and McDonald's Corporation responded to the claims of childhood advertising negatively influencing children. The spokesperson of McDonald's, Shelley Rosen, said "Ronald McDonald never sells to children. He informs and inspires through magic and fun" (Soechtig 1.04). This is a whole other interpretation of what Ronald McDonald does than that of health care officials. Even though it is hard to prove that the commercials actually affect a child's body weight, the main reason why a company advertises its products is to increase the demand for its products. This does not necessarily have to mean that people consume more food than usual while watching television, but there is a high chance that children will eventually increase sales of the product shown on television. A fast-food restaurant would not choose to advertise its products if it did not increase demand and therefore sales. Since the effect of television advertising on childhood obesity deals with the interplay of the characteristics of children, the attitudes their parents have, and environmental setting, it is a very complex issue (Chou, Rashad & Grossman 602). I will discuss this topic in more detail in chapter two.

Chapter 2: Fast Food Commercials on Television

As we have learned, watching television likely stimulates obesity among children and adults in the United States. In this chapter I will introduce the fast food restaurant McDonald's, since we will be focusing on McDonald's commercials in particular in the next chapter. We will look at how often children come into contact with food commercials in the United States and I will compare this to children in other countries. After having explained why children are often the target audience in commercials, I will look at which persuasive marketing strategies are most effective to use in commercials that target children.

2.1 McDonald's

"I'm Lovin' It". It is probably one of the most well-known advertising slogans in the world; most people will be able to link this sentence to McDonald's. McDonald's is one of the most popular fast-food chains and one of the top franchises in the world. It is a restaurant that has been selling their burgers for many years. When Dick and Mac McDonald opened their first restaurant in California in 1940, it was called McDonald's Bar-B-Q restaurant and in 1948, McDonald's was officially founded. The menu consisted of only nine items, one of which was the classic hamburger that sold for only fifteen cents. McDonald's came up with their French fries in 1949, when the French fries replaced potato chips. In 1955, McDonald's opened its second restaurant at the other side of the country; Des Plaines, Illinois. Only ten years later the number of McDonald's restaurants in the country had grown from two to over seven hundred. Having become a very popular restaurant chain in the United States, McDonald's started advertising its products. Its first national television commercial was aired in 1966 ("About McDonald's").

But before television became the primary medium for mass promotion and the McDonald's slogan became famous, the original McDonald's drive-in hamburger restaurant had already become known for its yellow arches and red and white tile stripes. The image of the arches was used as a commercial tool, since other forms of advertising were not yet very common (Hess 60). The first golden-arch stand was built in Phoenix, Arizona in 1953 but was demolished. In 1953, the second golden-arch stand was built; this time in Downey, California. This one is still in its original condition today. Between 1953 and the 1970s, the yellow arches became prominent fixtures on the American roadside landscape, which imprinted the image of fast-food drive-in architecture in the popular consciousness.

Since the restaurant was doing so well in the United States, the franchise decided to go international in 1967, opening its first international restaurants in Canada and Puerto Rico.

Today, McDonald's has over 33,500 restaurants in 119 countries around the world, and this number is still growing. The United States is the largest market in the McDonald's System in terms of restaurants, revenues, and operating income; of the roughly 36,000 McDonald's restaurants in the world, 14,000 are in the United States. Areas where McDonald's is expanding are mainly located in Asia and Europe. One country where McDonald's has a lot of potential in expanding the restaurant chain is the Netherlands, together with China, Korea, Russia, Poland, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland (AboutMcDonald's). The restaurant is becoming more popular every day, and even when there was an economic crisis in the United States and the financial industry and consumer goods were selling less products than before, McDonald's was selling more and more each month.

In 2004, the documentary *Super Size Me* by Morgan Spurlock came out which portrayed McDonald's as the cause of obesity in the United States. The documentary did not have many negative effects on the restaurant, but McDonald's did stop selling its supersize portions only a few weeks after the documentary's debut. But still after this documentary came out, the fast-food chain restaurant was doing great business. Since 2004, the company has quadrupled its share price. McDonald's has seen its stock rise with more than 500 percent in the past decade. This has to do with the fact that the fast-food restaurant listens to its customers. When especially mothers called for salads, snack wraps, oatmeal, and apples, McDonald's listened and put them on the menu (Kaufman 52).

Many Americans like to eat in restaurants and, therefore, spend nearly half of their food budget on food that is prepared outside of their home. The number of calories consumed away from home has increased over the past few decades. Between 1977 and 1978 only eighteen percent of an American's daily calories were from outside sources. This number had grown to twenty-seven percent by 1987 and 1988. Today, Americans consume approximately one-third of their daily calories from outside sources and mostly from fast food (Anderson & Butcher 31). As we have seen, many people worry about the effect normal restaurant food has on body weight and especially regular fast-food consumption is associated with adults and children gaining weight and becoming obese (Young & Nestle 239). Fast-food restaurants such as McDonald's are known for their large portions of food. Compared to Europe, the largest size of French fries and soda at McDonald's restaurants in the United States contain approximately 100 calories more than the largest size of French fries and soda offered in countries in Europe, such as Sweden. McDonald's is not the only one who serves very large portions. Burger King in the United States also serves portions of French fries that are nearly

2 oz. larger and contain 250 calories more than the largest size offered in the United Kingdom (Young & Nestle 245).

Since the large portions at the fast food restaurants are related to a growing number of obese people living in the United States, the United States Surgeon General's 'Call to Action' in 2001 forced fast food restaurants to control their portions. McDonald's was one of the restaurants that made a change in their portion sizes (Young & Nestle 239). Even though McDonald's has made changes to reduce the portion size over the past decade, its current portions are still much larger than they were when McDonald's first introduced the items. For example, today's largest portion of French fries weighs 6.0 oz. and is 250% larger than the 2.4 oz. size in 1955 (Young & Nestle 244).

2.2 Television Advertising

Food advertising is not something new; McDonald's aired its first commercial in 1966. Since the 1950s, children's television programming has been used for marketing food products, such as sweetened breakfast cereals and candy. According to analyses that were done during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, half or more of all commercials during children's programming show food and beverage products, especially food that is ready-to-eat, sweetened breakfast cereals, candy, sweetened drinks, and quick service restaurants, which are fast-food restaurants. A more recent analysis done by Gantz et al. shows that in 2005 half of all the advertising time is set aside for food. Also, food turned out to be the largest product category for advertisements on children's shows (Page & Brewster 184). Besides the fact that more than half of the commercials are about food, also the money spent on making these commercials has grown. In 1995, 9.8 billion dollars were spent on making commercials, while in 1999, 11.6 billion dollars were spent. This means that there was an increase of a little less than twenty percent (Anderson & Butcher 30).

In the United States, children are exposed to over 40,000 advertisements each year. Children in Great Britain see the most advertisements in Europe, namely 18,000 per year, which is a significantly lower number than the United States (Andronikidis 301). The number of commercials children see per year has grown over the past few decades and one reason for this is that commercials have grown shorter over time. This means that the average length of a commercial has become shorter and, therefore, children are exposed to more commercials (Anderson & Butcher 30). Child advocates, government regulators, and parents worry about the effect that advertising has on children's well-being. Therefore, there is a debate in many countries about whether or not advertisements that target children should be permitted.

Several industrialized countries, such as Sweden, Norway, and Finland have banned commercial sponsorship of children's programs. Besides that, Sweden also prohibited television advertising that targets children under the age of twelve (Chou, Rashad & Grossman 600). A reason why television advertising that targets children should not be permitted is because children do not always understand the persuasive role of advertising. Children tend to absorb information they see and hear without filtering it. As a result, advertisements can affect children, even when they are not the target (Andronikidis 300).

