

*December 2025*

# BURGER KING MARKETING STRATEGY

*International  
Women's Day  
Tweet (2021)*



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# Summary



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Brand: Burger King  
Campaign Moment: International Women's Day  
March 8, 2021

Original tweet read: "Women belong in the kitchen."

Follow-up Content: Thread explaining BK's intention to promote women in culinary careers.



## Strategic Intent (Inferred):

- Capture attention on International Women's Day
- Drive earned media attention through provocative copy.
- Position Burger King as a brand supporting gender equality in hospitality.
- Drive awareness of its culinary scholarship initiative
- Reinforce a bold, disruptive brand voice

This campaign fits squarely into real-time social media marketing, where speed, cultural relevance, and emotional reaction are primary drivers of reach

## So what?

- High Awareness
- Negative Sentiment
- Scholarship message did not land
- Apology necessary



# Campaign Overview

02

## Brand, Context, Goals, Timing



Burger King UK launched a social media campaign on International Women's Day in March 2021 with the stated aim of raising awareness about gender inequality within professional kitchens. The campaign was centred on a Twitter post stating **"Women belong in the kitchen"**, followed by a threaded explanation highlighting the underrepresentation of women in culinary leadership and the launch of a Burger King scholarship programme designed to support female employees pursuing culinary careers (Kelleher, 2021; Kesslen, 2021; Molina, 2021; SlideNine, 2025)

The broader context for this campaign was a heightened societal expectations for brands to engage meaningfully with issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. International Women's Day has become a focal moment for purpose-driven marketing, with consumers increasingly scrutinising whether brand activism was authentic, well-executed, and aligned with

organisational values (Ekren, 2025; Simchayoff). Social media platforms, particularly Twitter, function as real-time arenas for cultural debate, where brand messaging is rapidly interpreted, reframed, and amplified (Dijkmans et al. 2015; Mandelli & Cantoni, 2010; Shehata et al. 2017)

The primary goals of the campaign can be inferred as threefold. First, to capture attention during a high-noise cultural moment using a provocative hook. Second, to position Burger King as a socially conscious employer supporting women in the hospitality sector. Third, to generate earned media and positive brand sentiment through alignment with gender equality discourse. In terms of timing, the campaign was released on International Women's Day itself, ensuring maximum visibility but also sensitivity. While this timing increased potential reach, it simultaneously reduced tolerance for ambiguity or misinterpretation, as audiences were already primed to evaluate gender-related messaging critically (Kelleher, 2021).

From a strategic perspective, the campaign represents a high-risk, high reward approach to brand activism. While the underlying objective aligned with contemporary expectations of corporate social responsibility, the execution relied heavily on shock value at the initial point of contact, creating immediate exposure to reputational risk (Hickman, 2021; Torossian, 2021).

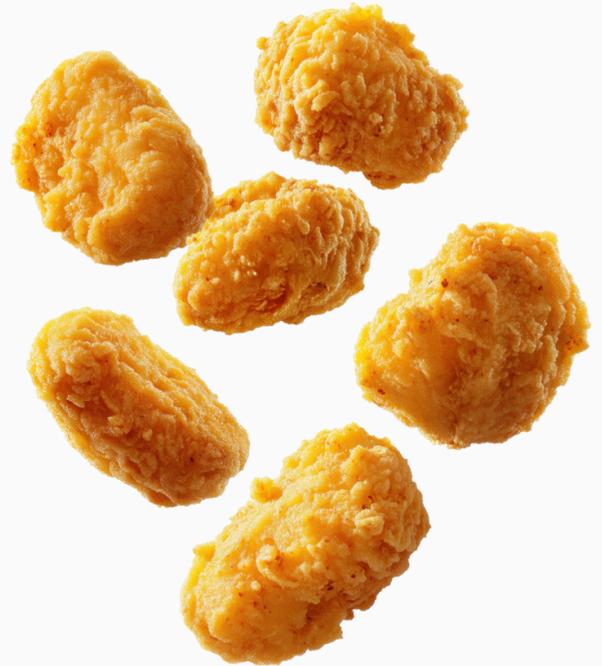


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# Audience & Segmentation 03

