

From Startup to Sensation: The Strategic Marketing Forces Behind Crumbl Cookies' Success

The logo for Crumbl Cookies, featuring the brand name in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letters are slightly rounded and have a thick weight. The background is a solid pink color.

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1. Introduction

In this section the background of the study, the problem definition, purpose and research questions will be presented, as well as the empirical and theoretical delimitations of the study.

1.1 Background

In today's consumer landscape, markets are increasingly saturated, with countless producers offering similar products. As a result, firms can no longer rely solely on the product itself to remain competitive; instead, success increasingly hinges on how effectively a brand can differentiate and resonate with its audience. In saturated markets, where functional differences are minimal, perceived brand value often becomes the decisive factor in consumer choice (Hanaysha, 2024).

Research shows that consumers are more likely to develop brand passion when they identify with a brand on a personal level, especially when they can also engage with a broader brand community (Azizi et al., 2024). This emotional connection strengthens loyalty and increases the likelihood of repeat purchases. Moreover, consumers tend to value non-alignable product attributes, those that are unique and not directly comparable, particularly during special purchase occasions. In these contexts, uniqueness and perceived "specialness" significantly influence decision-making (Liu et al., 2025).

Since its founding in 2017, *Crumbl Cookies* has grown into the fastest-growing cookie brand in the United States, expanding to over a thousand locations. With its distinctive pink packaging, ever-changing menu, and highly visual social media presence, Crumbl has managed to create a strong emotional brand experience in a market saturated with similar dessert offerings (Crumbl Cookies, 2025).

1.2 Problem definition

Crumbl Cookies' success offers a compelling case of how a brand can thrive without offering a radically innovative product. Rather than relying on product uniqueness alone, Crumbl has demonstrated that strategic branding and emotional differentiation can be powerful drivers of growth. This raises a central question: How did Crumbl manage to become the fastest-growing cookie franchise in the United States with a product that, while positioned as special, is fundamentally just a cookie? Understanding this requires a closer look at how Crumbl built brand personality, created perceived uniqueness, and leveraged consumer behavior to outperform its competitors in a saturated market.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to analyze how Crumbl Cookies has successfully differentiated itself within a highly saturated and competitive dessert market by building a brand characterized by strong emotional engagement and social virality. The study aims to identify the key strategic and psychological factors that contributed to Crumbl's rapid growth and consumer appeal.

1.4 Research Questions

- *How has Crumbl Cookies successfully differentiated its brand in a saturated market of substitute products?*
- *What strategic marketing factors influence consumers to choose Crumbl over competing cookie brands?*
- *How has Crumbl cultivated emotional engagement and social hype through brand personality and consumer behavior strategies?*

1.5 Empirical & Theoretical Delimitations

This study focuses solely on the brand *Crumbl Cookies*, analyzing marketing from 2017 to 2025. The case of Crumbl illustrates how modern brands can leverage brand personality and STP frameworks to achieve rapid market growth in a saturated industry. The paper will include the following theoretical frameworks, which are explained in more detail in the following section:

- Brand personality
- Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning (STP)

2. Theoretical Frameworks

In this section the theory frameworks will be explained. The frameworks used are Aaker's brand personality, and STP, Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning.

2.1 Aaker's Brand Personality

2.1.1 The Big Five

According to Aaker, brand personality can be defined as “*the set of human characteristics associated with a given brand.*” For example, *Coca-Cola* is often perceived as authentic, whereas *Pepsi* is viewed as young and spirited. Brand personality may be expressed through demographics, lifestyle, or human personality traits.

A widely used framework for measuring brand personality is the Brand Personality Scale (BPS), which identifies five key dimensions:

1. *Sincerity*
2. *Excitement*
3. *Competence*
4. *Sophistication*
5. *Ruggedness*

Similar to individuals, brands can embody a complex personality that spans across one or multiple dimensions. Each of these five factors is further divided into facets, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Brand Personality				
Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness
Down-to-Earth: down to earth, family oriented, small town	Daring: daring, trendy, exciting	Reliability: reliable, hardworking, secure	Class: upper class, good-looking, glamorous	Masculinity: outdoorsy, masculine, western
Honesty: honest, sincere, real	Spiritedness: spirited, cool, young	Intelligence: intelligent, technical, corporate	Charm: charming, feminine, smooth	Toughness: tough, rugged
Wholesomeness: wholesome, original	Imaginative: imaginative, unique	Success: successful, leader, confident		
Cheerfulness: cheerful, sentimental, friendly	Contemporary: up-to-date, independent, contemporary			

Figure 1. The five factors of brand personality (Aaker 2001)

A brand's perceived personality is influenced by everything associated with it. The primary drivers can be divided into product-related and non-product-related characteristics. Product-related characteristics include the product category, packaging, price, and attributes. Non-product-related characteristics encompass elements such as user imagery, sponsorships, symbols, age, advertising style, country of origin, brand image, and celebrity endorsements.

