

The **McVitie's**<sup>®</sup>  
**sweet**<sup>™</sup>

*Examining the £12 million advertising campaign,  
by the UK's leading sweet biscuit brand.*





“Biscuits can be a great way of signifying a moment’s break. They can be a mood enhancer, they can make a social moment that little bit better. So they are trivial but they are very important as small things make a difference”

(thedrum, 2014)

# Introduction

Global biscuit brand McVitie’s launched a campaign in 2014 that captured the attention and arguably hearts of many audiences. It was introduced with three 30 second TV adverts, which featured an unanticipated use of animals to metaphorically portray a selection of its established biscuit range, under the slogan and title, ‘Sweet’. Not only is McVitie’s a global brand present in over 100 countries (including France, where it was only launched in 2009), in the UK, the home of its heritage, McVitie’s is the leading sweet biscuit brand. In the UK, their Chocolate Digestives, Digestives and Jaffa Cakes products are ranked the top three sweet biscuits consumed, according to Statista, (2014). This report aims to assess McVitie’s latest campaign, brand strategy and objectives. Considering its effectiveness in relation to consumer behaviour.

The Sweet campaign was set to celebrate “everyday moments transformed by the great British biscuit” (UnitedBiscuits, 2014). UnitedBiscuits, the parent brand and corporate company for McVitie’s proposed that a masterbrand strategy was the direction needed for McVitie’s to extend its lead and be prominent as what could be described as the nation’s favourite biscuit brand (in the UK). Commentators have said it is often underestimated from the perspective of consumers, despite its leading position, which is understandable considering the growth of the sweet biscuit market and product category. The biscuit production industry has proven to be highly profitable. Sweet biscuits are a major category and have been “estimated to generate 49.5 per cent of revenue in 2015-16” (Ibis World, 2015). Some of the top competing brands and products to McVitie’s include; Burton’s Maryland Cookies and Jammie Dodgers, Fox’s Crunch Creams, Cadbury’s Chocolate Fingers and Dairy Milk Biscuits.

However, not limited to one population, McVitie’s had bigger aims. UnitedBiscuits CEO in 2014, Martin Glenn stated “our aim, simply, is to increase our international sales by 20 per cent over the next three years”. Thus the company’s aims go beyond maintaining their position in the UK but also highlighting the challenge and importance for McVitie’s to become a masterbrand. Each McVitie’s product must communicate a bigger (brand) identity than that of the product itself. Moritarty et al state, “the search for effective communication has led many companies to focus on the consistency of their brand’s communication in order to establish a more coherent brand (2015:58) therefore McVitie’s campaign must have coherence globally.

## Sweet Moments

The campaign’s concept was born from a simple insight about the way people consume biscuits, McVitie’s marketing director Sarah Heyen identified;

“Biscuits can be a great way of signifying a moment’s break. They can be a mood enhancer, they can make a social moment that little bit better. So they are trivial but they are very important as small things make a difference” (thedrum, 2014).

Each of the campaign’s adverts incorporates the ritualistic nature of how people consume biscuits, just as Sarah Heyen stated, each TV advert shows the social aspect and the sense of escape or pause from daily activities. The power behind the Sweet campaign is how it touches upon the emotional aspect of how people consume biscuits. Not merely the fact that they are eating biscuits but how they feel while doing so and relating that back to the bigger picture of the ritual of biscuit consumption.

It’s important for McVitie’s to have this approach towards this general insight due to the impact of the market and the economy. Both are crucial to understanding consumer behaviour. In society, what people experience through products and services has become a major priority when choosing amongst competitors, Solomon argues, “as manufacturing costs go down and the amount of ‘stuff’ that people accumulate goes up, consumers increasingly want to buy things that would give them hedonic value in addition to what they’re designed to do” (2007:51). In this instance, McVitie’s products, biscuits, are ‘designed’ to satisfy a person’s appetite, although food products such a biscuits are considered a luxury, being that they are not essential for survival. Within this campaign, McVitie’s transcends this fact. This is done by how they associate the emotional benefit to the consumption of a non-essential food, instead, they created a sense of need for biscuits as a product, but more so and in particular, their own biscuits.



# Pulling things together

The emotion associated with biscuit eating therefore formed the basis for the campaign. McVitie's initially launched 'Sweet' with 30 second TV adverts on iTV1 during prime time. Moving forward, the campaign hit a range of touch points including in-store, digital, social and PR. To better understand how the campaign was formulated, it is useful to examine the possible strategic approach used within some of the touch points in relation to the brand's objectives. First we should look at the TV adverts. They play a great part in the message behind the campaign and in turn began its narrative. In fact, the TV adverts set the overall tone for the advertising campaign. Prior research had led advertising agency Grey London to the insight that consumers feel a certain way when they consume biscuits and the advertising speaks this emotion back to them, effectively and with minimal copy. Rather, the scene, music and context of the TV adverts set the appropriate tone, supporting Moriarty et al's argument that "communication begins by knowing everything possible about the brand's consumer, then, speaking to them with a tone and message that resonates emotionally with what moves them" (2015:154). Essentially, the 'sweet' tone allows the audience to be more receptive to the advertising message, particularly on TV where there is already a sense of noise and congestion of advertising messages.