## Who it Targeted and How Effectively.

This section applies the Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning framework to evaluate how Burger King UK identified and addressed its intended audience, and why this strategic logic failed in practice. Burger King implicitly segmented the market across multiple bases. Demographically, the campaign focused on UK adults aged approximately 18 to 40, a core fast food consumption segment and a group highly active on digital and social media channels (Fryar et al. 2018; Hultgren, 2021). Psychographically, the intended audience can be categorised as socially aware, progressive, and receptive to ironic provocative brand humour. Behaviourally, the campaign targeted frequent Twitter users who engage with brand discourse, cultural commentary, and viral content (James, 2021; Reason Why, 2021).



Effective segmentation should create groups that are not only identifiable and reachable, but also predictable in their response to marketing stimuli. While Burger King's chosen segments were attractive due to their engagement potential, the segmentation logic did not sufficiently account for heterogeneity in interpretation within the broader social media environment.

In terms of targeting, Burger King adopted a narrow psychographic targeting strategy aligned with the concept of niche or differentiated targeting. The campaign prioritised culturally fluent Twitter users who were assumed to understand shock-based humour and threaded context. This reflects a deliberate trade-off between reach and resonance, favouring attention and earned media amplification over broad appeal. However, social media content rarely remains confined to its intended audience. The targeting strategy underestimates the role of secondary audiences, including women, advocacy groups, journalists, and casual users who encountered the message via screenshots or algorithmic redistribution. These users interacted with the content outside its intended sequence, leading to literal rather than contextual interpretation.

From a positioning perspective, Burger King attempted to reinforce its established brand identity as bold, culturally disruptive, and socially relevant. The intended positioning aligns with emotionally driven brand differentiation. In practice, however, the perceived positioning diverged sharply from this intent. Instead of being viewed as progressive and self-aware, the brand was widely perceived as insensitive and exclusionary. This gap between intended and perceived positioning illustrates how positioning is not defined by intent, but by audience interpretation. The campaign demonstrates how positioning can collapse when execution fails to align with platform norms, audience expectations, and the realities of non-linear content consumption.

Overall, while Burger King applied elements of the STP framework, the strategy lacked sufficient controls to manage audience spillover and interpretive risk. This misalignment at the segmentation, targeting, and positioning level set the conditions for reputational damage despite a socially aligned underlying objective (Kotler, 1994).

# Message Value Proposition Analysis

04

## Core Brand Promise



## Value Proposition Canvas

From a value proposition perspective, Burger King's campaign aimed to deliver multiple layers of value. On a social level, the brand sought to advocate for women's inclusion in professional kitchens and raise awareness of gender inequality within the culinary industry. Emotionally, the campaign attempted to signal solidarity with broader gender equality movements by aligning the brand with International Women's Day. Functionally, this message was supported by a tangible initiative: the announcement of scholarship funding designed to help women access culinary training and career opportunities.

However, the campaign directly activated significant audience pain points. These included long-standing gender stereotypes, systemic sexism, and the persistent underrepresentation of women in professional cooking roles, as well as structural barriers to education and career progression. While these issues were central to the campaign's intended message, their activation occurred too abruptly and without sufficient contextual framing.

This created what can be seen as a critical execution gap. By immediately triggering the audience's pain points and delaying the delivery of the underlying benefit, the shock value of the opening statement overshadowed the intended social value, preventing users from engaging with the campaigns intended purpose (Osterwalder et al. 2015).

When looking at this from a consumer behaviour perspective, the campaign followed the AIDA model only partially. The tweet clearly captured Attention yet it failed to generate Interest or Desire, with it provoking anger rather than curiosity. This reflects the emotionally reactive nature of platforms like Twitter where users rarely wait for additional context before forming, and sharing, their judgements.

