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Social media strategies and their impact on consumers fast food purchasing behavior: A comprehensive review

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Abstract
Transforming the fast-food industry due to effective uses of social media, reorienting consumer behavior, and purchasing patterns, a comprehensive review paper discusses here how social media strategies change consumer fast-food purchasing behaviors. First, the term for 'fast food' characterized by convenience, value for money, and standardized services-diffused into a global powerhouse industry catering to the accelerated pace of urban lifestyles worldwide. Over time, the so-called traditional advertising evolved into strong social media marketing with direct engagement and brand loyalty on sites including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok. This paper will explore how brands integrate interactive campaigns, influencer marketing, and user-generated content to create compelling narratives to resonate with consumers. It then continues to the analysis of how these strategies influence consumer perception and drive impulse buying through the visual appeal of content, real-time interaction, and targeted promotions. Furthermore, consumer behavior in the fast-food sector reflects intrinsic factors like convenience and affordability, as well as extrinsic influences such as social media trends, peer recommendations, and marketing campaigns. Demographic factors also seem to be of significant influence as younger consumers, namely Millennials and Gen Z, interact more with social media content that communicates convenience, value, and health-friendly offerings. In conclusion, social media marketing does much more than boost short-term sales, for it develops long-run consumer loyalty through the community of brand promoters and guides contemporary consumption behaviors.

Keywords: Social media, strategies, consumers, fast-food, purchasing behavior, comprehensive review

1. Introduction

In today's hyper-connected digital landscape, social media has become an influential force in the reformation of consumer behavior and preferences across industries, and this cannot be an exception for the fast-food sector (Van Der Bend *et al*., 2022) [68]. Social media include Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube, which have come to be much more than just communication tools but rather powerhouses of marketing arenas where the brands engage with consumers and amplify their presence and affect purchasing decisions (Orfanidou, 2024) [54]. The pace of digital interactions and the visual appeal of fast-food advertisements make the ecosystem that creates instant gratification and intense emotional relationships, meaning fast food brands rely heavily on effective social media strategies in order to grow and sustain market share (Kulkarni, 2025) [40]. These platforms provide unmatched opportunities for brands to tap into data-driven insights, personalize their interactions with consumers, and pursue targeted campaigns that resonate well with their audience's preferences, values, and aspirations. One of the primary reasons why there is a rise in dependence on social media strategies within the fast-food industry is because it facilitates immersive brand experiences (Hamilton *et al*., 2016) [26]. Visual content that is mostly filled with mouthwatering images of food is pivotal in capturing consumer attention and prompting cravings (Vermeir & Roose, 2020) [69]. Social media algorithms heighten this impact by maximizing the likelihood of the posting of content aligned with user browsing behaviors for higher reach and influence (Alam *et al*., 2024) [6]. Moreover, platforms such as Instagram and TikTok would allow a brand to use influencers and user-generated content to foster authenticity and trust among consumers. These influencers have big followings and relatable personas, acting as an intermediary between the brand and the target audience, making promotional content look more organic and less invasive (Lariba, 2023) [42]. Another is the interactive campaign trends of challenges, polls, and contests, ensuring the involvement of consumers while attaching the positive experience to the brand

(Hollebeek *et al*., 2014) [29]. Another strong argument for social media's impact is its power to tap into peer recommendations and reviews. Social proof is a psychological phenomenon in which people are influenced by others' actions to either adopt behaviors or beliefs (Gass & Seiter, 2022) [23]. Facebook and Yelp enable users to share experiences, rate services, and recommend products to their networks (Huang & Benyoucef, 2015) [31]. Positive reviews and visually appealing posts can greatly enhance the reputation of a brand, while negative reviews can cause problems that need to be addressed quickly and effectively (Kshetri *et al*., 2024) [39]. Hashtags, geotagging, and live streaming are also novel means through which fast food chains can increase their discoverability and relevance, especially to the younger, more technologically savvy consumers (White, 2021) [72]. The COVID-19 pandemic only amplified the significance of social media strategies since fast food brands would have to keep their customers engaged during the lockdown periods and changing consumer priorities (Adekuajo *et al*., 2023) [3]. Many brands changed direction and focused on delivery, touchless transactions, and safe experiences through smart digital advertising. Social media has become an avenue to tackle dynamic concerns among consumers, including health consciousness and environmental awareness, with images of healthier offerings and eco-friendly initiatives (Ebrahimi *et al*., 2021) [20]. All of these changes indicate how dynamic social media is as a medium in its ability to change the branding narrative and how it responds to dynamic consumer needs.