2.3 How Marketing Strategies Influence Children's Behavior

Over the past few decades, retailers have become more children-oriented. In 1984, approximately one-third of the retailers were children-oriented, while in 1991 this number had grown to two-thirds. Companies have started to realize that children represent market opportunities (McNeal 115). Even though it is complicated for marketers to come up with a commercial that actually influences a child's purchasing habit, the money and time put into this commercials will eventually be worthwhile (McNeal 85). But why would companies and marketers focus on children as consumers? The reason why so many commercials are aimed at children is because they are an important group of consumers for multiple reasons. First of all, children are three markets in one. They spend over six billion dollars annually of their own money at retail outlets, they directly influence almost 132 billion dollars in household purchases from retailers, and when they grow up they will eventually buy some of the products that retailers sell. Taken together, children save over 2.5 billion dollars annually of their income, so they might spend this money later on in their lives. Children buy a relatively wide range of products and services. They basically spend their money on whatever they think they need, which makes their spending discretionary. Children also make purchases in a wide range of retail outlets. Aside from the fact that children spend their own money, they also still often go shopping with their parents. This all makes it important for marketers to make commercials that are aimed at children (McNeal 108).

It is very important that the whole commercial speaks to children. First of all, it is important that the advertisement speaks the children's language if the advertisement wants to influence children's buying behavior. Besides that, it is also important that it appeals to the children's needs. When this is the case, there are multiple reactions children can have when watching a commercial. The advertisement can influence a child's attitude and behavior towards a product. After watching a commercial, a child will develop an attitude/opinion about every aspect of the advertisement; the product, the brand, the producers and the seller.

The behavior results from the complex of attitudes. The behavior of a child can take three forms. First of all, children can have a behavior towards or an opinion about a product. This means that the child will look for it or at it and that the child compares it with other brands, which can increase the chance of the child buying the product. The second form of behavior is that toward the parents. Children will try to influence their parents in such a way that they will either buy the advertised product or provide necessary funds. Last, there can be peer influence, which can influence the behavior of the child towards the product (McNeal145/146). When a child tries to influence their parents, the parents' behavior can result in four different reactions; purchasing the product, providing a fund to the children, negotiations with the children, or refusal. The company that comes up with a commercial aimed at children hopes that the children are successful in influencing their parents to buy the product, provide funds, or negotiate with them so that they will eventually give in to the children. This means that advertisements can cause children to inform their parents about the product and convince them to buy it. The company that advertises its products hopes that because of these three behaviors, parents will eventually buy the product and will form a favorable attitude towards it (McNeal146).

The main goal of an advertisement is to inform and persuade an audience and to compete with other companies. When making an advertisement aimed at children, many things can go wrong in the communication process. Marketers attempt to inform and persuade children as members of three markets. As a primary market, the marketer wants to see action, meaning purchases or store visits from children. It is important for marketers that children get the intended message from a commercial and that they pass this message on to their parents. This way, the marketer hopes that a child can persuade its parents to buy the product. Also, since children are an important market in the future, marketers want children to remember, like and favor the advertised product, which might eventually lead to children buying the product. To make sure that the children receive the message the marketers want them to get, it is important that there are no problems in the communication process (McNeal 148). To make sure that the advertisement is effective, marketers often stick to the three P-tests, which are the pro-test, the parent-test, and the pilot-test. The pro-test means that a person who is trained and experienced in understanding children examines the advertisement. Since there are many marketers who do not understand how children think, this is an important step in avoiding miscommunication. The parent-test is a test where a group of parents give their objective, parental opinion about the advertising strategy and tactics used. The pilot-test is a very small study of the effectiveness of an advertisement among the appropriate group of children. The

purpose of these three tests combined is to make advertisement targeting children as publicly – which means attracting many different children – and as effective as possible (McNeal 155).

2.4 Persuasive Marketing Techniques Used to Promote Food to Children

Multiple studies have been done about which marketing strategies are the most persuasive marketing techniques used to promote food to children. According to thirty-eight studies, the most effective techniques are premium offers, the use of promotional characters, nutritional and health claims, the theme of ‘taste’, and the emotional appeal to ‘fun’ (Jenkin et al. 283). What is meant by premium offers is that consumers will get an extra product with their purchase. This could be a free gift, such as a toy, or there could be a competition, a discount, or vouchers. Contests or sweepstakes that target children often partner up with movies or food. McDonald’s is an example that uses these strategies in their commercials (Jenkin et al. 289).

Often, high-calorie and low-nutrient food is paired with popular media characters or programs. Examples of popular media characters that are used by McDonald’s are Shrek and the Minions. It is not necessarily the case that those spokes-characters influence children’s choices when they are used in commercials. However, it is the case that two- to five-year-olds associate a spokes-character to the product that is shown in the same commercial, even when this character is shown outside of the commercial. This is one reason why companies use these characters, because children are attracted to them. When a child watches a movie that has a spokes-character in it that they have previously seen in a food commercial, there is a high chance that the child will think about the product shown in the previously seen commercial. This means that a program or character is associated with a particular brand. Therefore, the program or character itself becomes an advertisement for the food (Linn & Novosat 137/138). This technique of using popular media characters is designed to lure children into selecting the foods that are associating with their favorite character or television program. Also, they continually remind children of brands throughout the day (Linn & Novosat 137).

Even though health and nutrition claims are usually used as a persuasive marketing strategy aimed at adults, children are also receptive to and influenced by the information about health and nutrition. The amount of attention giving to these claims in the commercials range from only briefly mentioning it in a few words to giving detailed information about it. Besides the health and nutrition claims, appeals to taste or flavor are also a recurring persuasive technique used in food advertisement aimed at children. Another theme that has

been recurring in commercials for years is 'fun'. Fun could refer to non-verbal displays of fun and happiness, such as smiling or playing, but sometimes commercials actually use the word 'fun', 'happiness' or 'pleasure' (Jenkin et al. 290). An example of the theme of fun in McDonald's commercials is their clown Ronald McDonald.

Besides these most common persuasive marketing strategies there are also other persuasive techniques that are used in food advertisements aimed at children. The use of animation is common when a commercial tries to influence children. When looking at fast food commercials, themes that are often used are uniqueness or novelty. When something is new or unique, for example because it is only there for a limited amount of time, a child could be more willing to buy the product. Also, price can play a central role in commercials. A commercial could use terms as 'value for money' to try to persuade the audience. Aside from these techniques, children, but also adults, often like it when there is action, adventure, and fantasy showed in commercials (Jenkin et al. 290).

Another important aspect about a commercial is its duration. Most commercials are approximately thirty seconds long. Research has been done about the most effective length of television commercials, and most studies came to the same conclusion (Young). Commercials that are only fifteen seconds long are too short, which has to do with how the human brain works. Four types of memory are involved when a viewer needs to memorize the commercial, recall it and retain it. These four are knowledge, emotion, action, and an image tag. When a commercial is only fifteen seconds long, it becomes very difficult to put all four types of memory in the commercial. However, thirty second commercials appear to have the perfect length to create a good balance between the types of memory and conveying the intended message. When a commercial is longer than thirty seconds, the commercial also appears to be less effective. Approximately after forty-five seconds, a viewer will tune out, which means the information of the commercial will not be memorized by the viewer. Thirty seconds turns out to be enough time for a marketer to make an emotional and intellectual connection with the viewer (Young).

Chapter 3: Content Analysis

In this chapter, I will analyze one hundred McDonald's commercials to see which marketing strategies McDonald's uses that influence children's eating habits. First I will explain the methodology and after that I will go deeper into the marketing strategies. I have divided the marketing strategies into three categories: Happiness, Health, and the American Society. Each of these three categories consist of subcategories to explain what is meant by the categories and how McDonald's applies the marketing strategies in its commercials.

3.1 Methodology

The aim of this content analysis is to research how McDonald's tries to reach children with its fast food commercials. We already know which marketing strategies are most often used to reach children and in this analysis we will find out how McDonald's uses these strategies to reach as much children as possible and to influence their eating habits. McDonald's is one of the most popular fast food restaurants in the world and has a lot of money to spend on advertising its products worldwide. In 2014, McDonald's spent 142 billion dollars on advertising its products in the United States ("McDonald's Corporation advertising spending"). By marketing fast food, McDonald's tries to establish a prominent place in the minds of (potential) customers, which is called branding. It is important to look at the marketing strategies used in the commercials to find out why children in the United States like to dine at McDonald's restaurants. Because of these reasons, this fast food restaurant was chosen as the main focus of this study.

