

# When 'Just a Snack' Means Something Much Deeper



How understanding what Cheetos really means to adults nearly doubled sales targets.

## THE PROBLEM

Frito-Lay wanted to **reposition Cheetos to attract adults without losing their kid appeal**. Traditional research indicated adults saw Cheetos as messy, childish, and indulgent. All barriers to purchase. The conventional playbook would have been: **make it cleaner, more sophisticated, more "adult"**.

## THE DISCOVERY

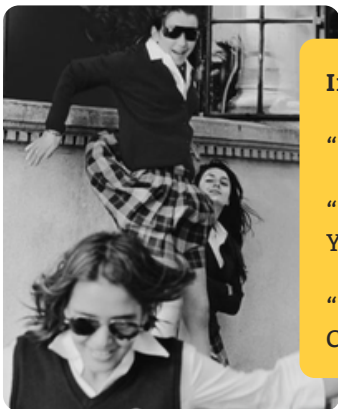
Through ZMET research, we discovered something unexpected: **Adults didn't want Cheetos to grow up. They wanted Cheetos to help them be less grown-up.** The orange fingers. The messy playfulness. The "this is bad for me" indulgence. These weren't the problem. They were the entire reason adults loved Cheetos. This product wasn't just food. It was permission

### What they said

"It's a snack"  
"I like the flavor"  
"It's convenient"  
"Cheetos are for kids"

### What they actually MEANT

An escape from adulting  
Permission to be mischievous  
A fleeting moment of playfulness  
"I feel like a kid again"



### In the words of one participant:

"These are three Catholic schoolgirls escaping out the window and having a blast."

"Whenever I eat Cheetos I feel like a kid again. You are getting your hands dirty... You feel free."

"Ever since you were a kid, they have been telling you don't do this, don't do that. With Cheetos I can suck on my fingers because I like the flavor. It's being a little mischievous."

## The Business Impact

Because the strategy was rooted in true meaning, not surface preferences, it **worked!** Cheetos successfully repositioned from "kid's snack" to "culturally relevant brand for playful adults" without alienating their core equity.



**11.3%**  
YOY sales increased



**8.5%**  
Search increase by  
end of year 1

### Award-winning Campaign

- David Ogilvy Award (ARF Grand Ogilvy)
- Jay Chiat Award for Strategy Excellence

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