

DIGITAL MARKETING ADOPTION AND PERFORMANCES OF FAST-FOOD COMPANIES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Abstract

This research investigated digital marketing practices and the profitability of fast-food enterprises in developing economies. To accomplish the study's objectives, three specific research goals were formulated to provide direction for the investigation. The research employed a survey approach, with a population consisting of 250 permanent employees. 244 was the sample size administered. The structured questionnaire was validated by experts in marketing. Data obtained from the field were statistically tested. The empirical findings revealed that email marketing, search engine optimization, and social media marketing exhibited significant positive relationships with the performance of fast-food companies in developing countries. Notably, the results indicated a substantial improvement in the performance of these companies over the past four years, suggesting that digital marketing strategies have exerted a strong and beneficial influence on their organizational outcomes. The study concluded that digital marketing, in its various dimensions, significantly enhances the performance and competitiveness of fast-food enterprises. Moreover, the findings showed that certain digital marketing tools possess greater efficacy in driving organizational performance than others. Consequently, it was recommended that fast-food companies should strategically leverage social media and other online platforms to strengthen their communication systems and optimize business performance.

Keywords: *Digital Marketing, Search Engine Optimization, Social Media Marketing, Email Marketing, Organizational Performance, Fast-Food Firms.*

1.1 Introduction

The emergence and continuous evolution of innovative technologies have significantly transformed the global business landscape, offering marketers a wide array of tools to enhance their operational efficiency and achieve organizational goals. The advancement and widespread acceptance of technological innovations, coupled with dynamic shifts in organizational structures and consumer preferences, have accelerated the adoption and growth of digital marketing practices across industries. According to Ponde and Jain (2019), digital marketing has ushered in a new era of communication, providing diverse platforms for organizations to interact with customers and conduct market research through real-time analysis of online consumer behavior and preferences.

In the fast-food industry, effective marketing strategies remain vital for organizational survival and competitiveness. The increasing dependence on digital technologies and internet-based communication has heightened the relevance of digital marketing in this sector (Saira, Sohailb, & Rehmana, 2023). Through digital marketing, fast-food firms can reach vast

audiences efficiently and cost-effectively. Online platforms have demonstrated a greater capacity for audience reach compared to traditional marketing media like print and television advertising (Irfan, Rasil, Sulaiman, Sami, & Qureshi, 2018). Other emerging tools, including video and affiliate marketing, further enhance engagement potential. These digital platforms enable firms to target specific customer segments, assess campaign effectiveness in real-time, and adjust strategies accordingly (Tariq et al., 2022).

Digital marketing also strengthens customer engagement and retention by facilitating real-time interaction and personalized service delivery. By analyzing customer data, fast-food companies can design tailored marketing campaigns that address individual needs and preferences, thereby improving customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Mensah, Narteh, Kosiba, & Muritala, 2022). Furthermore, the emerging 5G network can help fast-food brands differentiate themselves and establish leadership within their markets (Mensah et al., 2022). Empirical studies have underscored the positive association between digital marketing—particularly email and social media marketing—and organizational performance (Zahay, 2021). This relationship has been validated across various business contexts (Navithasulthana, Evangelin, & Shanmugam, 2021). Mobile marketing has also been identified as a major contributor to business performance improvement. Similarly, Addo et al. (2021) highlighted the positive influence of online advertising on organizational outcomes, while Islami et al. (2020) observed that intellectual capital enhances performance when moderated by perceived quality.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The inability of many fast-food companies to effectively adapt to evolving market challenges has been reflected in their declining performance indicators. Despite the recognized potential of digital marketing, its implementation within the fast-food sector has yielded suboptimal results. Numerous firms face uncertainties in digital adoption, which have constrained their orientation toward technology-driven marketing, thereby diminishing returns on investment and overall organizational performance.

