



Burger King At Forefront Of Viral Marketing With New Men's Fragrance 'Flame'

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DURHAM, N.H. - Burger King's marketing campaign of a new men's fragrance "Flame" that has a partially clad "King" looking seductively while laying on a fur rug in front of a fireplace may be a bit on the creepy side but it shows that the hamburger chain is at the forefront of viral marketing, according to a University of New Hampshire communication professor.

"There is nothing new about linking food with romance in ads - especially desserts and diet food for women, beer for men - but the Flame campaign derives some of its humor by subverting this connection. The taste of the Whopper, rather than the promise of romantic connection, as spoofed by the King's repulsive entreaties, is the real focus of desire in the ad," says Josh Lauer, assistant professor of communication at UNH.

"It remains to be seen whether this ploy will be successful. Ultimately, the fragrance is beside the point. The publicity associated with the humor and absurdity of it is an end in itself. It demonstrates, once again, Burger King's commitment to pushing the envelope in viral marketing," Lauer says.

According to Lauer, Burger King's latest marketing campaign of the Flame fragrance comes on the heels of its "Whopper Virgins" campaign, in which the Whopper is pitted against McDonald's Big Mac in taste tests with fast-food naïfs in remote locations such as Thailand, Romania, and Greenland. The campaign generated significant controversy, with critics condemning its ethnocentrism and promotion of unhealthy Western food, but also lots of buzz.

As the second largest fast-food hamburger restaurant behind McDonald's, Burger King is responding to intense competition. Earlier this year Burger King issued a mandate requiring its franchises to remain open until 2 a.m., an effort to attract late-night and after-party customers with the munchies.

"The Flame fragrance campaign is presumably aimed at younger male customers who enjoy the King character's creepy irony as a corporate anti-mascot," Lauer says.

Burger King has been at the forefront of online marketing innovation since the launch of its memorable 2004 Subservient Chicken website, Lauer says. This promotion invited online visitors to submit real-time commands to a seemingly live webcast of a person dressed in a low-budget chicken costume performing in their living room. (The chicken figure was actually pre-programmed to respond to hundreds of commands.) Burger King struck advertising gold again earlier this year with its Whopper Freakout campaign, which featured real customers reacting to (false) news that the Whopper had been discontinued.

"Both campaigns generated enormous interest in Burger King and an avalanche of hits at its sponsored website (as well as YouTube) to watch and share its message. The appeal of such

promotions is that they cut through advertising clutter by offering novelty and entertainment rather than a conventional one-sided advertising message," Lauer says.

More importantly, such promotions are viral - they are rapidly passed along from friend to friend online and encourage active participation in the marketing campaign, he says.

"In an ad-saturated environment, word-of-mouth promotion may be more persuasive because it is rooted in the trust and authenticity of real personal relationships. Even better than product placements, in which brands are embedded in entertainment content, word-of-mouth marketing inserts a brand directly into conversation among friends. Viral marketing campaigns are successful when they inspire thousands of positive, admiring conversations about one's brand," Lauer says.

Lauer holds a Ph.D. in communication from the University of Pennsylvania Annenberg School for Communication.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a New England liberal arts college and a major research university with a strong focus on undergraduate-oriented research. A land, sea and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 11,800 undergraduate and 2,400 graduate students

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