
Impact of Digital Marketing on Brand Awareness: Evidence from the Fast Food Industry

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of digital marketing tools on brand awareness of the fast-food industry in the Jaffna District. Digital marketing tools, such as social media marketing, content marketing, email marketing, and search engine advertisement are used as variables to examine the impact of these tools on brand awareness of the fast-food industry. The fast-food industry is growing with the development of cutting-edge technology. Studies on how digital marketing tools assist the fast-food industry to build brand awareness among customers are scarce. Although there are a few studies available on the domains, those had not comprehensively studied the impact of digital marketing on brand awareness. Available studies focused on different contexts and various sectors. Therefore, the need for studying digital marketing's impact on brand awareness in the fast-food industry in Jaffna District has urged the researcher to engage in the current study. The data were collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected from the people who consume fast food in the Jaffna District through a Google form questionnaire distributed through social media to test the study hypothesis. The sample size is 208. The collected data were assessed using SPSS. The study allows the fast-food industry managers, policymakers, app developers, and government bodies to incorporate the results in their strategy making, policy making, and decision making. This study proposes a comprehensive framework for enhancing brand awareness in fast-food industries through digital marketing techniques. The results show that digital marketing tools significantly improve brand awareness. Digital marketing tools, such as search engine optimization, content marketing, social media marketing, and email marketing, improve brand awareness in the fast food industry in the Jaffna district. This study is limited to Jaffna District with limited variables. Thus, similar research can be replicated in upcoming studies in various fields. This study aims to assist the fast-food industry to formulate its marketing strategies and develop promotional plans.

Keywords: Brand Awareness, Digital Marketing, Fast food industry

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01. Introduction

The global fast-food sector is quickly developing. Fast-food consumption patterns in the globe have changed significantly over the last decades, and its ease of use is generally seen as a major reason for its commercial appeal (J. R. Hanaysha, 2022a). The fast-food industry is booming and new restaurants are popping up everywhere due to the change in purchasing patterns and for time-saving (Gunarathna & Silva, 2022). The fast growth of the internet in the past few years has had an impact on the marketing business environment; particularly given the COVID-19 situation. The Internet allows businesses to reach a larger audience and generate attractive value propositions. Digital marketing simply defines itself as achieving marketing objectives by applying digital media, data, and technology (Dave Chaffey & Fiona Ellis-Chadwick, 2016). Within the last couple of years, the number of fast-food places in the Jaffna area has been increasing. Several new franchises like Taco Bell have started their business in the Colombo area (Mathanika & Sakitha, 2019). With the development of digital technology, most of these brands now have an online presence, making it easy for customers to learn more about the product and compare them to other choices before they make a purchase choice (Wijesinghe & Wanninayake, 2021). The probability of customers remembering the brand in different situations is called brand awareness. It is essential because it helps consumers to understand, recall, and be familiar with company branding and goods (BİLGİN, 2018). Brand awareness plays an important role in consumer decision-making, market performance, marketing mix, and brand equity (Zhang, 2020).

02. Research Problem and Research Question

Technology is developing rapidly and people are becoming more comfortable with digital marketing in every aspect of their life (Balapour et al., 2020; Diez-Martin et al., 2019). Even though a few research studies have been done separately on the domain of brand awareness and digital marketing, the currently available research on digital marketing and brand awareness does not focus on the fast-food industry in the Sri Lankan context. Previous Studies were conducted on various aspects and various sectors like tourism, telecommunication, and consumer purchase behavior. A study in India found that social media marketing is a major influence on consumer purchase intention of fast food and e-mail marketing helps to increase the customer base (Waleed Pathan et al., 2021). Another study carried out in Malaysia concluded that successful social media marketing would be crucial in aiding fast-food businesses in establishing a positive reputation, which will then result in perceived customer value (J. Hanaysha, 2016). Findings of another study in UAE also concluded that social media platforms serve as crucial tools for fast food firms to achieve their targeted marketing goals, such as fostering customer loyalty and influencing purchasing decisions (J. R. Hanaysha, 2022b). Therefore, it is evident that there is a scope that exists in the fast food industry to be studied. This motivates the researcher to explore the topic of assessing the impact of digital marketing on brand awareness: evidence from the fast-food industry in Jaffna District. The study focuses on addressing the research question of ‘Do digital marketing tools influence branding in the fast-food industry in Jaffna District?’.

