

# Promotion and strategy of Burger King on the Covid-19 pandemic situation and its impact on customer behavior

## Lucile De Almeida

IAE Lyon - Université Jean Moulin

e-mail: dealmeidalucile@gmail.com

## Luciné Petrocian

IAE Lyon - Université Jean Moulin

e-mail: l.petrocian@gmail.com

## Anna Janowska

Uniwersytet Łódzki, Wydział Ekonomiczno-Socjologiczny

e-mail: anna.janowska@poczta.onet.pl

## Piotr Domalewski

Politechnika Białostocka, Wydział Inżynierii Zarządzania

e-mail: piotr.domalski@gmail.com

## Abstract

In this article we will analyze the marketing activities undertaken by burger king - how they influenced customer behavior and whether they brought the intended effect. So how Burger King, as a huge company, has been conducting its marketing and promotion over the covid-19 situation? We will tell how it happens before and during a pandemic situation. How they make customers willing to buy their products? We will analyze the increases in reach in the social media used by Burger King and show which portals they focus on the most. Then we will describe how the pandemic influenced the steps and decisions made by the company, how the premises have changed during this time and how it affected the company. So we will present the changes to which the burger king had to adapt and what impact it had on the restaurant's stationary premises to keep customers. We will show how

burger king uses social media to ensure good contact with the customer and why it is difficult nowadays. We will do all of this to propose a new solution that, according to us, can improve one of the sectors of this business. And at the end we will also present detailed results of an online survey on changes in the use of remote food ordering, conducted among 59 respondents, which we believe is important due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic situation. Finally, we will analyze and summarize the information we have obtained

## **Key words**

Promotion, customer, strategy, management, Covid-19

## **Introduction**

Over the years trends and guidelines about marketing and strategy are changing but the companies need to follow it and adjust. We are writing this article more than a year after first lockdowns and changes caused by the covid-19 situation. In this article we will focus about some specific part of marketing like promotion and connection with the client in one of the most suffering industries, the restaurants. The situation may be different in other parts of the world but one thing is same – companies must comply with the guidelines and restrictions. In some cases restaurants need to be closed and sometimes they can be open only to sell food for take away, so they lose their main source of income. Some of them can't handle that situation and go bankrupt. All the others have to fight for the attention of customers to survive on the market and for this, the right people need to make the good decisions, that's why management is so important.

The most important element of this business is, of course, the customer. In this article, we are going to analyze the behaviors and choices taken by them. We will do this to get better information on what the restaurant guests require. We will check what the burger king have done to keep customers. And we will conduct a study on changing their habits caused by the covid-19 pandemic. Extramural orders for restaurants like Burger king is hard because they lose some advantage concluded in words „fast food” – if the food needs delivery, we think people are more likely to order from local restaurants – we gonna check it because in this case „giants” should increase promotion and connection witch the client by new ways.

More than year after influence of covid-19 we can achieve some progress about how to adjust and how to reach some things, but we can't achieve it all. This year showed how unready we were - not for virus but also for adjusting to new world. When someday this situation will end, the world will not be the same and companies

need to handle it by continuously evolving. No one knows when it will happen, but everybody knows that, when it will, companies need to be ready and have a long term plan. In this article we will focus in the Marketing of Burger King and how it affected the relationship with the client and his changes in habits.

## **1. Promotion of Burger King**

Customers are the basis of and the reason for the business activities of any firm [Dutta, 2012; Glińska *et al.*, 2021]. Before covid-19, restaurant operators were already undergoing a period of change, including shifts in consumer attitudes regarding digital ordering, delivery, drive-thru, health and wellness, and dining-in experience. Pandemic-related government-mandated operating restrictions have accelerated many of these trends and left many operators scrambling to catch up, or in many cases fighting for survival. We expect the restaurant industry will become a winners/losers situation after the pandemic, where companies that have invested in new technologies, digitally enabled restaurant formats, and more efficient operational procedures are poised gain market share at the expense of smaller independent players, many of which are unlikely to survive [Hottovy, 2020]. Burger King's marketing strategy has historically been largely limited to media advertising and word of mouth. Of course, this has changed over time, but now the brand focuses mainly on marketing in social media, such as the company's website, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and other channels to reach its customers. Predicting trends and exploring the characteristics that influence consumer demand for restaurants can inform restaurant management, strategic planning and marketing. Such information can also facilitate foodservice-related policymaking and evaluation among governments and other public sectors [Lasek *et al.*, 2016]. Burger King uses a unique pricing strategy. It evaluates its products according to the psychological behavior of clients. The products that sell most often are kept at a good price while discounted rates are launched for new or less selling products. The Burger King product line began with serving burgers and fries, and over time, the product offer was adapted to the needs of customers. Now Burger King offers burgers, fries, salads, breakfast menu, beverages like coffee and shakes, sweet items as well like cookies, ice cream and pastries. In fact, we see similarities between the restaurant industry during coronavirus-containment efforts and what happened to the retail industry coming out of the Great Recession in 2008-09, where consumers were quick to gravitate to online retail and many traditional brick-and-mortar retailers were slow to adapt to the changing environment [Hottovy, 2020].