# Channels and Execution

05

## Mix of Paid, Owned, Earned Media

Owned	Earned	Paid
Burger King UK Twitter account as the primary channel	Rapid amplification through retweets, quote tweets, screenshots, press coverage, and commentary from influencers and journalists.	No paid element. The campaign relied entirely on organic reach.

According to media mix theory, earned media can amplify visibility and credibility but is inherently uncontrollable, particularly in high-sensitivity cultural contexts (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). The absence of paid media limited Burger King's ability to frame the message, provide contextual reinforcement, or guide audience interpretation, increasing the risk of misalignment between intent and perception (Lovett & Staelin, 2016).

## Content Strategy Pyramid

From a content strategy perspective, the campaign's stated purpose was to raise awareness and demonstrate social responsibility. Its core content pillars included gender equality, brand boldness, and cultural relevance. The chosen format (short-form social copy designed for shock value) was distributed through a single platform, with no channel diversification (Deshpande 2017).

## Integration

Overall, the integration was low. The campaign lacked supporting content across platforms that could clarify intent, reinforce meaning, or guide audience interpretation after initial exposure. Twitter/X is designed for fast reactions, often without context. Burger King treated Twitter like a brand storytelling platform, not a real-time debate platform which amplified the risk of misinterpretation and, from there, backlash.



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# Results or Observed Performance

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The campaign achieved exceptionally high levels of awareness, reaching global visibility within hours of publication. From a reach and exposure perspective, the initial tweet performed strongly, benefiting from rapid amplification across social media platforms and mainstream news outlets. However, when evaluated through the AIDA framework, this heightened awareness failed to translate into positive impact.

Although audience interest was high, engagement was predominantly negative. Rather than stimulating curiosity with the campaign's intended message, interest was driven largely by outrage and moral opposition. Consequently, the campaign did not progress to the desire stage in any meaningful sense. It failed to foster brand affinity, emotional resonance, or perceptions of authenticity. Instead of reinforcing positive brand associations, the message damaged trust and weakened alignment with audience values (Hanlon, 2025; Husák & Kašpar, 2019).

At the action stage, negative responses dominated. These included unfollows, public criticism, and widespread calls for accountability, indicating a clear breakdown between generating awareness and conversion-related outcomes. From a KPI framework perspective, while the campaign succeeded in maximising top-of-funnel visibility, it performed poorly across key indicators of engagement quality, sentiment, and brand equity (Sarfranz et al. 2025).

Observed outcomes further support this evaluation. The original tweet was deleted within hours, followed by a public apology issued by Burger King UK. Media coverage was overwhelmingly negative, with the press focusing primarily on the controversy rather than the intended scholarship initiative. As a result, the campaign's functional objective of raising awareness of scholarship funding for women in culinary careers, was largely overshadowed. This highlights a critical disconnect between attention generation and strategic effectiveness (Hanlon, 2025).



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# Pain Points & Missed Opportunities

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This section applies the Data-Driven Optimisation Loop to identify where the Burger King campaign failed and how earlier intervention could have mitigated reputational damage (Frederiksen & Brem, 2017; Pitt, 2020). The initial “test” was the publication of a provocative headline tweet intended to capture attention and initiate a broader narrative around gender inequality in professional kitchens. This test relied on shock-based creative execution, assuming audiences would either read the full thread or interpret the message as rhetorical (Parry et al. 2023). The test did not include safeguards for high-risk variables such as cultural sensitivity, platform fragmentation, or out-of-context redistribution. No evidence of pre-launch scenario testing or alternative headline variants was visible, increasing exposure to interpretive risk.

Early performance indicators were available immediately following publication. High engagement velocity, combined with rapid negative sentiment in replies and quote tweets, provided real-time signals that the message was being interpreted unfavourably. However, these signals were not acted upon quick enough. Measurement must prioritise sentiment quality, not just engagement volume. In this case, negative sentiment was observable within minutes, yet corrective measures were delayed. The failure to translate measurement into learning represents a key strategic breakdown. Early reactions indicated that the headline message was being consumed independently of its explanatory content and interpreted literally rather than ironically. This learning should have triggered immediate reassessment of the campaigns framing, particularly given the heightened sensitivity surrounding International Women’s Day. The persistence of the original post despite escalating backlash suggests insufficient organisational readiness to interpret and escalate social listening insights.

