A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF BURGER KING'S MARKETING STRATEGY

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1. Executive Summary

The primary objective of this report is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of Burger King's marketing initiatives, encompassing a detailed exploration of its marketing strategy and managerial methodologies. Initially, the report provides an in-depth overview of the organization's background and its diverse portfolio of products. Subsequently, it employs two robust analytical frameworks—SWOT analysis and the 4P model (Product, Price, Promotion, and Place)—to meticulously examine both the internal dynamics and external environmental factors shaping Burger King's operational landscape. This focused examination is particularly geared towards identifying and evaluating prevalent challenges and threats within the domain of marketing activities, thereby furnishing a holistic and nuanced assessment of the company's positioning within the market. Derived from this comprehensive evaluation, the report offers three strategic recommendations designed to assist the company in navigating existing threats and elevating its competitive edge, either through the implementation of suggested advice or via strategic adjustments to its ongoing marketing endeavors.

2. An Introduction to Burger King

2.1 Development of Burger King

In 1953, Insta-Burger King in Jacksonville, Florida, laid the groundwork for what would become Burger King (Smith, 2012). Founders Keith J. Cramer and Matthew Burns, his wife's uncle, drew inspiration from the McDonald brothers' establishment in San Bernardino, California. They purchased two pieces of equipment called "Insta machines" and established their inaugural restaurant using an "Insta-Broiler" as a cornerstone. Their strategic approach was proved highly successful, leading to the requirement for all franchisees to adopt this equipment. Following financial difficulties in 1959, the company was restructured and acquired by Miami-based

franchisees James McLamore and David R. Edgerton, who renamed it Burger King. Over eight years of independent operation, the company expanded to over 250 U.S. locations before being acquired by Pillsbury Company in 1967 (Smith, 2006). Pillsbury attempted multiple reorganizations, notably hiring McDonald's executive Donald N. Smith in 1978 for corporate restructuring (Jakle & Sculle, 2002). However, amidst various changes in ownership and management errors, Burger King faced stagnation and a substantial decline in its value. In the early 21st century, investment firm TPG Capital purchased Burger King for $1.5 billion and initiated a series of restructuring efforts (Gale, 2023) (Trumbull, 2006). Yet, further value erosion occurred due to the financial crisis, leading to its subsequent acquisition by Brazil's 3G Capital for $3.26 billion (BBC News, 2010). Across these shifts in ownership and management, Burger King encountered challenges concerning marketing strategies, equity issues, and regional expansions. In 2019, Burger King announced plans to annually close up to 250 low-performing stores, later suspending operations in Russia following the eruption of the Russia-Ukraine conflict (Ettinger, 2020). Most recently, in October 2023, Burger King unveiled "The Sizzle," a novel store design initiative aimed at revitalizing its business through enhanced self-service kiosks, dedicated pickup zones for mobile app orders, and improved drive-thru services (Matthews, 2023).

2.2 Major Marketing Challenges Faced by Burger King

Marketing constitutes an integral component within a company's overall business strategy. In highly competitive landscapes where numerous rivals pursue identical objectives of maximizing sales, maintaining a consistent and superior position in the realm of marketing becomes imperative for companies to establish a robust market orientation (Leventhal, 2005). Armstrong and Kotler (2019) delineate marketing as the process of engaging with customers, fostering robust customer relationships, and expanding customer bases. Traditionally perceived merely as sales and advertising, contemporary marketing entails a multifaceted integration involving diverse stakeholders, tools, and methodologies. It functions as a social phenomenon capable