Many of the changes in consumer behavior regarding restaurants over the past several months were already taking shape before the pandemic. However, we believe

government-mandated quarantine measures and restaurant operating restrictions have accelerated the pace of these changes by a few years [Hottovy, 2020]. As previously mentioned, Burger King has been involved in many different types of marketing strategies, but nowadays social media marketing definitely prevails. The global digital market is currently the only correct and true marketing strategy. In short, the brand's recipe for a good social media strategy stands tall among other brands in the Quick Service Restaurant industry.

Research confirms that consumer behavior can be explored from two conceptual perspectives [Sunstein, 2015]. Burger King prefers to do it his own way - Moldy Whooper's campaign showed how the mold process takes place in the most popular sandwich available at Burger King. The advertisement showed precise dating, thanks to which it was possible to trace the process of decomposition by fungi on individual days. The whole advertisement ends with the slogan: "Beauty without artificial preservatives". The advertisement thus structured promoted the brand's commitment to abandon all artificial preservatives, which it achieved throughout Europe and 400 locations in the United States. Here's analysis Burger King's primary social media profiles across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram from June 01, 2019, to June 30, 2020. In times when we spend most of our time at home at the computer, Burger King wants to use these information channels as efficiently as possible to interest the client.

### **1.1. FACEBOOK**

Burger King has the largest number of fans on Facebook, compared to its other channels on Twitter and Instagram, with close to 8.5 million followers on its primary Facebook page. In the analyzed period, the brand counted as many as 203,000 followers, which means a follower increase of 2.45%, it is almost 513 newly added followers per day!

During this time, the brand published 170 posts, 118 of which are photos, 50 are videos, and 2 are plain text. Thus, 69% of the posts were photos, and they also enjoyed greater popularity compared to videos among the audience. In terms of content, Burger King primarily posted product threads on Facebook. The standardized use of brand colors and witty captions for advertising new products, deals and offers is a common feature of all Facebook posts. The brand only used a paid promotion on Facebook to post about its products. In the analyzed period, the brand shared 170 posts, of which as much as 58% was promoted on Facebook.

### **1.2. TWITTER**

Actually, Twitter is Burger King's throne. Unlike Facebook and Instagram, where the jokes are usually about products, on Twitter, the brand rightly expresses

its opinion and casts a shadow over its competitors. The brand shared a total of 7,484 tweets, of which as much as 97% were responses and only 2% were proactive tweets. This clearly shows how important it is for the brand to engage with its audience.

During this time, Burger King tweeted 40% of his responses within an hour and maintained an average response rate of 13 hours throughout the year, making sure that their customer queries are always responded to within a day. Burger King also ensured that customers are replied to on all days of the week.

### **1.3. INSTAGRAM**

Burger King gained 250,000 new Instagram followers for a total of 1.9 million followers in June 2020. The brand also saw the largest fan growth compared to Facebook and Twitter accounts, at 14.8%. In total, the brand shared 82 posts with audience in the analyzed period, which is less than half of what it posted on Facebook. This shows that despite seeing the most growth in Instagram fans, the brand still prefers to post more on Facebook than Instagram, due to its larger Facebook fanbase (8.5 million fans).