User imagery, explained further in Section 2.1.3, plays a particularly important role, as it is shaped by either actual brand users or idealized users portrayed in advertising. This imagery facilitates the process of brand personification, since the characteristics of the users themselves contribute to shaping the perceived personality of the brand.

According to Aaker, brand personality can help establish a differentiating identity, especially in cases where competing brands share similar product attributes. It not only defines the context of the product class and consumer experience but also informs practical decisions, such as packaging design, event associations, and the style of interaction between the brand and its customers (Aaker, 2010).

2.1.2 How brand personality creates brand equity

Brand personality can create brand equity, which Aaker explains through three models:

- *The self expression model*
- *The relationship basis model*
- *The functional benefit representation model*

The *self-expression model* describes how, for certain groups of customers, a brand becomes a means of expressing their self-identity, whether actual or ideal. Buying or using a brand can therefore serve as a way of constructing one's social self, with customers seeking out brands whose cultural meaning aligns with the person they wish to be. Emotional associations, such as aggressiveness or empathy, can also attach to a brand personality. These associations may stem from product use itself, for example using a certain computer brand. In this way, individuals are drawn to brands that reflect their own traits, such as a warm person gravitating toward experiences that feel similarly warm. Ultimately, consumers should feel enhanced or affirmed through their association with the brand (Aaker 2010).

Brands can also serve as “badges,” such as wearing branded clothing to signal identity. This allows a brand to become closely intertwined with its users, even forming part of their lifestyle. However, it is important to recognize that individuals rarely have a single fixed personality; instead, different facets of their personality dominate in different contexts. In some contexts, it may be very successful, but irrelevant in others. For example, Apple historically thrived in home and educational settings but struggled to achieve the same resonance in business environments (Aaker 2010).

The *relationship basis model* emphasizes the dynamic between the user and the brand. A brand might be perceived as a “friend”, meaning someone who is caring and understanding, but just like human

relationships, these connections vary. Some are built on fun, others on respect or reliability. Focusing on the relationship, rather than on brand personality alone, allows greater flexibility in brand identity creation. Aaker highlights two key types of relationships: *aspirational*, which offer social elevation, and *trusted*, which provide expertise. The choice of role should be central to brand strategy. However, successful relationships also depend on how the brand views its customers. For example, upscale brands risk being perceived as arrogant, while performance-oriented brands may unintentionally condescend to their audience (Aaker 2010).

The *functional benefit model* explains how brand personality can express the functional benefits of a brand. It can be strengthened by a brand's symbol, or the region it's associated with (Aaker 2010).

2.1.3 User imagery

Aaker defines user imagery as “*the set of human characteristics associated with the typical user of the brand.*” In some cases, user imagery overlaps closely with brand personality, but distinguishing between the two can be strategically important (Aaker 2010).

For example, Levi's brand personality is rooted in its heritage as a provider of durable workwear for miners, yet its user imagery today is urban, youthful, and fashion-driven. This contrast between personality and user imagery creates a unique and compelling brand identity. A similar phenomenon occurred when the hip-hop culture embraced *Timberland* boots, originally associated with farming and practicality. The adoption of the product by an unexpected audience redefined its user imagery, making it culturally relevant in a new context (Aaker 2010).

User imagery can therefore be shaped not only by actual users but also by idealized portrayals in marketing campaigns or through the influence of celebrity endorsers. By managing these associations, brands can expand their appeal and connect with aspirational audiences beyond their original base (Aaker 2010).

2.2 STP - Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning

When communicating an offering to customers, firms need to consider three key steps: Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning (Åsberg, 2022).

2.2.1 Segmentation & Targeting

Segmentation involves dividing individuals into groups based on selected variables and/or characteristics. Unlike mass marketing, where the same approach is applied to everyone, or individual marketing, where every individual is targeted differently, target marketing develops tailored strategies for specific groups.