The sample used in this analysis needed to be extensive and representative for most McDonald's commercials that are watched by children in the United States. It was important that the McDonald's commercials were not repetitive and therefore, data was collected from January 2015 until April 2016. In total, a number of one hundred McDonald's commercials were used in this analysis. Since the commercials were going to be compared to each other, it was important that the commercials were approximately all the same length. Therefore, the duration of all the commercials are sixty seconds or shorter. Seventy-one percent of the commercials are thirty seconds long, which is the perfect duration for a commercial according to the previous chapter. The other twenty-nine percent is either fifteen, forty-five or sixty seconds long. The commercials were found either on www.youtube.com or on <http://www.ispot.tv/brands/AoR/mcdonalds>. Ispot is a website that shows most, if not all, McDonald's commercials that have been aired in the past few years. It also mentions the duration of the commercial, it gives a brief summary of it, and it mentions the last time when

and on which channel the commercial was aired in the United States. In particular this last one was important when selecting commercials. It was of great significance that most commercials were aired on channels that many children watch. Based on the information given on Ispot, twenty-seven percent of the commercials were aired on the children's television channel Nickelodeon, and twenty-two percent on big channels such as ESPN, ABC, CBS, and NBC. Twenty percent of the commercials did not have data on which channel it was last aired. The remaining thirty-one percent of the commercial were last aired on smaller channels that children would watch as well.

During the coding process, all the commercials were first watched in their entirety. Since Ispot gives summaries of the advertisements, much information about the commercial was already transcribed. However, before the analysis could be done properly, it was important that the commercials were watched multiple times so that the information that was transcribed was correct. Based on the commercials that were watched for this analysis and the knowledge gained from the previous chapters, three categories were created that described the marketing strategies used in McDonald's commercials. When coding the content, it was of great significance that the contents in the selected categories were as similar to each other as possible and that they differed as much as possible from other content in the other categories. The three main categories were divided into subcategories as follows:

- (i) Happiness
 - (a) Happy Meal
 - (b) Premium Offers
 - (c) Imagination
- (ii) Health
 - (a) Health Claims
 - (b) Food Porn
- (iii) American Society
 - (a) Family Structure
 - (b) Social Media

Based on what was shown and said in the commercials and the marketing strategies mentioned in chapter two, these three main categories and seven subcategories best described the areas I wanted to focus on. By doing a content analysis, I want to find the answer to the question: How does McDonald's portray its products in television commercials to try and influence children's eating habits?

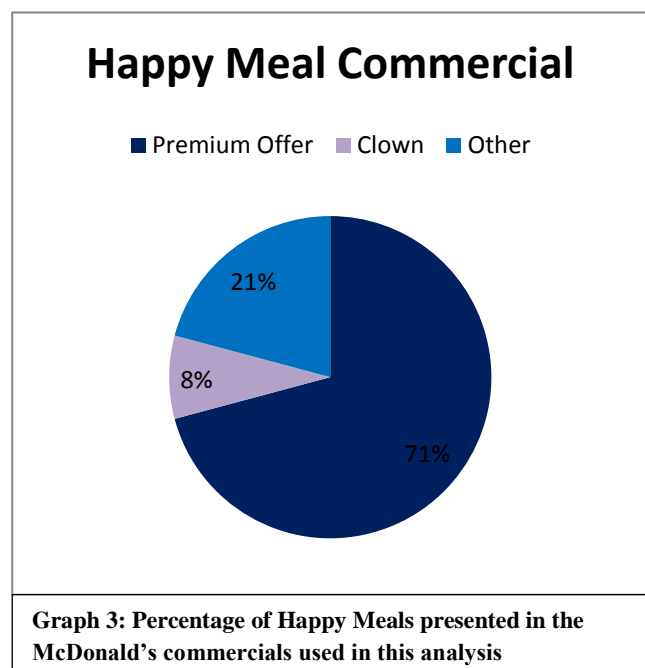
3.2 “Happiness”

As mentioned in chapter two, the theme of ‘fun’ has been used as a marketing strategy in commercials that target children. McDonald’s is a company that strategically uses this theme, for example by selling their Happy Meals, including premium offers, and using humor and the theme of imagination in their commercials.

Happy Meal

Most, if not all children in the United States have had it for dinner at least once in their life: the Happy Meal box at McDonald’s. Back in 1977, the regional advertising manager of the McDonald’s restaurant in St. Louis came up with a marketing plan to attract more children. After only two years, McDonald’s sold its first Happy Meal in the United States. When ordering this meal, the child would get a standard hamburger or cheeseburger, French fries, cookies, a soft drink and a free toy. These toys were very different from the toys children would get today: a few decades ago children would either get a McDoodler stencil, a McWrist wallet, an ID bracelet, a puzzle lock, a spinning top or a McDonaldland-character eraser (“AboutMcDonald’s”).

Today, the Happy Meal box is very popular and therefore, McDonald’s advertises this product in many commercials. According to this analysis, twenty-four percent of the commercials showed the Happy Meal box. Seventy-one percent of the commercials that show the Happy Meal box also introduce a premium offer, which is in ninety-four percent of these commercials a toy that a child will receive with their food once they order a Happy Meal. In one hundred percent of the commercials that introduce these new toys in the Happy Meal, children seem to be having a good time, laughing, and playing with the toy. It is important that the children in the commercial seem to like the toy, because this will make the viewer want to have it as well.



Eight percent of the Happy Meal commercials also show the Ronald McDonald clown and the remaining twenty-one percent will primarily introduce the Happy Meal box itself. Clowns are always optimistic and are known for trying to make children smile and that is exactly what Ronald McDonald does. For this reason, Ronald McDonald is used in the McDonald's commercials. In one



Image 2: Ronald McDonald (left)

hundred percent of the commercials in which Ronald McDonald is shown, the children seem much happier after they have met the clown, since they are always smiling afterwards. Children are not only smiling because they have met the clown, but also because Ronald McDonald is often shown together with the Happy Meal box, which also contributes to the fact that children seem happier after they have met the clown.

Since children are sensitive to the emotional appeal to 'fun', McDonald's introduces items such as the Happy Meal box, premium offers, and the Ronald McDonald clown, because McDonald's knows children will enjoy this. Children will want to have the Happy Meal box and premium offer they see in the commercial and because Ronald McDonald presents the food in a fun and likeable way to children, they will be influenced by it and therefore, there is a high chance that they will visit a McDonald's restaurant. Thirteen commercials that introduce the Happy Meal box also show a toy that children will recognize from a movie, a television show, or a game. This means that children already have an emotional bond with those characters. When McDonald's uses these characters, McDonald's hopes that children will get the same emotional bond with their brand as with the characters. Including the toys and Ronald McDonald in the commercials is therefore a way of branding: McDonald's tries to make sure that children will remember the brand and have positive emotions towards it. For these reasons, the use of these characters in the Happy Meal box and the commercials will influence a child's eating habit, because children will want to dine at a McDonald's restaurant.

Premium Offers

The toy children receive with their Happy Meal is one example of a premium offer. To make sure the toy looks and sounds appealing to children who watch the commercial, McDonald's uses particular words that are related to fun or having a good time. For example, in the Hot Wheels commercials, the voice-over says "Now your Happy Meal can shift into fun with the

DC superheroes hotwheels car”. This means that the Hot Wheels will make sure the child is going to have a good time. Another example is the commercial about the Shopkins in the Happy Meal. “Cute and exclusive shopkis. You can get a bag or a basket with two shopkins inside and one is a surprise. A colorful choice to go with the goodness of gogurt strawberry yoghurt. Only at mcdonalds”. Exclusive means that the Shopkins will only be available at McDonald’s and nowhere else, which is something children can be sensitive to. The fact that one is a surprise is also a way to try to make children go to McDonald’s. In general, people like surprises, which makes this deal appealing to them (Malick). Also the fact that it is a colorful choice might attract more children, since bright colors are associated with positive and happy emotions (D’Andrade & Egan 49).

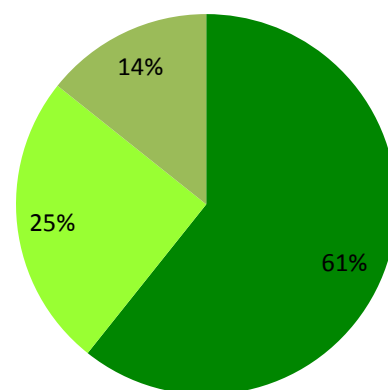
This means that the toys and happy meal will also trigger happy emotions, which can stimulate children to buy food at McDonald’s.

