PIZZAPRENEURSHIP: A CREATIVE SOLUTION DIRECTED AT COLLEGE-AGED CONSUMERS TO ENABLE BETTER ACCESS TO LITTLE CAESARS PIZZA

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INTRODUCTION

For my honors thesis professional project, I developed a creative solution for Little Caesars Pizza directed toward college-aged consumers that addresses an existing marketing problem. Little Caesars offers carryout pizzas at ultra-competitive prices. The brand’s marketing strategy has been generally effective, as it is the fastest growing chain in the United States based on the net number of stores added each year between 2008 and 2015 (Little Caesars, n.d.). Despite Little Caesars’ emphasis on low prices and convenience – two qualities the average college-aged consumer values when making food purchases – it currently struggles to attract students in college-town markets where the Little Caesars location is far from where they live. Because Little Caesars does not offer delivery and many store locations are not in reasonable walking distances, students rely on other pizza restaurants.

The brand’s current national advertising campaign is geared toward a more general population, failing to directly market to this demographic and allowing it to fall through the cracks. The challenge of my professional project was to increase sales of Little Caesars pizza to college-aged consumers in the markets described above without disrupting the company’s existing business structure. I first conducted primary and secondary research to understand the pizza market and my target consumer group. Then, I created a strategy based on insights derived from my research. Finally, I concluded my project with a creative solution that aims to address this marketing problem. A creative solution is an idea that solves a marketing communications problem in an innovative way within the client’s requirements. In a real-world scenario, the creative solution in my project would be an integrated component of a broader advertising campaign. When I
refer to advertising throughout this essay, creative solutions such as mine are included as one aspect of that general category.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

My project benefitted from the guidance of theories. Advertising has no overarching, general theory that is widely accepted. Instead, there is a “collection of pseudo-theories” (Ramond, 1976, p. 7) that are applied in various ways in different contexts. During my research, I came across an overwhelming number of studies and articles with a wide range of hypotheses and claims, many of which contradicted or challenged each other. I narrowed my focus to theories about advertising effectiveness and advertising creativity because they are the two most relevant areas of research for both my professional project and career trajectory.

In addition to the vast number of theories, there is also significant disagreement between academics and advertising professionals about the legitimacy and relevance of applying models to real-world situations. Professionals in the industry often do not acknowledge the potential usefulness of theories as models of how things operate, while many academics focused on advertising theory find that their own work does not translate well to practice (Nyilasy, 2012). Regardless, my theoretical research provided me with a conceptual framework to better understand advertising before beginning my professional project.

In this literature review, I provide a definition for advertising and outline the criteria I used as my definition during research. I then examine two consumer behavior models that are related to determining advertising effectiveness: hierarchy of effects
models and the elaboration likelihood model. I focus on these older models because “new theories are not models so much as explanations for conflicting results from consumer research” (Vaughn, 1980, p. 29). Both models describe the stages consumers go through while forming or changing brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Next, I review the FCB Grid, a quadrant matrix that integrates the hierarchy of effects models with the concept of consumer involvement. It helps direct creative strategy by illustrating how consumers approach the purchasing process for different products. I then look at the intersection of branding and advertising. The two are inextricably related, as advertising campaigns are centered on brands and their qualities. Next, I attempt to answer the question, “What is creativity in advertising?” by focusing on the criteria necessary for creativity as well as how different industry professionals perceive creativity in advertisements. Finally, I discuss how creative ideas that extend beyond traditional advertising campaigns are important for brands to implement.

**Defining Advertising**

Advertising is difficult to define, as it is a complex and dynamic field that is constantly changing. What is considered an advertisement is also becoming more difficult to define due to an increasingly wide range in the presentation and content, from old school print advertisements and television commercials to more recent phenomena like native advertisements, sponsored social influencers, and creative solutions, such as the idea included in my project. Despite the lack of an industry consensus on exactly what advertising is and what advertisements are, it is important to define what advertising is on some level because it is fundamentally different from other promotional terms, such as marketing and public relations.
Advertising and public relations are both subsets of marketing, which presents the “overall picture for how the company will promote, distribute, and price its products” (Klein, 2003, p. 1). The commonly known “4 P’s” of marketing include product, price, place, and promotion. While marketing refers to all of these aspects of a brand, advertising is focused only on the last P, promotion. A clear distinction between these terms is necessary for theoretical research purposes because they have different theories attached to them based on their communication objectives. As advertising techniques and technologies continue to change, the working definition of advertising continues to be updated. Still, there is no absolute definition that is widely accepted. I focus on two similar definitions that guided my throughout my research process.

Richards and Curran (2002) collaborated with a group of advertising experts to determine the essential components of advertising and create a broad, flexible definition for the term. Though they did not find a true consensus during their research, they derived a definition they felt represented the experts’ majority opinion: “Advertising is a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, now or in the future” (Richards, 2002, p. 74).

Expanding upon the ideas of Richards and Curran, Rodgers and Thorson (2012) offer a model that includes the basic elements that make up advertising. They contend the required attributes of what should be considered advertising are: contexts, advertising organizations, message sources, messages, channels, devices, audiences, intended effect, and unintended effects (Rodgers, 2012, p. 3). Examples of contexts include historical, ethical, and legal. Advertising organizations can refer to advertising agencies, corporations, and regulatory organizations. Message sources can range from corporations
to celebrities to politicians to ordinary citizens. Messages have two components: content and type. Content is what the advertisement consists of, whether it is print, video, audio, or a social media post. Type focuses more on the communication objective of the message; examples include brand, product, political, public service announcement, and issue messages. Channels include newspapers, radio, television, Internet search, and social media, while devices refers to physical objects, such as smartphones, laptops, e-Readers, and desktop computers. Audiences refers to demographic traits and consumer segments based on interests, such as sports fanatics or wine lovers. Intended effects of advertising include purchase or intention to purchase, attitude toward the advertisement and/or brand, memory, attention, and involvement. Unintended effects can be materialism, unnecessary purchases, and miscomprehension (Rodgers, 2012).

Rodgers and Thorson (2012) provide a model that is not a theory of advertising itself but rather “an attempt to organize the vast field of advertising scholarship” (p. 10). When researching advertising theories, I kept this model in mind as both a definition of advertising and a way to distinguish and organize the various components of advertising. Though I will reference marketing as a more general category of communications in this literature review, it is focused primarily on advertising.

**Hierarchy of Effects**

What constitutes advertising effectiveness is a matter of debate in the advertising community. There are two general camps of thought: That advertising is effective only when it immediately sells products, and that advertising is a long process that eventually may end with a purchase but includes many cognitive steps on the consumer’s part along the way. The hierarchy of effects refers to the body of work in advertising and marketing
literature that discusses this advertising effectiveness controversy (Barry, 1987). This area of discussion can be split into three general development periods: the early development phase, the modern development phase, and a period of “challenge and defense” (Barry, 1987, p. 252) when scholars have challenged the foundational assumptions of hierarchy of effects theory. Different scholars have included different steps or differing explanations of steps, but all hierarchy of effects models predict a sequence of cognition and identify which variables are significant for understanding consumer behavior. I focused on the most influential models.

Theories developed in the first phase were based upon St. Elmo Lewis’s AIDA model, one of the most referenced models in advertising literature (Barry, 1987). The AIDA model is a stair-step hierarchical framework that theorizes the steps consumers mentally go through before making purchases. AIDA is an acronym that stands for attention/awareness, interest, desire, and action. Building upon Lewis’ model, scholars made slight changes to the steps during the subsequent decades. Arthur Frederick Sheldon adjusted the first attention step by adding the word “favorable” and theorized an additional fifth step, which he called permanent satisfaction (Barry, 1987). Sheldon was one of the few theorists to even discuss that consumers could go through all of the steps with an unfavorable view of the product or brand (Barry, 1987). Early models were based on logic and intuition rather than empirical research, but they nonetheless provided the foundation for later hierarchy of effects models (Barry, 1987).

In the modern development period, Lavidge and Steiner (1961) applied the hierarchy of effects model directly to advertising. They emphasized their view of the sales process as that: a process. They contended that “all advertising is not, should not,
and cannot be designed to produce immediate purchases” (Lavidge, 1961, p. 59), arguing that the measurable criteria of immediate sales results is not enough to determine advertising effectiveness. Instead, they postulated seven steps that illustrate the mental process consumers go through before making a purchase. These steps are: unawareness of the product existence, awareness of the product existence, knowledge of what the product can offer, a favorable attitude/liking of the product, preference of the product over other brands, a desire to purchase and conviction that the purchase is wise, and the actual purchase (Lavidge, 1961). These steps are grounded in psychology, postulating that consumers go through a series of cognitive, affective, and conative stages. The steps are not equidistant, and consumers can move up several steps simultaneously (Lavidge, 1961). Additionally, the greater the “psychological or economic commitment” (Lavidge, 1961, p. 60) of the purchase, the longer it will take for consumers to go through these steps. For products that are a less serious commitment, it is more likely that some consumers will almost immediately be at the end of the process and make a purchase (Lavidge, 1961).

The most general critique of Lavidge and Steiner’s hierarchy of effects model seems to be that consumers do not go through all of those steps for every purchase; for example, sometimes awareness of a product is enough for someone to make the jump to the final step (Palda, 1966). This criticism is confusing and unnecessary, as the authors do acknowledge that consumers may not go through each individual step for every purchase. However, Lavidge and Steiner (1961) do not address the phenomenon of impulse buying in their theory, which most critics of the model bring up when analyzing
Impulse buying throws a wrench into the process because depending on the situation; an impulse purchase can bypass every step other than the final one.