Typically, segmentation is based on four dimensions:

- *Geographic*
- *Demographic*
- *Psychographic*
- *Behavior*

Geographic segmentation divides individuals based on their physical location or origin, such as country, state, or even neighborhood. Demographic segmentation focuses on variables such as gender, age, occupation, and ethnic background. Psychographic segmentation groups people according to social class, lifestyle, and personal characteristics. Finally, behavioral segmentation classifies individuals based on three factors: their attitude toward a brand, their level of usage, and their knowledge of the brand.

Once the segments are defined, the firm must determine which groups to prioritize, thereby establishing the target market (Åsberg, 2022).

2.2.2 Positioning

Positioning is about communicating a brand's competitive advantage and value proposition to the target market. It occurs both at the product range and company level, and is typically conveyed through elements such as pricing and product quality. Positioning involves making a clear promise to the customer and consistently delivering on it (Åsberg, 2022).

A key framework supporting positioning is the marketing mix, often summarized by the Four Ps. This model emphasizes that a strong marketing plan should integrate multiple areas to differentiate the product from competitors and create unique value for customers. The Four Ps are:

Product

The good or service offered to satisfy customer needs. Differentiation is essential, taking into account aspects such as product name, quality, and packaging (Åsberg, 2022; Kenton, 2024).

Price

Reflects what customers are willing to pay for the good or service (Kenton, 2024).

Placement

Where and how the product is made available, including distribution strategies, for example if the distribution is selective or intensive (Åsberg, 2022).

Promotion

Activities such as sales promotion, personal selling and advertising, designed to create brand awareness (Kenton, 2024).

3. Case Analysis

In this section, an analysis of Crumbl Cookies and its marketing strategy will be conducted, beginning with a company background and continuing with an analysis of its use of brand personality and alignment with the STP framework.

3.1 Crumbl Cookies

Crumbl Cookies was founded in 2017 by Jason McGowan and Sawyer Hemsley (see figure 2), who opened their first store in Logan, Utah. In 2023, systemwide sales across all franchises exceeded one billion dollars. By 2025, the brand had expanded to over one thousand franchised locations across the United States and Canada (Crumbl Cookies, 2025).



Figure 2: The founders: Jason McGowan and Sawyer Hemsley (Melvin 2025)

The original business idea was to deliver warm cookies directly to the Logan community, similar to *Insomnia Cookies* on the East Coast, despite the fact that the founders had no prior baking experience. The founders knew, however, that Utah was “bakery-driven” and that baked goods were part of the culture in the area. They started off with a single product; a chocolate chip cookie, using YouTube to learn. The reason behind the large size, still remaining today, was that “We thought that if we make our cookies large, then it’s meant to be shared.”

Hemsley began promoting the store on social media even before its opening, and Crumbl was profitable from the very first month. Within a few months, a second franchise was launched. Around this time, the founders introduced a weekly rotating menu, announced every Sunday, which quickly became a signature feature of the brand. Within two years, Crumbl had grown to 55 locations. See figure 3 for an example item on the weekly rotating menu.

Wedding Cake Cookie

A warm vanilla bean sugar cookie topped with an elegant swirl of vanilla and raspberry cream cheese frosting and a light crunch of white chocolate pearls.

[Learn More](#)

[Order Now](#)



Figure 3: The Wedding Cake Cookie, one of the items on the weekly rotating menu (Crumbl Cookies, 2025)

The company focused early on viral marketing, especially on *TikTok*, where it amassed 9.8 million followers, more than *Starbucks* and *Dunkin'* combined. The rise of *TikTok* during the pandemic significantly boosted Crumbl's visibility, attracting both enthusiastic fans eager to try the cookies and critics appalled by the spectacle of 1,000-calorie treats in the now-iconic pink boxes (see figure 4). Strategic brand collaborations, including partnerships with Kylie Jenner and *Dove*, further amplified its reach. Another distinctive feature of the brand is its open-concept kitchen, allowing customers to watch cookies being prepared in real time (Crumbl Cookies, 2025).



Figure 4: The iconic pink box (Crumbl Cookies, 2025)

Despite its rapid growth, the brand faces risks. Kevin Schimpf, director of industry research at Chicago-based consulting firm *Technomic*, noted: "When you just do one thing – selling cookies – it can always be a little bit more precarious of a business model. It's based a lot more on novelty than anything else." This also results in a threat, as novelty could wear off, evident when Crumbl closed its

first stores in 2023. To address this challenge, the company broadened its offerings to include cakes and pies while slowing its domestic expansion. Looking forward, however, Crumbl has set its sights on international growth, with plans to open stores in the UK, Australia, and Mexico (Melvin, 2025).