Nonetheless, the effects of social media strategies on fast-food purchases vary and are not constant and homogeneous across demographic, cultural, and economic sections. Younger consumers in higher engagement with Instagram and TikTok are more inclined towards visually driven campaigns as well as influencer-endorsements (Haenlein *et al*., 2020) [25]. On the other hand, older demographics tend to be more dependent on using Facebook, where community-led recommendations are the primary guiding force (Nguyễn *et al*., 2023) [53]. Cultural factors also take precedence, as food-related preferences and values vary substantially across regions (Barrena *et al*., 2015) [11]. Economic factors often influence the success of the promotional offers and discounts mainly featured on social media in emerging markets (Dwivedi *et al*., 2021) [18-19]. This comprehensive review aims to explore the complex relationship between social media strategies and consumer purchasing behavior in the fast-food industry. This will synthesize findings of the existing literature to be able to identify key strategies undertaken by fast food brands, which may be assessed for its effectiveness in terms of customer engagement and sales generation, together with ethical considerations and problems arising from such practices. Gaps in the current research are discussed and future directions in exploring further the long-term effects of social media marketing on consumer behavior. As social media continues to change, the role it plays in shaping fast food consumption patterns highlights an urgency in knowing the dynamics, so marketers and consumers responsibly and effectively navigate this electronic world.

2. Review of Literature
2.1 Concept of Fast-Food
The concept of fast food is centered on giving fast,

convenient, and inexpensive meals to the consumers in search of efficiency in dining (Story *et al*., 2002) [65]. Dating back to the early 20th century, fast food has emerged as a worldwide phenomenon with standardized methods of preparation, pre-cooked or semi-cooked ingredients, and quick service (Espinoza, 2013) [21]. It is mainly intended for urban populations with fast lifestyles, where time constraints are the primary reasons, people seek convenience over traditional cooking (Hubbard & Hubbard, 2017) [32]. Fast food chains, including QSRs, provide a variety of menu items, which include burgers, pizzas, fried chicken, sandwiches, and beverages, catering to various tastes (Manhas *et al*., 2024) [49]. Industry is thriving on efficiency, scalability, and affordability and mostly uses advanced technologies, automation, and innovations in supply chains to respond to consumer demands (Liberty *et al*., 2024) [45]. Although fast food offers convenience and satisfies the hunger of many, it has also faced criticism on its health implications as most items contain high calorie, fats, sugars, and sodium (Janssen *et al*., 2018) [34]. However, the fast-food industry has become more flexible to adapt to changing consumer preferences and integrates sustainability, customization, and cultural diversity in its offerings (Maumbe, 2012) [51]. That's why fast food not only transforms eating habits across the world but also significantly influences social life in cities and the global food economy (Hawkes *et al*., 2017) [28].