More specific criticisms are directed at the individual steps of the process, and not the model’s overall framework. Palda (1966) reviewed previous studies based on the hierarchy notion, concluding that “there is no good evidence that such changes in awareness precede rather than follow purchase” (p. 14). He also argued there is not a logical connection between the enjoyment of advertisements and consumers’ desire to purchase that brand (Palda, 1966). Palda’s survey of hierarchical studies illustrates both that there are many flaws in the process and that it is difficult to design experiments to test the process with reliable results. The heated debate in the academic community about hierarchical models highlights why professionals in the advertising industry may not consider theories too practical; there is so much disagreement about every aspect of the models and no theory stands out from the rest as something dependably true. However, the models are a good starting place for understanding consumer behavior.

I was interested in researching advertising effectiveness based on my project because in order to address Little Caesars’ goal to sell more pizza to college-aged consumers, my creative work needed to be effective. The hierarchy of effects models helped guide the way I thought about the consumer thought process while developing my research questions. Before this project, I had never conducted a focus group or personal interview, and creating questions based on models was a good starting point for that process. I wrote questions that aimed to understand my target consumer group’s awareness, knowledge of, attitude toward, preference, and desire to purchase from different pizza restaurants. I asked students about impulse buying and what factors
influence their purchasing decisions about pizza. Asking questions grounded in the model’s steps helped me understand the way my target consumer group thinks and feels about pizza purchases.

**Elaboration Likelihood Model**

Another consumer behavior model that consistently appears in advertising literature is the elaboration likelihood model, or ELM. Introduced by social physiologists Richard Petty and John Cacioppo (1983), this model helps make sense of the underlying processes of attitude change and persuasion. When applied to advertising, the ELM aims to predict attitude changes about the brand being advertised. It can grouped with hierarchy of effects models and other theories that attempt to determine when advertising is effective.

The model has two separate routes to attitude change: the central route and the peripheral route (Petty, 1983). Through the central route, the persuasion process is more direct and complete. The consumer’s attitude shifts because of his analysis of information that he feels is “central to the true merits of a particular altitudinal position” (Petty, 1983, p. 135). Consumers on this route thoughtfully consider the advertising message, which requires both the motivation and the cognitive ability to do so (Petty, 1983). The central route requires more active participation on behalf of the consumer. Attitude changes induced through the central route are generally more enduring and are predictive of behavior (Petty, 1983).

On the peripheral route, resulting attitude changes do not occur because the consumer has carefully thought through the pros and cons of the brand, but rather because they develop an attitude based on positive or negative cues in the advertisement.
The peripheral route allows consumers to develop or shift their attitude without engaging in extensive thought about the product or brand. Essentially, consumers who use the peripheral route are persuaded by factors that are unrelated to the message content of the advertisement. Attitude changes via the peripheral route are found to be temporary and not predictive of behavior (Petty, 1983). Petty and Cacioppo (1983) note that the ELM is incomplete and two routes cannot alone explain the wide range of attitude-change results that have been observed both in their study and other studies. However, they acknowledge that it is a simplifying and organizing framework for understanding consumers’ attitude shifts.

From their initial conclusion, Petty and Cacioppo (1983) conducted a study to understand the role of involvement in consumers’ attitude changes. High involvement messages “have greater personal relevance and consequences or elicit more personal connections than low involvement messages” (Petty, 1983, p. 136). Petty and Cacioppo concluded that effectiveness of different aspects of advertisements depends on a consumer’s involvement with it. When consumers display low involvement with the advertisement, peripheral cues – such as a celebrity endorsement – are more important than a thoughtful consideration of arguments, while the opposite is true for high involvement (Petty, 1983). Depending on the level of personal relevance of a message, independent variables have different effects on attitude-change outcomes (Petty, 1983). They conclude that the main factor in persuasion is motivational in nature (Petty, 1983).

It is important to note that a common misunderstanding of the ELM is that it is too simple and does not account for a range of personal factors. However, the ELM simply presents an elaboration continuum that suggests “people form attitudes using
more or fewer cognitive resources” (Schumann, 2012, p. 59). The ELM cannot predict consumer behavior, but rather, it is a continuum “representing the likelihood of cognitive effort a person will allocate to processing a message” (Schumann, 2012, p. 59). Based on this, it is helpful for advertisers to recognize and differentiate the situations in which consumers will actively seek and process information from advertisements and the situations when consumers will be more perfunctory in their analyses. Utilizing the ELM model will not provide advertisers with complete conclusions about how consumers’ attitudes change, but it can point them in the right general direction for potential advertising approaches based on the product.

As with all theories, there are criticisms of the ELM. The ELM postulates that attitude changes along the central route “vary only with argument quality, although changes in receiver attitudes may be systematically based, particularly by initial attitudes” (Scholten, 1996, p. 99). The ELM does not account for the fact that attitude-change is a complex cognitive process, and it can be difficult to predict for all consumers because of a plethora of personal variations. Additionally, the ELM inherently assumes that consumers will stay on one of the two routes (Scholten, 1996). It also assumes that the consumer will change his attitude toward the brand, even though it is possible that his attitude remains completely the same (Scholten, 1996). The ELM does not allow for the case in which the consumer either physically turns off or away from the advertisement, or that he mentally checks out and ignores its message. Despite these limitations, the ELM still serves as a general model for understanding consumer behavior and its effect on advertising effectiveness.
As with the hierarchy of effects models, basing some of my focus group and personal interview questions on the ELM guided my understanding of potential advertising effectiveness with my target consumer group. I asked participants questions about what kind of information changes their opinions on brands – particularly food restaurants – in order to try to understand what kind of promotions might shift their attitudes. I also asked questions to try to understand college-aged consumers’ level of interaction with advertising campaigns and how different advertising messages shift their perceptions of brands. These questions contributed to a better understanding of how college-aged consumers feel about Little Caesars and its competitors, as well as which factors they identified as significant enough to change their attitudes.

**FCB Matrix**

Vaughn (1980) introduced a model that integrates the hierarchy models with the concept of consumer involvement discussed by Petty and Cacioppo and other scholars. The four pieces for this model are “thinking,” “feeling,” “high involvement,” and “low involvement” (Vaughn, 1980, p. 30). Thinking and feeling are a continuum because some decisions involve one or the other, and many involve both (Vaughn, 1980). High involvement and low involvement are also a continuum because consumers can fall anywhere on it (Vaughn, 1980). Vaughn presents this as a matrix model with four quadrants.

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<th>Thinking</th>
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<td>High involvement</td>
<td>1 - Thinker</td>
<td>2 - Feeler</td>
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<td>Low involvement</td>
<td>3 - Doer</td>
<td>4 - Reactor</td>
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Quadrant 1 is high involvement/thinking, nicknamed the “thinker” quadrant. This first quadrant implies a need for information because of the importance of the product. Examples include major purchases such as cars, furniture, and new products the consumer has never tried (Vaughn, 1980). In terms of creative advertising, Vaughn postulates that specific, detailed information is what will attract and persuade consumers who fall into this quadrant.

Quadrant 2 is high involvement/feeling, or the “feeler” quadrant. The consumer is still highly involved with purchases that fall into this category, but the specific information is less important because it is more about how they feel about the product. Vaughn notes that in this quadrant, the importance is related to the consumer’s self-esteem. Examples include clothes, jewelry, cosmetics, and motorcycles. Creatively, ads for products that fall into this category should play on emotions and be memorable (Vaughn, 1980).

Quadrant 3 is low involvement/thinking, also called the “doer” quadrant. Purchases that fall into this area involve minimal thought and are often the result of habit formation. Examples include food and basic household items that are routinely purchased again and again (Vaughn, 1980). Because these purchases are so habitual, creative work in this quadrant should be reminders to consumers about these products. Additionally, Vaughn (1980) suggests that offering trials for products through coupons and free samples can “generate subsequent purchase more readily than pounding home undifferentiating copy points” (p. 31).

Quadrant 4 is low involvement/feeling, referred to as the “reactor” quadrant. This area of the matrix is for products that satisfy personal tastes, such as cigarettes, candy,
movies, and alcohol (Vaughn, 1980). This consumer’s logical interest will be “hard to hold and short-lived” (Vaughn, 1980, p. 32). Creatively, the advertisements of products in this category should focus on catching consumers’ attention.

Of course, some products do not fall perfectly in any of these quadrants and belong somewhere in between. The FCB matrix is simply a guide to help professionals organize the different advertising objectives for products. I found Vaughn’s matrix the most translatable to the actual advertising industry, which makes sense as he worked at Foote, Cone & Belding, one of the largest global advertising agency networks. He utilizes more relevant language and provides specific examples of how understanding and using the matrix can benefit every department at an agency, from account management to research to creative to media.