Although digital marketing has been identified as a crucial driver of business growth, its practical impact on the performance of fast-food enterprises remains inadequately understood due to a limited conceptual grasp of its objectives and mechanisms. Digital marketing integrates both incremental and radical innovations—incremental improvements enhance ongoing processes, while radical changes foster transformative shifts. For fast-food firms operating in volatile and competitive environments, embracing digital marketing is akin to a survival strategy essential for maintaining relevance and achieving sustainable performance. While some fast-food companies have pursued incremental digital initiatives that initially improved efficiency, these gains often dissipate as competitors replicate industry standards. In developing countries, structural and operational challenges—such as economic instability, overreliance on oil revenues, inadequate infrastructure, and limited technological capacity—further hinder optimal performance. As Khalil (2020) noted, organizational inertia, high implementation costs, and resource constraints impede the effective deployment of digital marketing tools.

Moreover, many fast-food enterprises in developing economies struggle to harness strategic entrepreneurship, data analytics, and digital intelligence for informed decision-making capabilities essential for achieving competitiveness and long-term sustainability. Consequently, issues such as weak customer service, operational inefficiencies, and exposure to fraud persist. Given these realities, it becomes imperative to empirically examine digital marketing practices and the outcome of fast-food companies in developing economies, in order to bridge existing knowledge gaps and enhance strategic outcomes.

1.3 Study Objectives

The key goal of the study was examination of digital marketing practices and performance of fast-food companies in developing countries, represented by Nigeria. The specific objectives include to:

1. Determine the extent social media marketing affect the financial outcome of fast-food companies.
2. Examine email marketing correlates with the performance of fast-food companies.
3. Ascertain the extent search engine optimization influence the performance of fast-food companies.

1.4 Research questions

The questions designed to serve as compass for the study include:

1. Do social media marketing significantly affect fast-food companies' performance in developing countries?
2. Do email marketing significantly relate to performance of fast-food companies in developing countries?
3. To what extent does search engine optimization significantly relate to performance of fast-food companies in developing countries?

1.5 Study hypotheses

The null hypotheses tested in the study include:

1. Social media marketing does not substantially affect fast-food companies' performance in developing countries.
2. Email marketing does not significantly considerably affect fast-food companies' performance in developing countries.
3. Search engine optimization does not appreciably affect fast-food companies' performance in developing countries.

2.1 Literature review

This study is hinged on the Resource-Based view theory (RBT). The RBT was originally proposed by Penrose (1959) and later expanded by Wernerfelt (1984), to understand the strategic value of human resources within firms. The RBV posits that a firm's internal resources—especially those that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable—are central to gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage. This framework represents one of the most prominent theoretical models within the field of strategic management, elucidating how organizations can achieve and sustain competitive advantage through the effective development, utilization, and optimization of their internal resources and capabilities. The theory posits that a firm's unique combination of resources and competencies constitutes the primary driver of its performance outcomes and long-term success (Mazikana, 2023).

The theory provides a conceptual foundation for evaluating which types of human capital contribute to long-term firm success. It emphasizes that organizational performance is a function of internal capabilities, including employee knowledge, judgment, experience, and skills. According to Wernerfelt (1984), resources consist of physical capital, organizational capital, and human capital. He defines human resources as comprising the intelligence, decision-making ability, and behavioural contributions of employees and managers. These human capital attributes, when aligned with firm strategy, help create conditions for sustainable high performance.

The application of the Resource-Based Theory (RBT) in this context suggests that firms within the fast-food industry can leverage their digital assets and competencies to create superior customer value in the marketplace. Organizational performance can be significantly improved through the strategic deployment of online tools like SEO (search engine optimization), email marketing, content marketing, and social media marketing (SM), all of which are digital marketing strategies that foster customer engagement, acquisition, retention, and loyalty.

For example, an organization with advanced expertise in SM can utilize this capability to design persuasive and interactive campaigns that attract new customers while strengthening relationships with current ones. Again, by capitalizing on social media analytics, such firms can gain deeper customers' knowledge, behaviors, emerging trends and preferences. This will in turn, inform the development of innovative products and targeted promotional strategies. Consequently, this adaptive use of digital competencies enables firms to respond proactively to evolving consumer expectations, thereby reinforcing their competitive positioning and ensuring sustained market relevance.