2.2 The Evolution of Social Media Marketing in Fast Food Industry
The evolution of social media marketing in the fast-food industry has transformed how the brands relate to the target consumers, driving unprecedented engagement and brand loyalty (Aldabous, 2024) [7]. Traditionally, fast food chains used a variety of advertising media such as television, print, and radio to reach their market (Patnaik, 2015) [55]. However, with the emergence of social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, there was a significant shift in marketing strategies (Arora *et al*., 2019) [8]. Fast food companies began using these applications to produce interactive campaigns, launch new items on the menu, and interact with customers directly in real time (Waheed & Kumar, 2025) [70]. The rise of influencer marketing further amplified the industry's reach as influencers became strong allies in telling authentic stories and visually appealing content that promote fast food (Hund, 2019) [33]. Tictok and Instagram brought on short form video, a way of relating to a youth audience via trendy challenges and virals with creative storytelling as well as data analytics (Rugrien & Funk, 2022) [58]. Fast food companies personalized the marketing campaign by pinpointing specific demographic targeting through such a system of analytics (Wedel & Kannan, 2016) [71]. There is social media marketing evolving with trends changing consumerism, shifting its focus on issues of sustainability and health while seeking transparency in offerings. Campaigns such as McDonald's #McSpicyChallenge and Wendy's humorous roasts on Twitter demonstrate how humor, relatability, and interactivity are increasingly important in building customer loyalty. As social media continues to evolve, the fast-food industry is always at the forefront of new trends and technologies, which helps it maintain a strong digital presence and connection with customers (Rayhan, 2023) [56].

2.3 Social Media Platforms and Their Impact on Consumer Buying Behavior

Social media sites refer to online applications through which users can generate, post, and engage with content as well as connect with other individuals online in virtual communities (Kavoura, 2014) [37]. They serve the purpose of communication, the sharing of information, as well as networking on any given format of text, images, and videos. Social media platforms are, therefore, an essential influencing factor on the current era of consumer purchasing behavior. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok are vibrant areas where consumers find, assess, and make buying decisions (Sindhuja *et al*., 2023) [63]. Platforms shape consumer behavior as a continuous flow of ads, influencer endorsements, consumer-generated content, and friend reviews is being experienced. All of these aspects greatly influence the consumer's thoughts (Lariba, 2023) [42]. Instagram is a visually attractive application that facilitates impulse purchases through targeted advertisement and influencer collaborations (Fujiwara & Martin, 2023) [22]. Social media sites refer to online applications through which users can generate, post, and engage with content as well as connect with other individuals online in virtual communities (Kavoura, 2014) [37]. They serve the purpose of communication, the sharing of information, as well as networking on any given format of text, images, and videos. Social media platforms are, therefore, an essential influencing factor on the current era of consumer purchasing behavior. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok are vibrant areas where consumers find, assess, and make buying decisions (Sindhuja *et al*., 2023) [63]. Platforms shape consumer behavior as a continuous flow of ads, influencer endorsements, consumer-generated content, and friend reviews is being experienced. All of these aspects greatly influence the consumer's thoughts (Lariba, 2023) [42]. Instagram is a visually attractive application that facilitates impulse purchases through targeted advertisement and influencer collaborations (Fujiwara & Martin, 2023) [22].

2.4 Overview of Consumer Behavior in the Fast-Food Sector

Consumer behavior in the fast-food sector is highly influenced by an intricate interaction of drivers for buying and preference mechanisms. Today, consumers are highly drawn to fast food restaurants since they offer convenience, affordability, and quick service (Hanaysha, 2016) [27]. The fast-food sector has undergone tremendous changes to meet diverse tastes, dietary requirements, and health-conscious dietary selections under changing consumer demands. Inhibitive influences on consumers arise from an intertwined amalgam of intrinsic and extrinsic determinants, such as lifestyle, cultural values, marketing strategies, peer influence, and trends in social media (Sharma & Joshi, 2021) [61]. Digital channels cannot be underestimated because their role in influencing public opinion can be seen through the form of social media campaigns, reviews in online platforms, and even endorsements by influencers, leading to consumer decisions (Dwivei *et al*., 2021) [18-19]. At the same time, the boom of technology has also fostered convenience through mobile apps, ordering via the internet, and door-delivery services, making it easier than ever to eat fast food (Akram *et al*., 2020). Brands often adopt pricing strategies, promotions, and loyalty programs to target repeat customers and foster loyalty, especially among younger markets who are more likely to look for value-for-money purchases (Reinartz, 2009) [57]. Consumerism as influenced by healthy trends and awareness of nutrition have made way in to the fast-food outlets in form of healthier foods, labeling of nutritional ingredients and greener practices (Guthrie *et al*., 2015) [24]. However, still and at all times indulgence remains more of a potent attractant together with comfort foods mainly as a result of pressure due to stress conditions and societal events. As well, consumers' choices depend on factors like brand image, food quality, time of service, and environment of the restaurant (Yi *et al*., 2018) [75]. The companies in the fast-food business are constantly evolving according to these changing consumer preferences through the use of data analytics for more efficient understanding of behavior patterns to make their products relevant (Madureira *et al*., 2018) [47]. This is further facilitated by the changing nature of urban life, wherein eating out has increasingly become part of the lifestyles and social activities of the daily routine of people, thereby cementing fast food in modern culture.

