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In the 21st century, the influence of social media on consumer behaviour and brand perception has become undeniable. With 76% of the 14,000 people Bazaarvoice surveyed in 2022 saying they are 'influenced to shop via social media' (*From scrolling to shopping: A look at Social Commerce in 2022 2023*)¹, it is no surprise that brands rely on social media to drive customer sales and build a successful business. Whilst product packaging design remains a vital element for attracting customers, there is a noticeable shift towards consumers prioritizing a brand's social media presence, rather than the appearance of their packaging / products. In this essay, I will be researching into the three keywords; Branding, Social Media and Packaging Design. I will be exploring how the role of social media and product packaging design influences consumer preferences and brand identity. I will also be looking for the differences and similarities between my three keywords.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines the term 'Branding' as "the act of making a product, organization, person, or place easy to recognize as different from others by connecting it with a particular name, design, symbol, set of qualities, etc." (Branding | English meaning - cambridge dictionary 1999)². Graphic design and branding are closely connected as graphic designers work to create recognisable brands, that are memorable and known globally. This is further demonstrated in a statement made by

American businessman and founder / CEO of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, where he said “Your brand is what people say about you when you’re not in the room” (*A new approach to building your personal brand* 2023)³. This statement has given me a new insight into branding and reminds me that a brand is not just about a logo or products, it is the perception that is collectively made when you are not in the room. It is about the reputation you build through every experience and interaction, which leaves a lasting impression on those around you. A prime example of this is the evolution of the fast-food chain McDonald’s’ brand identity.



Figure 1: *The McDonald's Logo History, Colors, Font, and Meaning, 2023*

McDonald's was founded in 1940 by brothers Dick and Mac McDonald. The logo is one of the most iconic symbols, which is recognised across the globe by people of any age. Initially created by the McDonald's president Fred Turner, the logo has undergone several redesigns since the company's initial design in 1940, with each of them reflecting the evolution of the brand and how they adapted to different design trends throughout the years. As we can see in Figure 1, the company's first design from 1940 is 'very conventional, and a very long way from today's identity' (*#brandvolution: How was the McDonald's logo born?* 2021)⁴. With a monochrome, rectangular logo design, McDonald's was branded as a barbeque instead of the fast-food chain it is known as today. Fastforward to 1948, McDonald's had redesigned their logo and

rebranded from “barbeque” to “hamburgers” which is what the chain is most famously known for today. The rebrand was due to ‘the brothers having decided to focus on a product that was becoming increasingly popular’ (*#brandvolution: How was the McDonald's logo born?* 2021)⁵. In addition to this, the brothers added the phrase “buy em by the bag” to their new logo, highlighting the option to take away now being available. Furthermore, the new logo accentuated all the strengths of the restaurant, including their affordability, and how the food could be consumed as well.



Figure 2: 1961-1968 'golden arches' logo, designed by Jim Schindler, 2021

In the early 1960's came a pivotal moment in the brand's history, this being the introduction of the world famous “golden arches” design, shown in figure 2. The 1961 logo was designed by head of engineering and design, Jim Schindler. Schindler was appointed by Turner to create the new design, in which Schindler ‘sketched out the first logo to incorporate the golden arches. He also included a slanted line running through the “M” to represent the sloping roof of the restaurants’ (*Woven Agency, Behind the brand: The Golden Arches* 2023)⁶. It is also said that Schindler chose to use yellow for the logo as it is ‘a colour that brings cheeriness’ (*#brandvolution: How was the McDonald's logo born?* 2021)⁷, which remains a key factor of their visual identity to this day. The golden arches then quickly became an iconic symbol for the chain, becoming synonymous with the promise of the brand's quality, value and consistency.

As McDonald's continued to expand, so did the logo. However, the main elements of the logo have stayed consistent ever since, with only slight tweaks being made to the current logo we have today. These tweaks include the thickness of the "M" changing, along with the position of the text, as well as the background being changing from white to red, however it was soon changed back to white. Finally, in 2007, the background was changed to dark green, highlighting the company's efforts towards being environmentally sustainable. Researching into the evolution of the McDonald's logo has highlighted the importance of adaptability in branding and the significance of consistency within rebranding.

'Websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone' (*Social media | english meaning - cambridge dictionary*)⁸ is the definition Cambridge Dictionary defines 'Social Media' as. Social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have revolutionised the way businesses interact with their consumers, offering countless opportunities for engagement and brand promotion. With billions of users worldwide, these channels have become vital for businesses to be able to showcase their products and connect with their desired target audience. Through visually appealing posts, brands can effectively communicate their message to the right audience and build a strong following. Graphic design plays a vital role in social media, with it being essential for visual content creation. By creating visually appealing content, such as infographics, posts and other graphics, companies are able to grab users' attention as they scroll through their feeds, leaving a memorable / lasting impression. Another factor that links with both graphic design and social media is the importance of establishing a personal brand. Having a personal brand enables individuals to differentiate themselves from other potential competition. In addition to this, it can 'position you as

an authority, elevate your credibility, widen your circle of influence, and help you make a more significant impact' (Claire Bahn, *How to create a strong personal brand on social media* 2023)⁹. The importance of having a personal brand is further demonstrated in a statement made by British entrepreneur, investor and podcaster, Steven Bartlett. Bartlett took to his Tiktok platform of over 1.8 followers to explain personal branding and its importance. In the video he said "every single person listening to this has a personal brand and you may not think you do, but you do have a personal brand." (Bartlett, *Make your day* 2022). He then went on to say "Your bio on your social media channels right now is a personal brand. The way you conduct yourself on Instagram, your Facebook page, this is all part of your digital reputation, and that's exactly what personal branding is." (Bartlett, *Make your day* 2022)¹⁰. Bartlett finally brings his statement to a close by saying "If I asked you how important reputation was, you'd tell me it is incredibly important as it relates to interpersonal relationships, business relationships, sales. You would say it is everything and that is because people buy from people." (Bartlett, *Make your day* 2022)¹¹. This statement has helped me to understand the importance of personal branding and how every single person develops their own personal brand without realising. It also highlights the fact that building a trustworthy personal brand is the key to a successful business. Furthermore, it has given me an understanding that a personal brand is something you have control over, and with the right knowledge, can design and scale to billions of people.

