

COVID-19: THE CRISIS AS OPPORTUNITY



The case of McDonalds' UK

Marketing Management (LCMB 7001)- Assessment 1

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Abstract

Businesses had to adapt to the new times where the government rules due to Covid-19 are stricter, especially in the hospitality industry. But the crisis is also an opportunity to drive (or consolidate) a digital way to purchase. In 2020, businesses had two options: adapt or close. The way to a technological process needed of a marketing strategy to organize the new *modus operandi* to sell.

Keywords: McDonalds' UK, touchpoint, marketing, Covid-19, Communication.

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1. Introduction:

The world has changed from 2020. Last year, Covid-19 showed us that life how we knew will not be the same. Mundial economy received a huge impact, each business had to accommodate its services under the new government rules, and the hospitality industry was one of the most affected business.

Economy in the UK is currently in one of the worst moments in three centuries, and the government has to pay a high economic price to maintain a social and economic balance. Businesses lose a lot of customers that prefer to put more attention on basic purchases as food, with an economy in recession, however, crisis is also an opportunity.

We are going to see how businesses had to redesign their marketing strategies to deal with a new situation. Our research will analyse how McDonalds' UK adapted its marketing strategy to the new times. In this sense, to adapt means link the new government rules with the practices of the company in Covid-19 times.

This paper will study how McDonalds' UK dealt with the problem produce by Covid-19 and how the company developed some mechanisms to created loyalty with its customers in the new international context. On the other hand, we are going to analyse how Covid-19 accelerated the process of purchase using the technologies.

Finally, we are going to see how McDonalds' UK took advantage of the new situation to encourage its customers to buy online and offline through its Digital Touchpoint. Thus, Covid-19 time was the just moment where the company suffered an important crisis, but it was also the opportunity to grow.

2. Definition of communication

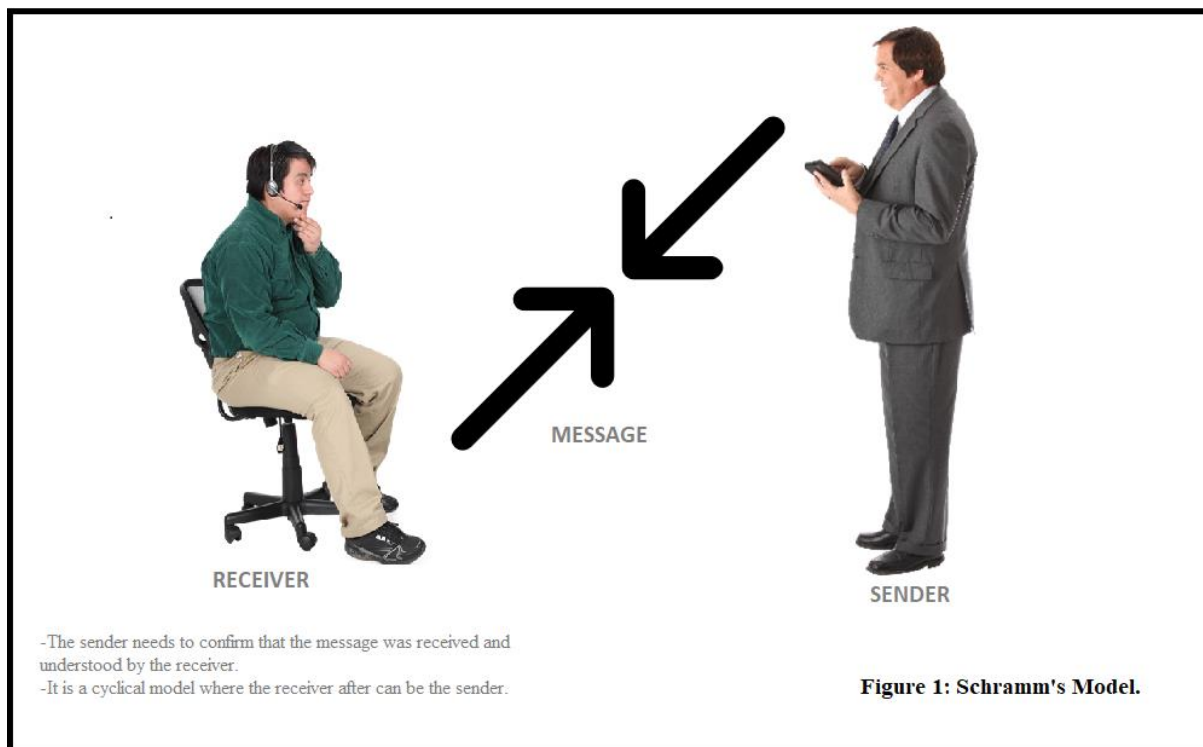
To understand definition of communication, we have to understand the model proposed by Wilbur Schramm. Janse (2019) suggests that Schramm Model is a process where there are at least three parts. The first part is a sender, the second part is a receiver, between them there is a link that is a message (third part). To complete the communication is necessary that sender confirms that the message was received and understood by receiver.