3.2 Theoretical Frameworks in Practice

This section examines Crumbl's application of the theoretical frameworks discussed in Section 2.

3.2.1 Crumbl & Brand Personality

Despite operating in a saturated market, Crumbl has achieved remarkable success in the United States. One explanation for this lies in how the company presents itself, by cultivating a brand personality that strongly resonates with its customer base. Crumbl positions itself as fun, trendy, and approachable. If imagined as a person, the brand could resemble a social media influencer, someone active online, attuned to the latest trends, sharing aesthetically pleasing content, and always aware of what is "in." Using Aaker's Brand Personality Scale (BPS), Crumbl aligns most closely with the *Excitement* dimension. The brand projects a youthful, imaginative, and trend-driven image, evident in its playful product design, vibrant pink packaging, and visually engaging, social media-focused marketing. The weekly rotating cookie menu contributes to a sense of novelty and unpredictability, reinforcing the *Excitement* trait. In this way, Crumbl does more than sell cookies, as it also delivers an experience that feels current, fun, and shareable.

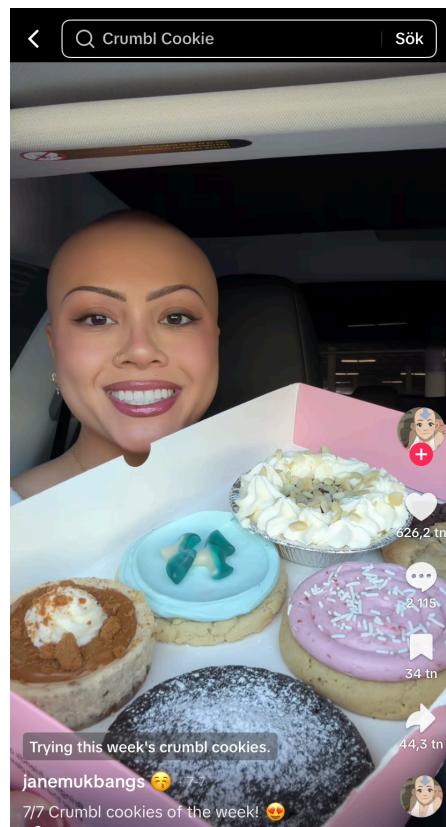


Figure 5: Screenshot from TikTok user @janemukbangs reviewing Crumbl's weekly flavors (TikTok, 2025).

As previously discussed, a brand's perceived personality is shaped by everything associated with it. Crumbl's strong social media presence (see figure 5) plays a central role in this perception, reinforcing its image as youthful, trendy, and engaging. Product-related characteristics, such as its sleek pink packaging, premium-yet-accessible pricing, oversized cookies, rotating menu, and open-kitchen concept, add to its distinct appeal. At the same time, non-product-related associations have further strengthened the brand: influencer endorsements, the instantly recognizable pink color scheme, and its cookie-shaped symbol all contribute to brand memorability. According to Aaker, brand personality helps create a differentiating identity, which may explain Crumbl's ability to stand out in an otherwise crowded cookie market.

Aaker's self-expression model suggests that brands can serve as tools for consumers to express their self-identity, whether reflecting who they are or who they aspire to be. Meaning that consumers are attracted to brands whose personalities match their ideal or actual self-image. Crumbl has successfully positioned itself as a brand that embodies qualities such as trendiness, youthfulness, and aesthetic appeal. These traits strongly resonate with younger consumers, particularly Gen Z and Gen Alpha, whose ideal self-image likely includes being perceived as fun, socially connected, and visually attuned. For these consumers, purchasing a Crumbl cookie and, crucially, sharing it on social media, is not merely a transaction, but a symbolic act of identity construction. In this sense, Crumbl functions as a "badge brand", enabling customers to signal aspects of their identity to others.

While Crumbl aligns strongly with the self-expression model, its fit with Aaker's relationship model and functional benefit model is less pronounced. The brand does not present itself as a "trusted expert" or "reliable friend," nor does it attempt to foster deep, enduring emotional bonds with consumers. Instead, its appeal is rooted in trends, novelty, and social sharing. Similarly, Crumbl's value proposition is not based on functional benefits such as health, convenience, or performance, but rather on indulgence, aesthetics, and cultural relevance. Its success, therefore, is driven more by symbolic and expressive value than by relational or functional positioning.

