

How Has a Shift to Digital Marketing Impacted Consumer Behavior?

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**Abstract:**

With the rise of social media, more and more consumers are turning to the internet to search for new products and recommend their personal favorite products and brands to peers. This research projects seeks to explain the impacts social media has made on consumers and their buying behavior, whether it be good or bad. An article from Science Direct says, “marketers have responded to this fundamental shift by increasing their use of digital marketing channels,” by reaching out to consumers in their daily lives (Stephen, 2016). This shift in marketing from print to digital did not happen overnight but was necessary for brands to stay alive in this new technology-driven world. Specifically, fast food chains have made quite an impact on consumers by creating personas on social media such as Twitter. Brands like Wendy’s, Popeye’s, and Burger King have many people talking due to their funny tweets and interactions with consumers.

### **Introduction:**

Shifting from print to digital marketing has been a long- and still evolving- process that allowed for much growth in the reach of a brand's message and allows for larger audiences to be reached, gaining brands more exposure. The purpose of this research project is to analyze the impacts social media has made on consumer behavior- specifically popular fast-food chains. This was done through researching increased sales versus decreased sales of brands and also researching potential consumer growth. With digital marketing, reaching large and diverse audiences is made much easier and this proposal seeks to analyze the impacts. The impacts of persuasion have also become more present with the shift to digital marketing because young minds are shaped by what they are seeing on their social medias. In an article on Junk Food Analysis, it reads "Omnipresent marketing of processed foods is a key driver of dietary choices and brand loyalty. Market data indicate a shift in food marketing expenditures to digital media, including social media," (Vassallo, *et al.*, 2018). With brands pushing their products- namely fast food chains pushing its processed foods- the youths are more likely to buy these products because increased visibility pushes them towards the product. As the article states, this repeated exposure is also creating brand loyalty among consumers which is benefiting the brands.

The collected data showed that social media had positive effects on consumers for the brands that utilized it correctly. One brand that was heavily researched was Wendy's, this brand created a persona online to interact with consumers and consumers found the account funny. This led to positive reviews, increased impressions on the social media page, which in turn led to increased sales for the company. The second brand that successfully used their platform was Burger King, this chain followed suit quickly behind Wendy's because they saw how successful that brand had become. The reason these two brands were able to successfully shift from print

media to digital media was because they built their following on social media and played to their audience's strengths, in this case it was using humor. The final brand that was researched in this project was Popeye's, this company was the last to cultivate its social media presence but was still able to create a successful profile that people wanted to follow. While all three of these brands use humor as their basis for building a following, they all use it differently which is what sets them apart and makes individuals want to follow all three.

### **Literature Review:**

The purpose of my research study is to analyze collected data from popular brands like- specifically fast-food chains- and see how their use of digital marketing affects consumers. Collecting data from platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, I aim to uncover consumer behaviors from social media. These postings allowed me to study the progress of Social Media Marketing in the past 10 years. At this stage in the research, the data will be generally defined as social media marketing is positively correlated with an effect on consumer behavior. My RQ1 for this study is will the effect of brand marketing through social media platforms, have a positive or negative effect? My HP1 for this question is that the outcome will be positive due to the easy access and visibility of the brand. My RQ2 is will people perceive the brand differently because of their social media presence and digital advertising, making buyers more or less likely to consume their goods? My HP2 for this question is brand marketing via social media will give gain more exposure and make consumers view them in a different light, driving sales up.

One outlier article I wanted to include because it was interesting was that because brands can promote themselves on social media, and as much as they wish, concerns were raised about

the obesity levels within the United States. Fast food chains having the freedom to promote their products, leads to consumers being exposed to the product and wanting to purchase it, but when it is unhealthy, concerns on health is brought up. In an article in the *American journal of Preventive Medicine*, concerns of monitoring social media marketing of certain products is necessary when it comes to youths (Powell, *et al*, 2013).

To make sense of fast-food restaurants taking on a social media persona to enhance their marketing strategies for their brand, I researched an article about Universities now using social media- such as Twitter- as one of their biggest tactics. An article in, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, studies the growth in student involvement as well as recruitment for the University through social media. With social media, it is much easier for brands to connect with their audience through their platforms. In the article, a major finding was, “future students are mostly interested in social interaction and information seeking when using social media,” (Constantinides, 2011). This is relevant to my research because it proves that consumers want to be involved with their brands and feel like they are a part of something bigger.

When researching this topic, another key finding I discovered was a person is more likely to purchase a product once they have been introduced to it through social media. An article in *ScienceDirect* researches changed behaviors of women buying a specific soy sauce after being introduced to it through a familiar platform and the results were very positive (Sun, Guo, Sisun, & Sun, 2007). This article relates directly to my RQ2 because I posed the question, will brands having more social media exposure be beneficial? I think this proves my hypothesis that it will have a positive impact on the companies because the experiment was successful due to the women seeing the product on social media.

As mentioned earlier, because the world is changing due to the impacts of social media and shifting to such a technologically dependent heavy society, brands must race to keep up, and building social media profiles is the answer. Reaching consumers in their everyday lives and allowing the brand to become so integrated with buyers, loyalty will build (Stephan 2016). In an article on consumer behavior, the question is posed, “how engaged is the audience in online activities,” this is a crucial part of the research proposal, to discover if brands marketing online is increasing their sales or just maintain (Vinerean, 2013). The last article for my literature review dives into digital marketing allowing consumers to be more independent and in charge of, “selecting the information on social media before purchasing,” (Lee, 2013). Consumers actively seeking their own information allows them to make well-rounded, thoroughly researched choices, because of this, brands must stay on top of their marketing to be the most desirable.