As we can see, in this cyclical model is important to encode and decode the message. Schramm (1954) remarks that is necessary that receiver understand the message, but the roles can change, and the receiver can be the sender and vice versa.

But how the sender can know that the message was received and understood? Schramm says that is not only necessary to send the message, but the sender also has to receive a feedback

(Schramm, 1954). This feedback can be done in the same way used by the sender or in other ways. We can identify that in this model there is another component: the channel.

For example, if the first part sends a verbal communication, the feedback by the receiver may be through non-verbal communication (other kind of channel) but it is always necessary that the sender know that the message was understood. Thus, we can see that encoding and decoding are fundamentals in this model. We can graphic the idea of Schramm through the next figure:



It is not only necessary to send the message, but also important that the receiver confirms the reception of that very message. The channel of communication can be different (verbal, no verbal, written, and even through gestures). Receiver response is how the receiver understands and reacts to the message. The answer can be with an attitude or behaviour.

3. Integrated Marketing Communications

The basic concept of Marketing Communication was synonym of promotion, but Marketing Communication involves other aspects such as target. We are going to see that promotion is one of the four key parts of marketing, but it is not Marketing Communication. Also Marketing Communication was compared with advertising, but this last one is only one part of Marketing Communication. It is necessary to know the process to understand its concept (Pickton & Broderick, 2005). Marketing communications look to send a clear message in the best way, on time to the right people.

Kotler et al. (1999) affirm that IMC coordinates its vehicles of communication to deliver a clear message about its products. Thus, IMC has as function to supervise that the media used is the best way to arrive at receivers, and the communication has to be clear and it must show the best of the company and the product they sell.

On the other hand, Duncan (2002) remarks that IMC looks to create a link between the brand and its customer to build a strong relationship. The IMC not only manage the message send for the company, but it is also necessary that the messages want the same goal: strengthen the brand.

We can see that Integrated Marketing Communications is much more than only the typical structure of communication. IMC unifies the components, defines the goal, defines the channels, design the best way to arrive at the receivers, and supervise that all the messages go in the same sense. Similarly, Hsu (2011) remarks that marketing activities and integrated marketing communication activities are two main methods to build brand equity.

4. Currents promotions of McDonald's in the UK

Simon & Sullivan (1993) indicate that managerial strategies including advertising, promotion, sales promotion, customer service, and marketing research execution will affect brand equity building.

In this sense, McDonalds' UK uses different marketing strategies to get to communicate with its customers and its potential customers. The company in the UK develops different types of promotions that we can divided into four parts:

4.1 Advertising: This type of promotion is the most significant, the company uses TV, radio, online, and print media. Sometimes, the advertisements on the online and print media are through the news.

The image displays two newspaper websites side-by-side, both featuring McDonald's Christmas 2020 advertisements. The left website is the Mirror, with a headline "McDonald's unveil Christmas menu including double Big Mac and Celebrations McFlurry". The right website is the Daily Record, with a headline "McDonald's Christmas 2020 advert has fans in tears with heartwarming festive story". Both articles describe a festive advertisement featuring a mother trying to get her teenage son to put away technology and embrace his inner child. The Mirror article includes a "MONEY" tag, while the Daily Record article includes a "LIFESTYLE" tag. Both websites show social media sharing options and a "SHARE" button.