Besides the toy that children receive with their Happy Meal, McDonald’s also has other premium offers. Examples of these are the Game Time Gold sweepstake and the Money Monopoly game. According to this analysis, twenty-eight percent of all the commercials used in this analysis introduced a premium offer. Sixty-one percent of those commercials introduced a premium offer in combination with the Happy Meal box, while twenty-five percent of the commercials were about the Game Time

Gold sweepstake and fourteen percent about the Money Monopoly game. According to the previous chapter, sweepstakes and contests often partner up with either a movie or famous person, so it comes as no surprise that McDonald’s does the same thing. The commercials about the Game Time Gold sweepstake all contained famous people. In the commercial ‘Newfound Loyalties’, we see former NFL coach Mike Ditka and wide receiver Jerry Rice playing the McDonald’s Game Time Gold sweepstake. Just like the movie characters that are often put in the Happy Meal box as a toy, children can also already have an emotional bond with the famous people who introduce the food in the commercial. For this reason, these people can influence children to visit a McDonald’s restaurant. Football is a very popular

Premium Offers

- Happy Meal Deal
- Game Time Gold Sweepstake
- Money Monopoly



Graph 4: Percentage of premium offers presented in the McDonald’s commercials used in this analysis

sport in the United States and therefore, these types of commercials can influence both adults and children.

The other contest that was very popular was Money Monopoly at McDonald's. Monopoly is a game that many people like to play and McDonald's used this to their advantage. By playing the Money Monopoly game people could win prizes ranging from free food to cash. Children like to play games, so this commercial can be appealing to children, but also to adults, since everyone likes winning prizes. Also, when parents do not want to take their children to McDonald's, the child can use the game to influence their parents' opinion. The commercial uses words that are appealing to many, such as 'free food' and 'cash'. The commercials explicitly tell the viewer that they have a one in four chance of winning a prize. They also compare the chance of winning the Money Monopoly game to other things, such as the odds of scoring a hole in one while playing golf, which is one in twelve thousand. This almost makes it look like everyone is going to be a winner at the Money Monopoly game at McDonald's. Comparing the winning chance at McDonald's to other things is a strategic marketing strategy and it will especially work for children who do not yet understand the persuasive role of television commercials.

The Super Bowl is a famous event in the United States and millions of Americans watch the game. The commercials about the NFL and the Game Time Gold sweepstake were primarily aired the weeks before the Super Bowl. Children who are fan of the famous people in the commercials are more likely to go to McDonald's when they see that their idol is going there as well. Both the Game Time Gold sweepstake and the Money Monopoly game are about winning prizes and children like to play games. Therefore, they will encourage their parents to take them to McDonald's.

Imagination

McDonald's tries to come up with new ideas that will make children continue to watch their commercials. One of these new ways of advertising its products is by making the food come to life. In the commercial 'An Avocado's Journey', a little avocado tells the viewer about the journey he made before ending up on a sandwich at McDonald's. Normally, commercials only show real people or Happy Meal boxes that have come to life. By showing the journey an avocado has made in his life to eventually end up in the place he is supposed to be, makes it fun for children to watch the commercial. What happens in the commercial is something that would never happen in real life, but as mentioned in chapter two, children are sensitive to products or commercials that are unique. Children have a lot of imagination and therefore,

they can identify with objects that are not human. Also, they like to read and hear stories and this commercial tells a story about an avocado. For this reason, McDonald's advertises its product in commercial where the viewer will need to have some imagination.

Another example of a commercial that needs imagination is 'Comedy Central: History 101'. We see children sitting in a futuristic looking classroom wearing clothes and using technology that we could only imagine wearing and using in the future. This commercial uses a smart balance between imagination and humor. The commercial is about the fact that McDonald's has introduced its All Day Breakfast Menu. The teacher wishes the students a Happy All Day Day, and the class breaks out in a cheer. Just like the 'An Avocado's Journey' commercial, this commercial also needs imagination because what we see is not reality. The fantasy and imagination aspect and humor used in this commercial will attract children's attention, which is what marketers want.

In total, eleven percent of the commercials need imagination from children. In eight of these commercials the Happy Meal boxes come to life. In these commercials, the Happy Meal boxes introduce the food, which is different from the way in which the food normally is presented: by a voiceover or by people who play in the commercial. However, a Happy Meal box that comes to life and introduces particular items will attract a child's attention. It makes it more fun for them to watch. The fact that children are attracted to commercials with the theme of uniqueness and novelty make the above mentioned commercials appealing to children and therefore, these commercials can influence a child's way of thinking about McDonald's and their eating habits.



3.3 Health

McDonald's is a fast food restaurant, which means that it serves food that is generally high in calories and not very healthy. When adults started to worry about McDonald's serving food that was not healthy enough for their children, McDonald's made it a priority to put healthy options on the menu, together with emphasizing what their food is made of. Also, McDonald's tries to portray its food in their commercials in such a way that it becomes hard for people to resist. This is called Food Porn.

Health Claims

Since McDonald's wanted to let people know that their food is healthy, it has put some healthy food choices on their menu. A child can now choose to get either McNuggets, a hamburger or a cheeseburger, as well as apple slices, carrot sticks, oranges/tangerines, yogurt, all types of milk and apple juice in their Happy Meal. These healthy options are clearly advertised in the television commercials. Twenty-four percent of the commercials used in this analysis made one or more health claims. Especially a healthy option is introduced often. Ten percent of the commercials make a health claim about the tangerines – also referred to as 'cuties'. The voiceover would mention that they are 'freshly' grown and because it is fruit, ordering cuties is a healthy option.

The other fourteen percent of the commercials either introduce a new healthy option or explain what the product is made of. An example of this is telling the viewer that the burgers are made of '100% beef'. Also, McDonald's has made commercials about its suppliers. This analysis contained two commercials about a fish supplier, one about an apple supplier, and one about a lettuce supplier. In these commercials, McDonald's gives information about where these products are grown and it always mentions that the products are of great quality, since the lettuce and apples are grown at places that have the right soil, right elevation, and right rainfall. Because of this, McDonald's suggests that they always have fresh and delicious products, which is emphasized in these commercials.

The new yoghurt in the Happy Meal box is supposed to be a healthy option for children. The Go-GURT is a low fat strawberry yoghurt that is only sold at McDonald's, making it an exclusive item as well. The Go-GURT contains only fifty calories and the commercials clearly show that the yogurt contains twenty-five percent less sugar than other leading low fat yogurts for kids. According to the McDonald's' website, the yogurt is also made with natural flavors and it is a good source of calcium and vitamin D. This all makes it a healthy option for children to choose in their Happy Meal. By introducing the yogurt in a fun

way – by letting Happy Meal boxes introduce them – McDonald’s combines the emotional appeal to ‘fun’ with health claims. The same is true for the cuties that are introduced in the commercials. Also, because children hear, see and learn about the healthy options at McDonald’s by watching the commercials, they can use these options as a counter argument when their parents tell them they cannot go to McDonald’s because it is unhealthy. As we have learned in chapter two, adults are receptive to and influenced by the information about health and nutrition, but children are as well. Therefore, introducing healthy options and giving information about the products can influence a child’s eating habit. Another reason for why McDonald’s always introduces a fruit, vegetable and/or low in fat dairy option is because they have to do this according to the McDonald’s Corporation Global Guidelines for Children’s Marketing (“AboutMcDonald’s”).

‘Food Porn’

The term might sound strange, but it is something that is often used to refer to food that looks so extremely good that you need to eat/have it. Food porn means that the food in advertisements or other visual media is presented in a spectacular way, which means that the presentation of the food is important. It is often a close-up image of food, which also makes it look extra delicious. The photographer has to make sure that the photo is taken from the right angle, so that it is presented in a stylish and ‘provocative’ manner, which is similar to pornographic photography. Therefore there is a similarity between food porn and sex pornography. Sex pornography is images and videos that show something exciting and often unrealistic and the purpose of these images and videos is to stimulate a desire for what is shown. The same is true for food porn; the audience enjoys watching these images and videos because it is something that they themselves can probably not do. Because of this, food porn has a pornographic metaphor (McBride 38).