The FCB matrix helped me frame the way I thought about the product for my project: Little Caesars pizza. It was useful when developing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for Little Caesars as a brand because it provides a structure for the different ways consumers think, or do not think, about purchases based on their product category. Pizza can fall both into Quadrant 3, the low involvement/thinking category, and Quadrant 4, the low involvement/feeling category. Pizza is often a habitual and routine purchase, and because it is inexpensive, it requires less thought and involvement, which would qualify it for Quadrant 3. However, pizza is also a product that satisfies personal tastes, along with candy and music, which means it can easily fall into Quadrant 4 as well. The two categories have different advertising approaches, but they both consider the products as low involvement purchases. Throughout my project research, I independently identified pizza as a low involvement purchase, especially for
college-aged consumers who often buy pizza with a group of friends or late at night. This aligns with where a purchase like pizza would fall in the matrix. The FCB matrix was useful for my project because it outlined how different products vary in their level of consumer involvement and how that affects the advertising campaign associated with them.

**Branding and Advertising**

Most scholars and professionals define a brand in one of two ways (Landor Associates, 2010). The first definition is based on the elements of brands: A brand can refer to any device such as a name, slogan, or symbol that distinguishes an organization or product from the rest of the market. The second definition focuses on how consumers perceive those elements: Walter Landor, found of Landor Associates, believes “products are made in the factory, but brands are created in the mind” (Landor Associates, 2010, p. 1). By this, Landor means that brands are defined by individuals, not by organizations. Despite efforts from organizations to strategically manage how consumers view them, the associations that come to mind when people think about brands are what drive consumer perception and behavior. For consumers, every interaction with a brand affects how they think and feel about it. Marketing and advertising plans are centered on the brand and its qualities.

Branding focuses on building these positive associations for brands. Branding is a “set of techniques designed to generate cultural relevance” (Holt, 2016, p. 42). It is about signals – “the signals people use to determine what you stand for as a brand” because these signals create associations (Adamson, 2007, p. 18). Branding and advertising are inextricably related and share many characteristics. For my professional project, I spent a
significant amount of time understanding Little Caesars’ and its competitors’ brands before I began thinking about advertising messages. Understanding a brand and its attributes is the first step for creating any advertising campaign.

Though the concept of branding has existed since the early 20th century, it has taken on a new meaning and significance in recent years. The use of the term has broadened greatly, and now people use it also to refer to entities such as universities and festivals (Krugman, 2012). The term branding is even used by people to discuss their skills, traits, and opinions as a “personal brand.” Branding serves as an integral part of advertising theory. When the development of national advertising campaigns allowed organizations to directly advocate for their products and services to consumers, they started focusing on crafting brands that represented their unique characteristics (Krugman, 2012). This market shift and new focus on brand identity changed the buying process because a special relationship was formed between producer and consumer (Krugman, 2012). With this relationship, brands seek to communicate truthful messages and create trustful bonds with consumers. A brand itself is a promise in many ways, and that promise sets the stage for every consumer touch point with the brand.

Throughout my professional project, I refer to a few aspects of branding when discussing my client and its competitors: brand equity, brand loyalty, and brand character/personality. Simply put, brand equity is the public’s valuation of a brand. When discussing brand equity in my project, I am referring to the commercial value derived from consumer perception of a particular brand name, rather than the product or service on its own (Romero, 2015). Though the term brand equity is frequently used in a positive way, it can also be used to describe a set of liabilities linked to a brand name. Brand
equity is an important concept for big brands that consumers easily recognize by name or logo, such as Little Caesars and its three main competitors, Pizza Hut, Domino’s, and Papa John’s. Because they are national chains with national advertising campaigns, most consumers know these brands. Brands like these rely on consumers’ awareness, loyalty, and attitudes toward them to be commercially successful. Advertising campaigns are one marketing communications tactic that help build brand equity.

Brand loyalty is one dimension of brand equity. It can be described as a consumer’s positive feelings toward a brand and a dedication to purchasing the same product or service over and over again, even if there are changes in the market, such as new products from a competitor brand. Brand loyalty is important for all brands, but it is particularly important for brands whose products are cheaper, more routine purchases. Pizza is an example of a product that is routinely purchased because it is gone after one use. For a brand like Little Caesars, brand loyalty is significant because it wants the same customers to keep returning every time they purchase a pizza.

Brands can advance their relationships with consumers by crafting unique brand personalities that consumers can understand and remember. A brand personality can be described as “the unique, authentic, and talkable soul of your brand that people can get passionate about” (Bhargava, 2008, p. 6). Sincerity is the personality trait that is most typically associated with successful brands (Krugman, 2012). Brand personality is perhaps the most important aspect of branding when it comes to advertisements. Advertisements must stay consistent with, and should strive to play on, the unique characteristics of brands that set them apart from competitors in consumers’ minds. For clarity, brand personality and brand character are terms typically used interchangeably.
Brushing up on my understanding of brands and the various aspects of branding was beneficial for my project because it put into perspective for me how many elements influence consumers’ perceptions toward brands and how advertising campaigns can shift those attitudes while staying true to the brand.

**What is Creativity in Advertising?**

Creativity is an essential component of advertising. Some would even say it is a “mission of the entire advertising industry, its raison d'etre” (Koslow, 2003, p. 96).

Creativity is a balancing act in advertising. It requires creatives to “think differently, to be imaginative, yet to be artistic and remain on strategy while employing novel approaches and new ideas” (Sasser, 2012, p. 191). The term ‘creativity’ is difficult to define because it is used in so many different contexts and is inherently a highly subjective concept.

Stein (1953) was the first to use the current standard definition of creativity. He defined creative work as “a novel work that is accepted as tenable or useful or satisfying by a group in some point in time” (p. 311). By novel, Stein means that the resulting product did not previously exist in the same form. Throughout decades of creativity research, that definition has been revised for greater specificity and clarification. The standard definition is bipartite: “Creativity requires both originality and effectiveness” (Runco, 2012, p. 92). Other views are still being developed, but this is the most widely accepted definition of creativity.

Originality has long been a requirement for creativity in the eyes of both creative theorists and ordinary people. It is almost universally agreed upon that originality is essential for creativity, or even the pinnacle of creativity. However, originality is not sufficient on its own because “ideas and products that are merely original might very well
be useless” (Runco, 2012, p. 92). Though Runco chooses the word ‘originality,’ different words have been used by others to discuss the same criteria, including ‘novelty,’ ‘newness,’ and ‘uniqueness.’

Though to a lesser degree than originality, many scholars have included effectiveness, or a related dimension, as the second vital criteria for creativity. Mackinnon (1965) argued that creativity must “serve to solve a problem, fit a situation, or accomplish some recognizable goal” (p. 485). Rothenberg and Hausman (1976) referred to this second criterion as ‘value,’ which they defined as “intrinsic worth and/or pragmatic usefulness” (p. 7). Like originality, effectiveness takes various forms, and it is important to note that different words are often used to discuss essentially the same concept. This extends well to advertising, as many professionals assume creativity is highly related to effectiveness (Koslow, 2003).

The standard definition for creativity is supported by empirical research. Runco and Charles (1993) conducted an experiment to assess how originality and appropriateness contribute to judgments of creativity. They created three different sets of ideas that were taken from an earlier study of divergent thinking. Participants each judged two sets of cards and sorted them according to three different criteria: originality, appropriateness, and creativity. Their results suggest that original ideas do not need to be appropriate to be perceived as creative, but that original ideas are not valued less by being appropriate (Runco, 1993). On the contrary, when it comes to unoriginal ideas, appropriateness may inhibit judgments of creativity (Runco, 1993). This study translates better to advertising than other creative disciplines because ideas rather than more concrete products, such as a physical piece of art, were being examined.
A more recent study by Caroff and Besancon (2008) arrived at similar conclusions. Creativity ratings were more favorable when the advertisements were more original (Caroff, 2008). For appropriateness, their results were more complicated. Advertisements’ originality affected creativity ratings more when appropriateness was low than when it was moderate or high (Caroff, 2008). Nonetheless, this study further supports the claim that originality and appropriateness are necessary, intertwined elements of creative work.

Though the supported standard definition identifies the general criteria for creativity, it does not touch on who is best fit to judge these criteria. Runco and Charles (1993) concluded that people are more accurate in judging originality than appropriateness. When judging originality, someone only needs to recognize that it is new or different idea, but when judging appropriateness, the judgments are generally much more subjective (Runco, 1993). Ideas may be perceived as being inappropriate or ineffective if they go against conventional logic or norms. This is relevant for the advertising industry “as agency clients possess specific appropriateness norms within their distinctive cultures” (Koslow, 2003, p. 98).

In the advertising industry, perceptions of creativity differ greatly, depending on whom you ask. Creativity should be interpreted differently person to person, but these two criteria should “anchor the concept” (Koslow, 2003, p. 97). It is important to reflect on advertisements to understand why some are more creative than others, but to do this, it is necessary to understand how perceptions of creativity vary from person to person.

As Runco and Charles’ study suggests, professionals in all agency roles may perceive originality in similar ways, but some perceive appropriateness as strategic while
others perceive it as artistic (Koslow, 2003). Creatives are more likely to perceive advertisements as creative if they are artistic, while account executives tend to perceive advertisements as more appropriate if they are strategic (Koslow, 2003). This disparity is not necessarily negative, however. Although an advertising campaign may have a unified communication objective, creative and account executives have different intrinsic motivations and goals. The utility of an advertisement for an account executive “is primarily evaluated in terms of its fulfillment of the client's communication objectives” (Hirschman, 1989, p. 51).