McDonalds' UK advertises through news, and also reaches its customers through the social networks of the newspapers

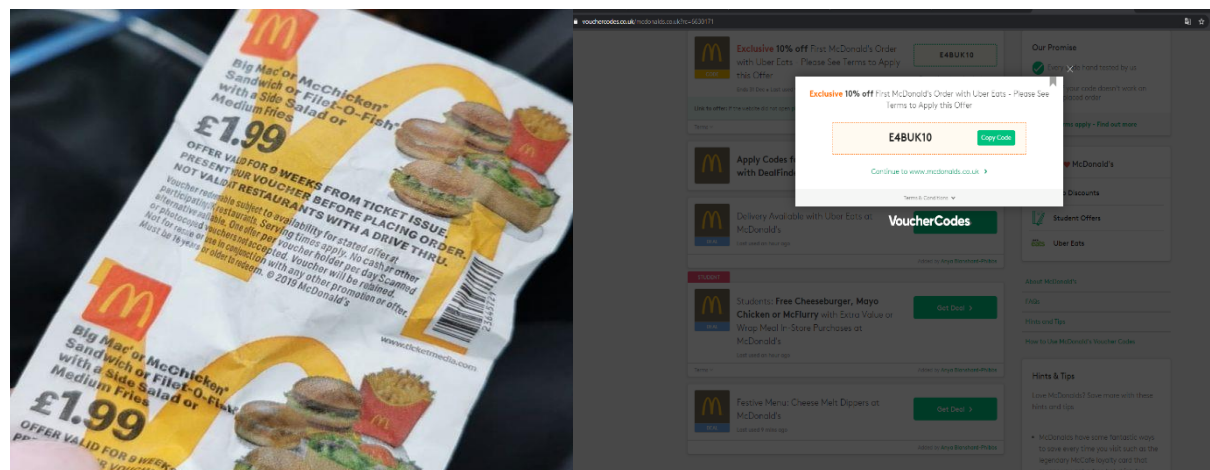


McDonalds' UK advertising on public roads

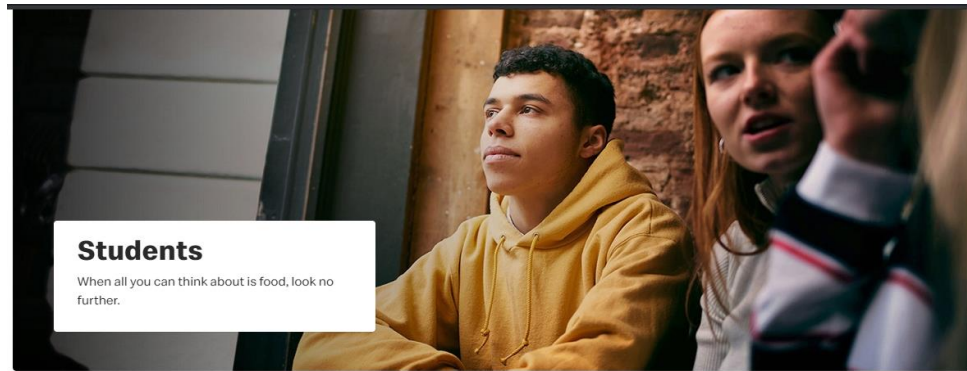
As an illustration, the company has a Christmas protagonist in its advertising during December, in 2020. The central character was Tom, he is a teenager who is moved by the magic of Christmas through his childhood memories every time he went to McDonald's.

In the same sense, an important characteristic is that the company uses the emotional factor in its advertising. On the other hand, other channels of communication are the account of the company through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

4.2 Sales promotions: McDonalds' UK offers discount coupons so much so that it is published in the newspapers and online.



Print and online discount coupons of McDonald's UK



Get a free Cheeseburger, Mayo Chicken or McFlurry® Original when you buy any Extra Value or Wrap Meal and show your valid student or Student Beans ID.*