## **2. Changes due to the Covid-19 pandemic**

Due to the covid-19 pandemic, Burger King had to change some things about their promotion, their way to sell their product and influence the favor of customers. Firstly, they add on their website an article about them respecting the rules like handwashing and sanitization. Indeed, it is necessary with the health conditions to ensure people that there are no risks for them eating Burger King's products. That move for sure increased people's confidence in restaurant safety.

About their communication, since people were less in the street because of the lockdown and were not able to go in the restaurants, Burger King used social medias to keep in touch with people during the lockdown. In France, for example, they launched the recipe of the whooper in Twitter so that people could do it at home.

They also had to adapt with the delivery because the demand increased. Indeed, the delivery platforms increased their turnover by 27% in one year in the world, thanks to the pandemic. Both demand and offers rose, so Burger King had to choose the best partners to make profits of this opportunity. As they say in their website "We have been meeting with the world's biggest delivery partners to make sure they can handle increased demand for delivery.", they develop their BK mobile app to allow deliveries. And this has generated considerable interest in the internet community. They also are partners with Uber eats, DoorDash, GrubHub and Postmates famous in USA.

Furthermore, they decided to take advantage of this pandemic by innovating and improving their performances. Indeed, pick-up volume have increased by over 200% since March 2020 and was already increasing before the covid-19 pandemic, so they decided to work on that. Moreover, it is also a necessity for the restaurant to reduce the contact with people and the footprints to make it safe for their clients.

Since the click & collect and drive-thru were the only way for people to buy Burger King products, they decided to improve it, for indeed in the second quarter of 2020, drive-thru sales made up 85% of total US sales, compared to about 67% of total sales in US restaurants. It is easy to see that despite the change in customer behavior, it did not have a negative impact on sales and the customers agreed to the new rules

Later they launched their “Restaurant of Tomorrow” plan, which is supposed to emerged in 2021 in Miami, Caribbean Islands and Latin America. It consists in changing lot of things like their logo, their restaurants’ design, and their delivery mode. They also decided to use renewable packaging because of the environmental impact of the increase of orders.

To satisfy customers the new restaurants are smaller than traditional ones, they decided to make less inside and more outside. They develop a new way to buy from fast food without having to eat it in the restaurant. This new design is supposed to be more efficient and contactless. Indeed, this new design is focused on a development of different delivery modes:

- Drive-in areas: there are under solar-powered canopies. Guests place their orders through the BK app and received it in their cars.
- Curbside delivery: customers must order on the app before arriving to the restaurant so that employees can prepare their order. When they arrived at the restaurant, they have some parking spots reserved for them and must notify it in the app so that they can receive their order.
- Pick up lockers: This is a completely contactless experience. The food will come from the kitchen and go straight to the lockers. The order will be picked up at coded lockers in the exterior of the restaurant.
- Multi-lane drive-thru: They will add some drive-thru lane to increase the efficiency. There will be digital menu boards and the orders will be delivered by a conveyor belt system. Moreover, each lane will have its own pick-up spot. There is a new design features a suspended kitchen and dining room above them.

### **3. Methodology**

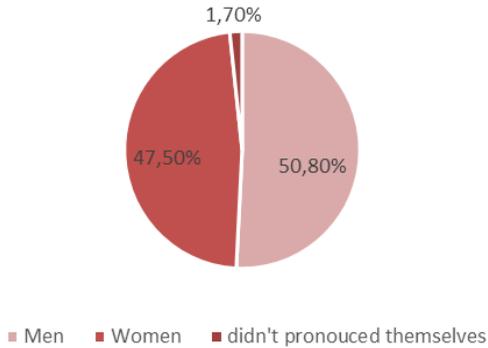
The aim of our study is primarily to check how the global lockdown and the constantly changing guidelines for the covid-19 pandemic influenced customer behavior mainly in fast food restaurants. We were curious if the new situation would change people's approach to ordering food frequency. We decided to conduct an online survey because in our opinion it was the best way to obtain reliable information quickly. We made the questionnaire available in the university environment by the respondents mainly aged 18 to 24 years old from different European countries. The group we studied were students of the University of Aveiro, regardless of the field of study and year. The academic community was subjected to the survey because, in our opinion, it is the social group that most frequently use fast food restaurants. By this we could be sure that the answers provided by the respondents were truthful and supported by experience.