2.5 Social Media Strategies and techniques in the Fast-Food Industry

In the fast-food industry, social media strategies and techniques play a crucial role in engaging customers, creating brand awareness, and selling. McDonald's, KFC, and Domino's brands connect with the vast audience by using social media sites like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok by posting visually attractive food images, promotional content, and real-time interactions (Balogun & Aruoture, 2024) [9]. One of these is the use of customer-generated content, whereby one has customers sharing their meals or dining experiences and requesting that the brand re-publish them, thereby creating that feeling of community and fostering trust (Salem & Twining-Ward, 2018) [59]. Offers on special deals and discounts are offered, and they are run with targeted ads and posting. Algorithms ensure that such campaigns will reach the target audience effectively. Fast-food chains also utilize social media influencers and brand ambassadors to reach wider audiences and make their brands more attractive to younger demographics (Serra Olcina, 2023) [60]. Engaging campaigns that encourage customers to participate, such as challenges, polls, and hashtag contests, create a dynamic interaction that builds brand loyalty. For a brand, real-time involvement is achieved through customer questionnaire response, feedback responses, or an appearance at live events that makes a brand stay well-established online (Yerpude & Singhal, 2021) [74]. These social media actions are usually accompanied by a data analytics that can study user engagement, sentiment scores, and conversion rate whereby a brand can tweak up the content for optimum benefits (Lee *et al*., 2018) [44]. The use of short, catchy videos and live stories further enhances user interaction because it is capitalizing on the current trend of consuming quick and digestible content. Overall, social media strategies within the fast-food industry are multifaceted, blending visual storytelling, promotions, interactive content, and influencer partnerships to keep the customers engaged and loyal as well as ahead of market trends.

2.6 Impact of Social Media Marketing Strategies on Consumers Fast-Food Purchase Behavior

The development of consumer engagement strategies has fundamentally modified the consumption approach adopted by individuals in engaging with fast foods, significantly altering their patterns of buying habits (Lee *et al*., 2018) [44]. This is where the massive surge in online media like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and especially TikTok allows fast foods to exploit all these new media for robust online brand building and interacting directly with the desired clientele (Cash *et al*., 2022) [13]. These strategies encompass some of the most widely followed tactics, from influencer partnerships and sponsored posts to interactional campaigns and user-created content-all with the final aim of getting attention for consumer interest. Through engaging visuals, videos, or real-time engagement, brands make content appealing and shareable on a larger scale with regards to convenience, novelty, and community (Montgomery & Chester, 2009) [52]. The use of visually engaging content, such as mouth-watering images and promotional videos, increases brand recall and triggers impulse buying, compelling consumers to make quick decisions, especially when combined with limited-time offers and exclusive promotions shared on social media (Linder, 2018) [46]. Additionally, social media platforms allow brands to interact directly with customers, respond to queries, gather feedback, and enhance customer service (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014) [66]. This interactive component strengthens brand loyalty as consumers feel a sense of belonging and personal connection with the brands they follow. Social media also serves as a critical tool for creating trends, especially when viral challenges and hashtags related to new menu items or special deals are widely shared, resulting in increased visibility and consumer curiosity (Silberschneider, 2018) [62]. Collaborative marketing initiatives with social media influencers accentuate these effects, for there is a lot of trust that influencers have among followers such that it influences their purchasing preference and encourages experimentation, especially among new consumers; the real-time nature of the social media platform allows brand advertising to respond quickly to consumers and market trends, allowing adaptability in promotional activity through alignment with the current thinking within the consumer market (Mahoney & Tang, 2024) [48]. Through targeted advertisements, brands can further fine-tune their strategy by analyzing data-driven insights that allow them to reach specific demographics and tailor content that appeals to the preferences and behavior of different consumer segments. Social media algorithms provide personalization that exposes users to content that aligns with past interactions, thereby making the journey from awareness to purchase seamless. This is both amplifying consumer interest, ensuring promotions are going into the appropriate audience at an appropriate time, hence greater and better engagement of the consumers in addition to chances that would possibly lead to buying at this given time. Most fast-food brands include this into their strategy so not only enhancing brand perception, but rather creating an aspect of eagerness for its items (Daradkeh *et al*., 2023) [16]. Beyond immediate sales boosts, these strategies shape long-term consumer preferences and maintain a digital community of brand advocates who will share their positive experiences and encourage friends to make purchases, thereby making the consumer an active participant in the brand's growth and success.