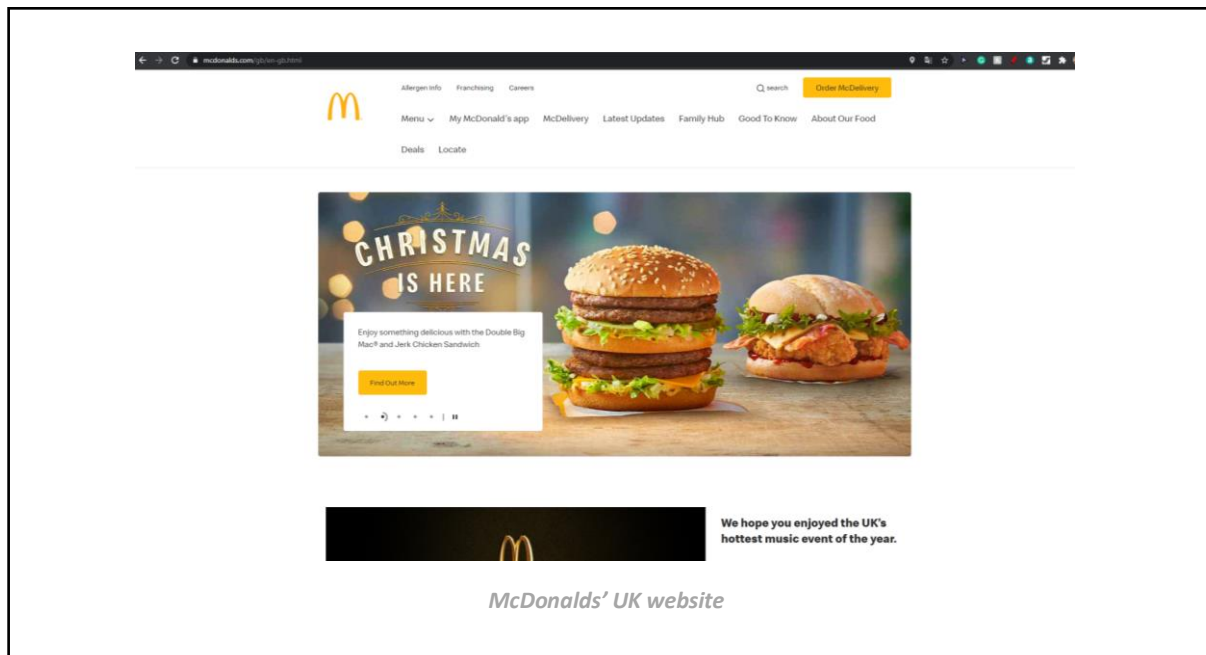
With each purchase, McDonalds' UK offers free products the students

4.3 Public relations: The company has its charity foundation called Ronald McDonald House Charities, which helps a lot of people that need money for health treatments. The foundation gets their funds through the same company and donations from their customers.



RMHC helps a lot of people in the UK

4.4 Direct marketing: McDonalds' UK fairly communicates directly with its customers using newsletters, email, and fliers.



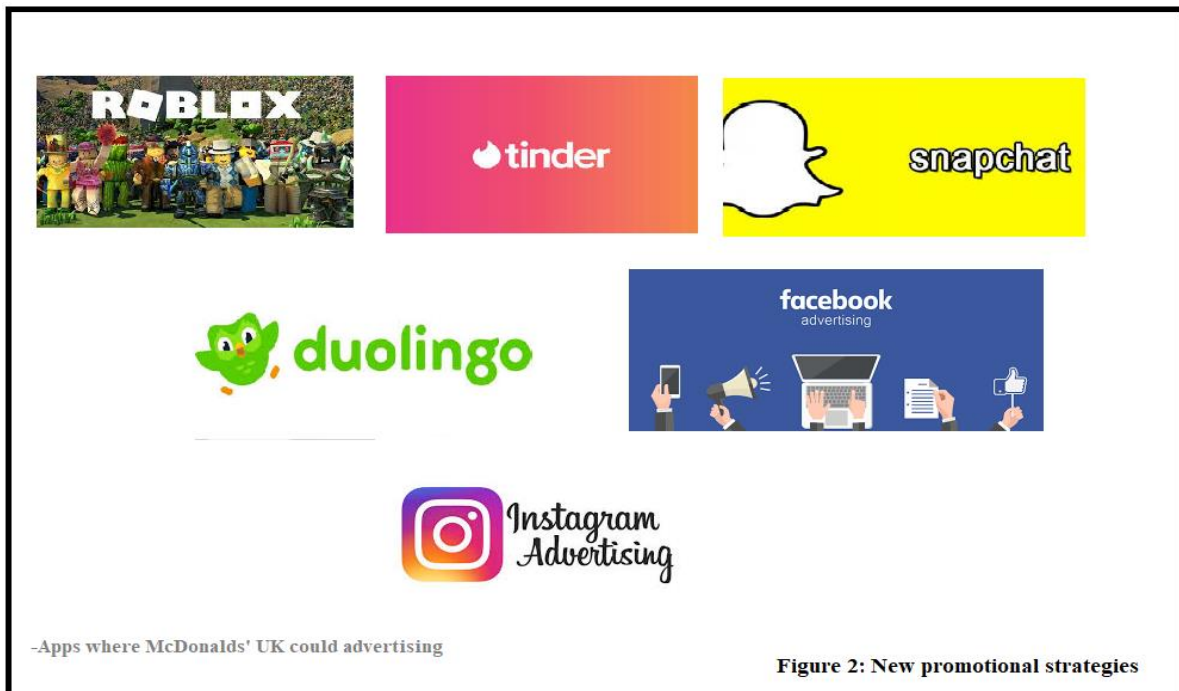
5. New promotional strategies that can use McDonalds' UK