It is clear that emotion is a pivotal aspect of the campaign and that advertising needs to evoke an emotional response. Why? Besides emotional responses being crucial to capturing audience attention to the advertising text, emotion also needs to drive action. Advertising needs to communicate effectively to achieve the desired perception in consumers to gain the required emotional response that fits with the desired 'call to action'.

In this instance, emotion further has an impact on consumer behaviour. While Jansson-Boyd argues that advertising messages should target audiences when they are already in a positive emotional state for subsequent positive product association (2010:73), Tellis claims advertising should aim to induce specific emotions in a positive (i.e. effective) manner, and that the specific emotion has a key role within the advertising (2004:148-171).

In relation to consumer behaviour this role can be understood as priming. Tellis defines priming as "a phenomenon wherein exposure to a brand name during some entertaining or distracting event leads to better recall and preference for that name" (2004:119).

The impact that McVitie's adverts have in turn is how they remind consumers at the point of sale or in decision making of the emotion they feel and should embrace when they eat biscuits and in doing so; gain an emotional rather than rational preference for their brand. Tellis further claims that priming is better suited and more effective for more established and dominant brands such as McVitie's with a "reputation in the market and are probably familiar to consumers" (Tellis, 2004:119). Therefore complementing one of their objectives of reawakening the brand through familiarity and preference.



Behind the needs and desires of consumers, McVitie's had a further underlying mission to 'awaken' or 'revitalise' their brand. In the manner that most brands are created, McVitie's launched their campaign in a way that also launched their new identity as a biscuit manufacturer, arguably through a publicity advertising approach. The surprising and unconventional use of animals to advertise biscuits made for human consumption is enough to evoke emotion but also conversations between consumers about the brand. Although they may not be the first brand to use animals to sell food, they are the first within their brand and product category to do so and in essence that has made them distinctive. More importantly, what makes the idea behind the 'Sweet' campaign hold strength is its association with the values of consumers beyond biscuit consumption.

The campaign includes kittens, puppies and the tarsier to represent the brand's respective biscuits. With this, it cleverly utilises the "core values that govern attitudes" about animals (Mortuary et al, 2015:157),

particularly the domestic animals. The general and debatably semiotic perception of domestic animals is their homely, friendly and comforting nature. There is a general consensus of sensitivity to animals in society and definitely western culture. The idea within this campaign illustrates Jansson-Boyd's idea of "how consumers perceive products and services is often influenced by the way in which they were marketed, personal experiences and how they are judged by people's social surroundings" (2010:38).

We can understand how the stories told within each McVitie's advert can be linked to not only how people consume biscuits but the motivating factors in consumer decision making. Audiences may be motivated by the idea of the adverts fitting into the narratives of their own personal lives, which includes their beliefs and values. In fact, the sweet campaign brings to life a story about McVitie's, while also including the personal stories of consumers, regardless of whether they own a domestic animal themselves.



# Strategy

With the concept and advertising strategy in place, McVitie's had to figure out the best approach to deliver the advertising message with a media strategy. As stated before, the touchpoints of the campaign included TV, in-store, digital, social and PR. It is clear the 'Sweet' campaign was intended to be a multimedia campaign, presumably to have the widest reach to really emphasise the launch of the brand's new look (minor changes had been made to the McVitie's logo), and identity as a master brand. Consumer behaviour entails more than the simple purchase of goods and services. It involves how people also "dispose of these goods and services" as well as activities around this that "satisfy their needs and desires" (Noel, 2009:11). Thus through recognising this, we can understand the role of choosing certain media can have on a campaign and that "consumers have specialised needs that media can meet" (Baron and Sissors, 1919: 2).

There are various way to assess the suitability of the media used within a campaign, some advantages and limitations more obvious than others. Pradeep (1963) takes a neurological stand point behind the effectiveness of communication through different types of media to understand consumer behaviour. He claims "the larger screen size of the TV platform helps the human elements and fine details shown in commercials to have the highest

emotional engagement" (Pradeep, 1963: 225). This could help assist in understanding why the content of the different media platforms in the 'Sweet' campaign differ slightly. For example, the TV adverts for the campaign have people/humans, supporting the notion to drive emotional engagement by Pradeep but also the emotional nature of the campaign itself, while print, social media and digital media only feature the animal characters of the 'Sweet' campaign narrative. Not to claim the other media lacks the emotional tone the advertising desired but we can assume that the print and digital platforms are more focused on priming and memory retention of the brand at point of purchasing the product category.