3.2.2 Crumbl & STP

Segmentation and Targeting

The STP model helps explain how Crumbl identifies and appeals to its key customer groups. The brand primarily targets its audience through demographic, psychographic, and behavioral segmentation, thereby forming a relatively niche segment of the market.

National Flavors

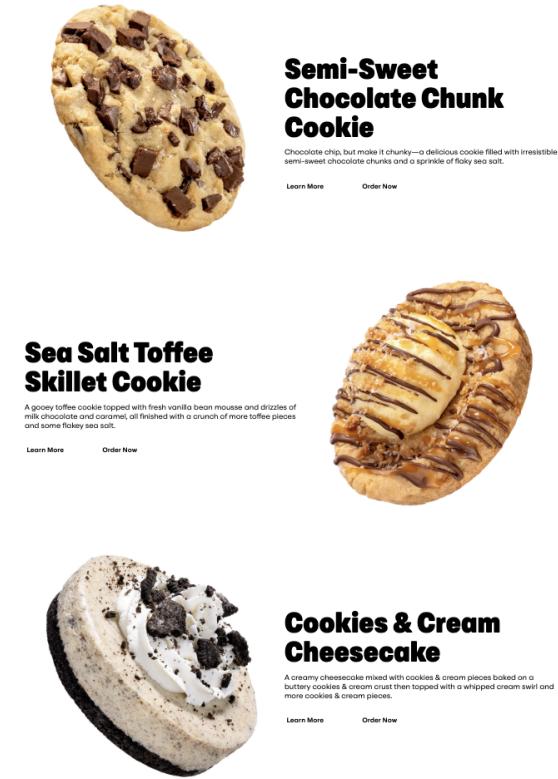


Figure 6: An example of part of a weekly menu, taken from the Crumbl Cookie website (Crumbl Cookies, 2025)

Demographically, Crumbl focuses on a younger audience, particularly Gen Z and Gen Alpha. These consumers are likely familiar with the brand through social media, which sets Crumbl apart from more traditional coffee shops or cookie brands. Unlike casual, on-the-go purchases, a visit to Crumbl is probably a more deliberate, anticipated event. Many customers will likely have already viewed TikTok reviews of the weekly cookie drop or browsed the brand's carefully organized website to decide which flavors look most appealing (see figure 6 above). Once in-store, the experience is likely to be photographed and shared online.

Psychographically, Crumbl appeals to social media users and trend-oriented individuals, not just dessert lovers, but individuals who actively seek out moments they can share, document, and identify with. Behaviorally, Crumbl targets those who associate food with special occasions and social connection, as opposed to everyday snacking. Their cookies are meant to be experienced, not just eaten. However, in order not to lose the customers who simply want a cookie, the menu always includes the chocolate chip, ensuring that the brand does not alienate more traditional customers who simply want a familiar treat.

Positioning

Crumbl's positioning centers on differentiation. Rather than presenting itself as just another cookie shop, the brand emphasizes the experience, not only in terms of taste, but also visually, transforming itself from a simple dessert brand into a trendy, social media-driven identity. Crumbl further enhances

this positioning by releasing weekly flavors and limited-edition cookies, creating a sense of urgency and anticipation. This strategy ensures the brand isn't perceived as a "once-in-a-lifetime" treat, but rather as something that can become a weekly ritual. For example, trying the new menu with friends, and posting it on social media, can become a shared habit and a way to engage with the wider Crumbl community, whether that means joining the devoted fans or the critics of its high-calorie creations. See more on the Four Ps of Crumbl's positioning strategy in Appendix A.

4. Discussion

In this section the findings will be interpreted and the implications of these described. Lastly, the limitations of the analysis will be mentioned.

Crumbl has successfully built a strong brand personality, achieved perceived uniqueness, and leveraged consumer behavior to outperform competitors in a saturated market. The brand has achieved remarkable success with a simple product by differentiating not through the product itself, but through the way it is consumed and experienced.

To differentiate itself, Crumbl has effectively applied brand personality, positioning itself within the *Excitement* dimension of Aaker's Brand Personality Scale. By consistently reinforcing traits such as youthful, imaginative, and playful, the brand distinguishes itself from its competitors. Social media plays a central role in amplifying this identity - showcasing the rotating menu and limited-edition flavors, Crumbl influences consumers to choose its brand over competing cookie brands. Moreover, Crumbl's brand identity aligns with the values and aspirations of its core audience, enabling it to function as a tool for self-expression. As a "badge brand," Crumbl allows consumers to communicate something about themselves, style, trend-awareness, or lifestyle, by purchasing and sharing a cookie. Thereby, Crumbl has cultivated emotional engagement and social hype through brand identity.