As we explained, McDonalds' UK develops different types of promotions divided into four parts. We can suggest that the company could adopt the next changes:

5.1 Advertising: TV and radio were the most important mass media for a long time, but currently, social media are most used, the company could advert through Facebook (adults), and Instagram (young people), but not only in McDonalds' UK account, but it would also be essential advertising in the social media of well-known people as singer or athletes.

Moreover, the company could advertise in apps used for a lot of people as dates apps as Tinder, Bumle, OkCupid or Happn. Even, McDonalds' UK could advert in well-known apps as Spotify, Amazon Music or Snapchat.

In the same sense, the company could advertise in free Apps where it is compulsory to watch the advertising before using the application as Duolingo, even in-game app as Roblox or Among Us.



On the other hand, the marketing strategy of the company is to show the brand and the price as the most important characteristics, but it would be significant that the product is also sold based on its attributes.

Additionally, we believe that bus advertising would be a good strategy to show the new products of the company. For example, this year, the advertising of McDonalds' UK was on a public road, mainly in the bus stations, but would be better to have permanent mobile advertising.

5.2 Sales promotions: if the customers want to use a discount coupon need to look for it in the print newspaper or online. In this sense, the company always waits for the customers to look for the discount coupon.

It is not a secret that the restaurant sells fewer products days Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, so the company could social media advertising discount coupons to be used for the three days with fewer sales.

5.3 Public relations: Ronald McDonald House Charities is a solidary idea, especially because it helps a lot of people, but people need to ask the foundation, and sometimes is not possible to know how to start the application.

It would be a good idea if the foundation allocates part of its budget to help others in need as orphans, families that suffer physical violence, etc. RMHC would be most well-known and a lot of people would receive bits of help.

5.4 Direct Marketing: a long of time the company distributes print flyer in important account. McDonalds' UK could use its sales receipts to show a new product or advertising its website.

6. Branding and brand equity

Kotler, Armstrong & Harris (2017) emphasize that branding helps to identify products and their benefit for the customers, adds value to the purchase of the customer, and develop brand relationships.

On the other hand, brand equity is a concept complex, it has been defined and measured by different researchers in different senses. Gill & Dawra (2010) remark that while one school study brand equity as the additional preference of the customers for a product, there is another school led by Aaker that involve brand equity with a set of assets.

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Brand equity is a value, but it is intangible (Ambler, 1997; Berry, 2000) because is not material, it is a construction made with time, through to different experiences in a relationship between the company and its customers.

Aaker (1991) designed a scheme of brand equity where there are five dimensions: brand awareness/notoriety, perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand association and other proprietary assets. To understand what pushes this value, it is necessary to know and understand each of these five dimensions.

As we said, brand equity is intangible and created an association of the brand with its customers (Tanveer & Nawaz, 2016). We can identify that brand equity is the result of how customers perceived the brand and what is its image.

Thus, brand equity born with an emotional relationship between the company and the customers. Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster (2008) affirm that brand equity has two key drivers: engagement (connection with the stakeholders) and alignment (experience with all stakeholders groups).

Additionally, Keller (2003) says that brand equity is the incremental utility of a branded product. In this sense, brand equity add value to the product of the company, and it is a competitive advantage to businesses with high brands (Christiansen, Yıldız & Yıldız, 2013).

Brand equity helps to increase the value of a product or service (Hsu, 2011), there is a relationship between the brand and its product in the mind of the customer. But we cannot confuse it with brand identity (brand name, logo, and slogan) that differentiate products from others, and it is the primary source of competitive advantages (Garett, 1994).

We can see that this concept is multidimensional because it has different elements, and they are combined at different levels. The customers associate the brand with its products or service, and attribute them positive characteristics and favourable image and feel loyalty to the brand (Villarejo, 2003).

7. Aaker's Brand Equity model in McDonalds' UK

Aaker's Brand Equity Model identifies 5 brand equity components: 1) Brand loyalty; 2) Brand awareness; 3) Perceived quality; 4) Brand associations; 5) Other proprietary assets (Aaker, 1991).