2.1. Objective of the study

The main objective of this study is to examine the impact of digital marketing tools on brand awareness in the fast food industry in the Jaffna District. In addition to that, there are sub-objectives in the study to achieve. Those are given below:

- impact of search engine optimization on brand awareness of the fast food industry.
- impact of content marketing on brand awareness of the fast food industry.
- impact of social media marketing on brand awareness of the fast food industry.
- impact of email marketing on brand awareness of the fast food industry.

03. Review of Literature

Technology is developing rapidly and organizations are capitalizing on it to reap benefits (Balapour et al., 2020). Fast food industries are using digital marketing techniques to promote brand messages and strengthen consumer relationships (Waleed Pathan et al., 2021).

3.1. Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is simply defined as empowering businesses and organizations to collect, process, analyze, and interpret data more effectively, which is important for the successful execution of a wide range of commercial activities (Sinothando Tshuma et al., 2023). In previous literature, scholars have used digital marketing and its different elements to examine the impact of brand awareness. Nevertheless, the current study emphasizes four significant components to examine the brand awareness of the fast-food industry.

3.1.1. Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization, often known as SEO, refers to a variety of strategies that are implemented to achieve higher rankings in the results of internet searches (Dave Chaffey & Fiona Ellis-Chadwick, 2016; Nasution et al., 2020). Existing literature explains that leveraging search engine optimization will have an impact on brand awareness to promote the business to the target audiences (Andonov, 2020; Nyagadza, 2022). Hence, Search engine optimization plays a crucial role in brand awareness. Therefore, it is hypothesized as follows :

H1a: There is a significant impact of search engine optimization on brand awareness.

3.1.2. Content Marketing

Content marketing focuses on producing and disseminating content about a company's products and brands that are useful, relevant, and consistent to attract and keep a target audience to generate revenue. (Patrutiu Baltes, 2015). Past literature examines the impact of content marketing on building brand trust, purchase intention, online engagement, and purchase decisions (Al-Gasawneh & Al-Adamat, 2020; Patrutiu Baltes, 2015; Wardana1 et al., 2022; Weerasinghe et al., n.d.). Therefore, content marketing has to be studied in brand awareness. As such, it is hypothesized as follows :

H1b: There is a significant impact of content marketing of digital marketing on brand awareness.

3.1.3. Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing can be categorized as those that allow users to contribute content, thoughts, and ideas while also promoting interaction (Alves et al., 2016; Sheth, 2018). Existing pieces of literature examine social media marketing features from different aspects, such as building brand equity, enhancing brand loyalty and brand trust, and examining consumer behavioral patterns, purchase intention, and purchase decision (J. Hanaysha, 2016; J. R. Hanaysha, 2022b; J. R. Hanaysha et al., 2021; Riaz et al., 2019). Hence brand awareness plays a major role in social media marketing. Thus, it is hypothesized as follows :

H1c: There is a significant impact of social media marketing on brand awareness.

3.1.4. E-mail Marketing

Email marketing is the practice of communicating with clients or potential customers about a good or service via email. Email marketing may be utilized as a powerful digital marketing strategy to advertise businesses outside, mostly to the younger generation (Rettie, n.d.; Sahni et al., 2018). E-mail marketing is a crucial medium of communication in building customer relationships and building brand awareness. E-mail promotions bring twice the return on investment (Ellis-Chadwick & Doherty, 2012). E-mail marketing plays a decisive role in attracting customers' attention and branding. Therefore, it is hypothesized as follows :

H1d: There is a significant impact of email marketing of digital marketing on brand awareness.

3.2. Digital Marketing and the Fast-food Industry

A study (Waleed Pathan et al., 2021) examines the digital marketing impact on the purchase intention of the fast-food industry. Another study (J. Hanaysha, 2016) examines the importance of social media advertisement to enhance brand equity. A previous study (Etale & Uranta, 2022) examines the relationship between digital marketing and consumer fast-food purchasing behavior patterns. A study (J. R. Hanaysha et al., 2021) explores social media marketing features and brand loyalty in the fast-food industry in UAE.