Crumbl's precise targeting of a niche market, mainly young, trend-conscious, and digitally active consumers, has contributed significantly to its success. For this audience, buying Crumbl isn't a casual, on-the-go snack decision. It's often a planned activity, designed to be shared on social media. Crumbl's success exemplifies the power of branding over product differentiation, having transformed itself from a simple dessert brand into a trendy, social media-driven identity. It shows the importance of creating sharable and unique brand experiences, in a market full of substitute products.

However, Crumbl's success also brings vulnerabilities. Its dependence on trendiness and social media presence puts it at risk of brand fatigue. If the hype fades, engagement could quickly decline. Its visibility also makes it more susceptible to public backlash; with millions of eyes on the brand, a single negative incident, whether related to product quality, staff treatment, or customer service, could rapidly go viral and trigger a large-scale response, such as a boycott. Unlike smaller or less socially visible companies, Crumbl must maintain a consistently positive brand image to avoid disproportionate damage from mistakes. Additionally, the heavy focus on digital platforms excludes non-digital audiences, such as older consumers or those less active online. Expanding marketing efforts into more traditional channels, such as television or print, could help the brand widen its reach and reduce overreliance on social media trends.

Crumbl's need to diversify into cakes and pies reflects another challenge, raising the question of how sustainable a novelty-centered brand identity can be in the long term. Future research might investigate whether *Excitement*-driven brands can evolve toward hybrid positioning strategies that incorporate elements of *Sincerity* or *Competence*, offering stability alongside novelty.

Despite these insights, the analysis has some limitations. It is primarily based on publicly available sources and secondary data, including social media activity and brand communications, which may not fully reflect the internal strategic decisions made by *Crumbl*. Moreover, the lack of primary data, such as interviews with Crumbl executives or surveys with actual customers, limits the depth of the consumer perspective.

5. Conclusion

This study has shown how Crumbl's success can be understood through the combined lenses of brand personality theory and the STP framework. It has explored how *Crumbl Cookies* has managed to become the fastest-growing cookie franchise in the United States, not through radical product innovation, but by strategically leveraging branding, emotional engagement, and consumer behavior. In an industry saturated with substitute products, Crumbl distinguished itself by creating a brand experience that goes beyond the product itself. By aligning with Aaker's *Excitement* brand personality dimension, and employing targeted segmentation, Crumbl has crafted a brand that is not only consumed, but also shared, experienced, and symbolically worn like a badge by its customers.

Through its strategic use of social media, rotating menus, and visually distinctive packaging, Crumbl has elevated its cookies into cultural symbols that align with the fast-paced dynamics of online trends. Through the STP framework, it becomes clear how Crumbl effectively identifies and appeals to a younger, trend-driven demographic, building emotional engagement through community interaction and personal identity expression.

The company's success demonstrates the power of symbolic and expressive branding over functional differentiation. However, it also highlights key risks: reliance on digital hype, vulnerability to backlash, and potential brand fatigue. To sustain its success, Crumbl may need to evolve its marketing strategy to reach beyond social media audiences.

Ultimately, Crumbl Cookies exemplifies how modern branding can elevate even the simplest product into a lifestyle experience. Its trajectory underscores the growing importance of emotional value, visual expression, and strategic identity alignment in today's competitive markets.

The case contributes to ongoing discussions about the sustainability of *Excitement*-driven brands and the risks associated with novelty-based positioning. Further research could explore how such brands evolve when initial excitement diminishes, or how symbolic and functional benefits can be integrated more effectively to support long-term loyalty.

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Appendix A - The Marketing Mix

1. Brand Segmentation & Targeting

As discussed in Section 3.2.2, Crumbl primarily applies demographic, psychographic, and behavioral segmentation to identify its core consumer base. This segment consists of younger consumers who are highly active on social media. They are often trend-conscious, eager to share personal experiences online, and seek brands that reflect their identity. Additionally, the segment tends to associate food with social occasions, rather than routine consumption.

2. Positioning

Crumbl does not position itself as just another cookie shop. Instead, it emphasizes the overall brand experience, both in terms of taste and visual appeal. The company sets itself apart by creating a sense of urgency and anticipation through limited-time offerings, and by using highly shareable, social media-friendly packaging. This strategic positioning reinforces Crumbl's image as a trendy, experience-driven brand rather than a traditional bakery.