Creatives, on the other hand, “viewed the advertisement as a communication vehicle for promoting their own aesthetic viewpoints and personal career objectives” (Hirschman, 1989, p. 51). It is necessary to note that by pleasing the client, account executives are serving their own career goals as well (Hirshchman, 1989). Based on these findings, it can be said that “appropriateness should and does differ among advertising agency disciplines” (Koslow, 2003, p. 97). Account executives often prefer advertisements that display originality, but they will “settle for unoriginal but artistic craft in advertising to please the client” (Koslow, 2003, p. 108). Because part of their job is to advocate for the client, this is logical. Many creatives “require strategy as stimuli in the form of a brief, as much as they need artistry and originality” (Koslow, 2003, p. 108). They believe that being original while remaining within the confines of a tight strategy leads to the most creative work. This aligns with the ideas of Stein (1953) who claimed that creative insights come from “a reintegration of already existing materials or knowledge, but when it is completed it contains elements that are new” (p. 311).
Creativity is hard to define, and the creative process is difficult to understand. Reading about creativity and its role in the advertising industry put a lot of things into perspective for me before I began my own creative process for my project. It was helpful to understand what professionals consider the criteria to be for advertising creativity as well as how perceptions of creativity shift depending on the differing motivations and goals of professionals.

**Creativity Beyond Traditional Campaigns**

My professional project resulted in a creative solution. Such a solution falls into the general category of advertising, but it is a bit different than traditional advertising campaigns that consist of print, television, radio, and/or digital advertisements. In his book about his creative advertising career, Michael Newman (2003) highlights the importance of deviating from the traditional mediums. He argues that people are no longer interested in just learning about brands through advertising. To succeed, advertisers “must now create an emotional connection, be more responsive and collaborative” and “learn to create fans of their customers” (Newman, 2003, p. 23). With social media and online interactions, it is much easier for brands to now connect and collaborate with consumers, especially the digitally native generation of current college-aged consumers.

Newman believes that ideas must be bigger than the advertisements themselves. He encourages creatives to “use the medium, don’t just be in it or on it; embody, extend, expand, and explode it” (Newman, 2003, p. 315). Newman (2003) argues that restricting brand ideas to traditional mediums is too limiting because “ideas that happen in the real world are far more interesting than ideas that are neatly fenced into traditional
advertising” (p. 317). My creative solution, the Pizzapreneurship Program, is a brand idea that breaks free from the bounds of traditional mediums. However, it is a flexible concept, as it could also easily be integrated into a traditional advertising campaign.

Newman (2003) also discusses a number different “creative paths” for generating ideas for brands (p. 355). My creative process followed one of these paths: Problem/solution. Newman notes that the challenge inherent in this path is making the advertisement more about the solution rather than the problem. Many advertisements are part story and part sell, but “it’s usually better to make the sell a part of the story” (Newman, 2003, p. 355).

Implementing the Pizzapreneurship Program is the first step, but if that were successful, I would recommend that Little Caesars take the opportunity to tell the story of the idea. The story of the idea is the story of those who participate in the program. Telling that story could consist of many things: Why they got involved, how it affected their life, their experiences along the way, and who they met through the program, to name a few examples. Though my creative solution is not traditional in nature, I believe that later on it would pair best with a traditional campaign to tell the stories of the pizzapreneurs and further advertise the program.

ETHICS

Advertising is inherently a tricky industry for ethics because of demanding clients, constant deadlines, and a need to continually push the boundaries of creativity. Yet, it is necessary for advertisers, as with all media professionals, to understand and insist on the importance of adhering to ethical standards. In order to be perceived as
credible, the advertising industry must actively pursue ethical practices. In the following section I examine the current ethical landscape in advertising as well as outline some of the most significant ethical values and consider how they relate to my professional project. I also discuss a conflict of interest I experienced during my project and reflect on how I handled it.

**Advertising Ethics Landscape**

Unlike the models of advertising effectiveness I discussed earlier in this essay, advertising ethics raises fundamentally different questions about “what is right and good in the conduct of the advertising function. It is concerned with questions of what ought to be done, not just what legally must be done” (Cunningham, 1999, p. 500). Advertising professionals do not only serve their clients, but they also serve society by communicating necessary information about available products and services in the economy. This responsibility requires advertisers to always be thinking about what is the best solution for their client, their agency or organization, and consumers.

The American Marketing Associations advocates for six key professional ethical values: Honesty, responsibility, fairness, respect, transparency, and citizenship (American Marketing Association Statement of Ethics, n.d.). These values are very similar to those held in news journalism, highlighting how advertising is commercial information that should be treated with the same ethical standards as editorial information. In a similar vein, the American Advertising Federation has eight guiding principles that advertising professionals can refer to while navigating ethical decision-making. The first principle is: “Advertising, public relations, marketing communications, news, and editorial all share a
common objective of truth and high ethical standards in serving the public” (Snyder, 2011, p. 3).

This principle is perhaps the most important of the eight, as the advertising industry is often perceived as deceptive compared to news journalism despite emphasizing the importance of the same ethical values. To combat this discrepancy, advertising professionals must make complete truthfulness their top priority. The ethical foundational basis of all communications is that they should be truthful and non-deceptive. The remaining AAF principles are much more situationally specific compared to the AMA’s general ethical values. They cover issues such as personal ethics, clear labeling of commercial versus editorial content, full disclose for paid sponsorships, advertising to children, and consumers’ personal privacy (Snyder, 2011).

The American Association of Advertising Agencies, or the 4A’s, has an ethical code that is focused more on the resulting creative work than the entire process. It states that advertisers will not knowingly create advertisements with “false or misleading statements or exaggerations, visual or verbal,” “testimonials that do not reflect the real opinion of the individual(s) involved,” “claims insufficiently supported or that distort the true meaning of practicable application of statements made by professional or scientific authority,” and “statements, suggestions, or pictures offensive to public decency or minority segments of the population” (Standards of Practice of the American Association of Advertising Agencies, 1990). The 4A’s code is geared toward message ethics, highlighting the potential ethical pitfalls creatives need to look out for when developing advertisements. It is vital that creatives in the industry understand ethical concerns before
beginning creative work so problems do not arise later on in the process when there is less time to solve them.

The Better Business Bureau’s Code of Advertising touches on the same ideas of truthfulness and transparency described above, but it differentiates itself with the statement that “an advertisement as a whole may be misleading although every sentence separately considered is literally true. Misrepresentation may result not only from direct statements but by omitting or obscuring a material fact” (BBB Code of Advertising, n.d.). This code is significant because it acknowledges that truthfulness and non-deceptiveness are distinct in the sense that every aspect of a communication can be true, but it can still be misleading for consumers.

The ethical codes and principles from these professional organizations are the basic framework for the way current advertising professionals ethically conduct themselves. I had read them all before in classes, but refreshing myself on these values was a necessary step before beginning my project so that I was aware of potential ethical predicaments from the start.

**Transparency**

The American Advertising Federation advocates for transparency, noting that it is the one main constant as the marketing and advertising landscape continues to change rapidly. The concept of transparency implies open communication and accountability, assuring that all stakeholders are on the same page. Transparency is an important ethical issue in all forms of communication, especially advertising, because it “doesn’t simply address the content of our messages to other people, but requires us to think about the form and nature of our interaction with others” (Plaisance, 2014, p. 71). It requires
advertisers to be open about their decisions and be cognizant of how those decisions may affect consumers, either in a positive or negative way.

Transparency is a relevant issue for my creative solution because the implementation of the Pizzapreneurship Program would involve Little Caesars forming a cooperative relationship with participants. The extent of this relationship and how the program works would need to be one hundred percent transparent to the general public. When participants sign up, it would be vital that they fully understand the terms and conditions of the program. According to the BBB’s Code of Advertising, “the primary responsibility for truthful and non-deceptive advertising rests with the advertiser” (BBB Code of Advertising, n.d.). Rather than leaving the explanation of the program up to individual franchise owners who may be confused or not on the same page as Little Caesars’ corporate headquarters, it would be essential for the advertisers to create the communications that describes the details of the program. I would advocate for a simply written, one-page document that would be easy to read for any consumer with the necessary qualifications to participate in the program.

Additionally, the consumers who buy pizza from those in the Pizzapreneurship Program should be aware of how the program works and why they are paying slightly more for Little Caesars products under the conditions. I believe this could be accomplished by implementing a national digital campaign that explains how the program works, after its initial launch. I would also recommend that Little Caesars provide program participants with conversational examples of how they can explain the program and price difference to consumers while selling pizza at the pop-up tents. No matter how it is done, it is ethically important to communicate this information to
consumers so they fully understand the program and do not feel confused about the transaction.

**Respecting Consumers**

It could be argued that the Pizzapreneurship Program would exploit both the participants and consumers for Little Caesars benefit. I reflected on this possible interpretation often while working on my creative solution. However, the relationship between Little Caesars and the program participants would be mutually beneficial. The program would also make Little Caesars more accessible for college students in markets where store locations are too distant from campuses. All stakeholders would benefit from the implementation of the program: The franchisee could sell more pizza in an ethically sound manner; pizzapreneurs could financially benefit; and college students would have easier access to an affordable meal option.

Advertising strategies that “target certain segments of a community are morally obligated to balance their advertising objectives with ideas of community well-being” (Plaisance, 2014, p. 224). The Pizzapreneurship Program would accomplish this by making Little Caesars food more accessible for college students while also offering them potential entrepreneurial opportunities. By taking both the needs and strengths of college students into account, the program would promote the well-being of the target consumer group.