A good example of establishing a personal brand comes from the social media campaigns for the 2023 Barbie film, which was directed by Greta Gerwig. For decades, Barbie has been an iconic figure representing aspiration, fashion and most importantly, diversity. With the upcoming release of the new film, the marketing team

aimed to take advantage of Barbie's everlasting appeal, whilst also modernising her appearance to better suit today's audience.



Figure 3: *Still from Barbie, 2023*

There is one main theme that runs throughout the Barbie franchise, and that is the use of the colour pink (see fig 3). Production designer Sarah Greenwood was in charge of the colour scheme for the film and according to Artnet, the colour scheme for Barbie Land 'came about, in part, from director Gerwig's admiration for American painter Wayne Thiebaud' (*'It Took Forever to Get to Those Pinks': Here's How the Set Design Team Behind 'Barbie' Brought the Doll's World to Vibrant Life 2023*)¹². Thiebaud is known best for his paintings of sundaes, cakes and ice creams, and uses no blacks or whites when painting shadows. The production team then adopted this way of working and used no whites or blacks for any of the shadows on set.



Figure 4: *Barbie and Ken Advertising Poster, 2023*

The marketing for Barbie was a huge success and this is because they were consistent with their brand identity throughout advertising, as well as successfully targeting their demographic of young girls and their parents. An example of the consistency is the poster created of both Barbie and Ken, which was used to advertise the film (see fig 4). The marketing campaigns are carefully designed to appeal to this audience, accentuating themes of self-expression, as well as friendship and empowerment. Furthermore, this creates a deep connection between the brand and its consumers. Barbie also had a strong presence on all social platforms, including websites, and most importantly, social media channels. By using these platforms, it allows the marketing team to interact with fans, promote new movie releases and share Barbie content.

'Packaging Design' is described by MarchBranding as 'the process that allows your packaging to fulfil a wide range of functions. It needs to stand out from your competitors' packaging in some way, as well as appeal to customers in-store and online' (Branding, *Packaging design - creating packaging that stands out* 2021). The importance of packaging design is very overlooked by society; however, design plays a vital role in influencing consumers on what to purchase. According to MarchBranding, 'around a

third of purchasing decisions are based solely on the packaging' (Branding, *Packaging design - creating packaging that stands out* 2021) ¹³. The most common misconception surrounding packaging design is that graphic designers just want to make things look pretty; in reality, it is about creating a noticeable, eye-catching and memorable design. CEO of Apple, Steve Jobs, states 'Packaging should be theatre; it should create a story, because it is this story that shapes our emotional connection to a product' (*The theatre of packaging - lil packaging* 2013). This statement from Jobs changed the way I think about packaging design, it emphasises the role packaging plays and shows how a package can be used for storytelling as well as its purpose. A good example of this is the Tiffany & Co. Blue Box packaging.



Figure 5: *Tiffany & Co. Blue Box*, 2023

The Tiffany Blue Box made its debut in the mid 1800's, the blue box symbolises much more than what is inside. Tiffany & Co. Was founded in 1837 by Lewis Tiffany and John B. Young in New York City. Even though the company was founded in 1837, the Tiffany Blue Box did not make its debut until the 19th century, but quickly became a symbol of luxury and sophistication. It is said that the blue colour of the box was inspired by a robin's egg, as that is the closest colour to the packaging. Due to the sophisticated and unforgettable colour, 'Tiffany Blue' has its own Pantone code. By Tiffany keeping to the one iconic colour, it shows consistency throughout all

their packaging and brand identity, which for a luxury brand like Tiffany is important, as it always keeps the brand recognisable. In addition to this, it will keep consumers coming back as they can easily identify the product from any other, making them more willing to buy. Having consistency throughout the packaging / branding also creates a sense of trust and reliability too. To this day, the Tiffany Blue Box is an integral part of the brand identity.

During this essay, I have visited multiple research areas, which have all been based off each keyword. I have found that each keyword I have researched in to have had their differences but have also been quite similar. 'Social Media' and 'Packaging Design' have both managed to lead back to 'Branding', however 'Social Media' and 'Packaging' have been quite different to each other. When researching into social media, it required more of a marketing aspect, however packaging design required more thought, such as having to come up with a design idea which is both memorable and consistent to your brand. The possible areas of study I could look at for next year could be product packaging design, in which I would create my own packaging for the practical side, however I am keen to potentially do something involving social media, but I am unsure on what yet. A possible research question I could use for next year is:

'Is there more of a focus on social media rather than product packaging design in the 21st century?'

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List of Figures:

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Fig 2: *1961 - 1968 'golden arches' logo designed by Jim Schindler* (2021) *#Brandvolution: How was the McDonald's logo born?* Available at: <https://www.pixartprinting.co.uk/blog/mcdonalds-logo/> (Accessed: 17 April 2024).

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