Adjustment occurred after only significant reputational damage had already been materialised. Approximately 19 hours after the original post, Burger King UK published a public apology acknowledging that the message was inappropriate and that the campaign had missed its mark (Kelleher, 2021; Kessler, 2021). From a data-driven optimisation perspective, this response represents a delayed and reactive adjustment rather than a timely optimisation. By the time the apology was issued, negative sentiment had already stabilised across twitter and earned media channels, and the narrative had largely shifted from the intended scholarship initiative to criticism of the brand’s judgement. The apology itself functioned as a corrective communication but did not materially recover the campaign’s original objective. It did not meaningfully re-frame the brand’s positioning within the International Women’s Day discourse. Delayed responses in high-sensitivity contexts often reduce the effectiveness of corrective messaging.

## **Earlier adjustment options could have included:**

- Immediate clarification or reframing within the first hour of backlash
- Pinning contextual explanation to the original post
- Temporarily suspending the content while reassessing sentiment trends
- Deploying parallel clarification across other owned channels

In summary, while Burger King did eventually adjust its approach through apology, the 19-hour response window significantly limited the effectiveness of this intervention. The delay illustrates a failure to translate early performance signals into timely strategic action, reinforcing the importance of rapid optimisation in digital-first campaigns.



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# Strategic Recommendations

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If Burger King were to pursue the same objective of supporting women's inclusion in professional kitchens, an improved strategy would require rethinking **message sequencing, channel integration, and risk management**, while still allowing the brand to maintain bold creative expression. The core issue was not the campaign's intent, but the misalignment between insensitive message delivery and audience expectations within a highly reactive digital environment.

The recommendations are structured using STP refinement, the Content Strategy Pyramid, and the Data-Driven Optimisation Loop.

## Strengthen STP Framework

### Segmentation

Burger King should continue targeting socially aware, digitally active consumers but explicitly recognise that social media campaigns inevitably reach secondary audiences, including advocacy groups, journalists, and casual users who may encounter content out of context

### Targeting

Targeting assumptions should shift from a narrow, irony-literate Twitter audience to a broader public-facing audience. Campaigns addressing equality issues should be designed for **interpretive robustness**, meaning messages remain appropriate even when consumed in isolation.

### Positioning

Burger King should reposition itself from a provocateur to a **credible ally brand** in equality-related discourse. This does not require abandoning boldness, but it does require prioritising responsibility and empathy when engaging with sensitive social issues.

## Content Strategy Pyramid

From a messaging perspective, the campaign should prioritise an empathy-led focus over shock-first tactics. Rather than opening with a provocative statement that activates audience pain points, the message should first establish shared values and emotional safety.

- **Purpose**

- Demonstrate Burger King's genuine support for women's inclusion in professional kitchens by communicating clear intent, shared values, and tangible action. The end goal is to build trust and credibility before seeking amplification.

- **Pillars**

- Gender imbalance in professional kitchens
- Access to training and career progression
- Burger King's scholarship initiative

- **Formats**

- Formats that allow clarity and context, such as short-form video, carousel posts, and a supporting landing page explaining the scholarship

- **Distribution**

- SEO, Social Media, Email, Paid Advertising

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# Strategic Recommendations

09

## Channel Strategy and Integration

Platform selection and execution should be reconsidered. For nuanced storytelling on a highly sensitive topic such as women's roles in culinary professions, Burger King should prioritise platforms better suited to narrative depth.

### • Launch Platforms

- Launch longer-form storytelling on Instagram and Youtube for storytelling and explanatory content
- Condensed versions of the message can be adapted to twitter once context has been established elsewhere. This allows the brand to control first impressions rather than react defensively to backlash.