**Conflict of Interest**

In an advertising agency, the types of work completed for my project would span multiple departments: research & planning, strategy, and creative. As Wasserman (2010) explains, “A typical professional conflict of interest arises when the same individual is
expected to fulfill more than one role in regard to the same client” (p. 259). I found myself in this situation because I was involved in every step of the advertising process rather than completing duties for one area, as I would in a real-world setting. For example, to develop a strategy, I had to write a creative brief. A creative brief is a document that inspires the creative team to come up with the most effective communications response to solve a client problem. It is the starting point for the idea creation, and every decision of the project should align with the goals outlined in the brief. In an advertising agency, the strategy team would develop the creative brief and then hand it over to the creative team.

I fulfilled both roles for my project, which was a conflict of interest as the same person should not be involved in creating and executing the strategy. It would have been a more authentic experience to work from a creative brief formed by a different party. Conflicts of interest are not inherently negative, however. It can be argued that they are an inescapable feature of advertising because professional communicators work “within a nexus of interwoven and overlapping obligations, most of them perfectly legitimate” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 259). In situations like mine, transparency is an effective way to manage the conflict and mitigate any potential concerns that could arise from it (Wasserman, 2010).

I managed this conflict by providing full disclosure to all involved parties. I was open about this conflict with my advisor, Professor Chuck Borghese, who also recognized it was not an ideal situation to create and execute strategy. Additionally, the client is aware that my project is an undergraduate thesis completed by one individual. Though this conflict was a disadvantage, it worked out in the end because it diversified
the type of work I was doing and made my project more comprehensive.

**REFLECTION**

**Why Little Caesars?**

I chose Little Caesars as a brand to focus on for two main reasons. First, the marketing challenge they have in attracting college-aged consumers is a real business problem. Athens, Ohio is a perfect market example of how Little Caesars’ lack of delivery and distant store location hinders students from purchasing their products. Second, my advisor has a relationship with Little Caesars, which allowed me to have inside insight into the brand that helped inform my project. Though I did not have the chance to directly interact with Little Caesars myself, my advisor’s relationship did improve my understanding of the brand both because I had access to resources I otherwise would not have, and because my advisor was already extremely knowledgeable right off the bat about the company. Though the marketing challenge was very much real, in retrospect, I do wish I could have done real work for a client rather than speculative work for a national brand. However, I am still grateful for the opportunity and satisfied with my project.

**Research, Strategy, & Creative**

My project challenged me to step outside of both my professional and personal comfort zones. I modeled the basic organization of my project on advertising campaign submissions for the National Student Advertising Competition. I participated in the competition during my freshman and junior years of college as a copywriter, then
creative director. Based on my experience with this competition, I decided that I wanted to do a comprehensive project that included research, strategy, and creative work.

Yet, I did not have much prior experience in advertising research or strategy. I had created surveys and evaluated their results in classes, but I had never before conducted focus groups or personal interviews. I had also developed two creative briefs (a strategic act) before my project. This lack of experience forced me to do a little self-teaching about advertising research and strategy, grounded on what I have learned in classes.

I am happy with my decision because I learned so much about the different areas of advertising throughout my project. Developing questions for and organizing focus groups and personal interviews was an intimidating task for me at first because I was not sure where to begin, but I am satisfied with how they all turned out. Conducting both the focus groups and personal interviews were rewarding experiences for me, as I have never before been involved in this part of the advertising process. Though the majority of the focus group participants and interviewees were Ohio University students – mainly because Athens is an ideal market example for the challenge at hand – I also reached out to and spoke with students across the country to broaden the scope of my project. My primary consumer research really laid the groundwork for my creative idea and eventually helped me realize that an innovative creative solution was the best way to address the problem at hand.

When developing a professional project idea, I knew I wanted to do something with creative thinking and copywriting. I designed my project to give me this opportunity. A key aspect of the marketing challenge was to address the problem without
changing Little Caesars’ existing business structure – essentially, solve the problem without Little Caesars adding delivery. Because of this, I originally felt that advertisements that attempted to change the target consumer groups’ perception of the brand were the best way to go. In the end, switching from an advertising campaign to a creative solution was the best option based on the client’s ask. The need to adjust plans based on client needs happens in the advertising industry every day, making it a valuable experience for me. I consider my idea a success because it addresses the challenge perfectly while being innovative and original. Logistically, I am not sure how difficult making my idea a reality would be. As a creative, I presented the idea I felt was the best and most effective for the problem.

Another Possible Creative Direction

Creative work needs to be grounded in research and strategy. It is tricky not to jump the gun and start thinking of creative work before receiving the creative brief, but it makes the process more authentic and typically leads to the most effective creativity. I will admit, though, that I had some general creative ideas before my research was complete. I was very interested in highlighting the Little Caesars’ brand character and altruistic efforts. I explored the potential of these ideas, but in the end, they did not stand up to the research. Nonetheless, this focus helped guide a lot of the process for me, even though it did not lead anywhere for this specific market problem.

Little Caesars does incredible philanthropic work and has helped millions of people. Yet, most consumers are unaware of this because Little Caesars does good to do good, not for attention or praise. This notion is admirable and speaks volumes about the ideals and values of the restaurant founders. The Little Caesars Love Kitchen travels
across the country to help those in need, meeting the needs of the hungry, the homeless, and disaster survivors. The Love Kitchen has served nearly three million people since its start (Little Caesars, n.d.). Local Little Caesars owners and regional donate all of the necessary resources. An estimated 50,000 employees have volunteered to support the program in their communities (Little Caesars, n.d.). Little Caesars’ veterans program that was designed to provide veterans with special incentives to help them open their own franchise if they are transitioning from service or seeking a new career (Little Caesars, n.d.). Little Caesars’ founders also created Ilitch Charities, a non-profit foundation that invests in the Detroit community’s future. The organization provides scholarships for youth and grants to other nonprofits while supporting programs in the areas of community development, human services, education and recreation (Little Caesars, n.d.).

I did not know much about Little Caesars before beginning my project, but I was blown away by its efforts to help those in need and support its communities. Based on this knowledge, trying to understand how the target audience perceives brand values and philanthropic efforts, and whether they factor into purchasing decisions, was a significant aspect of my consumer research. I concluded that college-aged consumers may not necessarily seek out information about the values and causes of brands, but once they obtain that information, it can strongly influence their purchasing decisions.

However, even though this consumer group may care about brand values for higher involvement purchases, they care much less when it comes to lower involvement purchases like pizza. This was a frustrating conclusion for me to accept because I felt there was a lot of creative potential in this area, but for small, almost mindless purchases like pizza, I knew it would be a stretch, as well as go against the existing Little Caesars
brand, to focus on these brand attributes. Prior to beginning research, I did not understand the stark juxtaposition between the comical, lighthearted nature of Little Caesars national advertisements and its strong tradition of giving back to its communities. I saw a huge missed opportunity for the brand. But in the end, I came to a better understanding of the function of their current national campaign. For most consumers, pizza is just pizza, and although they may appreciate the ideals of Little Caesars, it is not enough to influence their decision greatly for such a minor, often routine purchase.

**Collaboration**

The scope of work I did is typically, and should be, done by a team of people. I had great discussions with my advisor about every facet of my project, but it was still missing the collaborative spirit of advertising that I love and believe leads to the most incredible work. I knew that my project covered different advertising disciplines, but I was not prepared for how lonely the work felt. Based on my experience with the National Student Advertising Competition, I missed having the opportunity to work with peers to build ideas and inspire each other.

Toward the end of my project, I decided to collaborate with a designer to help me display the content of my project in a more visually appealing way. I connected with a former peer colleague from *The Post*, a student publication at Ohio University, on LinkedIn and explained the project to her. Abby Day, the current art director of *The Post*, was interested in collaborating with me. Using my professional network to find someone to work with was a great practical experience. At most advertising agencies, copywriters and art directors/designers work in pairs to develop ideas. My creative idea is a write-up, and thus does not necessarily need to be visually illustrated at this stage of idea
formulation, but it was still nice to have the chance to work with a designer for the presentation of my project. For full disclosure, I paid Abby $10 per hour for her work, because I could not find any experienced designers who were willing to do the work at no cost.

**Conclusion**

My professional project was an incredibly challenging yet rewarding experience for me overall. It took many turns along the way and almost nothing turned out as I had planned, but that forced me to be flexible and adaptable. I set incredibly high expectations for myself, and with this project, I realized that with real work, nothing is ever perfect and I can only do the best I can with the resources I have. I am satisfied with the outcome because the process felt very real and taught me so much about both advertising and myself. Now, I am looking forward to starting a career in the advertising industry. I know that some of the lessons I learned throughout this process will help guide me through the next step of my life.
WORKS CITED


PIZZAPRENEURSHIP
A CREATIVE SOLUTION

CARA HANSON
HONORS TUTORIAL COLLEGE
APRIL 2017

DESIGNED BY: ABBY DAY
## Introduction

For my honors thesis professional project, I created a marketing campaign focused on college-aged consumers for Little Caesars Pizza. Little Caesars is the third largest pizza chain in the United States behind Pizza Hut and Domino’s Pizza. Founded by Mike and Marian Ilitch, the first Little Caesars store was opened in Garden City, Michigan, in 1959. Three years later, the chain’s first franchise location was opened. The decision to grow the brand through franchising helped expand Little Caesars across the country and the world. It grew from a single store to the huge global chain it is today. It is currently based in Detroit, Michigan.