of cultivating enduring customer relationships and delivering significant customer value when executed adeptly. To attain an efficient marketing strategy and generate customer value, organizations undertake the comprehensive marketing process (Armstrong et al., 2019). Burger King stands as a prominent global food chain renowned for its remarkable success. Over its seven decades of operation, Burger King has transcended its origins as a humble burger establishment to emerge as the second-largest fast-food chain globally, boasting a vast network of over 17,000 outlets distributed worldwide. Notably, even amid the pandemic, Burger King sustained exceptional profitability, recording a substantial profit of $823 billion (DV, 2020). However, the extensive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Burger King's worldwide restaurant operations notably altered the operational dynamics during 2020, 2021, and 2022, with the year 2022 presenting a relatively subdued influence compared to earlier periods. During this period, operational continuity persisted in nearly all restaurants, albeit some encountered restrictions, encompassing constraints on dining capacities, adjusted operational hours, and sporadic temporary closures mandated by governmental lockdown measures. Notably, select markets, especially in China, re-imposed temporary limitations in 2022 in response to escalating cases and emergent viral strains, pursuant to government directives. Furthermore, 2022 witnessed escalations in the costs of commodities, labor, and energy, partly attributed to the ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine conflict on the macroeconomic sphere. Heightened inflationary trends may exert considerable influence on the global economy, potentially inducing foreign exchange strains and amplified interest rates. Failure on the part of Burger King and its franchisees to effectively realign pricing strategies to counteract escalating costs without impinging adversely on consumer demand could potentially undermine Burger King's business trajectory and operational outcomes.

3. A Comprehensive Analysis of Burger King's Marketing Activities

In this section, an in-depth analysis of the marketing strategies and management challenges faced by Burger King will be conducted through the utilization of two business analysis tools — the SWOT analysis and the 4P model (Product, Price, Promotion, and Place). The objective is to identify the primary external threats and internal weaknesses confronting the organization.

3.1 SWOT Analysis

The SWOT Analysis, integrated within the SOSTAC® framework, evaluates the present state of a company and its market landscape, encompassing an assessment of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (Alka, 2015). Once a target market is established, the identification of strengths and weaknesses aids the company in mitigating weaknesses and capitalizing on existing strengths. Opportunities and threats, being external factors beyond the company's control, are anticipated to forecast future developments. This tool serves to pinpoint competitors and facilitate the strategic positioning of the company within the market (Kruger, 2016).

3.1.1 Strengths

Through the application of a SWOT analysis, Burger King's strengths can be distilled into the following four key points. Firstly, Burger King possesses a robust brand image. As one of the globally recognized fast-food chains, Burger King holds a strong and distinctive brand image. Its iconic products, logos, and advertising campaigns have facilitated the establishment of a powerful brand recognition and loyalty among consumers. The ACSI score serves as a measure of customer satisfaction, influenced by various factors such as product quality, service standards, and overall customer experience. The data illustrates the American Customer Satisfaction Index (an economic indicator of U.S. consumer sentiment) evaluations of Burger King restaurants within the United States across the period of 2000 to 2023 (Chen, 2023).

For the most recent year documented, 2023, Burger King achieved an ACSI score of 76. This figure reflects a marginal rise of one point in comparison to the preceding year's assessment. A higher ACSI score typically indicates improved satisfaction with the brand's offerings, services, or overall customer experience.