This approach aligns with the Paid, Owned, Earned media logic, reducing reliance on uncontrolled earned media during the initial exposure phase.

## Data Driven optimisation Loop

To operationalise these recommendations, Burger King should implement the following mechanisms:

### Test

- Pre-test headlines and creative variants internally, including sensitivity and interpretive risk reviews
- Scenario-test how messages appear when screenshotted or viewed without context

### Measure

- Monitor real-time sentiment, reply tone and quote-tweet framing rather than engagement alone
- Establish early warning thresholds for negative sentiment escalation

### Learn

- Assign clear ownership for interpreting social listening data within the first hour of launch
- Document learnings regarding message interpretation, platform behaviour and audience response

### Adjust

- Enable rapid response protocols including pinned clarifications, caption edits, or temporary content suspension
- Deploy immediate cross-channel clarification if early signals indicate misinterpretation

## Framework

Finally, Burger King should implement a formal social issue campaign governance framework, including:

- Clear escalation pathways for sensitive campaigns
- Defined decision rights for real-time intervention
- Pre-approved response playbooks for backlash scenarios

This would allow Burger King to continue engaging in purpose-driven marketing while managing reputational risk in line with the realities of digital platform dynamics.

# EXPECTED IMPACT

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The implementation of the proposed improvements is expected to deliver stronger and more sustainable performance outcomes across the marketing funnel, as measured through a KPI-based evaluation framework. By aligning message sequencing, channel integration, and platform selection with digital consumer behavior, the campaign would shift from short-term attention generation toward long-term brand and social value creation (Gale & Langford, 2025; Montag, 2025; Salsi, 2024).

At the awareness level, the revised strategy would maintain high reach while reducing reputational risk. By establishing contextual clarity and emotional safety before amplification, Burger King could still benefit from cultural relevance and earned media visibility without triggering widespread backlash. This approach supports sustained awareness rather than volatile, controversy-driven exposure.

In terms of engagement, the campaign would be expected to generate higher-quality interactions. Rather than outrage-based reactions, engagement would be reflected through positive sentiment indicators such as supportive comments, content saves, and constructive discussion. These metrics provide a more accurate signal of message resonance and alignment with audience values than raw interaction volume alone.

At the conversion stage, clearer framing and improved integration across owned and paid channels would increase the visibility and perceived legitimacy of the scholarship initiative. This would likely translate into higher click-through rates, greater awareness of eligibility criteria, and increased scholarship applications, indicating a successful transition from awareness to action.

From a retention and brand health perspective, the improved strategy would strengthen trust, particularly among female consumers and socially conscious audiences. Consistent and credible execution in purpose-driven communication increases the likelihood of positive brand advocacy beyond the campaign period.

Finally, the application of a structured data-driven optimization loop (testing message variants, monitoring sentiment and engagement quality, and adjusting execution in real time) would reduce strategic risk in future cultural campaigns. Over time, this learning-oriented approach would enhance Burger King's credibility in purpose-driven marketing, enabling the brand to engage with sensitive social topics more confidently and effectively.

## Why this strategy is stronger

- It preserves Burger King's creative boldness without relying on shock as the primary hook
- It aligns message delivery with consumer behaviour and platform norms
- It operationalises data-driven optimisation rather than treating it as a post-hoc fix
- It directly addresses where the original campaign failed and how to prevent recurrence

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# Example Mock Up

12

Burger King

Women in Culinary Careers

## Why Women in Culinary Careers Matter

Professional kitchens have long been spaces of creativity, precision, and craft. Yet women remain significantly underrepresented in senior culinary roles, despite making up a substantial portion of culinary school graduates.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

# Progress Through Opportunity

Supporting women in professional kitchens through scholarships, mentorship, and career pathways. Building a more inclusive culinary industry, one opportunity at a time.

Apply Now →

23%

HEAD CHEF POSITIONS

Held by women, despite representing nearly half of culinary graduates.