Little Caesars offers carry-out pizzas at ultra-competitive prices. Little Caesars is known for its iconic “Pizza! Pizza!” tagline that was originally introduced in 1979 to promote the chain’s offer of two pizzas for one price. Through advertising, the tagline was popularized about 10 years later and widely used nationally until 1998. In 2012, Little Caesars launched its first national campaign in 15 years, returning back to the “Pizza! Pizza!” tagline, though it no longer used to promote a two-pizza offer. The brand’s marketing strategy has been generally effective, as it’s the fastest growing chain in the United States based on the net number of stores added each year between 2008 and 2015. Little Caesars differentiates itself from its competitors in two distinct ways. First, it offers incredibly affordable prices with a $5 pizza. In a day and age where even Subway, known for its classic $5 Footlong, has now upped that price tag to $6, Little Caesars remains the lowest cost option in the national chain pizza market. Second, Little Caesars always has pizzas hot and ready. Customers do not need to order ahead of time; they can simply drive to a Little Caesars and pick up a fresh pizza immediately. This market niche separates Little Caesars from its competitors who only make food to order. The downside of Little Caesars’ model is not offering delivery services, which all of its main competitors provide.

College students love pizza, cheap prices, and convenience, making Little Caesars sound like the most ideal option. But despite Little Caesars’ emphasis on low prices and convenience, two factors that are important to the average college-aged consumer, it currently struggles to attract students who live in college towns or areas where the Little Caesars location is far from campus or off-campus living. Because Little Caesars does not offer delivery and is not in a reasonable walking distance, these students rely on other pizza restaurants who either deliver or have stores physically closer to students. The brand’s current national advertising campaign is geared toward a more general population, failing to directly market to this demographic and allowing it to fall through the cracks. That brings us to my assignment.
Get more Little Caesars Pizza in the hands of college students without disrupting the existing business structure.

**THE CHALLENGE**

**RESEARCH OVERVIEW**

Unlike marketing research, which looks at a brand from all angles, advertising research typically looks for the emotional aspects of the situation. Marketing research is grounded more in quantitative studies and is more definitive while advertising research requires qualitative research and is more intuitive. My research had two main focus areas: the market and the consumer. Because the objective of this research is to form a creative advertising solution, I utilized more advertising research techniques. To begin my research, I learned everything I could about Little Caesars, its competitors, and its position in the market. I also examined current industry trends to better understand the marketing landscape of pizza chains, specifically, and food restaurants, on a wider scope. I then focused on understanding the current college-aged consumer in general, beyond the world of pizza. I focused on purchasing habits, media usage, values, and lifestyle choices to better understand this group. The average college student today, aged 18-22, spans two generational groups: Millennials and iGens. I focused on secondary research regarding both generations to inform my campaign. This research came from studies, scholarly journals, and news articles. The secondary research supplements the main research driving this campaign: my primary consumer research. I conducted online surveys, personal interviews, and focus groups to understand how college-aged consumers feel, think, and make decisions about buying pizza. With three focus groups with 14 total participants, 12 personal interviews, and 203 survey responses, my research includes 229 original research impressions.

**MARKET RESEARCH**

The first step of my research process was experiential primary market research. I began by familiarizing myself as much as possible with Little Caesars and the pizza market. I visited three Little Caesars locations in Athens, Ohio; Columbus, Ohio; and Naperville, Illinois. I purchased a pizza to try the product for myself and better understand the consumer experience. This was a natural place to start the process. I also researched Little Caesars and learned as much as I could about the company’s history, founders, brand values, products, franchise opportunities, and philanthropic efforts. I analyzed past and present advertising campaigns for the brand. I also examined Little Caesars’ social media presence, including its Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, to get a feel for the brand’s voice and how they interact with customers online. My advisor provided me with four internal-facing Little Caesars videos that demonstrate how they communicate to their franchisees and employees. The videos highlight the company’s culture and values. One video specifically about values encourages Little Caesars’ employees to be heroes at work by living by five guiding principles: Serve others; never give up; be an all-star; invent something; and own your work. Though the majority of my research will focus only on the external communications of Little Caesars, this insight into the internal workings helps me understand every dimension of the brand. I noted a stark contrast between the tone and language of Little Caesars’ advertising, particularly its television commercials, and the tone and language of its internal videos. The brand’s national advertising campaign uses a humorous, lighthearted tone, which conflicts with the humble and dedicated tone of its internal communication materials. This initial research was necessary to immerse myself in the company so I had a fully informed understanding of the brand as I began secondary market research.

**MY SPECIFIC RESEARCH OBJECTIVES WERE AS FOLLOWS:**

- Understand the typical thought process college students go through when deciding to order/purchase pizza
- Identify what methods would be the most effective for connecting with the college-aged demographic
- Leverage Little Caesars’ competitive advantages to successfully target the intended consumer segments
SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT analysis examines the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for a company.

**STRENGTHS:**

* Affordable price with $5 pizzas, the cheapest in the national chain market
* Pizzas are hot and ready when customers walk in; no need to order ahead of time (a market niche)
* Social responsibility programs and charitable donations have helped millions of people
* Advertisements are perceived as fun, playful, light-hearted

**WEAKNESSES:**

* Does not offer delivery
* Store locations are typically in strip malls, which are often far from college campuses and off-campus housing
* No online or digital ordering methods (for bigger or more specific, personalized orders)
* Consumers are not aware of Little Caesars’ philanthropic efforts
* Lowest brand loyalty for national chain

**OPPORTUNITIES:**

* Leverage the brand’s commitment to giving back to its communities
* Add an online ordering component
* Add a delivery option, without owning vehicles
* Build partnerships with universities

**THREATS:**

* Market is saturated with both chain and independent pizza restaurants
* Local pizza restaurants and chains offer a more personable experience
* Pizza not perceived as healthy choice
* GrubHub and uberEats are delivering a wide variety of food options in most locations

Each of the competitor has unique qualities that sets them apart:

**PIZZA HUT:**

* World’s largest and most well-known pizza restaurant
* Broadest range of ordering methods
* Strong social media presence

**DOMINOS:**

* Strong brand equity
* Humanized online ordering experience with delivery tracker
* Known for its quick service

**PAPA JOHN’S:**

* Appeals greatly to families and sports culture
* Perceived as having better quality ingredients
* Plays it safe with brand voice and messaging

**OTHER RESTAURANTS:**

* Often family-owned, notable establishments in communities
* Likely to use local, fresher, and/or better quality ingredients
* Typically the same price or more expensive than chain options

Identified the main competitors for Little Caesars as Pizza Hut, Dominos Pizza, and Papa John’s. Though there are so many options for pizza — from casual dining restaurants that specialize in personal pizzas, to local pizzerias, to regional chains — the three aforementioned restaurants are the most similar to Little Caesars because they are national chains with significant market shares. Also, although my project is centered around research in Athens, Ohio, as a sample group and test market, I wanted this research to translate and be applicable to most college atmospheres in the country. Athens has noteworthy local pizza options such as Avalanche Pizza, Courtside Pizza, and GoodFella’s Pizza. These restaurants are represented below in the “other” section. I focus on their general characteristics that can be applied to other local pizza places across the nation.
PIZZA INDUSTRY

I read many articles and reports about the current and predicted future trends in the pizza industry. The most notable trend by far in the pizza industry right now is using digital communication in a new, smart way. This is a major opportunity for Little Caesars to target more Millennial consumers and to improve Millennial perception of the brand.

Digital ordering is already standard for Little Caesars’ top competitors:

• Domino’s has a humanized pizza tracker that you can customize: It tells customers who is making their pizza and when, giving them updates and moving along the progress bar every step of the way. Customers can track their orders either on Domino’s website or via its mobile app.

• Pizza Hut has a straightforward yet slick mobile app that allows customers to reorder their previous orders with one click. It also has nutrition facts available, including food allergy and sensitivity information as well as a nutritional calculator. Its website is fairly standard, but allows customers to reorder previous orders with ease.

• Papa John’s may be a bit less digital-savvy, but it still has multiple options for customers. It has a standard website that allows for online ordering as well as a mobile app that also has an order tracker.

WHERE DOES LITTLE CAESARS FALL IN THE CURRENT DIGITAL PIZZA LANDSCAPE?

Little Caesars’ model does not fundamentally need a digital component, but as the digital ordering options for other restaurants improve and become even more standard, Little Caesars runs the risk of being left behind. Its website is fairly standard compared to competitors. Little Caesars currently does have a mobile app that allows customers to look up store locations and view the menu. It has a helpful feature called “Pizza Party Calculator” that tells customers how much food they need to order based on how many people are eating. It also has sound: “Pizza, pizza!” is the first thing you hear when opening the app. Though it is a bare-minimum app, it fits very well with the brand.

Some Little Caesars locations do offer mobile ordering for pick-up and delivery. However, it is a complicated process. Different locations utilize different third-party companies that facilitate the online ordering process and, in relevant cases, the pick up of the food from the restaurant and the delivery of it to the customer. If a location provides this option, there will be a prominent “Order Now!” button on that store’s information page.

For example, the Athens, Ohio location offers this service. When customers click on the button, it redirects to a ChowNow web page outside of the app. ChowNow is an online food ordering system that restaurants can hire, allowing customers to order their food on mobile apps or through the restaurants’ websites. It is inefficient to have a mobile app that opens a web page. ChowNow does offer branded mobile apps for restaurants, and there currently is one for Little Caesars called “LC Custom.” This app allows you to order directly from it, but it is an additional app download for customers. It does not have all of the information from the regular Little Caesars app or the same branded feel.