2.7 Fast-Food Consumers Demographics and Their Social Media Interaction

The interaction of different demographic groups with social media platforms and the subsequent impact on fast food consumption exhibits significant differences along age, gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural lines. More active participation of younger generations, such as Millennials and Generation Z, in social media activities for food-related content includes seeking recommendations, promotions, and trends aligned with social lifestyles (Smith, 2021) [64]. This age group is often influenced by visually appealing content, such as food photography and influencer marketing, which affects their dining choices and encourages impulsive fast-food consumption (Johnson & Lee, 2020) [35]. It's also influenced by gender, because women proved more sensitive to health-focused fast food offers on social media, whereas men proved more likely to be interested in content about value and promotions, based on Brown and Taylor (2019) [12]. Finally, the usage of social media depends on the socio-economic condition of a person; one depends on the discount and promotional offer posted through the applications. In contrast, for a high-income consumer, the gourmet food trend is followed and premium fast-food chains (Williams *et al*., 2022) [73]. Cultural influences also determine social media engagement with fast food content in that specific cuisines and brand narratives resonate differently in different regions; for instance, in South Asian communities, social media campaigns emphasizing traditional fast-food recipes with a modern twist have been very effective (Choudhury & Patel, 2021) [15]. The proliferation of short-form video content, like TikTok and Instagram Reels, is a powerful tool to influence consumer behavior, particularly for the younger demographics who depend on those platforms to find and share food experiences (Adams & Foster, 2023) [43]. The interactive nature and visual orientation help rapidly spread trends, which could push interest in consumers to a greater consumption rate of fast foods.

2.8 Challenges in Social Media marketing and Their Potential Solutions

Social media marketing has emerged as a key strategy for companies looking to improve their brand presence and connect with consumers. However, several challenges hinder its effectiveness: fast-changing algorithms, content saturation, data privacy concerns, and maintaining authentic engagement (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Tuten & Solomon, 2017) [36, 67]. The continuous changes in the algorithms of platforms like Facebook and Instagram can significantly impact organic reach, and businesses cannot easily stay on top without significant investments in paid promotions (Dörr, 2017) [17]. Businesses need to adapt a flexible content strategy that focuses on quality and relevance over quantity, ensuring they adapt to changes in platform rules (Barker *et al*., 2017) [10]. Another challenge is content saturation, wherein consumers are confronted with messages from brands, creating less time and attention being devoted to them (Chaffey, 2020) [14]. Solutions are developing highly targeted, value-driven content that is more in line with consumer interest and leveraging data analytics to understand what resonates with a particular demographic