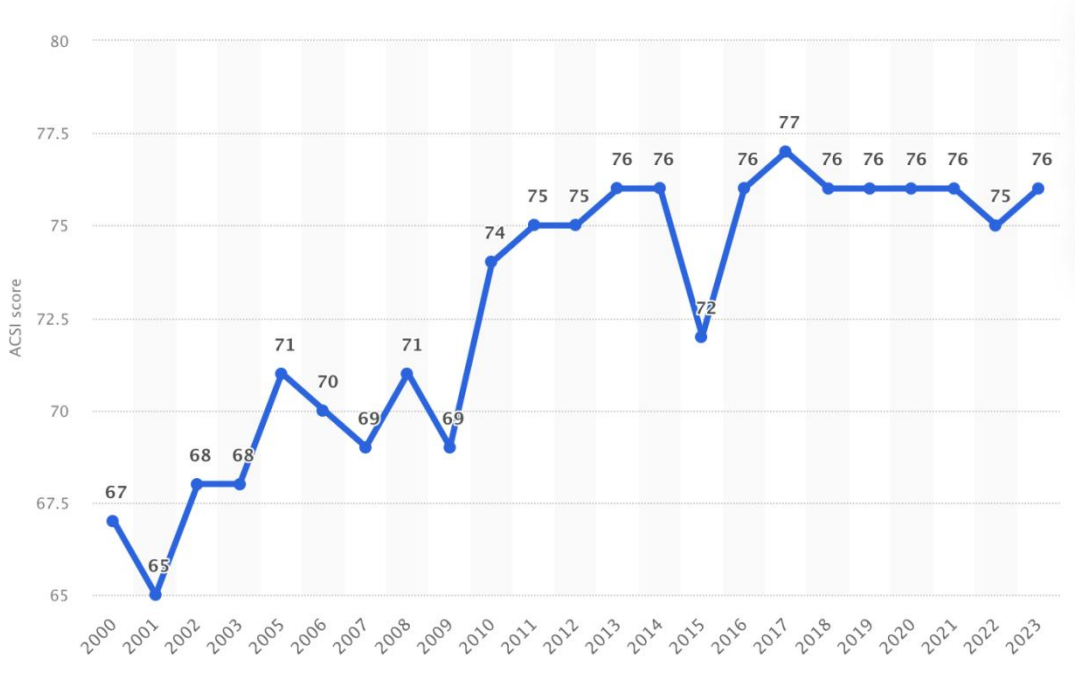

Figure: American Customer Satisfaction Index: Burger King restaurants in the U.S. 2000-2023 (Statista Research Department, 2023)

This brand image contributes to customer attraction, enhances corporate reputation, and supports the growth of market share.

Secondly, Burger King boasts a formidable market presence based on high market penetration. With a broad global presence and coverage, Burger King has strategically established numerous outlets in various countries and regions, achieving extensive market penetration. This widespread market presence ensures a stable revenue stream for the company and provides support for maintaining a leading position in competitive landscapes across different regions.

Thirdly, Burger King maintains moderately differentiated products. Within the fast-food industry, Burger King's product line exhibits a certain degree of differentiation. Through offerings such as signature burgers, diverse flavors, ingredient choices, and innovative product launches, the company distinguishes itself

from competitors. McDonald's has historically led the market by introducing a meticulously standardized food selection, offering limited personal choices within a narrow menu while ensuring uniformity in every hamburger. In contrast, Burger King emphasized a customer-centric approach with its slogan "have it your way." Although McDonald's has maintained its long-standing dominance in the market and continues to do so, Burger King has remained competitive, exhibiting significant sales growth. This trend implies a potential shift in consumer preferences, favoring personalized options over standardized offerings, as observed by the rising appeal towards Burger King's approach (Goldsmith, 1999). This moderate differentiation aids in catering to diverse consumer segments, elevates product recognition and favorability among customers, and contributes to an increase in market share.

Fourthly, Burger King showcases innovative marketing strategies. The company consistently engages in innovation by introducing new products and services to attract and retain customers. Burger King's marketing strategies, infused with creativity, encompass advertising campaigns, digital marketing, and collaborative initiatives, drawing a broad audience. These innovative marketing approaches contribute to enhancing brand awareness and market share.

3.1.2 Weaknesses

Burger King's predominant weakness presently revolves around its limited oversight over franchisees. The company's operational framework heavily relies on an extensive network of franchised outlets, yet it struggles with exerting comprehensive control over these franchise operators, potentially resulting in inconsistencies in both managerial protocols and quality assurance. In 2022, Burger King managed and franchised a cumulative total of 19,789 restaurants worldwide. Predominantly, a substantial portion, amounting to 19,739 establishments, operated under franchise agreements. Over the past decade, despite the continuous growth in the global count of Burger King's franchised restaurants from 13,615 in 2013 to 19,739 in 2022, the number of company-operated restaurants has remained notably scarce, hovering

around a relatively stable figure of approximately 50 units. Conversely, the company retained operational control over a mere 50 units, marking a noticeable decline over the past decade as more franchised stores replaced company-operated ones. Should franchisees fail to maintain consistent service standards, this could detrimentally impact the brand's reputation and customer experiences, consequently affecting the overall business performance.