Food companies and restaurants are a perfect example of presenting their food in such a way that the audience can barely resist it. McDonald’s is very good in presenting their food in a delicious manner in their commercials. Nearly one-third of the commercials analyzed in this analysis introduced their food in such a way that



Image 3: Mozzarella Sticks presented as Food Porn

the images of the food can be called food porn. The mozzarella sticks are not presented on a plate with some sauce on the side. Instead, McDonald’s pulls the sticks apart which makes the

cheese come out of the stick (image 3). By doing this slowly, it creates a juicy, delicious image. McDonald's does the same with its burgers. Instead of just putting the burger together like they would normally do in the restaurant, the burgers are slowly put together in the commercial. Everything slowly falls out of the air, which, first of all lets the audience see all the ingredients, and second of all creates the food porn effect. The burgers are grilled and we see and hear it sizzling. The sauce is slowly dripping off the burger when someone presses on top of it and, again, there is a focus on the melted cheese on the burgers. McDonald's even tries to create a juicy and delicious image of the fries in their commercials, letting them slowly fall out of the air on the kitchen counter, bouncing up and down in the air. Also the breakfast items cannot escape from being presented in this stylish manner. Hotcakes are flying through the air, eggs are cracked and baked and this all happens in slow motion. The maple syrup is poured over the hot cakes and it is dripping off it on the side, which will make the food look delicious and extra appealing to many.

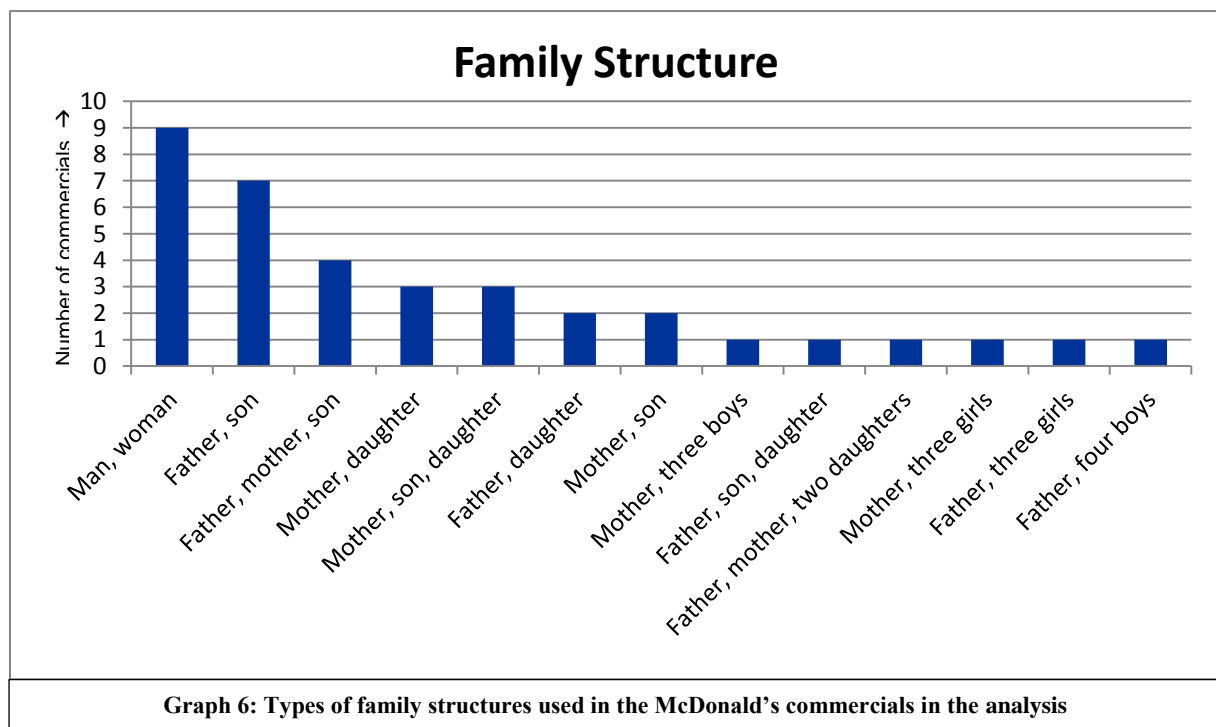
Even though children might not understand the pornographic metaphor, they will see that the food is presented in such a way that they will want to eat it. The way the food looks like is very important to children, because it has to look appealing to them: it has to look tasteful. Since the strategy of food porn presents the food in this almost irresistible way, children can be influenced by this presentation of food from McDonald's and therefore, it can influence a child's eating habit.

3.4 The American Society

In this category, we will look at how twenty-first century family structures are portrayed in the commercials and why it is important that there is cultural diversity in the commercials. We will also look at how social media plays a role in today's commercials.

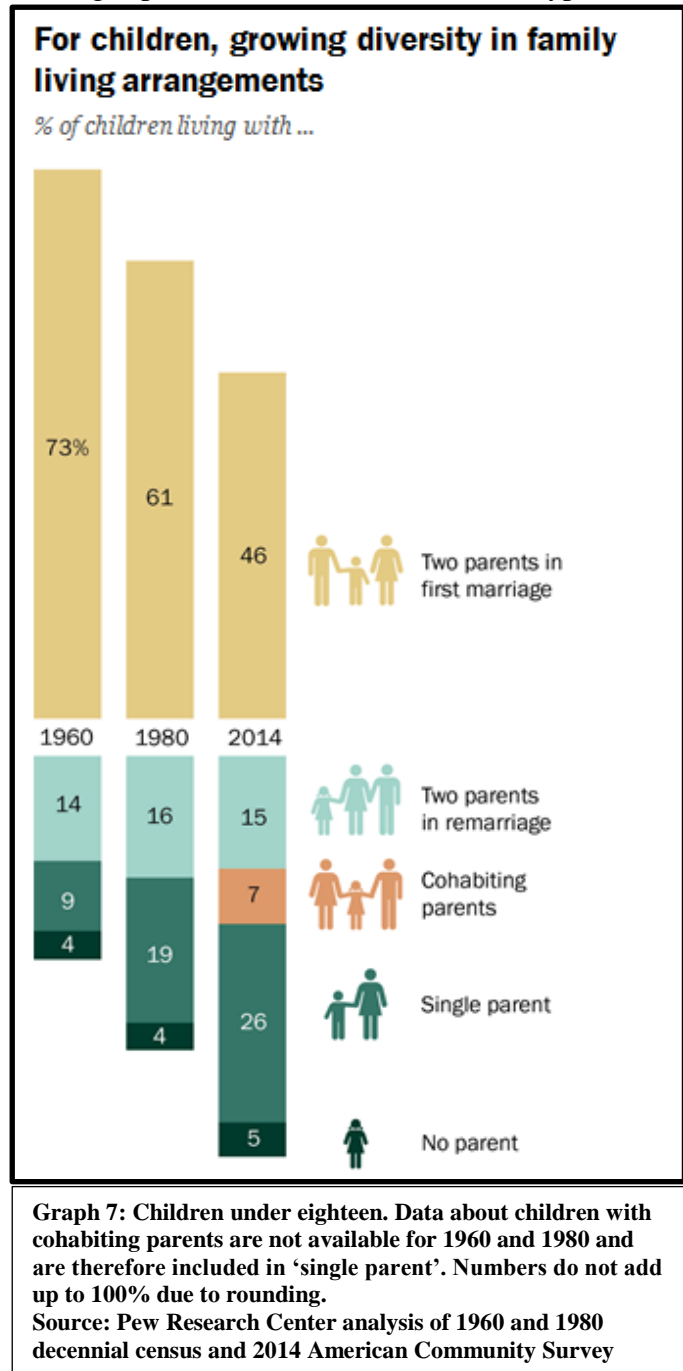
Family Structure

The traditional American nuclear family is a family that consists of a heterosexual, monogamous, marriage that will last a lifetime. In this family, the woman is the full-time housewife and the man is the primary provider and ultimate authority. Together, they have biological children. This is what the traditional American family looked like in the first half of the twentieth century, but this changed after the 1950s (Popenoe 528). Nowadays, there are many families that look very different from the above described traditional American nuclear family due to various reasons, such as an increasing divorce rate and the fact that some people do not want children.