### **Methods:**

The method for this research study was a quantitative approach. I have chosen to focus solely on fast food chains and analyze their Twitter platforms to study the impact of social media on consumer behavior. As the researcher in this study, I analyzed the impressions that fast-food brands have on Twitter, specifically, Wendy’s, Popeye’s, and Burger King. These accounts have a successful following on Twitter and are not the stereotypical “popular” chains that most consumers tend to choose first, so I will seek to see if their personas have benefitted them. Impressions are qualified as a like, share, or reply on Twitter. A strength of this method is that the impressions allowed me to see exactly how well the brand is marketing themselves by their level of engagement and also the exposure they are gaining. The retention rate of an audience is another factor that will be considered when analyzing the impressions. Branding is huge part of

how these companies are so successful on social media, so I looked at the link between curating a brand on social media with increased sales. A limitation of this quantitative approach would be that Twitter reaches a certain demographic-typically younger- so all consumers of the brand are not properly represented. The fast-food chains must use their social medias to cater to the ever-evolving younger audiences of social media in order to continue marketing their products.

Because this research study is using a quantitative approach, the data collection procedures I used in the study was calculating the impressions from each brand's Twitter such as likes, shares, and replies. Analyzing these replies, likes and shares will allow me to see how the brand is viewed by its audiences on social media and what the brand's engagement with its consumers is like. Understanding how the brand portrays itself and is viewed on social media will allow me to then comprehend how well the company is employing its digital marketing tactics. Wendy's Twitter account has the highest number of followers with 3.8 million consumers following the account. This was not a surprise to see because Wendy's is famously known for their social media presence. Next is Burger King with 1.9 million followers and Popeye's ranking third with 241.5 thousand followers. Using this data, I looked at the interaction between the fast-food chains and the consumers. The same ranking was found for the interaction as well, this part was interesting to me because Popeye's recently released a new chicken sandwich which has been extremely popular, and consumers took to social media to express their thoughts on the new product.

My procedure for conducting this research was to collect data from each specific brand's Twitter profile page to look at the metrics. Analyzing recent data versus data from 10 years ago will lead me in the direction of how well brands are marketing on social media and how it is impacting consumer behavior. This showed me the growth of the brand, the growth of the

consumers and the loyalty that consumers have for each brand. From the data I collected, I proved in this research project the positive relationship between digital marketing and increased sales for the brands, by analyzing the Twitter impressions that brands utilizing social media accounts have made a positive difference in the consumer's choice. Consumers having increased exposure to advertising, creates an impression and leads consumers to the products creating a brand loyalty.

### **Findings & Discussion:**

My overall findings in this research project is that brands with a large social media presence, that are utilizing social media marketing have a more positive relationship with consumers and have increased sales. This is because consumers feel like they are a part of the brand and can interact with them. Brands are also able to get immediate feedback on products, ideas, campaigns, etc. from consumers and tailor the outcomes of that feedback to the consumers, which in turn will make the consumers the happiest.

This new age of social media users, turns to social media first to look for information and to look for products, so if a brand is not advertising their product online, they are more than likely going to be passed over- word of mouth will only go so far, and tends to stay local. Wendy's, Popeye's, and Burger King realized this, so they capitalized on the opportunity to create a large following when they had the chance, it is much harder starting out now because people care much more about who they follow. Growing their franchises was a much easier task to face when they have a following of millions of consumers behind them.

In this project I discovered how social media marketing is linked to branding for companies. These fast- food chains must brand themselves online and be sure their appearances



are kept up or else consumers may trade loyalties and opt for another restaurant. When shifting from print marketing to digital marketing this became even more important for brands to be aware of because on the internet, anyone can be an advertiser. Any person can say something about a brand, so these companies want to be sure they are controlling the narrative and what is said about them online is good. An example I found for how these brands do this is on Twitter, the brands respond to consumers. If people send them tweets asking questions, giving feedback, or leaving a negative review, the brands will respond and engage with the consumer with will either smooth things over or make the consumer happy for the interaction and feel valued.

All these things are notable findings in the shift from print to digital marketing and create a positive correlation between the data that was collected in this research project. Digital marketing has made it easier for consumers to gain access to information and interact with their favorite brands. Brands are more easily able to create their brand image and portray it on the internet so consumers can see the brand and interact. In a research study conducted on social media marketing, it was proven that there is a strong relationship between social media marketing and branding (Al-Zyoud , 2018).

In conclusion, the shift from print advertising to digital advertising has positively impacted the brands and the fast-food chains that are utilizing it correctly. Giving consumers increased exposure to digital advertisements allows for them to crave the product they are continuously seeing. It also allows for consumers to find information on the product if they so desire. Analyzing the Twitter metrics of the three fast-food chains, allowed me to see the growth the brand has made within the last 10 years and how social media has helped them to do that. This research project was an overall success in proving my hypotheses and finding a positive correlation between digital marketing and sales.

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