Though the Athens, Ohio location does not offer delivery, ChowNow does offer delivery services as an add on. If a restaurant purchases this feature, customers can order from online or in a branded app. Then, the restaurant accepts the order and inputs when the order will be ready. A ChowNow driver picks up the food and delivers it to the customer. Customers have the ability to track the order. There is a delivery fee for the restaurant, which varies depending on the location. Restaurants then have the opportunity to split the delivery fee with the customer as they see fit.

ChowNow is just one of many third-party companies that Little Caesars locations work with to enable online and/or mobile ordering and delivery. Similar companies that other Little Caesars locations utilize are: GrubHub, OrderUp, and DoorDash.

SECONDARY CONSUMER RESEARCH

For secondary consumer research, I looked at pizza eaters and Millennials. Though there’s much overlap between both groups, there was different research specific to each that helped me better understand my target market. I read a variety of articles and studies about both groups.

QUICK FACTS:

• Everyone likes pizza. Or, at least most people do. 93% of Americans eat pizza at least once a month.

• The average pizza consumer is changing. The new typical pizza lover is a young woman who exercises twice a week.

• Pizza eaters’ demand for delivery is as high as it’s ever been, even though the ordering tools may have changed.

• With a buying power of more than $1 trillion, Millennials are the largest generation in American history.

• Millennials are natural co-creators. They want to interact with brands and interact with their food by making it their own.

• Millennials want to be more informed about companies and their business practices. They “expect products to do more for them and for their community.”

• Millennials “excel in a fast-paced world” and live a more on-the-go lifestyle. They value convenience and “options that allow them to be in control.”

• Millennials are a young, entrepreneurial workforce. 60 percent of Millennials consider themselves to be entrepreneurs.
Overall, there were responses from college students in 23 states: Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.
ONLINE SURVEY:
I utilized an online survey through Qualtrics to learn some basic, more quantitative information about my target consumer group. I sent it out to my peers and received 197 total responses. I didn’t set a goal sample size because secondary research provided me with more exact numbers with smaller margins of error than research I could conduct on my own. The data from the survey results gives me a general feel for the purchasing habits of college students and Millennials for pizza.

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE SURVEY:
• The majority of college students eat pizza at least once a month
• College students eat more pizza between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m., but also eat a lot from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m.
• Half of college students order pizza online through a website; a quarter use a mobile app; 20 percent call and speak to someone on the phone.
• Little Caesars is the least preferred restaurant out of the four biggest national chains
• The taste of pizza is the most important factor for college students when making a decision, but not by much. They also highly consider convenience and price.
FOCUS GROUPS AND PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Though I found my survey results useful, the information collected was focused on the processes college students go through when buying pizza. The focus groups and personal interviews I conducted helped me better understand this consumer segment on a much deeper level. I arranged focus groups that each consisted of 4-5 participants. This was enough people to generate meaningful, insightful conversation, but they were small enough that everyone had the opportunity to and felt comfortable sharing their opinions. As the moderator, my goal was to facilitate the group and generate discussion based on a wide range of related topics. I aimed to impose some structure while still allowing the conversations to flow organically. I chose to make my focus groups run for thirty minutes, which I felt like was enough time to fully discuss the selected questions but not too long that the participants would get bored, frustrated, or run out of different responses. I aimed to have strangers in each focus group, though in two instances, participants knew each other beforehand. I conducted three focus groups and then stopped once no new responses occurred, an indication that I had reached the point of saturation. I asked a wide range of questions about pizza, spending habits, technology and media use, hobbies/use of free time, education, and work.

In addition to my focus groups, I conducted 12 personal interviews. I spoke to a wide range of students that fall into my overall demographic, with ages ranging from 18 to 22, different colleges in six states, and different campus locations and sizes. I primarily interviewed Ohio University students, but I included students from other universities in order to gain insights that are easily translatable to the general national college student population. I asked similar questions as I did in the focus groups with the same general topics.

SIGNIFICANT QUOTES

The typical college student is involved with student organizations, which greatly range from Greek life to student publications to special interest clubs to political organizations. Ohio University, for example, has more than 400 student organizations. Many focus group participants and interviewees brought up how they typically have food, especially pizza, at student organization or university-sponsored events.

“"I eat pizza the most when people give it out at meetings or events, usually for student organizations. I almost expect big events to have free pizza.”

“"We go with whatever is the easiest to take mass orders of, because the organization I’m involved with has like 20 people, so it’s small enough for personal orders but not so small for something too difficult. We try to mix it up, but we get pizza the most often. It’s just easier for big groups.”

“"I don’t buy pizza a lot, but I have it pretty frequently for free at different events and meetings for things.”

“"I’m an RA, and pizza is my go-to to bring residents to events. It also doesn’t require much prep or clean up, which is a bonus.”

“"I’m the commissioner of the Senate Appropriations Commission. I allocate about half a million dollars annually to student organizations on campus. I talk to hundreds of student orgs about their organizations and their events. Events that have food tend to do better; people are more likely to come if there’s food to entice them. Most events go for pizza. It’s simple, it’s easy, you don’t really meet a lot of people who don’t like it. It’s probably the most common food we get funding requests for.”
Focus group participants and interviewees cited price and convenience as the two main factors that influence their pizza purchasing decisions. As college students, they talked about how they have limited money to spend and how pizza is cost-effective option that doesn’t require too much effort. Grabbing a slice of pizza with friends on the way home from a night out seems to be a common trend for many students. Students also discussed how delivery is important to them because they lack transportation to drive and pick up pizza, or they don’t want the inconvenience of walking far.

“Usually when I order pizza, it’s because I want something in my mouth as soon as possible and I don’t really care beyond that, so the cheaper the better for me.”

“We order pizza on nights when I don’t want to cook and we just to chill and relax. It’s our food for lazy nights in. We only get it delivered and never go to pick it up.”

“Price is the most important thing for me when it comes to pizza. I see it as a cheap meal. I’m not willing to spend more than ten dollars on a pizza.”

“If I have the choice to buy a lotion or coffee, for example, that benefits entrepreneurs in underdeveloped nations and the product is similarly priced to the generic brand, I will always want to choose the product that benefits a good cause.”

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“I appreciate companies and restaurants that do things that align with my ideals, but usually it’s more expensive, so I can’t always afford to go to those places.”

“I know that Little Caesars] tries to stay low key about their philanthropic efforts in the local communities. It’s a good thing, I don’t know why they don’t talk about it more.”

Focus group participants and interviewees indicated that they may not necessarily seek out information about the values and causes of brands, but once they obtain that information, it can strongly influence their purchasing decisions. Because of limited income and/or spending money, current college students may not be able to sustain purchasing habits that reflect their social and political values and beliefs. However, participants also indicated that even though they may care about brand values for bigger purchases, they care less when it comes to smaller purchases like pizza.
CONSUMER OBSERVATIONS

*College-aged students view pizza as a cheap convenience food.
*College-aged students care about the values and social causes of brands if they know about them, but they do not necessarily seek out that information.
*College-aged students eat a lot of pizza at student organization meetings. They associate pizza with events that involve large groups of people.

CONSUMER PERSONNAS

Based on the observations from my research, I divided my target consumer group into three personified, more specific segments.

NICK // CONVENIENCE DEVOTEE
Nick is, in many ways, the quintessential college student. He’s invested in his classes and consistently acknowledges he’s at college to get an education, but Friday through Sunday is focused on his social life. Nick has a couple of great friends and many acquaintances he hangs out with on the weekends. Between classes, intramurals, and weekend plans, Nick doesn’t have time for a part-time job. He’s on a tight budget, but it works out because he doesn’t put a lot of thought into what he eats. He’s down for anything to fill him up, as cost-effective as possible. It’s an added bonus if he can share with his friends. Nick isn’t what you’d call a planner. He’s an impulsive buyer, often making last minute decisions, especially when it comes to food. He’s not a great grocery shopper and typically ends up ordering food or eating out at least a few times a week. Nick doesn’t care much about the health benefits — or negatives — of what he’s eating. He’s (not very successfully) trying to eat out less, but when he does, he wants something greasy and satisfying. Nick uses social media daily, mostly to interact with his friends and stay updated about what he’s interested in, including his favorite sports teams and comedians. He doesn’t seek out a lot of information on his own, but he’ll engage with news he stumbles upon on his Facebook and Twitter feeds.

JULIE // CONSCIOUS CONSUMER
Every meal, Julie really thinks about what she’s eating before she eats. She cares a lot about what she’s putting in her body. You can catch Julie at the grocery store at least glancing at all of her food labels before making decisions. She appreciates fair-trade, organic, non-GMO, and local ingredients, and she’s willing to spend a little extra for those things. Julie doesn’t always follow her own rules, but she’s cognizant of the health and community benefits of doing so. She enjoys eating out and ordering food, but she tries to limit doing so, and usually does once or twice a month. Julie frequently does basic research about brands she likes. She’s quick to stop supporting companies if she disagrees with their politics or values. When Julie finds a brand or product she really likes that checks out under her ethical standards, she becomes an enthusiastic advocate for it. She tells her friends about what she’s buying and what she knows about the company, encouraging them to check things out. Julie uses social media daily to stay informed and stay connected with friends. She follows all of her favorite news sources and influencers on Twitter, frequently retweeting information she finds interesting, especially if it aligns with her politics or worldviews.
STRATEGY OVERVIEW

My research led me to three independent consumer observations, from which I developed the above consumer profiles. The exercise led me to realize how unrelated the three observations are from each other, making them incompatible to fuse together for a unified idea. Before writing my creative brief, I reflected back on all of my research. I reexamined my focus groups and interviews and decided to concentrate on the first consumer observation and its relevant consumer profile: Nick, the convenience devotee. I made this decision because it was the most general observation, and almost every person I interviewed mentioned price and convenience as important qualities for pizza for them.