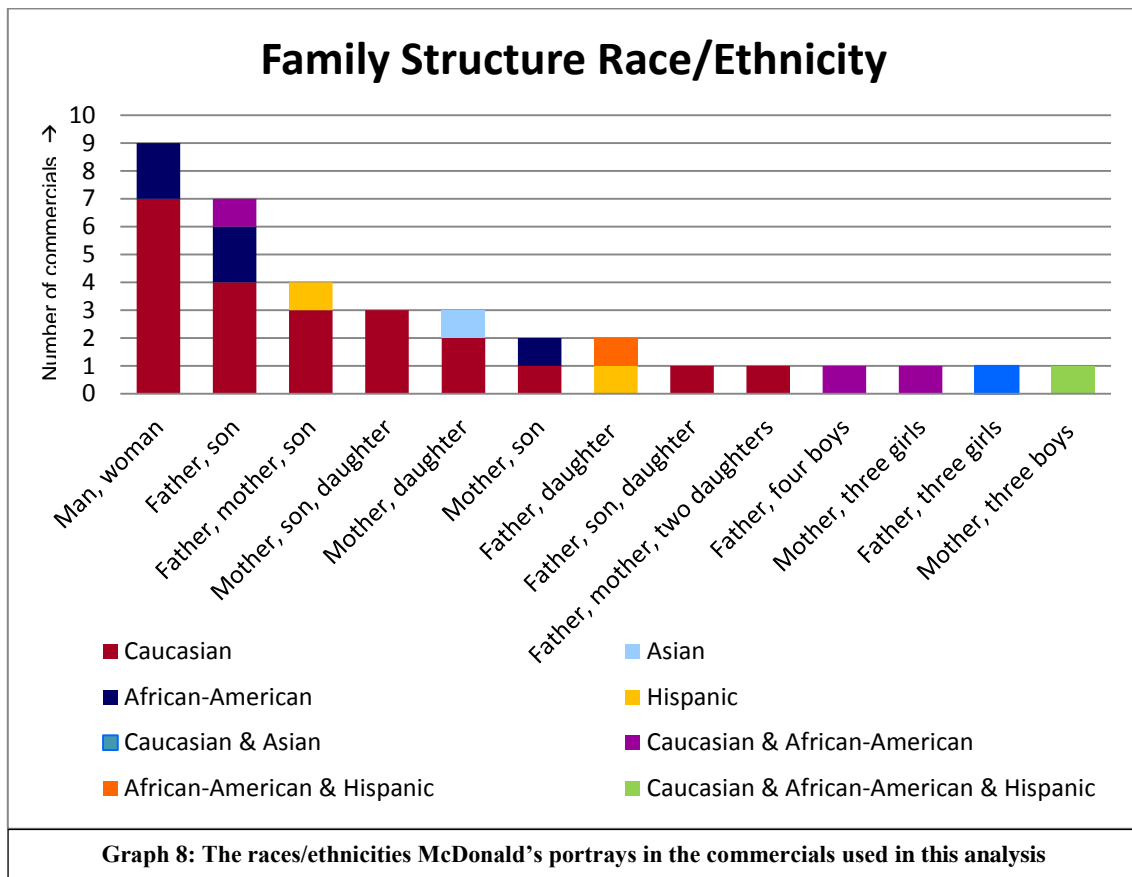
McDonald's shows different types of family structures in their commercials. The one hundred commercials that were used in this analysis showed thirty-six families. Graph 6 shows how often the different types of families were portrayed in the McDonald's commercials. In nine percent of the commercials, McDonald's shows only a man and a woman who are in a relationship with each other. This does not mean that they do not have children: they might not be shown in the commercial and in one case the presented couple

was pregnant. When looking at graph 6, we can conclude that McDonald's most often shows families where either the father or the mother is missing. Twenty of the thirty-six commercials that show some type of family structure show only a father or a mother with children. This does not necessarily have to mean that they are single-parent families, but since this type of family structure is common in the American society, these families could represent a common American family of the twenty-first century. It is striking that the traditional American family of the first half of the twentieth century is not shown very often: only five times. However, the reason why this type of family structure is not shown often is because McDonald's wants the viewer to recognize their family in the commercial. When looking at graph 7, we see that the number of two-parent households is declining. In 2014, fewer than forty-six percent of children in the United States were raised in a family with parents who were in their first marriage, while this percentage was seventy-three percent in the 1960s: a time when the traditional American family was still very popular. While the number of two-parent families in their first marriage has decline by twenty-seven percent, the number of cohabiting and single parent families has drastically increased. From this can be concluded that McDonald's portrays families that are



common in the American society. This is important, because children need to be able to recognize their family in the families shown in the commercial. When a white young girl sees a family dining at a McDonald's restaurant that is very similar to her family, she will be more likely to identify with that girl than a girl who belongs to a family that is very different from hers. Because the families are alike, the girl who watches the commercial will see what a

good time the family is having at McDonald's and she will want to have the same experience. This means that the girl wants to visit the McDonald's restaurant as well.



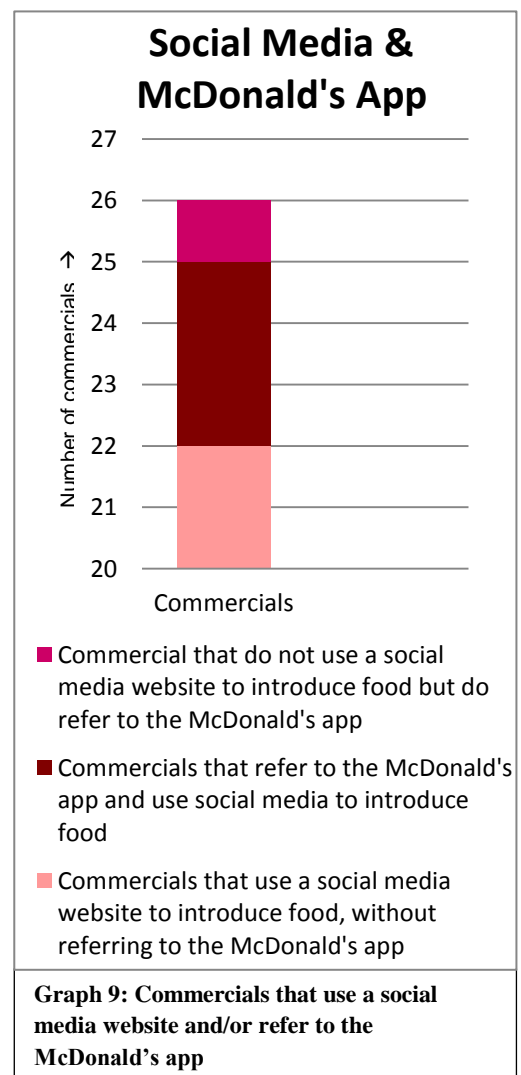
Besides the fact that McDonald's shows families that consist of a different amount of people, McDonald's also shows culturally diverse families. McDonald's has made sure that the actors in their commercials are different in age and have different backgrounds. Children, adults, and seniors all play a role in the commercials and they can be Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic or Asian. This means that we see people from different ages, backgrounds, race, and ethnicity. The previously mentioned family structures that are presented in the commercials are sometimes culturally diverse. As we can see in graph 8, the most common race that is portrayed in the commercials is Caucasian. Only five commercials show a family that belongs to the same race, while thirty-one percent of the commercials show a family that consists of people of different races. In some commercials, a family is presented where, for example, the mother and two boys are Caucasian, while one boy is African American. This does not necessarily mean that these three boys belong to the mother that is shown in the commercial, but this could be the case, since the United States is a culturally diverse nation. Not only does McDonald's show culturally diverse families, it also shows groups of friends that are culturally diverse. Fifteen commercials show groups of

friends enjoying McDonald's food. In general, these groups of friends consist of people of different races: they are Caucasian, African-American, Asian, and Hispanic. In only four cases the group of friends consisted exclusively of African-Americans. A reason for why McDonald's makes sure that many races and ethnicities are represented in the commercials is the same as for why McDonald's portrays different family structures: the viewer needs to be able to identify with the people shown in the commercial. It is important that McDonald's shows all these different types of families and groups of friends, since these factors can encourage a child to visit the restaurant.