-Brand loyalty: This component means that if customers repeat a purchase of the same product with the same brand name, they get loyal to this brand (Man, 2016). Brand loyalty has two elements: the price premium and loyalty.

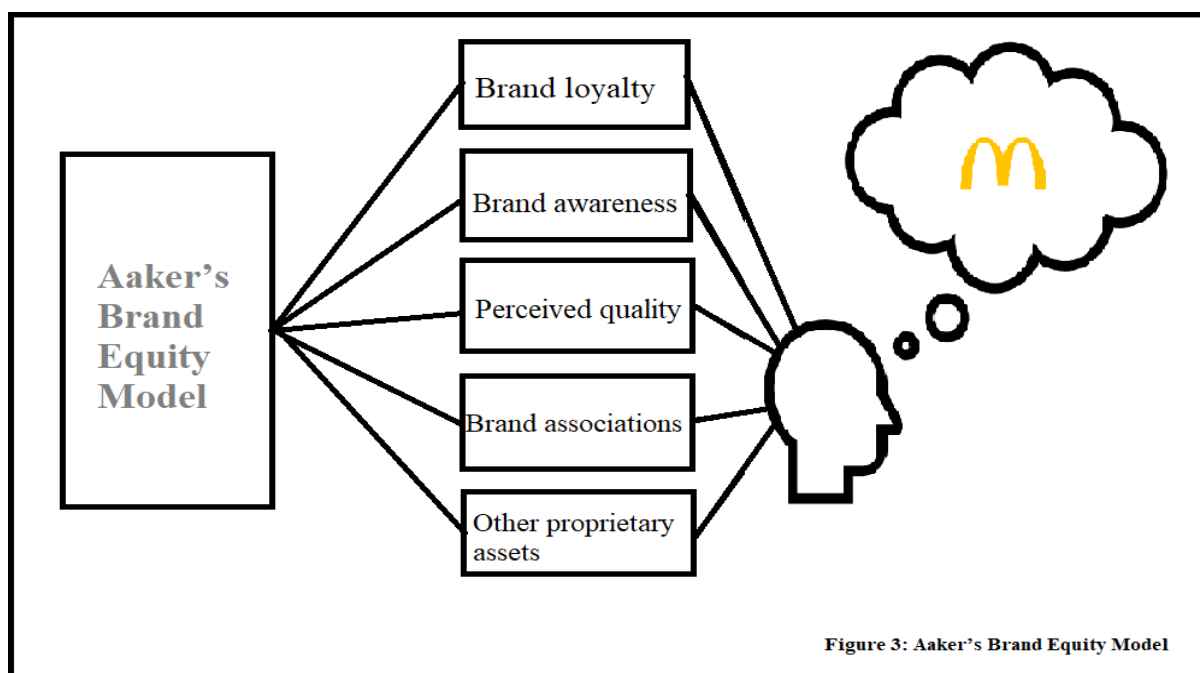
-Brand awareness: The second component helps consumers identify the brand as a member of a certain product category and helps the company choose when products are displayed at the points of sale (Petromill et al., 2002).

-Perceived quality: It is the reason to purchase it, level of differentiation in relation to competing brands, price of the product when customers evaluate the quality as compared to the price.

-Brand associations: McDonalds' UK is active in community services and contributing to society to gain a higher reputation among consumers, for example in charity and sponsorships with Ronald McDonald Houses Charities.

-Other proprietary assets: In this last component we can see elements like relations with trade partners, intellectual property rights, trademark, and patents (Aaker, 1991).

Zaynutdinova & Palka (2017) conclude that brand equity described by Aaker is understood as the difference that the customer finds in the purchase decision when have to choose between a marked product and a favourite product without a brand name, assuming that the two products are identical, but the brand name grants identity to its product, this is the difference that helps the final decision.



Aaker (1996) argues that is fundamental to build a broad brand vision that recognizes a brand greater than a simple set of physical attributes. Aaker's Brand Equity Model is important because the different components produce a unique product in the mind of the customers, there is a connection between the product and the brand. This product choice leads the customer to prefer the brand, even before equality of attributes and conditions with other brands (Zaynutdinova & Palka, 2017).

