

RESTAURANTS

McDonald's Is Defending Its Latest Controversial Meal

The chain's collaboration with Cardi B and Offset is rubbing some franchisees the wrong way.

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Courtesy of McDonald's

McDonald's is making waves with its latest celebrity meal collaboration featuring power couple Cardi B and Offset, but not everyone is lovin' it.

Several McDonald's franchisees are reportedly concerned that the partnership with the married rappers will damage the brand's image. These critics want the fast-food giant to do away with the promotion altogether because they claim it violates a set of internal rules called the "Golden Arches Code."

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But McDonald's is refusing to bend to the pressure and is standing by its decision to collaborate with Cardi B and Offset, who have been married since 2017.

"Across our marketing, we're focused on putting McDonald's at the center of culture," Tariq Hassan, chief marketing and customer experience officer for McDonald's USA, said in a statement. "Artist collabs have helped reignite fans' love for our food and fueled significant business momentum, both for the company and our restaurant owner/operators. And the reason they've been so successful is that our partners are real fans of the brand themselves – that authenticity is our secret sauce."

"Cardi and Offset are an iconic couple who have their own date-night tradition at McDonald's that goes back years," Hassan added. "We're proud to share a little piece of that with customers across the U.S. with our latest campaign, which is about love and celebrating the special moments we all share over McDonald's."

McDonald's USA doubled down on this support in an additional statement.

"McDonald's stands behind our partnership with Cardi B and Offset. They have been incredible partners and we support them as a family," the statement said.

The "Golden Arches Code" at the center of the backlash states that collaborations with celebrities and influencers "that have potential risk to damage our brand based on statements they have made or their positions on certain issues" aren't allowed. It also prohibits "music partnerships associated with content that includes offensive language in the lyrics," according to *Bloomberg*, which obtained a 2021 copy of the rules.

The McDonald's franchisees believe that the profanity and explicit content featured in some of the married couple's music breaches this code. But McDonald's confirmed that this feedback is only coming from a small group of franchisees and does not overshadow the widespread support and

excitement for the promotion that it has seen from operators and employees across the U.S. The company also maintains that brand safety is a top priority, and it is making sure to be careful about what it posts on McDonald's channels.

Dropping the promotion before it naturally runs its course would force McDonald's to miss out on a collaboration opportunity that has been extremely lucrative in the past. McDonald's 2020 meal partnership with Travis Scott was so popular that the chain started to run short on burgers nationwide. Another collaboration with the k-pop group BTS was so successful that McDonald's extended the promotion and fast-food wrappers from the offering started to go on sale online for inflated prices.

McDonald's launched the Cardi B & Offset meal nationwide on Valentine's Day this year, branding it as the perfect option for date night. The order comes with a classic McDonald's cheeseburger, a Quarter Pounder with Cheese, two drinks, a large order of fries, and an apple pie.