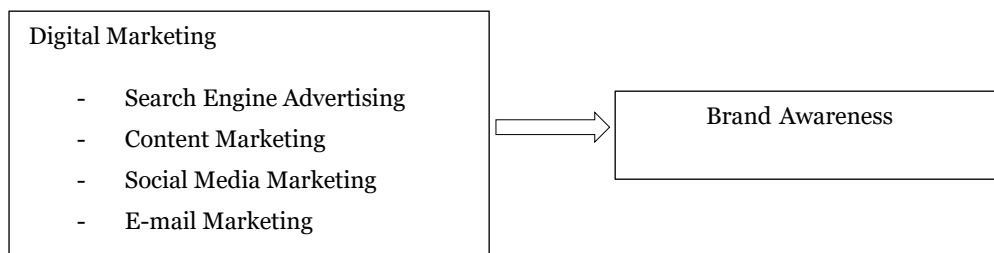


Figure 1: Conceptualization Model

3.3. Brand Awareness

Brand awareness can be defined as the consumer's ability to recognize and recall a brand name from a logo when presented with different situations. (Bakator, 2018). Digital marketing tools have been used as independent variables to measure the impact. Tools are search engine optimization, social media marketing, content marketing, and e-mail marketing. In earlier studies, it is reported that digital marketing tools are used to build brand trust, brand equity, and brand loyalty (BİLGİN, 2018; J. R. Hanaysha et al., 2021; Riaz et al., 2019).

3.4. Conceptualization

The following figure shows a conceptual model proposed for this work based on the literature review and the hypothesized links. The main objective of the study is to examine the impact of digital marketing on brand awareness. Thus, the developed research framework is shown in the figure 1.

04. Methods

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire and secondary data were collected through journals, published reports, the Internet, libraries, and periodicals. The convenience sampling technique was used to collect data. Since the population is not well characterized, a sample size of 208 was used. Here, the researcher from Jaffna collected data from 208 people who frequently eat at fast-food restaurants. As the data were collected from primary data sources, a quantitative methodology was deemed appropriate for the investigation. The questionnaire was created using prior literature, expert opinions, and study standard questionnaires.

05. Data Analysis

5.1. Reliability of the Data

Cronbach's (alpha) is the most frequently employed test for determining the internal reliability of data, which is one part of investigating the reliability of acquired data. A score of 0.7 or greater is deemed satisfactory for reliability (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 1: Results of the Reliability Test

Variables	Cronbach Alpha
Search Engine Optimization	0.917
Content Marketing	0.869
Social Media	0.777
E-mail Marketing	0.776
Brand Awareness	0.730

5.2. Validity of the Data

Kaiser Meyer Olkin measures the sample adequacy where the test contrasts the observed correlation coefficient's magnitude with the partial correlation coefficients' magnitude.

Table 2: Results of the KMO Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.925
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1859.565
	Df	10
	Sig.	0.000

A KMO value between 0.5 to 1.0 indicates that the factor analysis is appropriate. The table above indicates that the overall data set possesses an appropriate KMO value.

Convergent Validity is a measure of how closely a test is related to other tests that assess the same constructs; whereas, discriminant validity is the degree to which your measure does not correlate with or is inversely correlated with measurements of other constructs. The table below summarizes the output of the convergent and discriminant validity test for individual variables of the study.

Table 3: Results of Convergent and Discriminant Validity Test for Variables

Variables	Convergent Validity	Discriminant Validity
Search Engine Optimization	0.901	0.983
Content Marketing	0.897	0.977
Social Media	0.968	0.949
E-mail Marketing	0.911	0.961
Brand Awareness	0.908	0.963

5.3. Descriptive Statistic Analysis

The following table summarizes the descriptive statistics of the variables of the study.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	SD
Search Engine Optimization	2.291	1.125
Content Marketing	2.333	1.147
Social Media	2.313	1.147
E-mail Marketing	2.408	1.225
Brand Awareness	2.353	1.181

Based on the above results it seems that the respondents have given the highest weight to e-mail marketing among the other components of digital marketing with a mean value of 2.4083; the lowest weight has been given to search engine optimization representing a mean value of 2.2917. The second highest weightage of preference has been given to content marketing with a mean value of 2.333; whereas, the mean value of social media is 2.3125. The mean value of the dependent variable is 2.3538. Therefore, the weight of the digital marketing

components has been given by the respondents as e-mail marketing, content marketing, social media marketing, and SEO.