2.1 Product

Crumbl's core product is a large, indulgent cookie presented in a visually distinctive pink box, reinforcing the brand's aesthetic appeal. The menu typically features about seven cookie flavors that rotate weekly, often including limited-edition offerings or collaborations with celebrity endorsers. Despite the frequent changes, the classic chocolate chip cookie remains a permanent fixture on the menu, providing consistency for returning customers.

2.2 Price

Crumbl adopts a premium pricing strategy that reflects the product's size, uniqueness, and perceived luxury. Rather than positioning itself as an affordable, everyday treat, the brand emphasizes indulgence and special occasions. In addition to its core offerings, Crumbl occasionally introduces larger desserts at higher price points. To maintain inclusivity, the brand also offers smaller-sized cookies at lower prices, appealing to a broader range of customers while preserving its premium positioning.

2.3 Place

Crumbl's physical stores are designed primarily for pick-up rather than in-store dining, with no seating and limited emphasis on in-store ambiance (the altem life, 2024). This setup encourages customers to enjoy their cookies elsewhere, often at home or in their cars, further reinforcing the brand's takeout and social media-friendly experience. Store locations are typically placed in high-traffic areas and shopping centers (Crumbl, (n.d.)). Additionally, Crumbl has expanded its accessibility through partnerships with delivery platforms such as Uber Eats (Uber Eats (n.d.)), enabling broader reach and aligning with digital-first consumer habits.

2.4 Promotion

Crumbl relies heavily on social media marketing, influencer partnerships, and user-generated content to build brand visibility and emotional engagement. From the beginning, the company distanced itself from traditional advertising channels, instead leveraging platforms like TikTok to create viral momentum. This strategy aligns closely with the habits and preferences of its young, digitally native target audience, allowing Crumbl to cultivate a sense of community, excitement, and brand loyalty.

Appendix B - Sustainability

Crumbl partnered with *Metsä Board* to develop a more environmentally friendly packaging solution. The aim was to reduce plastic use and overall waste by creating lightweight packaging that still offered grease resistance. By adopting Metsä Board's dispersion barrier board, Crumbl successfully reduced its packaging weight by 32% and its carbon footprint by over 50% (Metsä Board, 2022).

However, the company has faced significant backlash for continuing to use eggs from battery-caged hens. This practice, which is banned in several U.S. states, confines hens to extremely small, unsanitary spaces. Despite customer concerns and calls for improved animal welfare standards, Crumbl has yet to publicly address the issue. This silence risks undermining the brand's playful and friendly image, particularly in a market where consumers increasingly expect ethical business practices (The Humane League, 2024). Competitors such as *Krispy Kreme* have already taken steps in this direction, announcing in 2024 that 100% of the eggs used in their U.S. operations are now cage-free (*Krispy Kreme*, Inc., 2023), placing Crumbl behind the curve.

Another concern relates to the high calorie content of Crumbl's products. Most cookies contain between 700 and 1,000 calories, which is roughly 30% to 50% of an adult's recommended daily intake. While the brand's rotating menu encourages weekly repeat purchases, regular consumption could contribute to weight gain and increased health risks such as heart disease (Tarantino, 2025). That said, Crumbl does display calorie information on its menus, and it could be argued that nutritional responsibility ultimately lies with the consumer.

Crumbl has also been criticized for violating federal child labor laws by allowing employees aged 14-17 to work excessive hours and operate hazardous equipment. Although the \$57,854 in fines may be a minor cost for the company, the incident negatively affects its brand image (Campbell, 2022).

The company's website features a “*Crumbl Cares*” section highlighting charitable initiatives, such as cookie donations to educators and disaster response teams. However, it offers no information on environmental sustainability or supply chain ethics (Crumbl, LLC, 2025). This suggests that Crumbl prioritizes goodwill gestures over substantive operational changes related to sustainability or animal welfare.

Appendix C - The Business Model

Crumbl's revenue is generated through cookie sales in physical locations, with additional income from online ordering and delivery partnerships. The brand's rotating weekly menu encourages repeat purchases, while limited-edition flavors and collaborations drive anticipation and urgency. To ensure the quality of the cookies, they are baked in house throughout the day. This, together with its open-concept kitchen that allows customers to watch the whole process, creates a sense of transparency (Ifeanyichukwu, 2024). In 2025, Crumbl has over a thousand stores worldwide, and sells more than a million cookies everyday (Crumbl Cookies, 2025).