We asked people if their habits changed and what are the restaurants in which they order more. We wanted to focus about the biggest change in the food companies, the take away and drive-thru increasing. This survey was perform online, we send a link to people so that they could answer it easily and fast. In a survey, we asked people how often they ordered food before the pandemic. What restaurants did they do it from and with what frequency. The next question was about the same topic, but in the present situation. We also asked for suggestions on what could be improved on the burger king distribution site. We performed this survey in march and we get 59 answers.

We decided to use a survey as a tool. In our opinion, this is the best way to get an answer among young people. With this solution, they have a lot of time to respond and to think about the potential response. The online survey link was shared with them, so they could take the survey at any point of the day. The survey was also anonymous, so the respondents had no barriers in providing information.

### **4. Results**

Fifty-nine people in total responded to the survey. Twenty-nine of them are male and twenty-eight are female. Two people were reluctant to provide information on this.

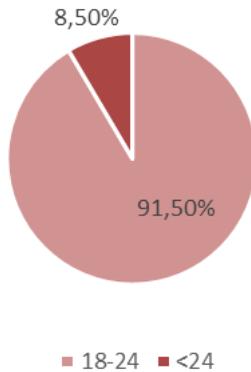


**Fig. 1.** Respondents gender

Source: own, based on the survey.

The person tht answered are 50,8% men, 47,5% women and 1,7% didn't pronouced themselves (Fig. 1)

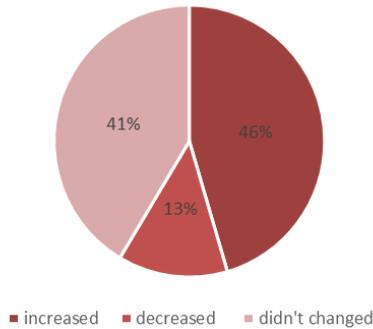
The same fifty-nine people were asked about their age. It turned out that fifty-four people are aged 18-24. The remaining five people are over twenty-four years old. Survey shows that 91,5% of respondents was between 18 and 24 years old. (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** Respondents age

Source: own, based on the survey.

To analyze the new consuming habits that changed because of the covid-19 pandemic, we decided to make a survey. We asked people if their order frequency changed and this are the results.



**Fig. 3.** Changes in order frequency

Source: own, based on the survey.

Twenty seven out of fifty nine people, so about 46% of people started to order more since the beginning of the pandemic. It's almost half of the people which means that food companies need to adapt to those changes (Fig. 3).

Since Burger King has already launched a strategic plan to reinvent their restaurant and their way of selling, it was difficult to think of new things they could do.

Firstly, we thought of Burger King dispensers. It would allow the brand both making promotion and sell their products in another way. The dispensers would be in public places, since the logo, the name of the brand and maybe also slogan will be on the dispenser it would attract attention of people. Moreover, it will also be another new way of selling their products. It is still on the idea of fast food because it would permit people in a hurry to buy some products from Burger King even faster. It is also on the idea of the "after covid-19" which changes consuming habits. Indeed, according to our survey, 46% of people order more since the beginning of the pandemic. Buying food in dispensers could be a new way to sell food outside the restaurants.

In our survey, we asked people if they would buy Burger King products from a dispenser, 57% of them said yes. It is already a good figure but to improve the marketing of those dispensers we decided to analyze if there was a link between people genders and their opinion on the dispensers.

Chi-square analyze: If there were Burger King dispensers in publics spaces, would you buy some products?

**Tab. 1.** Chi-square analyze

	Men	Women	Total
Yes	19	14	33
No	10	14	24
Total	29	28	57

Source: own, based on the survey.

The responses show that 19 out of 29 men would buy the products from the distributor. 14 out of 28 women replied that they would also buy the products in question. There are a total of 33 people interested. 10 men replied that they would not buy the products from the distributor. There are 14 women, 4 more than men, who also do not support this vision. In total, there are 24 people who are not interested.

Degree of freedom:  $(2-1)*(2-1)=1$

Level of significance: 0,05 (5%)

Critical chi-square value: 3,841

**Tab. 2.** Chi-square analyze

O	E	O-E	IO-IE-0,5	$(IO-IE-0,5)^2$	$(IO-IE-0,5)^2/E$
19	16,79	2,21	1,71	2,92	0,17
14	16,21	-2,21	1,71	2,92	0,18
10	12,21	-2,21	1,71	2,92	0,24
14	11,79	2,21	1,71	2,92	0,25
					0,84

Source: own, based on the survey.