Another advantage of Aaker's Brand Equity Model is that is an important tool to help manufacturers and their marketers analyze strengths and weaknesses related to a brand (Man,

2016). The model helps to build a marketing strategy and provides value to customers through detailed information conveyed to them convincing them to purchase.

A disadvantage of Aaker's Brand Equity Model is that it does not analyse what happens after the sale. To know and to understand what the customer feels after the purchase is important because provides objective evidence that firms after-sales services capabilities can significantly contribute to building its brand equity (Ahmad & Mohsin, 2012).

Another disadvantage is that Aaker's Brand Equity Model have not a semiotic approach, because the model does not analyse social and cultural codes and it does not relate them to the culture of customers over time and throughout the world (Oswald, 2012). Aaker's Brand Equity Model is a study from 30 years ago, the culture changed, the world changed, and each case has different characteristics. This is a standard model but is not applicable in all circumstances and all the products.

In the same sense, Aaker's Brand Equity Model provides only an indication towards a set of items that can contribute to brand equity, but nobody knows how and which of these items should be combined to capture it. These items are exhaustive, and their reliability and validity are needs to be answered (Gill & Dawra, 2010).

Finally, we think that Aaker's Brand Equity Model is a guide with three decades old, and the model of businesses changes, and the culture change too. Managers must understand that each company is a 'different world' where the model are only guide, but they are not rule. Managers have to build on their own logic and have to understand the nature of customer-company interactions and have the ability to act when there is a problem (Wang, Wei & Yu, 2008).

8. Touchpoint process in McDonalds' UK

During these last years, McDonalds' UK is developing a lot of channels to sell its products. The idea to use a Digital Touchpoint is to maximize satisfaction but it is important not to lose the end-to-end journey experience.

In 2020, due to the government rules, use of technological channels to buy the products of the restaurants, was compulsory. McDonalds' UK used these rules to encourage its customer to buy through its technological channels.

But, what is Touchpoint? Maechler, Neher & Park (2016) affirm that Touchpoint is an individual transaction through which customers interact with the business and the offers of the company. Communication is a technological process.

As we said at the beginning, Covid-19 changed the life and the businesses, government rules in the UK about the pandemic are compulsory and the companies had to adapt to the new times. But in this process, the companies need to be training employees with the new technologies. They are an important tool because it is necessary to institutionalize a new and higher requirement of needs assessment to serve customers (Dinis et al., 2020).

Currently, companies as McDonalds' UK need to innovate constantly their process to sell. The best companies are the ones that adapt to changes, cultures, and mind-sets. This is an important step to build a relationship between the company and its customers, where both win (Duncan et al., 2016).

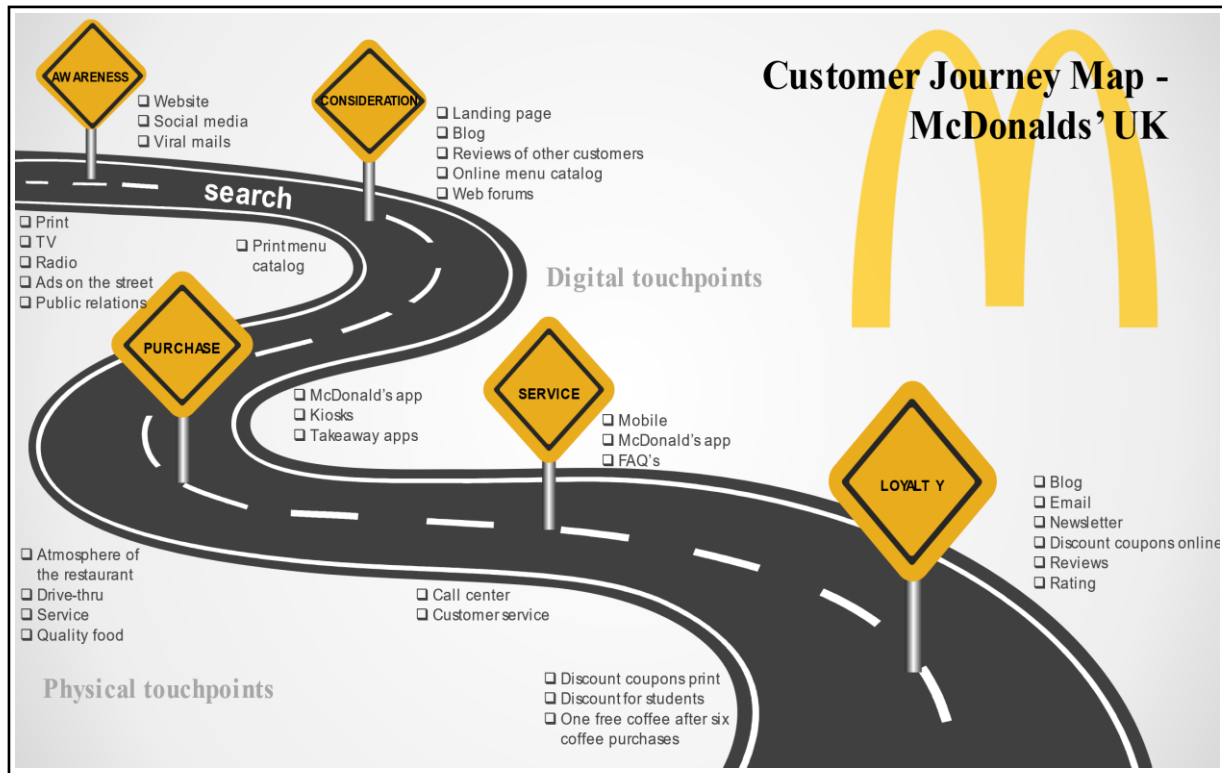
Thus, Britt (2020) argues that customers want companies to use their data to provide a good service and personalization. In this sense, McDonalds' UK encourages its customer to create an account to personalize their purchases and build a special relationship in different steps of the purchase. But the mechanism cannot be only automatic, it is necessary to create ways to clear communication.