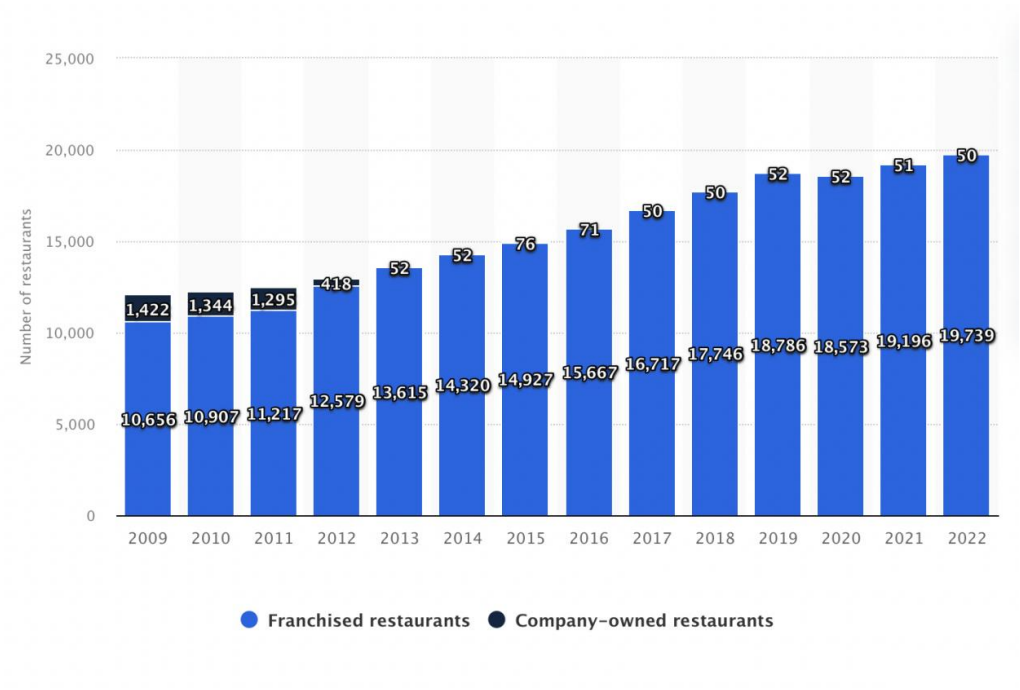

Figure: Number of Burger King restaurants worldwide from 2009 to 2022 (Statista Research Department, 2023)

Additionally, within the highly competitive fast-food industry, Burger King frequently engages in price competition and offers promotions, potentially impacting the company's profit margins. This reliance on a low-price strategy could constrain investments and developments in other areas. Moreover, persistent dependence on low-cost competition may diminish brand value and profitability.

3.1.3 Opportunities

Ajzen's research evidenced that consumers' conduct is shaped by their perceived capability to execute a particular behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In the post-pandemic era, the fast-food industry faces a threat from the growing consumer emphasis on healthy

eating habits and lifestyles. The heightened consumer focus on nutritional value, natural ingredients, and health impacts in food consumption may potentially diminish preferences for traditional fast food, posing challenges to companies in terms of their product portfolios and marketing strategies. However, within these threats and challenges often lie opportunities. According to data from Circana InfoScan Reviews and Mintel, PBMA's total sales are projected to amount to $1.46 billion in 2023, with an anticipated increase to $1.801 billion by 2028. However, there is a range of forecasts, with a worst-case estimate at $995 million and a best-case scenario reaching $2.6 billion. In terms of consumer behaviors, budget-conscious individuals exhibit more caution in their shopping patterns. Mintel discovered that in 2023, only 20% of consumers adopted a reduced meat diet, while 53% attributed their reluctance to try new foods, such as plant-based alternatives. Analyzing dietary preferences from Kantar Profiles and Mintel data, there was a decline in the identification of consumers as flexitarians, vegetarians, or vegans. Specifically, in 2023, 8% identified as flexitarians, 4% as vegetarians, and 2% as vegans, compared to 10%, 5%, and 4% respectively in 2022. Moreover, the percentage of consumers adhering to a reduced meat diet decreased from 21% to 18% between 2022 and 2023. In a survey encompassing over 1,400 adults to select multiple options, Mintel identified key reasons behind consumer choices: 48% prioritized taste and flavor, 35% perceived meat as a superior source of nutrition, and 34% cited cost as a significant factor. Additionally, 24% expressed concerns about texture, and 21% mentioned the perceived level of processing in the products (Daily, 2023). Therefore, Burger King can achieve this by introducing new menu items, exploring products catering to healthier dietary choices, or addressing specialized diets to attract a broader spectrum of consumers.