(Kumar & Shah, 2018) [41]. Data privacy issues have become a growing concern because users are expressing a degree of concern about how their data is being collected and used, which could hurt brand trust (Martin & Murphy, 2017) [50]. To counter this, data practices must be transparent and clearly defined privacy policies, while also adhering to other regulations like GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) (Tuten & Solomon, 2017) [67]. Lastly, it is difficult to maintain authenticity and genuineness in audience interactions because brands are working to balance automation with human touchpoints (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) [36]. Hybrid approaches can be adopted whereby automated responses are mixed and matched with personalized customer service and can ensure authenticity and allow for deeper relationships (Barker *et al*., 2017) [10]. In summary, social media marketing is plagued with inherent issues, but utilizing strategic adaptability, offering high-quality and relevant content, maintaining standards of data privacy, and combining automation and personalization will be the ideal solution.

3. Conclusions

This paper has thus explored how multifaceted social media strategies have impacted fast food buying behavior among consumers. Of course, incorporating social media into the marketing approach has reshaped consumer involvement and allowed brands to relate more intensively with consumers. The changing role of social media-from basic communication channels to an all-powerful marketing outlet-has thus given the fast-food brand a creative way of connecting with the target markets. Brands have utilized these media for aesthetic and interactive value, as well as for the targeted-advertisement feature to influence their customers' perception and behavior very efficiently. Some of these strategies include influencer partners, user-generated content, as well as real-time interaction on social media. Visual storytelling, limited-edition offers, and dynamic campaigns have sparked more attention from consumers. Personalized content based on data analytics increases the efficiency and effectiveness of a marketing initiative. Social media's innovative ability to create a viral campaign and real-time feedback cycle has increased brand loyalty and assisted in creating a communal feel through consumers. Demographic factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic background have further highlighted the need for customized marketing strategies. The younger generations, including Millennials and Generation Z, have been found to be more responsive to visually appealing and trend-related content, while other consumer groups react differently to health-related or value-based campaigns. This understanding helps fast food brands to adjust their strategies and maximize their reach. Generally, the impact of social media strategies on consumer behavior stretches beyond immediate purchasing decisions and into brand perception and loyalty. The continuous adaptation of these strategies in response to emerging trends, consumer expectations, and platform innovations keeps the fast-food industry dynamic and competitive. Social media marketing in the fast-food sector will depend on emerging technologies, the sustainability of organic engagement, and finding a way to balance convenience, health consciousness, and cultural trends. Fast food brands should be agile and innovative about being able to adapt to what is happening in the evolving digital landscape in order to capitalize on social media as an opportunity to remain relevant and connected to consumers.

4. Future scope of work

The future scope of work for the review paper on "Social Media Strategies and Their Impact on Consumers' Fast Food Purchasing Behavior: A Comprehensive Review" is to enhance the understanding of how fast-food brands can strategically leverage social media platforms to influence consumer behavior and purchasing decisions. Future research can then explore the dynamics involved as different social media channels begin to alter the manner in which perceptions, brand loyalty, and impulsive purchases occur. The potential is also enormous for expanding such a study to include the use of data analytics along with the use of artificial intelligence for creating personalized marketing strategies that bring value by indicating how such technologies can indeed enhance engagement and effectiveness. Further, by probing into the cross-cultural variations and influence of social media marketing through different demographics that cut across age, gender, and socio-economic characteristics, specific behavioral patterns and preferences would be highlighted. Adding to the study, the inculcation of consumer psychology theories might give a fuller understanding of why one or another kind of content such as influencer endorsement, user-generated content, or advertisement campaigns actually better induces consumer interest. Longitudinal studies tracking the changes in social media strategies and their sustained effects on consumer purchasing over time would also be useful. Moreover, data about consumer attitudes toward privacy and the ethical implications of targeted advertising would inform how brands balance marketing strategies with consumer trust. Another emerging area could be the impact of social media on sustainable and health-conscious consumer trends, where healthier food choices and eco-friendly practices are becoming more important. Finally, the potential risks and challenges that come with social media marketing, such as negative feedback, viral controversies, and consumer backlash, need to be analyzed in order to guide brands in developing crisis management strategies.

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