CREATIVE BRIEF

MARKETING CHALLENGE: College students do not eat a lot of Little Caesars pizza, although there are many restaurant locations in college towns/near colleges and the affordable price is appealing to this group. Distance from campus and students not having cars/transportation are major factors.

COMMUNICATION PURPOSE: The goal of this campaign is simply to get more Little Caesars pizza in the hands of college students. It will position Little Caesars as a brand that is perfect for college students because of its affordability and convenience (always hot and ready). Currently, college students view Little Caesars as a great option, but its distance from campuses/residences is enough to push students to other options. This campaign will work to fix that problem, either by changing students’ mindsets or addressing the issue.

TARGET AUDIENCE: The target audience is college students, ages 18-24. They’re on a budget, especially when it comes to food. They often order in or make simple meals rather than spending a lot of time, energy, and money on cooking. Typically, they are looking for the cheapest option that will satisfy them. They use social media and digital communications daily to stay connected with friends, get their news, and find out information about brands and products.

KEY INSIGHT: When college-aged consumers choose pizza, they do so because it’s affordable, convenient, and universally appealing. If a pizza brand does not live up to these three qualities, it will be overlooked.

DIRECTIONAL IDEA: Little Caesars is already affordable (likely the most affordable option) and universally appealing. It’s also already extremely convenient in the sense that they always have pizzas hot and ready. The only missing piece of the puzzle is getting the product from the restaurant into the hands of college students on/near campuses or near where they either go out socially or live. The strategy for this campaign is to get the pizza from point A to point B in a way that will make Little Caesars more appealing than its competitors for college-aged consumers.

BRAND CHARACTER:
- Fun
- Affordable
- Clever
- Distinctive
- Convenient (except for this consumer group)

EXECUTIONAL INSIGHTS: The types of communication need to reach college students. From my research, this consumer group interacts with digital and social media ads the most. This is an opportunity to specifically target the type of consumers this campaign would be directed at. This group also relies on word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and influencers, especially when it comes to food, opening the possibility of influencer advertising. The campaign also could look at partnership/sponsorship opportunities with universities near Little Caesars locations.
SOLUTION

Little Caesars Pizzapreneurship Program

OVERVIEW:
There are the college students who do not buy Little Caesars simply because it does not offer delivery and is not in walking distance of where they live. And then there are the college students who consider themselves entrepreneurs and are always looking for potential business opportunities. The Little Caesars Pizzapreneurship Program aims to connect these groups of students together in a mutually beneficial way. It invites college students to tap into their entrepreneurial spirits and partner with the brand to make some extra cash. The type of students who would be a good fit for the program are eager to embrace the unknown by being innovative. They welcome challenges and have a desire to collaborate with the brands in their life rather than just be receivers of one-way advertising messages. These students are aware that they have a lot to contribute to the world. Little Caesars understands this entrepreneurial spirit, too – in fact, it’s that same spirit that helped the restaurant grow from a single store in Michigan to the global chain it is today. For a restaurant chain that has so many locations in college towns and areas with high student populations, it makes sense to tap into the ambition, creativity, and youthful perspective of college students. This opportunity for students is like freelancing for Little Caesars, if you will. The initial launch of the program will offer three different opportunities for pizzapreneurs to connect and sell pizza to their student peers and their communities. Pizzapreneurs can sign up to deliver Little Caesars using their own car and/or run pop-up tents to sell pizzas in high-traffic areas. Students can also place large orders through the program on behalf of student organizations and receive a discounted price. It is vital to the note that consumers will be paying more for Little Caesars pizzas if purchased through the Pizzapreneurship Program than if they picked up a pizza in stores. However, the trade-off for the slightly higher price tag is convenience. The following descriptions use the characteristics of Athens, Ohio as a college-town market, but the same concepts can be applied to any student market with minor adjustments.

WHY COLLEGE STUDENTS?
To address the marketing challenge at hand, the program is specifically targeting student markets. Because of this, the Pizzapreneurship Program will be geared toward college students. Only current students – at least 18 years old and officially registered with a college or university – can participate in the program as pizzapreneurs. Little Caesars as an organization has always had an incredible sense of community. Its philanthropic efforts speak volumes about the core values of the brand: It understands the needs of its customers and tries to use its resources to address those needs. The Pizzapreneurship Program would be an opportunity for college students to make money on their schedule, working the hours they are available. National student debt is at an all-time high, and finding a job as a student in an area with a high student population can be a real challenge. Little Caesars understands that college students are often overlooked despite having so much determination and willingness to act outside the box. This program will give them a chance to partner with a global brand and financially benefit while learning how to be entrepreneurial.

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DEVELOPMENT
Ordering for delivery would be integrated into the existing Little Caesars’ mobile app. Consumers interested in ordering would be able to open the app, type in their zip code, and instantly see if there are any active drivers in their area. If there are, they will be able to easily place an order for delivery to their dorm, apartment, or house with the same ease as any other pizza restaurant that typically offers delivery. The app would notify first-time users that the driver would not be a Little Caesars employee, but rather a student who is partnering with the brand. It would offer a brief explanation about the Pizzapreneurship Program so every party involved understands the relationships the program facilitates and why ordering a pizza costs slightly more than picking one up in stores. The closest Little Caesars location would receive the order and start preparing or organizing it, depending on what was ordered. Though the program is mainly focused on serving students, anyone in the designated delivery area for a store location can utilize the service. The active pizzapreneurs in the area would get a notification and drive to pick up the order at Little Caesars. The Little Caesars staff would organize and pack up the order for the driver, making their sole responsibility to drop the food off to the customer. The program would not accept cash payment, but all major credit cards, as well as payments via Venmo, a mobile payment service that allows users to transfer money to other accounts. This way, the pizzapreneur would not have to deal with any payments. The customer pays Little Caesars directly, and then the pizzapreneur receives payment at the end of their shift. Preparing with Little Caesars eases the process for every party involved and eliminates any possibility for financial fraud. Currently, a classic pizza from Little Caesars
costs $5. Classic pizzas delivered via the Pizzapreneurship Program would cost $7, providing the student with $2 profit per pizza delivered as well as any tips.

**POP-UP TENTS**

College students mainly eat pizza during two general time frames. They usually either order a pizza for dinner after a long day when they do not want to cook, or they grab a slice or two after a night out with friends. The pop-up tent option would allow pizzapreneurs to rent a Little Caesars tent and set it up in high-traffic areas on campus. Each Little Caesars location near a student market would receive one tent and one food warmer from the organization to make the pop-up tent a possibility for students. In Athens, Ohio, for example, student organizations often sell grilled cheese or other food items at tables or tents during these peak hours of activity and consumption. The Pizzapreneurship Program pop-up tent idea falls along similar lines. It would give consumers the opportunity to easily pick up a Little Caesars pizza on their way home from classes or the bars. Because pizza is often an impulse buy, this set-up allows for consumers to make a quick decision on their way home. The option to buy an entire pizza for $6-10 is likely cheaper than the other options on the way home. Individuals or student organization members who want to fundraise could run these pop-up tents. The pizzapreneurs would simply organize the time, location of the tent, and number of pizzas with their Little Caesars store beforehand through the Pizzapreneurship Program mobile app. They would have to reserve their location’s tent and food warmer for that time period. On that day, they pick up the necessary materials from Little Caesars and set up their tent. If they will not be done before Little Caesars closes, they have the option to return the equipment in the morning. Pizzapreneurs are allowed to sell Little Caesars’ classic pizzas between $6 and $10 at the pop-up tents. It is up to their discretion to decide how much to charge depending on what they think they can sell them for. Little Caesars’ will provide these students with conversational examples of how they can explain the program and price difference to consumers when selling pizzas. This level of transparency is key to making the program work efficiently.

**STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS**

Food is often a staple at events run by student organizations. It is an incentive for attendance, especially when meetings or events occur during peak dinner hours. College students express an association between student meetings and free food. According to the 2016-17 Commissioner of the Ohio University Student Appropriations Commission, who manages funding requests for student organizations on campus, 13.6% of the total funding requests were for food, as of February 1, 2017. That is the second highest category behind travel expenses. This 13.6% represented $18,273.29, as of February 1. This is just an example of how much a university allocates for food purchase for student organizations. There is significant opportunity for Little Caesars to partner with universities and prepare large, affordable orders for student groups. The Pizzapreneurship Program would offer incentives for student groups that organize large orders through it. This incentive would be 10% off the entire order if it includes 10 or more pizzas. Little Caesars is already likely one of the cheapest food options in student markets. The extra discount available for students through the program helps them support their organizations. For groups to access this promotion, one student will have to create a Pizzapreneurship Program profile on the mobile app and submit the order on behalf of the student group in advance. Unlike the other two avenues, pizzapreneurs do not make a profit facilitating these large orders. However, they are making food more affordable for their student organizations.

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