3.1.4 Threats

Burger King's restaurant operations are significantly influenced by regulatory changes, encompassing health, sanitation, safety, and other regulations implemented

by federal, state, provincial, and local government agencies across various geographic regions. Adherence to both existing and evolving laws is paramount, as non-compliance might result in governmental fines, sanctions, bans, or temporary halts in franchise sales. Compliance challenges extend domestically and internationally to franchise-related laws governing terminations, renewal refusals, offers, and sales regulations, such as those stipulated by the Federal Trade Commission in the United States, potentially leading to economic penalties or legal disputes with franchisees (Stocklight, 2022).

Moreover, the complex regulatory environment poses significant risks, necessitating effective management. Climate change adds another layer of challenges, impacting the company's operations, supply chain, and reputation. Concerning environmental sustainability issues such as packaging, waste management, animal welfare, deforestation, and land use, strategic commitments, disclosures, and actions are required. Failure to address these issues or adapt to evolving sustainability standards may result in market, operational, and reputational risks. Climate-related factors might decrease agricultural productivity, affecting the availability and pricing of commodities, particularly key ingredients in Burger King's products, such as beef, chicken, coffee beans, and dairy. Additionally, climate change-induced natural disasters and extreme weather conditions might disrupt the supply chain and consumer demand.

Burger King faces mounting pressure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adopt sustainable practices, and any failure in this regard could lead to negative publicity, diminished brand value, and adverse impacts on the business. Therefore, effectively addressing these intricate regulatory environments and managing the challenges posed by climate change and sustainability are crucial to maintaining the company's business and financial standing.

3.2 4P Analysis

The marketing mix, recognized as the fundamental four Ps of marketing, constitutes the orchestrated efforts undertaken by a company to establish a unique positioning for

its product or service amidst competitive offerings (Kenton, 2023). Each business formulates a distinct marketing mix, strategically selecting and optimizing tools aimed at influencing customer behavior and the market landscape. These constituent elements are categorized into four key variables, namely product, price, place, and promotion (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

3.2.1 Products

Burger King's flagship products primarily consist of hamburgers, among which one of the most renowned product lines is the Whopper burger. The Whopper burger stands out due to its oversized dimensions, multi-layered structure, and distinctive combination of ingredients. The company also offers various types of hamburgers that encompass diverse tastes and flavors, catering to the diversified demands of consumers. Alongside burgers, Burger King provides chicken and fish products as alternative options. These include chicken burgers, chicken nuggets, chicken wings, fish sandwiches, etc., aiming to meet the preferences of consumers who are less inclined towards red meat. Complementary to main meals, the menu includes side dishes like French fries, chicken nuggets, onion rings, and more. These side items act as supplementary choices, providing customers with a variety of accompaniments, enhancing meal options. In terms of beverages, Burger King offers a range of choices such as sodas, milkshakes, water, iced tea, juices, and coffee. These beverages furnish consumers with an array of drink options to suit diverse preferences. The company's desserts and sweets encompass pies and soft-serve ice creams. These dessert options are presented as after-meal treats or snacks, granting customers sweet indulgence choices. While Burger King features distinctive products and various taste selections, its focus remains on delivering classic, uniquely flavored, and high-quality products. However, compared to competitors, its product portfolio might be relatively limited. At times, this constrained product range may limit the company's ability to attract new customers or retain existing ones, particularly in accommodating new consumer trends and taste preferences.

3.2.2 Prices

In Burger King's marketing amalgamation, the pricing strategy encompasses market-oriented pricing and bundle pricing. Burger King predominantly employs market-oriented pricing as its principal pricing approach, relying on market dynamics and variables such as supply availability, demand fluctuations, and competitor pricing to determine price ranges and points. This market-oriented pricing tactic ensures the company's price structure remains competitive, adaptable to market demands, and responsive to competitive landscapes. Furthermore, as a complementary pricing method, Burger King adopts bundle pricing. For instance, patrons can avail themselves of value meals, family packages, and children's meals at bundled prices, offering more cost-effective alternatives than individual menu items. The bundle pricing strategy caters to groups of diners, particularly families, by presenting economically attractive meal options. The market-oriented pricing strategy grants the flexibility to adjust prices in accordance with market fluctuations and competitive scenarios, thereby sustaining competitiveness. Simultaneously, the bundle pricing approach, by providing financially appealing bundled selections, attracts a broader consumer base, particularly those inclined towards value-oriented purchases. This strategic pairing underscores the fast-food chain's consideration of market dynamics in its pricing approaches, ensuring alignment with consumer preferences while upholding a competitive stance in the market landscape.

