Social Media Marketing Features and Empirical Studies in the Fast Food Industry Context: A Literature Review and a New Window for Future Promotion

Vijitha K. Jayathunga; Jacquline Tham; Ali Khatibi

Postgraduate Centre (PGC), Management and Science University, University Drive, Off Persiaran Olahraga, 40100 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

E-mail: vijithaja@gmail.com

Abstract

The fast food industry is a major player in the global economy. In 2020, the global fast-food market size was $125.05 billion, and it is projected to reach $137.74 billion in 2021 and grow to $1,467.04 billion by 2028. Social media plays a significant role in promoting this industry due to its size. This study aimed to identify the features of social media marketing commonly used to promote products and services and to explore which of these features was tested in empirical studies in the fast-food industry. The study used a qualitative approach, analyzing existing literature. The results revealed that advertising, sales promotion, generated content (firm and user), and e-word of mouth are commonly used in social media marketing. However, only two of these features have been tested more extensively in the latest empirical studies of the fast-food industry. These were advertising and sales promotion. Thus, this study suggests that more empirical studies should be conducted to understand the effect of all social media marketing features on customer intention within the fast-food industry. It potentially opens new windows for industry promotion.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing; Features and Empirical Studies; Fast Food Industry

Introduction

Food is a fundamental human need (Jayathunga et al., 2024a; Nirmani et al., 2017). People consume different types of food to satisfy their hunger. The food consumption pattern of any society reflects the cultural values and characteristics of that society. Patterns of food consumption over some times are identified as the food culture of that society (Hindi et al., 2024). With the technological development of society, the traditional food consumption patterns of a society cannot be prevented from transforming into a new culture. Fast food is one emerging trend seen in this new technological world (Daradkeh et al., 2023; Nirmani et al., 2017).

Social Media Marketing Features and Empirical Studies in the Fast Food Industry Context: A Literature Review and a New Window for Future Promotion

1

Fast food was first popularized in the 1950s in the United States (Ejike & Obeagu, 2018; Ngozika et al., 2018; Talwar, 2003). Fast food refers to quickly prepared and served foods (Ngozika et al., 2018). According to Rosenheck (2008), fast food is a low-cost, convenient food that is purchased in places that allow for the consumption of food without the need for a waiter. Fast food is often inexpensive and convenient. Today, fast food consumption is more of a fad than just a diet. One of the world's leading profitable businesses sustaining huge global companies (Slack et al., 2021). According to Zion Marketing Research (2017), the global fast-food market capitalization was over $1.63 billion. In 2023, the market size of the quick service restaurant industry worldwide reached 978.4 billion U.S. dollars (Statista, 2024). The global fast-food market size was $125.05 billion in 2020 and is projected to grow to $137.74 billion in 2021 and reach $1,467.04 billion by 2028 (Fortune Business Insights, 2024). Compared to this high market size, the impact of fast food on human life is also high. Fast food companies are spending huge amounts of money on advertising and trying to attract customers (Sudirjo et al., 2024).

In the past decade, marketers in the fast-food industry have increasingly turned to mass media for advertising (Nisansala & Rathnasiri, 2022). They have used television, radio, newspapers, and magazines to promote their fast food brands. However, nowadays, marketers in the fast food industry are also more inclined towards social media marketing (Jayathunga et al., 2024a). Social media is a powerful subform of mass communication that is Internet-based and allows for two-way communication (Susilo et al., 2024). From the inception of Facebook in 2004 to the emergence of YouTube in 2005, these social media platforms have significantly influenced digital culture (Shaikh, 2024). As of April 2024, the most popular social networks worldwide, ranked by the number of monthly active users, are Facebook (3065 million), YouTube (2504 million), Instagram (2000 million), WhatsApp (2000 million), TikTok (1582 million), WeChat (1343 million), Messenger (1010 million), and others (Statista, 2024). Thus, social media marketing has become a fast-growing subject because of its communication power.

Social media marketing is an increasingly popular method that allows quick communication between customers and sellers (Tuten, 2023). It is a low-cost way to maintain customer relationships and gather a vast amount of customer data. Marketers are using social media to target customers' intentions to promote their products and services (Li et al., 2023). Intention is a motivation for planned behavior of the future (Jayathunga et al., 2024a; Manju et al., 2024a). Therefore, authors assume that intention is the immediate antecedent of behavior. Intentions lead to behavior. This means that individual intentions directly influence individual actions (Manju et al., 2024b). Thus, customer intention refers to the various goals, desires, and plans that customers have regarding their interactions with products, services, and brands. These intentions can significantly affect purchasing behavior and brand loyalty. In a marketing context, customer intentions can be categorized based on various aspects of consumer behavior and strategic planning. These are purchase intentions (Agusiady et al., 2024; Bleize & Antheunis, 2019; Zhuang et al., 2021), repurchase intentions (Hussain et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2024), and behavioral intentions (Guo et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2023). The purpose of this study is to determine the social media marketing features that affect these intentions in the context of the fast food industry. Several empirical studies have tested the effectiveness of social media marketing features in the fast-food industry, but there is limited literature analysis regarding those studies. This study aims to address this gap and provide new insights and avenues for further research in the field of fast food and social media marketing.