Social Media

A marketing strategy that is still fairly new is the use of social media in commercials. Since social media have become more important in the last few years and are used especially by children and young adults, including social media in commercials will attract children's attention. Twitter and Facebook are popular social media websites where everyone can express their opinion, thoughts, and feelings. Today, food is already advertised on Twitter and Facebook and these websites show clips about how to make delicious food yourself. McDonald's uses these websites to their advantage. Also, McDonald's often refers to their app that people can download for free on their smartphone.

In my analysis, twenty-six commercials referred to the app and/or used a social media website to introduce food items. Twenty-three of these commercials used a social media website – Twitter or Facebook – to introduce the McDonald's food. In 'Celebration', a girl is sitting on her bed writing a tweet that says "Woke up L8, freaked, then remembered McDs all day bfast #Boomshakalakalaka". Then, a male nurse tweets: "@McDonalds YAAAASSSSSSSS #alldaybreakfast soooo good". Two boys and a security guard also tweet about how great it is that they can now have breakfast at McDonald's all day long. The way of



communication in these commercials is typical for today's society. Children and young adults spend more and more time on their phone and on social media websites. By using social media in the commercials, the advertisement will get more attention from the younger audience, since it is something they are familiar with, but also because their type of language is used in the commercials. They can relate to writing a post on Facebook and writing tweets on Twitter. This commercial shows that McDonald's listens to its customers, even when they post their thoughts and opinions on social media, and second, that they adapt their commercials to their audience, which in this case are mainly children and young adults.

Twenty-three percent of all the commercials used in this analysis introduce the McDonald's app. Since eighty-five percent of all young adults in the United States and almost two-thirds of all Americans own a smartphone, showing the app in the commercials is a way of branding as well (Smith). Using social media websites and the app in their commercials to advertise their food is a smart marketing strategy of McDonald's, especially since we have previously seen that the commercials used in this analysis are aired on channels that are popular among children and young adults. For these reasons, the use of social media can influence a child's eating habit.

Conclusion

As we have seen, children today are exposed to many hours of screening time. There is an important connection between watching television and becoming obese: while watching television the energy input is higher than the energy output, which causes people to gain weight. Even though obesity has been an issue with a long history, childhood obesity has become a concerning problem worldwide and especially in the United States since recently. The energy imbalance that is caused while watching television is not the only factor that can contribute to children becoming obese. Since children watch many hours of television each day, they get exposed to many different types of commercials. Since a great amount of the commercials aired in the United States are about food, children already come into contact with persuasive marketing strategies at a very young age.

The marketers that make the fast food commercials use specific marketing strategies to persuade and influence children to buy food at their restaurant. Being one of the most popular fast food restaurants in the world, McDonald's airs its commercials on a daily basis to gain more customers. Especially children have become a target audience, since they are an important group of consumers: they can spend their own money, influence their parent's spending behavior, and they can spend their saved money later on in their lives when they are adults. For these reasons, it has become very interesting for businesses to focus their commercials on children. McDonald's is a perfect example of a business that targets their commercials at children.

The most common and effective marketing strategies used in commercials are 'premium offers', the use of promotional characters, nutritional and health claims, the theme of 'taste', and the emotional appeal to 'fun'. By doing a content analysis, I wanted to research how McDonalds applies these strategies in their commercials to reach children and influence their eating habits. The one hundred McDonald's commercial that were analyzed in this study were aired between January 2015 and April 2016. All these commercials were approximately sixty seconds, were found on two websites, and were mostly aired on television channels that are watched by children and young adults in the United States. The commercials were coded in such a way that they could be divided into three main categories and seven subcategories.

As we have seen in the content analysis, McDonald's uses many of the previously mentioned marketing strategies to influence children's eating habits. Especially the emotional appeal to fun is a recurring theme in its commercials that has a significant impact on children's eating choices. McDonald's is known for its Happy Meal and the Ronald McDonald clown and they are therefore often used in their commercials. Clowns try to make

children laugh so that they will have a great time. Children will want to meet the clown and have a great time at the restaurant as well. When the Happy Meal box is shown, often a premium offer is also shown: a toy. These toys can be characters from movies or television shows, which means that children already have an emotional bond with them. By using these characters in the commercials, McDonald's hopes that children will also get an emotional bond with the McDonald's brand. The toy that children receive with their Happy Meal is not the only premium offer that McDonald's has. McDonald's made eleven commercials about the Game Time Gold sweepstake and Money Monopoly game. These commercials also show famous people, which means that McDonald's tries to influence children the same way as they try to influence children with the toy. Also, the fact that these two premium offers are games and the customer can win prizes makes it appealing to children as well.

Another theme that is used by McDonald's as a marketing strategy to influence children's eating habits is the theme of uniqueness and novelty. Eleven percent of the commercials needed some kind of imagination, which made the commercials appealing to children. Also the commercials that use social media in them have the theme of uniqueness and novelty. Since children in today's society spend many hours on social media, McDonald's smartly uses this to its advantage. By using 'their' language and presenting their lifestyles in the commercials, children and young adults will watch the commercials and be influenced by them because of the way in which the food is presented to them.

Since some people in the United States were concerned about McDonald's serving food that was unhealthy for children, McDonald's started to include health claims. Both adults and children are receptive to and influenced by information about health and nutrition, and since McDonald's often combines these health claims with the emotional appeal to 'fun', children can be influenced by this information, which can change their eating habits. Besides the health claims, McDonald's also pays a lot of attention to how the food is portrayed in the commercials. The way in which the food is presented by McDonald's is of great significance. By using the 'food porn' effect, the viewers will want to eat the food, since it looks irresistible. Children can be influenced by the presentation of the food, which can influence their eating pattern.

Last, McDonald's shows many different types of families in their commercials. In twenty of the thirty-six commercials that show a family structure, McDonald's shows a family where the father or the mother is missing. The typical two-parent family is shown less often. Also, the members of the family are not always of the same race. The reason why McDonald's shows these different types of families is because children need to be able to

recognize themselves and their family in the commercial. When they recognize themselves and their family in the commercial, they will want to go to McDonald's, because they want the same experience as the people in the commercial. Therefore, these commercials can influence a child's eating habit.

All these commercials have as their main goal to increase sales and therefore, McDonald's uses all of these marketing strategies to influence children's eating habits. However, even though McDonald's tries to claim differently in their commercials, their food is still very high in fat, sugar, and salt. This makes it bad for children to eat, since it negatively influences their health. Therefore, it can be concluded that the marketing strategies used in the commercials to present the food to children increase the number of obese children in the United States.

In the end, children want what they see in the commercials. It is not just about the food, but it is also about the experience they will have when they are at the restaurant. They want to experience the same things that are shown in the commercial, whether this is the delicious advertised food or having the family together and having a good time. The commercials portray the restaurant and its food in such a way that children are lovin' it.