3.2.3 Places

In Burger King's marketing portfolio, restaurants function as the primary distribution channel, directly supplying products to customers. These establishments strategically position themselves in areas with high foot traffic, facilitating extensive market coverage and bolstering brand exposure. The restaurant amenities offer both dine-in and take-out services, catering to consumers seeking convenient dining choices. The layout and placement of these restaurants play a pivotal role in attracting consumers

and elevating brand visibility. Beyond the restaurant sphere, customers can access exclusive discounts and complimentary offerings via the company's mobile application. This mobile app serves as a convenient platform for customers to place orders, conduct transactions, and seize promotional opportunities, enhancing their interactive engagement. Additionally, customers have the option to place orders online through Burger King's official website and opt for doorstep delivery services. This holistic approach, integrating both online and offline strategies, has garnered favorable reception among customers, contributing to enhanced revenue streams for the company.

3.2.4 Promotion

Burger King consistently allocates substantial financial resources toward its advertising efforts. In 2022, the company notably increased its measured media advertising expenditures in the United States, reaching nearly $500 million, a significant rise from $326 million in 2021. These advertising initiatives are strategically designed to augment brand recognition, captivate consumers, and stimulate product sales.

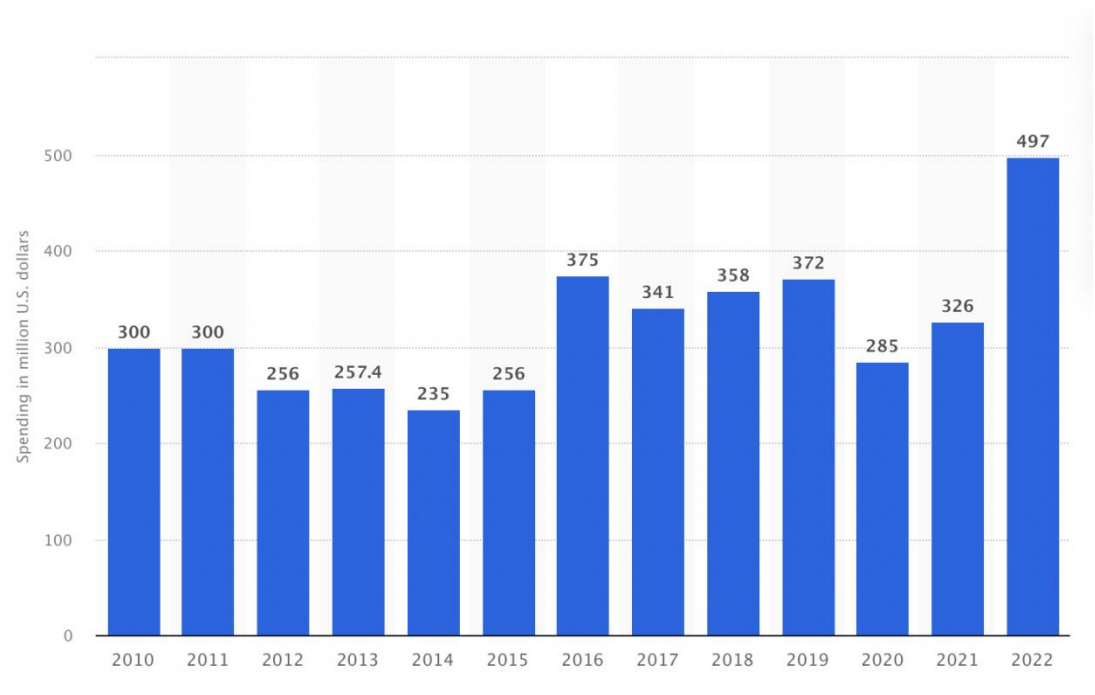

Figure: Advertising spending of Burger King in the United States from 2010 to 2022 (in million U.S. dollars) (Faria, 2023)