Research Method and Approach

The research method involves specifying the category of information to be obtained before the study or derived from the research participants. The data analyzed can be quantitative or qualitative (Azam et al., 2021). In this quantitative study, the authors used the literature review method for data analysis (Manju et al., 2023), which is divided into four parts. The first part focused on identifying social media and social media marketing (SMM) features. In the second part, the authors develop a model that

Social Media Marketing Features and Empirical Studies in the Fast Food Industry Context: A Literature Review and a New Window for Future Promotion

2

explains the effect of social media features on customer intention. The third part examined empirical studies that have looked at the effects of social media marketing features on consumer intention in the fast food industry. The authors used the Google Scholar database to search for that. The authors used the keywords "fast food," "social media marketing feature," and "intention." After reviewing the studies, the authors identified the social media marketing features that affect consumer intention in the fast food industry and then analyzed the nature of those effects.

Result and Discussion

In the early 1990s, the term "social media" became more and more common. With over two billion active users worldwide, it has grown into an inseparable entity today (Bashar et al., 2024; Chawla & Chodak, 2021). With AI technology, social media—which has surpassed mass media—is developing quickly. (Park et al., 2021). Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) defined social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Through specific virtual communities and groups, it enables users to interact, produce, share, and exchange information as well as opinions and ideas (Bashar et al., 2024). Stated differently, social media offers enormously easy access to open-source information (Khanom, 2023) and, because of its directionality and interoperability, has emerged as the most potent communication medium in the modern marketing period (Appel et al., 2020; Park et al., 2021). As a result, social media marketing has emerged as a key topic in the modern business world.

Social media marketing (SMM) is the use of social media platforms to communicate with customers to build brands, boost sales, and improve website traffic. It has become one of the most popular and successful forms of digital marketing (Celine, 2012; Sajid, 2016). Among the many benefits of using social media platforms for business purposes, industry professionals particularly value the increased exposure for their brands and products, as well as the increased traffic on their websites (Fan, 2023). Social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok are among the top-recognized platforms for delivering desired marketing outcomes. For example, according to a global survey, 89 percent of responding social media marketers used Facebook to promote their business, while another 80 percent did so via Instagram (Statista, 2023). Many recent studies indicate that marketers utilize the features of these social media platforms to shape customer intention.

There are four common social media marketing features used to influence customer intention: advertising (Herawati, et al., 2024), sales promotion (Raji et al., 2019), generated content (firm and user), and e-word of mouth (Jayathunga et al., 2024a(. Among these, advertising is the most commonly used marketing feature on social media. Advertising is the conveyance of information about products, services, or ideas in an impersonal way through various media (Egbulefu & Nwaoboli, 2023). According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), advertising is defined as "any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor." Therefore, advertising on social media provides businesses with the opportunity to interact with their customers more effectively compared to mass media (Icha, 2015; Tuten, 2023).

Sales promotion is a short-term strategy aimed at boosting product and service sales (Martinus & Anggraini, 2018; Regina Shwastika, 2021). According to Kotler and Armstrong (2012), sales promotion is a "short-term incentive to encourage the purchase or sale of a product or service." Sales promotion tactics can include contests, sweepstakes, games, lotteries, gifts, sampling, tie-ins, exhibitions, demonstrations, fairs and trade shows, rebates, low-interest financing, coupons, trade-in allowances, entertainment, and trade promotions (Martinus & Anggraini, 2018). The primary goal of sales promotion is to stimulate interest and encourage consumers' intention to try new products, offering numerous

Social Media Marketing Features and Empirical Studies in the Fast Food Industry Context: A Literature Review and a New Window for Future Promotion

3

benefits for consumers (Regina Shwastika, 2021; Kurniawan & Suhermin, 2023, December). Currently, this goal is being pursued more actively through social media (Jayathunga et al., 2024a).

Word of mouth is a communication channel where individuals or groups make recommendations for a service or product based on personal experiences (Romadhoni et al., 2023). According to Poturak & Turkyilmaz (2018), customers are interested in hearing about both positive and negative experiences with a product or service, and these recommendations can influence their purchasing decisions. Word of mouth significantly impacts customers' purchasing intentions (Richins, Root Shaffer, 1988). Customers are eager to share their opinions and experiences about products through word-of-mouth communication (Ermeç, 2022). With the advent of social media platforms, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) has emerged alongside traditional word-of-mouth (WOM). E-WOM refers to both positive and negative statements about a product or company that are shared over the internet by potential, current, or former customers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Individuals who appreciate a post on social media are likely to "like" and "share" it with their friends. As a result, E-WOM in social media has become one of the most influential marketing communication tools today (Romadhoni et al., 2023).