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Appendix

All the commercials used in the content analysis:

- All Day All Night: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WX6aYA4cdA>
- All day Breakfast (Motorcycle): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLNhOx2hhFE>
- All Dressed up: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/A1Af/mcdonalds-happy-meal-all-dressed-up>
- Alphabetical Order: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7JTU/mcdonalds-chicken-mcnuggets-alphabetical-order>
- An Apple A Day: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/7wJq/mcdonalds-happy-meal-an-apple-a-day>
- An Avocado's Journey: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/7UYd/mcdonalds-guacamole-sandwiches-an-avocados-journey>
- Angry Birds: Eyebrows: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ixnw2edMX4>
- Any Two: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AbWi/mcdonalds-mcpick-2-any-two>
- Award Shows: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AbsL/mcdonalds-award-shows>
- Badder & bolder: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7IW8/mcdonalds-hot-n-spicy-mcchicken-badder-and-bolder>
- Bering Sea Fisherman: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7ICk/mcdonalds-bering-sea-fisherman>
- Big Mac Attack: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7wmi/mcdonalds-big-mac-big-mac-attack>
- Breakfast for Dinner: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AYCw/mcdonalds-all-day-breakfast-menu-breakfast-for-dinner>
- Build-a-Bear: Give a Little Love: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AIfJ/mcdonalds-happy-meal-build-a-bear-give-a-little-love>
- Call Me: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRApTuBB9yY>
- Celebration: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AYMu/mcdonalds-all-day-breakfast-menu-celebration>
- Chase The Sleepiness Away: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7uEO/mcdonalds-breakfast-dollar-menu-chase-the-sleepiness-away>
- Cloudy Day: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7ogD/mcdonalds-happy-meal-cloudy-day>
- Color Your Day: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/7UYw/mcdonalds-mccaf-color-your-day>
- Comedy Central: History 101: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AwL7/mcdonalds-comedy-central>
- Cool Off: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AVbh/mcdonalds-crispy-and-cool-deal-cool-off>
- Cowboys: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AwA6/mcdonalds-game-time-gold-cowboys-featuring-jerry-rice>

- Cubemates: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOqurI8mwHQ>
- Cuties Are Back: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AtBV/mcdonalds-happy-meal-cuties-are-back>
- Delicious Summer Flavors: http://www.ispot.tv/ad/7P_O/mcdonalds-frappe-delicious-summer-flavors
- Ditka's New Team: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AAr4/mcdonalds-ditkas-new-team-featuring-mike-ditka>
- Double It Up: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7vpF/mcdonalds-double-combo-double-it-up-song-by-afrojack>
- Drive-Thru: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AdcD/mcdonalds-mcpick-2-drive-thru>
- Early Riser: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AkDf/mcdonalds-egg-mcmuffin-early-riser-song-by-water-liars>
- Emojies and Cuties: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/A6Dr/mcdonalds-happy-meal-emojis-and-cuties>
- Everything You Love: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7HG/mcdonalds-quarter-pounder-with-cheese-everything-you-love>
- Flirting: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7VL8/mcdonalds-20-piece-mcnuggets-flirting-featuring-gregory-white>
- Fish Supplier: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7dnE/mcdonalds-fish-supplier>
- Football Dunk: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7dLA/mcdonalds-mcnuggets-football-dunk>
- Get Yours: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/A5Ag/mcdonalds-money-monopoly-get-yours>
- Give It Up Two Times: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7XZu/mcdonalds-double-quarter-pounder-give-it-up-two-times>
- Goat: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7YxY/mcdonalds-goat>
- Good Morning: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AO6j/mcdonalds-all-day-breakfast-good-morning-song-by-moon-taxi>
- Good Things: https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7ad_/mcdonalds-good-things
- Graffiti: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7kHO/mcdonalds-1-soft-drink-graffiti>
- Grilled Onion Cheddar Burger: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7w61/mcdonalds-dollar-menu-grilled-onion-cheddar-burger>
- Hello Kitty Toys: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AVRA/mcdonalds-happy-meal-hello-kitty-toys>

- Hotel transylvania 2: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ALlP/mcdonalds-happy-meal-hotel-transylvania-2>
- Hotwheels: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ilgQ1dULPQ>
- Ingredients: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7JJA/mcdonalds-ingredients>
- Lemonade: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9PWX1akeUU>
- Lettuce Supplier: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/7bKL/mcdonalds-lettuce-supplier>
- Lil Coach: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AwEF/mcdonalds-game-time-gold-lil-coach-ft-mike-ditka-jerry-rice>
- Listen to Your Taste Buds: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/7092/mcdonalds-listen-to-your-taste-buds>
- Lovin' is All Around: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/79F5/mcdonalds-buttermilk-crispy-chicken-lovin-is-all-around>
- McDonald's TV Commercial For Smiles: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7krR/mcdonalds-smiles>
- Melty Mozzarella: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AnZe/mcdonalds-mcpick-2-melty-mozzarella>
- Mini Golf: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7mWGBDQYcug>
- Minions: Family at the Drive-Thru: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/7PiS/mcdonalds-minion-mania-minions-family-at-the-drive-thru>
- Mix-or-Match: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/Akp4/mcdonalds-mix-or-match>
- Mix & Match: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AndQ/mcdonalds-mcpick-2-mix-and-match>
- Music Happy Meals: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/7pxk/mcdonalds-musical-happy-meals>
- NFL: Super Bowl 50: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/AO14/mcdonalds-all-day-breakfast-nfl-super-bowl-50>
- New Beef Delights: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yc380-RwNKs>
- Newfound Loyalties: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/Aww9/mcdonalds-newfound-loyalties-featuring-mike-ditka-jerry-rice>
- Odds, Money Monopoly: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/A5ws/mcdonalds-money-monopoly-odds>
- Our Food. Your Questions: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7zEe/mcdonalds-our-food-your-questions>
- Pay With Lovin: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7xYZ/mcdonalds-super-bowl-2015-pay-with-lovin>

- Photo Day: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/At1w/mcdonalds-happy-meal-photo-day>
- Pokemon: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/AIBN/mcdonalds-happy-meal-pokemon>
- Prizes Are Coming, Money Monopoly: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/A1W4/mcdonalds-money-monopoly-prizes-are-coming>
- Rabbits: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AZzv/mcdonalds-happy-meal-rabbits>
- Random Acts of Kindness Everywhere: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/A1Lm/mcdonalds-random-acts-of-kindness-everywhere>
- Redemption: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/Ad8H/mcdonalds-game-time-gold-redemption-ft-jerry-rice-mike-ditka>
- Reminder: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7QYt/mcdonalds-sirloin-third-pound-burger-reminder-ft-max-greenfield>
- Saturday Morning With Bob: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/7UL4/mcdonalds-morning-mac-saturday-morning-with-bob>
- Selfies: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AnZp/mcdonalds-mcpick-2-selfies>
- Seven: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/A2mp/mcdonalds-happy-meal-seven>
- Shopkins: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1opskEHIRDE>
- Signs: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7HKU/mcdonalds-signs>
- Smile: My Little Pony: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AqcR/mcdonalds-happy-meal-smile-my-little-pony>
- Summer and Love: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/7cUm/mcdonalds-summer-and-love>
- Sunday Night Football: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AwjT/mcdonalds-game-time-gold-sunday-night-football>
- Super Bowl Commercial 2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEbrNUXGq0Q>
- Super Fans: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AwAP/mcdonalds-game-time-gold-super-fans-featuring-deion-sanders>
- Star: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7cC9/mcdonalds-sirloin-third-pound-burgers-star-feat-max-greenfield>
- Stories and Drinks: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/AfGW/mcdonalds-stories-and-drinks>
- Studio: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/AbeC/mcdonalds-mcpick-2-studio>
- The Angry Birds movie: Launch: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/ATaQ/mcdonalds-the-angry-birds-movie-launch>
- The Bachelor: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AnZy/mcdonalds-all-day-breakfast-the-bachelor>

- The Books You Love: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AOpv/mcdonalds-happy-meal-the-books-you-love>
- The Break in: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/A1Am/mcdonalds-happy-meal-the-break-in>
- The Drop: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27vDKHS1FVQ>
- The Intern: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AOS9/mcdonalds-all-day-breakfast-the-intern-feat-reginald-hudlin>
- The Morning Show Crew: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AIrx/mcdonalds-breakfast-the-morning-show-crew-feat-dl-hughley>
- The Peanuts Movie: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AAei/mcdonalds-happy-meal-the-peanuts-movie>
- The Rules: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AYSS/mcdonalds-all-day-breakfast-menu-the-rules>
- The taste: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/AOUf/mcdonalds-signature-crafted-recipes-the-taste>
- Transformers: Robots in Disguise: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/AqaO/mcdonalds-happy-meal-transformers-robots-in-disguise>
- Unapologetic Big Mac: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/7Fiy/mcdonalds-unapologetic-big-mac>
- Wedding Night: <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/AkDb/mcdonalds-quarter-pounder-wedding-night-song-by-telekinesis>
- We Hear You: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/AYwm/mcdonalds-we-hear-you>
- World's Best Mom: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/At2W/mccafe-worlds-best-mom>
- 100 Million Prizes: <http://www.ispot.tv/ad/A5Rg/mcdonalds-money-monopoly-100-million-prizes>
- 100% sizzle: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JH0qgBrORD0>