5.4. Regression Analysis

Regression analysis refers to a situation where independent variables are hypothesized to affect one dependent variable. R square is known to be the coefficient of determination. Hypothesis testing has been carried out using the result of Linear regression analysis. The result of the Linear Regression Analysis is given below.

Table 5: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the Estimate	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
1	0.875 ^a	0.766	0.752	0.29971	0.000	1.930

Moving on to other statistical components, R-squared is 76% and it implies that 76% of the change of the dependent variable (brand awareness) is explained by the independent variables in the study. The F-statistic P-value is 0.000 which is statistically significant; thus, it is a sign that reflects that the overall model is statistically significant and good enough in predicting the dependent variable. The standard error of regression is 0.29 and it is a low level of deviation in error, which is at an acceptable range. Durbin-Watson value is 1.930 which is close to 2; thus, it implies that the model doesn't suffer from autocorrelation.

Table 6: ANOVA table Summary

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	260.144	4	65.036	724.041	.000b
	Residual	17.516	195	.090		
	Total	277.660	199			

According to the ANOVA table above, the P value (sig.) is recorded as 0.000 and this is below 0.05, which means that it is significant at a 95% confidence level. The overall model is significant.

Table 7: Coefficients of the Variables of the Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-0.012	0.049		-0.252	0.801
	Search Engine Optimization	0.200	0.059	0.190	3.395	0.001
	Content Marketing	0.339	0.069	0.329	4.902	0.000
	Social Media	0.242	0.072	0.235	3.384	0.001
	E-mail Marketing	0.231	0.049	0.240	4.710	0.000

The above table provides the required information to predict the impact of digital marketing tools on brand awareness. The significant value can be used to test that. If the significant value is less than or equal to the Alpha value (0.05), there is a statistically significant impact on the dependent and independent variables. The beta value represents the average amount the dependent variable changes for the unit change of the independent variable.

Based on the coefficient values in the above table, the regression equation of Brand awareness can be constructed as follows:

$$BA = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{SEO} + \beta_2 \text{CM} + \beta_3 \text{SMM} + \beta_4 \text{EM} + \varepsilon$$

Where,

BA = Brand Awareness

β_0 = Intercept

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3,$ and β_4 = Population Slope

SEO = Search Engine Optimization

CM = Content Marketing

SMM = Social Media Marketing

EM = E-mail Marketing

ε = Random Error

The overall regression model of this study is explained through the following equation:

$$\text{Brand Awareness} = -0.012 + 0.200 \beta_1 + 0.339 \beta_2 + 0.242 \beta_3 + 0.231 \beta_4 + \varepsilon$$

5.5. Hypotheses Testing

4 hypotheses have been developed to investigate the said impact. This section tests the hypotheses and discusses the findings concerning the prevailing literature.

H1a – There is a significant impact of Search engines on Brand Awareness.

The hypothesis is accepted and if there is an increase in search engine advertising in the fast-food industry, brand awareness significantly increases.

H1b – There is a significant impact of Content Marketing on Brand Awareness.

This hypothesis is accepted and if there is an increase in content marketing, brand awareness significantly increases.

H1c – There is a significant impact of social media on Brand awareness.

This concludes that social media has a significant impact on Brand Awareness.

H1d – There is a significant impact of email marketing on brand awareness.

The hypothesis is accepted in this case, which means that e-mail marketing does have a significant impact on brand awareness in the fast-food industry in Sri Lanka.