The effect of social media marketing features on customer intention has been studied in various contexts. Examining these studies, it appears that sometimes the effect of marketing features on social media customer intention is mediated by variables such as brand image and brand trust. Taking these factors into account, a new model can be developed to demonstrate the effect of social media marketing features on customer intention as follows:
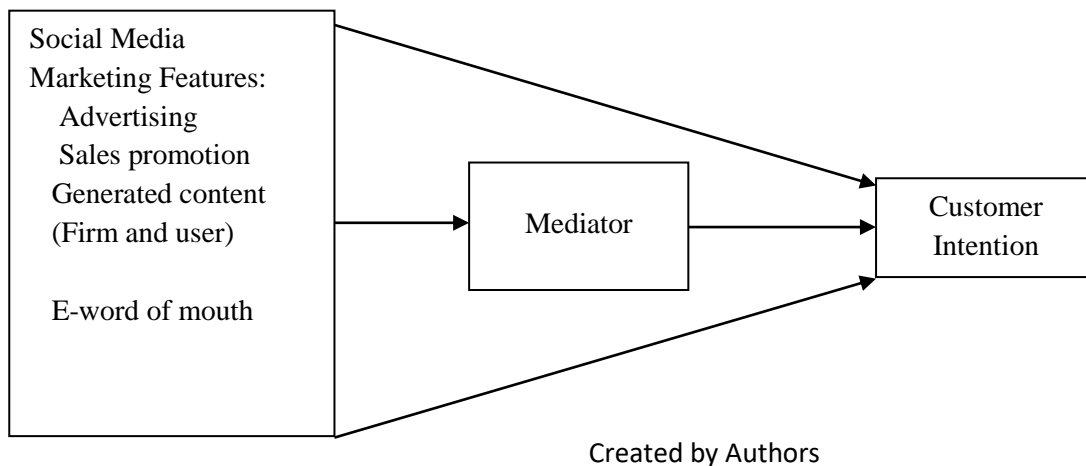

Created by Authors

Figure 01: News Model for Social Media Marketing Features on Customer Intention

According to the above model, social media marketing features directly and indirectly affect customer intention. However, the literature review's analysis of this study revealed that marketers in the fast food industry primarily utilize two social media features to shape these customers' intentions. They are advertising and e-Wom. Below is a meta-analysis of studies that confirm the effect of these social media features on intention in the fast food industry.

Social Media Marketing Features and Empirical Studies in the Fast Food Industry Context: A Literature Review and a New Window for Future Promotion

4

Table 01. Meta-analysis of the study

Social media feature	Author(s)/Year	Country	Method	Customers intention	Effect
Advertising	Jayathunga et al. (2024a)	Sri Lanka	Survey	Behavioral intention	Significant positive direct effect & Significant mediating effect through brand image
	Hanaysha (2022a)	United Arab Emirates	Survey	Purchase intention	Significant mediating through brand engagement
	Hanaysha (2022b)	United Arab Emirates	Survey	Purchase intention	Significant positive direct effect
	Nisansala & Rathnasiri (2022)	Sri Lanka	Survey	Purchase intention	Significant positive direct effect
	Separamadu et al. (2021)	Sri Lanka	Survey	Purchase intention	Significant positive direct effect
	Aji et al. (2020)	Indonesia	Survey		Significant positive direct effect
eWOM	Jayathunga et al. (2024a)	Sri Lanka	Survey	Behavioral intention	Significant negative direct effect & Significant mediating effect through brand image
	Wijesinghe & Wanninayake (2021)	Sri Lanka	Survey	Purchase intention	Significant positive direct effect
	Separamadu et al. (2021)	Sri Lanka	Survey	Purchase intention	Significant positive direct effect
sales promotions	Jayathunga et al. (2024b)	Sri Lanka	Survey	Customer Intentions	Significant positive direct effect
user-generated content	Jayathunga et al. (2024b)	Sri Lanka	Survey	Customer Intentions	Significant negetive direct effect

Conclusion and Suggestions

These are the features of social media marketing: advertising, sales promotion, generated content, and e-word of mouth. Empirical studies in various contexts have identified these four features as having direct and indirect effects on customers' intentions. Empirical studies examining the effect of these social media marketing features on consumer intention have also been found in the fast-food industry. However, recent research in this area is very limited, leading to a lack of subject knowledge in the related literature. As a result, the authors suggest that more empirical studies should be conducted to examine the direct and indirect effects of social media marketing features such as advertising, sales promotion, generated content, and e-word of mouth in the fast-food industry. This will help to acquire new knowledge in that subject.

Social Media Marketing Features and Empirical Studies in the Fast Food Industry Context: A Literature Review and a New Window for Future Promotion

5

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Social Media Marketing Features and Empirical Studies in the Fast Food Industry Context: A Literature Review and a New Window for Future Promotion

6

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Social Media Marketing Features and Empirical Studies in the Fast Food Industry Context: A Literature Review and a New Window for Future Promotion

7

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Social Media Marketing Features and Empirical Studies in the Fast Food Industry Context: A Literature Review and a New Window for Future Promotion

8

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Social Media Marketing Features and Empirical Studies in the Fast Food Industry Context: A Literature Review and a New Window for Future Promotion

9

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Social Media Marketing Features and Empirical Studies in the Fast Food Industry Context: A Literature Review and a New Window for Future Promotion

10