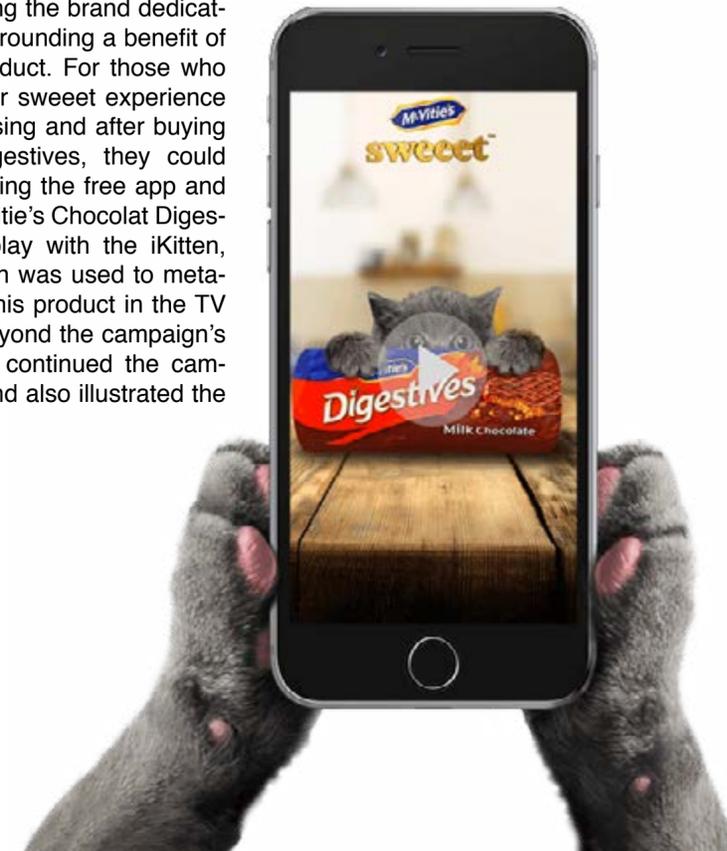
Furthermore, Pradeep also claims his studies have shown that "mobile and internet environments give a significant boost in memory retention for most of the ads tested" arguing that this is due to the need to focus on the usually smaller screens and also how audiences tend to voluntarily engage with the devices that hold this media. (Pradeep, 1963: 225).



The McVitie's campaign strongly exemplifies both of these points. In 2016, they continued their campaign with the launch of the Chocolate Digestives campaign in an interactive mobile app. After the success of the initial launch of the campaign in 2014, marketing director, Sarah Heyen proclaimed the brand wanted to continue to celebrate the everyday biscuit eating moment with a focus on the Chocolate Digestives product. The app, called the 'McVitie's iKitten App' was an opportunity for the brand to take the 'Sweet moment' from the TV screen, to actively involving consumers in the 'Sweet experience'. The app allows "consumers to play with their very own virtual kitten" (UnitedBiscuits, 2016). Of course, the launch of the app was accompanied with another TV advert within the series, although focusing on announcing the app but furthering the idea of bringing the experience into the space of consumers and showing that "as interconnectivity becomes easier, the boundaries between screens is beginning to drop away" (Pradeep, 1963:221).

We can understand from the campaign's objectives why the brand utilised a wide spectrum of media and the £12 million budget only supported the strategy. Having maximum coverage further contributed to the relaunch of McVitie's but within this, the smaller campaigns such as the iKitten app had within them, their own strategies. With the Chocolate Digestives product being more the most popular (in terms of consumption) product of McVitie's, it's unsurprising the brand dedicated a whole app surrounding a benefit of purchasing the product. For those who wish to extend their sweet experience beyond TV advertising and after buying the Chocolate Digestives, they could do so by downloading the free app and scanning their McVitie's Chocolate Digestives wrapper to play with the iKitten, being that the kitten was used to metaphorically portray this product in the TV adverts. Moving beyond the campaign's initial adverts, this continued the campaign's narrative and also illustrated the

success of the initial media platforms used. Especially if the brand are now focusing on audiences and consumers, who are already in the market of buying their specific products but at the same time enticing new consumers. Mortuary et al state "entertainment has always had a positive value on advertising messages" (2015:134) and the interactive game structure of the iKitten app is exactly that.



Having broken down the campaign, the following creative brief is presumptive of what the actual McVitie's 'Sweet' campaign brief was, which in turn aids the understanding of what the strategy behind the campaign.