Burger King is renowned for its daring and thought-provoking advertising initiatives, aimed at seizing attention and distinguishing the brand from its rivals. The company fearlessly ventures into unconventional territory by utilizing humor, satire, and occasionally controversial content to generate buzz and foster consumer engagement. An illustrative case is Burger King's "Whopper Detour" campaign, leveraging geolocation technology to incentivize customers to visit McDonald's outlets and subsequently receive a discounted Whopper at a nearby Burger King restaurant. This campaign not only garnered extensive media coverage but also underscored Burger King's adeptness in utilizing innovative technology and creativity in its marketing endeavors. Embracing elements of popular culture constitutes a significant aspect of Burger King's marketing strategy, ensuring resonance with its intended audience. By embracing contemporary trends, memes, and cultural references, the company captivates consumer attention, staying pertinent in a swiftly evolving cultural milieu. For instance, Burger King's integration of a campaign inspired by the popular video game Fortnite involved establishing a virtual restaurant within the game, providing players with an interactive experience with the brand. This inventive approach facilitated Burger King's outreach to a younger demographic and enabled the brand to establish a foothold in a digital realm frequented by its target audience (Urrutia, 2023). In addition, Burger King adeptly employs various social media platforms to actively interact with its audience and stimulate discussions related to its brand. By strategically utilizing platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, the company disseminates humorous and intellectually stimulating content, promptly addresses customer inquiries, and executes promotional initiatives. Burger King's astute and captivating presence across social media channels has attracted considerable attention and commendation, significantly enhancing the brand's visibility and fostering a favorable public image. Moreover, the company frequently engages with other brands and influencers on social media, fostering dialogue and expanding its outreach (Dan, 2023).

4. Conclusion

Through the comprehensive analysis employing both the SWOT and 4P models to assess Burger King's current market positioning, several significant findings have emerged. Initially, Burger King enjoys a robust brand identity and widespread market penetration in the global fast-food industry, owing to its distinctive product offerings, iconic branding, and substantial promotional initiatives. This formidable brand recognition serves as a magnet for customers, elevates its reputation, and solidifies the expansion of its market share. However, the company encounters multifaceted challenges, including inadequate oversight of franchisees, potentially hampering cohesive control over product quality and in-store services. Additionally, the cutthroat competition in pricing within the fast-food landscape, coupled with limited diversity in meal combinations, and the escalating consumer focus on health consciousness, notably with the emergence of health-centric dietary preferences, present formidable hurdles. In navigating this highly competitive environment, Burger King must display agility in effectively addressing these challenges, seizing available market opportunities, and perpetuating a sustainable competitive advantage.

5. Recommendation

Based on the foregoing conclusions, the subsequent recommendations can be proposed for Burger King. Initially, Burger King could foster growth by either expanding into untapped international markets or amplifying its footprint within established markets. Leveraging the global trend, the company aims to establish a resilient brand identity in emerging markets or unexplored regions, seeking to diversify revenue streams and consolidate its position within the global market landscape.

Secondly, Burger King should strengthen its management of franchisees by fostering increased communication, providing enhanced support and guidance, ensuring

uniformity in service standards, and refining overall brand consistency.

Thirdly, Burger King may explore diversification of its product portfolio. The company can introduce a broader range of healthy and diverse products to meet the growing demand for healthier dietary choices. Venturing into segments such as vegetarian options, organic food varieties, and catering to diverse tastes and preferences can attract a wider consumer base. Fourthly, Burger King could escalate its investments in technology, focusing on elevating service quality and digital transformation. Leveraging digital technologies to refine service processes, augment efficiency, and enhance convenience would be a strategic approach. Optimizing customer experiences through mobile applications and online ordering systems could be pivotal for success.

Simultaneously, instituting strategies for corporate social responsibility and sustainability, such as implementing technology-driven sustainable supply chains and endorsing eco-friendly packaging, among other initiatives, could significantly augment the brand image and allure consumers with a heightened focus on social responsibility.

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