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Fast Food Ranked Sixth Out of 15 Industries Studied in MBLM's *Brand Intimacy 2020 Study*

Branding Agency MBLM Releases Fast Food Findings of its Annual Study and Analyzes How Consumer Sentiment about the Industry Has Been Affected by the Pandemic

Starbucks Placed First in the Industry, Followed by Chick-fil-A and McDonald's

NEW YORK — July 8, 2020 — The fast food industry ranked sixth out of the 15 industries studied in MBLM's *Brand Intimacy 2020 Study*, which is the largest study of brands based on emotions. MBLM (pronounced Emblem), the agency using emotional science to build more intimate brands during these unprecedented times, is also analyzing how consumer sentiment about the industry has been affected by the pandemic. Brand Intimacy is defined as the emotional science that measures the bonds we form with the brands we use and love, and has become more important as brands adjust the way they connect with consumers during today's unprecedented times.

MBLM's study, now in its 10th year, revealed that Starbucks ranked #1 in the fast food industry followed by Chick-fil-A and McDonald's. The remaining brands in the top 10 for the industry were: Dunkin', Subway, Wendy's, KFC, Taco Bell, Domino's and Pizza Hut. Additionally, top intimate brands in the U.S. continued to significantly outperform the top brands in the Fortune 500 and S&P indices in both revenue and profit over the past 10 years, according to the study.

MBLM also examined how the industry has been impacted the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Pizza Hut's largest franchisee NPC International, Inc. filed for bankruptcy due to shutdowns, which added to the competitive stress the brand had been facing.[1] On the other hand, Domino's has seen comparable-store sales increase by over 20% in April and May and its stock was up 26% for 2020 as of July.[2] The fast food industry is also giving back during the pandemic. For example, Chick-fil-A created a $10.8 million community relief effort in April, through which it provided funds to franchisees to distribute to local communities in need.[3] Starbucks launched its Starbucks Global Partner Emergency Relief Program in April to help its employees impacted by the pandemic.[4]

"The fast food industry has performed fairly consistently in our study over the past few years, and has built emotional connections with customers," stated Mario Natarelli, managing partner, MBLM. "As with virtually all industries, the pandemic has greatly impacted fast food. Some of the top brands have garnered largely positive and supportive responses from consumers, while others have faced criticism and scrutiny. Understanding how and why consumers express their connections during COVID is valuable for all brands in the industry to examine. Now more than ever, positive emotions can drive performance."

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[1] Pizza Hut and Wendy's operator files for bankruptcy, as COVID-19 puts pressure on struggling restaurant sector
[2] Why Domino's Pizza Stock Has Risen 26% So Far in 2020
[3] Chick-fil-A® Announces Multi-Million Dollar COVID-19 Community Relief Effort
[4] Starbucks commits $10M USD in COVID-19 relief for partners around the world

Additional noteworthy fast food industry findings in the U.S. include:
- The U.S. fast food industry had an average Brand Intimacy Quotient of 32.1, above the cross-industry average of 31
- Starbucks was the top brand in the industry, and both millennials and users over 35 years old ranked Starbucks as their favorite intimate brand
- Starbucks led among men, whereas Chick-fil-A was the top intimate brand among women
- Chick-fil-A also led among users with incomes under $100,000, whereas users with an income over $100,000 preferred KFC
- Indulgence, associated with moments of pampering and gratification, was the most prominent archetype in the category, and Starbucks was the top-performing fast food brand for indulgence

MBLM also further analyzed the industry in an article entitled, "Fast Food & COVID-19. How consumers are talking about their favorite fast food brands during the pandemic." The piece reviews the industry's performance in the study and also the impact of the pandemic. Additionally, MBLM augmented its Brand Intimacy research with social listening research it captured during the week of June 15th for the top five ranking fast food brands. The agency found that, while the brands spoke in generally similar terms about their responses to COVID-19, consumers spoke differently about each brand on social media. Starbucks' users demonstrated a lot of emotion for the brand; Chick-fil-A's users spoke about service and reliability with a few expressing disappointment about the brand adapting to COVID-19 but overall the brand was strongly linked to being efficient; McDonald's was not seen as positively as it was viewed as a big corporation caring about profits and not protecting employees; Dunkin' had people talking about the brand actively hiring, their COVID-19 routines and devotion to Dunkin' and appreciation of local franchises; and Subway had mixed consumer mentions – with people associating it with financial trouble but also highlighting the brand's donations to medial workers. Fast food has seen varied results during the pandemic. MBLM questions what will happen with the industry as states reopen, close and reopen in varying degrees. The agency concludes it seems likely consumers will remember and continue to deepen their emotional attachments with the brands in this space as they continue to evolve their offerings and provide the indulgence many crave.

The *Brand Intimacy 2020 Report* contains the most comprehensive rankings of brands based on emotion, analyzing the responses of 6,200 consumers and 56,000 brand evaluations across 15 industries in the U.S., Mexico and UAE. MBLM's reports and rankings tool showcase the performance of almost 400 brands, revealing the characteristics and intensity of the consumer bonds.

To view the fast food industry findings, please click here. Additionally, MBLM offers Custom Dashboards providing extensive data for brands included in its annual *Brand Intimacy* Study. To download the full *Brand Intimacy 2020 Study* or explore the Rankings click here.

Methodology
During 2019, MBLM with Praxis Research Partners conducted an online quantitative survey among 6,200 consumers in the U.S. (3,000), Mexico (2,000), and the United Arab Emirates (1,200). Participants were respondents who were screened for age (18 to 64 years of age) and annual household income ($35,000 or more) in the U.S. and socioeconomic levels in Mexico and the UAE (A, B and C socioeconomic levels). Quotas were established to ensure that the sample mirrored census data for age, gender, income/socioeconomic level, and region. The survey was designed primarily to understand the extent to which consumers have relationships with brands and the strength of those relationships from fairly detached to highly intimate. It is important to note that this research provides more than a mere ranking of brand performance and was specifically designed to provide prescriptive guidance to marketers. We modeled data from over 6,200 interviews and approximately 56,000 brand evaluations to quantify the mechanisms that drive intimacy. Through factor analysis, structural equation modeling, and other sophisticated analytic techniques, the research allows marketers to better understand which levers need to be pulled to build intimacy between their brand and consumers. Thus, marketers will understand not only where their brand falls in the hierarchy of performance but also how to strengthen performance in the future.
To read a more detailed description of MBLM's approach, visit its Methodology page.

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About MBLM: MBLM has invented a new marketing paradigm, Brand Intimacy, delivering expertise and offerings across three areas of focus: Agency, Lab and Platform. With offices in seven countries, our multidisciplinary teams help clients build stronger bonds and deliver optimized marketing outcomes and returns for the long term. To learn more about how we can help you create and sustain ultimate brand relationships, visit mblm.com.