06. Results and Discussion

Both brand awareness and digital marketing are crucial for any organization. Learning about digital marketing helps the organization understand how to reach and interact with its target audiences online. Brand awareness is essential as it contributes to the development of customer

credibility and trust. The present study was conducted based on a theoretical framework, developed based on different studies conducted on the topic in the past. The key findings of this study have concluded that there is a significant relationship between search engine advertising, content marketing, social media, and email marketing on brand awareness. Findings have complied with existing literature. Similar results were found in the previous studies. Social network marketing and email marketing have a beneficial effect on building brand and consumer buying intentions in the fast-food industry of Hyderabad (Waleed Pathan et al., 2021). Techniques to leverage the search engine optimization tools, such as mobile page acceleration, micro-vlogging, voice search, traffic, and messaging, make a positive impact on building a brand in the fast food industry in the South African context (Nyagadza, 2022). The intention to purchase fast food online is positively and significantly impacted by content marketing to build brand equity in Indonesia (Wardana1 et al., 2022). Social media marketing is essential for creating and enhancing brand equity in the fast-food sector (J. Hanaysha, 2016; Riaz et al., 2019). The relationship between e-mail marketing features and consumer purchase decisions is mediated by brand trust (J. R. Hanaysha, 2022b). The existing results show that each digital marketing tool significantly improved brand awareness, however, the present study examined the four components as a whole. Therefore, it can be said that employing digital marketing communication tools will assist businesses to improve consumer loyalty and enrich customer communication, which leads to building strong brand equity.

6.1. Limitations of the Study

This study was only focused on the consumers who live in the Jaffna district leaving the other provinces unattended. Therefore, the sample size is narrowly defined. The results of the study can be responsibly limited and difficult to generalize across the country. Another limitation is the data of this study was collected through digital channels. Therefore, the consumers who do not have any access to digital platforms were omitted from the study. The other limitation is the language barrier. The questionnaire was designed only in the English language. Future studies could be done in other contexts, as the convenience sampling methodology was used in the current study, and the findings cannot be generalized. Future research should test the causal link between the proposed variables in other types of industries. Therefore, future studies can examine other digital marketing communication tools, such as publicity and event sponsorship. Finally, this study used four dimensions to measure digital marketing which may not be adequately comprehensive.

6.2. Implications

This study will have a significant impact on the academic perspective and practical aspects. This study contributes to the domains of digital marketing, branding, and the fast-food industry as it examines the impact of digital marketing tools on brand awareness. In addition, this study will aid the policymakers, fast-food industry, IT experts, advertising agencies, and marketing companies to address the importance of digital marketing tools in the fast-food industry which is still in the veiled area in Sri Lanka. In connection with practical contributions, the empirical findings of the present study outline several implications in digital marketing on brand awareness

of the fast-food industry in Sri Lanka. As mentioned, this study will aid external stakeholders to formulate their marketing strategies in order to reach a larger audience through digital platforms. The adoption of digital marketing expands the possibilities available to managers

when making decisions (Jaradat et al., 2022). Further, this study would help fast-food companies and related bodies by providing comprehensive, detailed, and practical guidelines on the usage of digital marketing. The new knowledge produced by this study will be advantageous to society; especially, fast-food companies, government bodies, IT Experts, and the general public as they update themselves through digital platforms.

07. Conclusion

This study attempted to examine the impact of digital marketing tools on brand awareness in the fast-food industry. The results indicated that digital marketing tools represent vital platforms for fast-food brands to attain their desired marketing objectives, for instance enhancing brand equity and influencing consumers' purchase decisions. This study's digital marketing tools comprise four dimensions: search engine optimization, content marketing, social media marketing, and e-mail marketing. All of these dimensions are found to be crucial predictors of brand awareness. In order to strengthen the brand in the fast-food industry, it is crucial to routinely share engaging posts and brand information on digital marketing platforms. Utilizing digital media sites for marketing appears to be a relevant method to reach the target market and influence their attitudes, especially in light of consumers' growing interest in fast-food consumption. These findings suggest that policymakers should increase their digital media presence and regularly research the shifting demands of customers before creating offers to address those needs. Therefore, employing digital marketing communication tools will assist businesses to improve consumer loyalty and enhance brand equity.

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