# The Creative Brief

## Background:-

McVitie's is the UK's leading sweet biscuit brand. However, sitting comfortable in their position has made them a victim to their own success. With the sweet biscuit product category rapidly growing, and newer brands forming with fresh and charismatic identities, McVitie's needs to update its own mundane personality and restore a bigger impression amongst consumers; while still reminding them that McVitie's is classically great. McVitie's understands biscuit eating is a ritual across the whole nation, it is a moment unnoticed that had great meaning to people's daily lives. Subtly, the brand's significance in relation to this needs to be better represented through advertising.

## Objective:-

The goal is to create campaign to make the brand more distinctive in the growing sweet biscuit brand market. This would require a master brand approach, in a campaign that emphasises how individual products are united under the McVitie's. The campaign should improve consumer's overall perception and encourage them to choose McVitie's as their preferred biscuit brand.

## Target Audience:-

Male and female audiences aged between 18 and 50 years, already in the market of buying biscuits (both sweet and savoury). The campaign should speak to a wide demographic in terms of lifestyle, social class and other characteristics.

## The Outcome:-

- Establish McVitie's as a master brand of its individual products.
- Maintain old customers while reviving the classic brand to attract new customers.
- Increase international sales by 20%

## Substantiation:-

- McVitie's is a popular brand, it's estimated to be bought 14 times per year by 89% of UK households. (UnitedBiscuits)
- The significance of biscuit consumption in consumer daily lives.

## Tone of Voice:-

Emotional, Gripping and Entertaining.

## Requirements:-

(A multimedia campaign)

- 30" TV Advert
- Digital Advertising
- Social Media
- Print
- Press/PR

*Mandatories can be found on the client brief.*

## ...In Conclusion

Overall both the concepts used to illustrate the messages behind the advertising and the media strategy approach worked together solidly in meeting the various objectives the brand had set out. The use of animals was ingenious in achieving all of the campaign's objectives, particularly in making the brand distinctive. It was an original idea for a well-established, classic brand, propelling it further as a competitor against 'newer' (with a contemporary feel) sweet biscuit brands and their products such as Oreos, BelVita and others.

Due to McVitie's already being in the top position of their product category, an increase in sales isn't a primary objective of this campaign; however it is useful in assessing whether the bigger objective of changing brand perception and making the brand preferable has been achieved.

The continuation of the campaign since the release its release in 2014 is arguably the greatest indication that it has been effective. For example how the campaign has been able to use multiple media and promotion strategies, the Sweet Toys to the iKitten app, shows that the animal concept was strong because it is applicable in different forms.

Thus from assessing the different components of the Sweet campaign and using that to compile a fictional brief, it would be fair to conclude the Sweet campaign brought about and is continuing to progress with the evolution of the McVitie's brand.



# Bibliography

- Jansson-Boyd, C. (2010) Consumer Psychology. McGraw Hill/Open University Press. Berkshire.
- Noel, H. (2009) Basic Marketing 01: Consumer Behaviour. Ava Publishing. Switzerland.
- Moriarty, E.S. Mitchell, N. Wellis, W. (2015) Advertising and IMC: Principles and Practice. Pearson. Harlow.
- Pradeep, A.K. (1963) The Buying Brain: Secrets of Selling to the Subconscious Mind. John Waley and Sons Inc. New Jersey.
- Sissors, Z, J. Baron, B.R. (1919) Advertising Media Planning. McGraw Hill. New York.
- Solomon, M.R. (2014) Consumer Behaviour: Buying, Having, Being. Pearson Education Canada. Toronto.
- Tellis, J. G. (2004) Effective Advertising: Understanding When, How and Why Advertising Works. Sage Publications. California.
- IbisWorld. 2015. Biscuit Production in the UK: Market Research Report. [ONLINE] Available at:<http://www.ibisworld.co.uk/market-research/biscuit-production.html>. [Accessed 19 March 2016].
- Statista. 2014. Leading Sweet Biscuit Brands in the UK. [ONLINE] Available at:<http://www.statista.com/statistics/302794/leading-sweet-biscuits-brands-in-the-uk/>. [Accessed 18 March 2016].
- UnitedBiscuits. 2014. McVitie's Unveils £12 million campaign celebrating everyday moments transformed by the great British biscuit. [ONLINE] Available at:<http://www.unitedbiscuits.com/news/corporate-news/mcvities-unveils-12-million-campaign-celebrating-everyday-moments-transformed-by-the-great-british-biscuit/>. [Accessed 18 March 2016].
- UnitedBiscuits. 2016. The sweet™ kittens are back as McVitie's launches new Chocolate Digestives campaign and interactive mobile app. [ONLINE] Available at:<http://www.unitedbiscuits.com/news/the-sweet-kittens-are-back-as-mcvities-launches-new-chocolate-digestives-campaign-and-interactive-mobile-app/>. [Accessed 19 March 2016].