

M&M's: A Casualty of the Culture War

Part 1: Introducing M&M's

- M&M's are button-size chocolate candies covered in a sugary coating.
- Invented by Forrest E. Mars, the candies were first released in 1941 (M&M's, 2023).
 - The candies were inspired by soldiers during the Spanish Civil War who ate similar chocolate disks covered in sugar; the sugary coating prevented the chocolate from melting (Schumm, 2019).
- Today there are 59 M&M's flavors (Wiki Fandom, n.d.).
 - Peanut M&M's, introduced in 1954, was the first product offering beyond the original.
 - With the release of the peanut M&M's came the brand's most notable tagline, "Melts in your Mouth, not in Your Hands" (M&M's, 2023).
- M&M's is owned by the larger parent company Mars Incorporated.
 - Other notable confectionaries in the Mars family include Skittles, Snickers, Twix, Starburst, and several others.

Part 2: Industry & Competitors

- Narrowly, M&M's is in the confectionery industry, which consists of "chocolates, gum, and various sugar-based products" (Foodware 365, n.d.).
 - The US confectionary industry was estimated to be worth \$46.53 billion in 2022 (Statista, 2022).
- More broadly, M&M's are in the snack category, which includes "bakery snacks, confectionary snacks, savory snacks, and others" (Fortune Business Insights, 2023).
 - The US snack food industry was valued at \$105.9 billion in 2022 (Statista, 2023).
- M&M's largest competitors are candies owned by The Hershey Company.
 - Some of the largest brands under The Hershey Company include Hershey Chocolate, Reese's, Heath, and Kit Kat.
 - Reese's Pieces were created in 1978, aiming to compete with M&M's directly.
- In 2020, the five most popular candies in the US included (1) Snickers, (2) Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, (3) Hershey Kisses, (4) Kit Kat, and (5) Peanut Nut M&M's (Cameron, 2022).
 - This data contrasts with 2002 when M&M's were America's most popular candy (Belz, 2019).

Part 3: How M&M's Builds Its Brand

- M&M's is notorious for generating buzz via pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1987).
 - In 1981 M&M's were the first candy to go to space (Schumm, 2019).
 - In 1984 M&M's were the official candy of the Olympics.
- M&M's makes it clear that you are eating M&M's and not another candy.
 - In the 1950s M&M's got their signature "M" stamped on each piece of candy.

- This was a direct response to the growing number of near-identical competitors at the time (Schumm, 2019).
 - The slogan "Look for the m on every piece" was created (M&M's, 2023).
- The fictional "spokescandies" are M&M's largest brand building avenue.
 - Spokescandies were born in the early 1960s.
 - Food mascots gained popularity in the 1950s and 1960s.
 - Ronald McDonald, Cap'n Crunch, and Tony the Tiger were also birthed during this era (Ad Age, 2007).
 - The goofy nature of the spokescandies were loosely based off The Flintstones.
 - Initially, the M&M's spokescandies were sweet and friendly; each color did not have distinguishable characteristics.
 - It wasn't until the mid-1990s that the spokescandies each got unique personalities (O'Reilly, 2023).
 - The decision was made by an outside marketing agency brought in to revamp the brand (O'Reilly, 2023).

Part 4: The Spokescandy Debacle

- In 2022, the spokescandies got a massive remodel.
 - According to Mars, the changes were made to reflect a "more dynamic, progressive world" (Ibrahim, 2022).
- During the remodel, characters got lengthy descriptions and their styles were dulled with the goal of being more inclusive (Diaz, 2023).
 - Unlike the original spokescandies, each color had unique traits, tone, hobbies, and interests.
 - The largest controversy during the 2022 remodel was the removal of the green M&M's "sexy boots" that were replaced with sneakers (Ibrahim, 2022).
 - The change frustrated conservative news hosts and feminists (Diaz, 2023).
- In January 2023, M&M's announced an "indefinite pause" on the spokescandies, replacing them with Maya Rudolph (Jones, 2023).
 - The pause was short lived as M&M's announced the return of the spokescandies during the 2023 Superbowl.
- Since the return of the spokescandies, the purple M&M's (who is plus-size and queer) has been heavily marketed (Mouriquand, 2022).

Part 5: Where Can We Go From Here?

- Consumers are still largely frustrated, arguing that "woke" candy is unnecessary.
- Modifying a brand image must remain consistent. The robust remodel towards inclusivity altered M&M's brand image too drastically.
 - Incremental changes over time would be much more palatable.
- As a global brand, M&M's must avoid becoming overly political in its messaging.
 - The recent politicization of the spokescandies excludes audiences that were once M&M's loyalists.

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