68%

REPORT BARRIERS

Women citing lack of mentorship and flexible working arrangements.

40%

ATTRITION RATE

Women leaving professional kitchen roles within five years.

"The kitchen knows no gender, only skill. But the industry must build the bridges that allow talent to rise."

Read Stories from the Kitchen →

## Our Commitment

As a major employer, we recognize our responsibility to create pathways. Our commitment goes beyond words—we're investing in tangible programs.



### Culinary Scholarships

We provide financial support for women pursuing culinary education, covering tuition, equipment, and certification costs to remove barriers to entry.

LEARN MORE →



### Paid Internships

Our structured internship program offers hands-on experience in professional kitchens, with fair compensation and clear pathways to permanent positions.

LEARN MORE →

### Barriers to Progression

#### Limited Mentorship

Women in professional kitchens often lack access to senior mentors who can guide their career development and advocate for their advancement.

#### Workplace Culture

Traditional kitchen hierarchies and long, inflexible hours can create environments that are challenging for women to navigate and thrive in.

#### Visibility Gap

Women chefs receive less media coverage and recognition, making it harder to build the professional reputation needed for career advancement.

## The Opportunity

Our scholarship and internship program is designed to support women pursuing careers in professional kitchens. We provide financial assistance for culinary education, paid internship positions, and ongoing mentorship from experienced culinary professionals.

This is more than just financial support—it's a comprehensive pathway to career advancement, with structured training, skill development, and clear progression opportunities within our organization and the broader culinary industry.

## Program Benefits

### Financial Support

Scholarships covering tuition, equipment, and certification costs for culinary education programs.

### Paid Internships

Competitive compensation during your internship period, with clear pathways to permanent positions.

### Expert Mentorship

One-on-one guidance from experienced culinary professionals who advocate for your career development.

### Career Pathways

Structured progression opportunities within our organization and connections to industry partners.

### Eligibility Criteria

- Currently enrolled in or accepted to a recognized culinary education program, or recent graduate (within 2 years)
- Demonstrated passion for professional culinary careers through coursework, work experience, or personal projects
- Commitment to completing the full program duration (8-12 months depending on track)
- Legal authorization to work in the program location

### Application Timeline

#### Application Period

Rolling admissions throughout the year, with priority review for applications submitted by March 31st for summer/fall start dates.

#### Review Process

Applications reviewed within 2-3 weeks of submission. Selected candidates invited for interviews.

#### Program Start

Multiple start dates available throughout the year to accommodate different educational schedules.

## Stories from the Kitchen

Meet the women shaping the future of professional kitchens through skill, dedication, and craft. These are their stories—told in their own words.



EXECUTIVE PASTRY CHEF

### Elena Petrova

"Every dish tells a story, and I strive to make each one a masterpiece of flavor and passion."

#### Skills & Expertise

Mastery of classical French patisserie, innovative dessert creation, and intricate sugar work.

#### Ambition & Craft

Elena's ambition is to elevate the art of dessert, blending traditional techniques with modern aesthetics. Her craft is defined by precision, creativity, and an unwavering commitment to quality ingredients.

Read Full Story

Home

Burger King

https://seizwy-my-site-bhe4yofq-tohanlon3.wix-vibe.com/

# Example Mock Up



**INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY**

REAL TALENT BELONGS IN EVERY KITCHEN

**YOUR CAREER STARTS HERE** 

Find Pathways to culinary management, leadership and professional growth



**CELEBRATE HER SUCCESS** 

With only 25% of women in professional culinary positions, Burger King wants to change this.

Search Women in Culinary Professions at Burger King to find out more.



**STORIES FROM THE KITCHEN** 

*"Every dish tells a story, and I strive to make each one a masterpiece of flavour and passion"*

Elena Petrova started her Culinary Profession through the Burger King Apprentice Programme in 2019.

**Skills & Expertise**

- Pastry
- Desserts
- Sugar Work