$0,84 < 3,841$  so the opinion on dispensers and the gender are independent. It means that for the marketing of the dispensers we need to think of something that will touch both genders (Tab. 2).

Maybe, people won't buy products because they could think it is not fresh enough, indeed, fries and burgers need some strict condition conservation. As a result, in the dispenser they could put their dessert and their sweet products that don't need conservation conditions as strict as their salty products. Moreover, it could allow the brand to give another image of them and open to a new market. The brand mostly know for its burger could also focus more on its sweet products.

Secondly, Burger King could create or add on its own app a page like "too good to go". It consists in selling at the end of the day the products that will be thrown away at a low price. First, it's another way to sell their products by their app.

Secondly, it permits less waste and at the same time it will give them a good brand image fighting against waste and rubbish.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of the study was to determine the promotion and strategy of burger king during the covid 19 pandemic and their impact on customer behavior. The surveyed group consisted mainly of university students aged 18-24. As many as forty-six percent of respondents admitted that after the pandemic began, they used restaurants more often. This may be due to the excess of free time caused by the pandemic situation in the world and the change in eating habits caused by it. Among the respondents, the number of women and men was almost the same (29 men and 28 women). We also asked the respondents about the potential willingness to buy in the event that restaurants introduce food dispensers in the city. As many as nineteen out of twenty-nine men and fourteen out of twenty-eight women said that they would use this option. It seems safer than entering a normal restaurant and exposing yourself to contact with other people. It is also a faster purchase option. The dispenser idea can also allow them to be more present in a new market which is the coffee market and the pastry market. It will increase their selling because they will touch a new profile of consumers who don't really want to go to fast-food but would like to buy a snack to eat after their work day or during their shopping.

Summarizing the information we have collected, we come to the conclusion that the decisions made by Burger king restaurants could have influenced the frequency of orders of this restaurant. First of all, you can see a significant difference on their social media such as Facebook or twitter. Burger king thus befriends customers, reminds them of the restaurant's existence and creates a bond with them. Going further, such as activities such as cooperation with multiple couriers or the publication of "Restaurant of Tomorrow" plans help them too.

The interesting fact is that many people, despite the potential to have more time due to the pandemic, prefer to order food instead of cooking it themselves. Most people reacted positively to the idea of vending machines, and we can also see in the survey that introducing them in cities will open up new paths in this sector of the market.

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# **Promocja i strategia restauracji Burger King podczas pandemii Covid-19 oraz ich wpływ na zachowania klientów**

## **Streszczenie**

W artykule przeanalizujemy działania marketingowe podjęte przez firmę Burger King. Sprawdzimy jak wpłynęły one na klientów oraz czy przyniosły zamierzony efekt. Postaramy się pokazać jak Burger King jako ogromna, międzynarodowa firma prowadziła marketing i promocję podczas pandemii Covid-19, oraz porównamy je z działaniami prowadzonymi przed tą sytuacją. Opowiemy jak firma sprawia, że klienci chętnie kupują ich produkty. Przeanalizujemy wzrosty zasięgów w mediach społecznościowych restauracji i pokażemy na prowadzeniu których skupia się ona najbardziej. Następnie omówimy jak pandemia wpływała na decyzje oraz podejmowane przez firmę kroki. Przedstawimy więc zmiany, do których Burger King musiał się dostosować oraz jaki wpływ wywarły one na stacjonarne lokale restauracji. Pokażemy w jaki sposób firma wykorzystuje media społecznościowe aby utrzymać bliski kontakt z klientem i dlaczego w dzisiejszych czasach to bardzo trudne. Następnie zaproponujemy nowe rozwiązanie, które naszym zdaniem może usprawnić jeden z sektorów tego biznesu. Na koniec przedstawimy szczegółowe wyniki ankiety internetowej przeprowadzonej wśród pięćdziesięciu dziewięciu respondentów dotyczącej zmian w zachowaniu klientów dotyczących zdalnego zamawiania jedzenia. Wszystkie uzyskane przez nas informacje przeanalizujemy i podsumujemy.

## **Słowa kluczowe**

promocja, klient, strategia, zarządzanie, Covid-19