Nowadays, the customers are focused on integrating and optimizing marketing across all touchpoints with more sophisticated and customer-centric solutions, the pandemic accelerated these necessities.

However, is it possible to manage a business through technology? There are recent experiences like Starbucks in China that show the future is nearby. In Beijing, the company integrated physical and digital customer touchpoints. Its idea is to have a good customer experience offering new levels of convenience and speed to meet the needs of today (Starbucks, 2020). The experience and feedback were positives.

In the same sense, Garbato (2019) remarks that the uses of Touchpoints are growing, and it seems that total connectivity is already a new religion, a lot of customers are using smartphone-enabled apps to eliminate long waiting lines.





In our customer journey map, we want to graphic what is the current way of a customer of McDonalds' UK who buy a product. Our study is divided into two parts: Digital and Physical touchpoint. Also, we can identify three levels in our map: pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase.

-Pre-purchase is composed of Awareness and Consideration. The information is the same, but the channels of communication are different. The same advertising is on TV and social media like YouTube. The main difference is that different targets receive advertising on different channels.

-Purchase: the customer can purchase in the restaurant by asking the order to the cashier (prohibited procedure during almost all 2020), through the kiosks, or buy it from their home online purchase.

Post-purchase: Venugopal (2010) refers that post-purchase a customer should derive satisfaction from the product. This level of our case is composed of Service and Loyalty. The customer also has the possibility to interact physically and digitally.

Finally, we can see that in part due to Covid-19 and in part by the digital expansion we are living, the technological process of purchase is growing.

McDonalds' UK wants that the purchase is digital. This will produce benefit for the company (fewer employees and faster services), and for the customer (not long queue, not to exit from home and to see online the product before purchasing).

9. Conclusion

Government rules due to Covid-19 have accelerated the online purchase process worldwide and companies as McDonalds' UK were prepared for the current situation. In the midst of the economic crisis due to pandemic, there were positive aspects that helped to accelerate technological buying and selling transactions.

In this sense, McDonalds' UK understood that is the exact moment to stimulate a digital purchase. At the end of November 2020, the company launched a creative promotion: the customer who download the McDonald's app have a free cheeseburger with its purchase. The company knows that a lot of people do not use the app and wants to prove that it is a great and easy experience.

On the other hand, McDonald's UK CEO, Paul Pomroy, remarked that the company, under the current situation, have to find a balance between innovation and risk-taking because they cannot always be at the cutting edge of innovation (Fleming, 2020).

The marketing strategy was one of the main changes for the businesses during 2020. The companies had to adapt to the government rules and the marketing strategy had to drive the new model of purchase as part of a set of changes without precedents.

We could see that digital touchpoint is growing, and its benefits are plenty. We can think that during next year the technological experience of online purchase will be naturalized. However, it will be necessary that the communication channels of the companies find the best way to guide customers through this change and transformation.

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