Crumbl has positioned itself as trendy and youthful, resonating with its younger consumers of Gen Z and Gen Alpha. The target audience is engaged with social media, making it easy for the company to reach its customer base through *TikTok* and *Instagram*. Not only does the brand post their menus and products, they also communicate with their customer base through comments, creating hands-on relationships with their fanbase. Furthermore, when customers request the return of a certain flavor, Crumbl often acknowledges this and delivers on it, creating a sense of the customers being heard and further strengthening the relationship between brand and customer. By leveraging user-generated content and influencer partnerships, Crumbl can achieve effective advertising while spending relatively little on traditional marketing. The large size of the cookies, their aesthetically pleasing designs, and the pink boxes, makes the product social media friendly and more likely to be shared online, resulting in a smart and cheap way of spreading news about the brand (Jarrar, 2025).

Upon opening their first store, Crumbl quickly scaled by franchising. Local entrepreneurs can apply through Crumbl's website to open their own Crumbl-branded stores under corporate oversight. After a successful interview there's an onboarding, ensuring a standardized training for franchises (Crumbl, LLC (n.d.)).

Crumbl describes itself as unique and tech-driven, having developed an app that allows users to track the weekly flavors, place orders and earn rewards. Customers can choose delivery, pickup, catering or gifting, a lot of options making sure that the delivery of the product goes smoothly. By offering a mobile app, the company encourages higher engagement and purchase frequency (Crumbl, LLC (n.d.)).

By emphasizing delivery and pickup rather than in-store dining, Crumbl significantly reduces operational costs related to store size, seating, customer service, and cleaning. This model also creates a distinctive and engaging customer experience. Upon entering the store, customers can place their order either with a staff member or via a touchscreen. The cookies are then prepared in an open kitchen, offering a form of live entertainment as part of the visit (The Altem Life, 2024). Additionally, customers can personalize their orders by adding a note to the box, further enhancing the sense of customization (TikTok, n.d.).

Appendix D - Core Values

On Crumbl's website, the company states its mission as: "Bringing friends and family together over the best desserts in the world." It outlines four core values, which are analyzed below: Experience, Relationships, Authenticity, and Innovation (Crumbl Cookies, n.d.).

Crumbl defines the Experience value as: "We build experiences that surprise and delight." (Crumbl Cookies, n.d.). The company delivers on this through its weekly rotating menu, limited-edition cookies, celebrity and brand collaborations, and even personalized delivery notes, all contributing to a sense of surprise and delight. However, to maintain this standard, Crumbl must continually introduce fresh ideas and evolve its concept. It has already taken steps in this direction, for example by expanding its menu to include pies. This kind of ongoing innovation is necessary given the expectations of a social media-savvy audience that likely quickly grows tired of repetition.

The Relationships value is stated as: "We foster meaningful relationships." (Crumbl Cookies, n.d.). This goes beyond collaborations with other brands; Crumbl has developed a strong bond with its fanbase by responding to comments, adjusting menus based on customer feedback, and sharing user-generated content. Their corporate communication, on the other hand, lies in stark contrast to this, as the company has remained silent on animal welfare concerns. This raises questions about how deeply these values are actually embedded in operations.

Authenticity is described as: "We are authentic and transparent in all we do." (Crumbl Cookies, n.d.). This value is reflected in the open-kitchen concept in every Crumbl store, where customers can observe the baking process firsthand. Real cookie samples are also displayed at the counter, giving a clear picture of what to expect. However, this transparency does not extend to all areas of the business. Criticism has emerged around Crumbl's continued use of battery-caged hens and the lack of any public stance on this issue. Such contradictions may weaken customer trust, especially among those who expect brands to practice what they preach.

Lastly, Innovation is framed as: "We pursue what's next without fear." (Crumbl Cookies, n.d.). Crumbl has many examples of innovation, for example their constantly changing menu, and the app used to order cookies. The company's use of social media as a marketing strategy also fits into this category, as the company has made a prime example of using social media apps such as *Tiktok* to create buzz for their products. Yet, there are areas where the company appears hesitant to innovate. Notably, Crumbl has yet to make progress in ethical sourcing, especially when it comes to animal welfare, topics that are becoming increasingly important to modern consumers. These omissions suggest that some innovation efforts remain selective.