Nevertheless, the theory remains highly relevant to this study, which investigates how digital marketing practices impact fast-food performance. RBT supports the idea that such practices must be intentionally aligned with the firm's internal capabilities and resource realities. Therefore, in the context of this study, RBT provides a sound explanatory base for exploring how internal digital marketing practices, when effectively managed, can yield sustained competitive advantage and enhanced performance among fast-food companies in resource-constrained environments.

An organization possessing advanced digital competencies undoubtedly can enhance its online presence by securing higher rankings on search engine results pages. The analytical insights derived from SEO performance can further inform the refinement of content marketing strategies and social media campaigns, ensuring they are better aligned with audience preferences and behavioral patterns. Establishing a strong digital presence and cultivating thought leadership within the industry can, therefore, serve as a foundation for achieving sustained competitive advantage. Overall, the Resource-Based View (RBV) offers a robust theoretical lens for examining the influence of digital marketing on organizational performance, particularly within the telecommunications sector. By effectively leveraging unique digital resources and capabilities, firms can deliver superior value to consumers, thereby strengthening their competitive positioning and driving long-term performance outcomes.

2.2 Conceptual review/framework

Digital marketing refers to the strategic promotion products' and services' promotion through the Internet, and also encompassing mobile communication, digital displays, and other electronic media (Desai, 2019). As technological innovation continues to evolve, various DM strategies have become increasingly prevalent. Furthermore, digital marketing extends beyond Internet-based channels to include other digital media platforms such as mobile communication systems, callback services, and interactive mobile tones.

Broadly, digital marketing encompasses all marketing initiatives that employ digital devices or online networks. Organizations utilize these online channels and systems to engage existing and potential customers. This form of marketing relies on diverse digital tactics and communication strategies that allow businesses to connect with consumers in the virtual spaces where they spend much of their time. It integrates an extensive range of activities,

from website management and online branding to digital advertising, electronic brochures, and email campaigns, all of which fall within the broader domain of digital marketing. According to Neha (2014), digital marketing represents the stage where Internet-based and information technologies are systematically employed in the planning and execution of marketing operations. Similarly, Etale and Uranta (2021) describe digital marketing as the process of implementing marketing and advertising activities through computerized technologies—such as mobile devices and digital displays—to effectively communicate with customers. These scholars equate digital marketing with e-marketing, defining it as the exchange of goods and services between buyers and sellers through electronic media and processes. Correspondingly, Elisabeta (2014) conceptualizes electronic marketing as the use of digital and interactive technologies to establish and sustain meaningful connections between firms and their target consumers.

Concept of Performance

Organizational performance refers to the effectiveness and efficiency with which an organization utilizes its resources to achieve predetermined objectives (Firer & Williams, 2013). Performance metrics serve as indicators of both operational efficiency and goal attainment. Every strategic decision made within an organization ultimately influences its performance outcomes. To evaluate their success in meeting strategic goals, organizations develop Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which provide measurable benchmarks for assessing overall effectiveness.

Traditionally, organizational performance has been measured using financial indicators such as profitability, productivity, and market evaluation (Firer & Williams, 2013). Financial performance metrics often include ROI (return on investment), ROA (return on assets), and ROE (return on equity). In contrast, operational performance measures encompass non-financial indicators such as market share, product innovation, product quality, industry competitiveness, technological efficiency, and organizational sustainability over time (Wekesa, 2016).

Hence, the increasing relevance of digital marketing underscores the necessity of exploring its influence on business outcomes. Many firms, particularly in the fast-food industry, recognize the potential of digital marketing but remain uncertain about where or how to begin implementation. Presently, digital platforms—such as social media, email, and search engines—have profoundly reshaped consumer perceptions and behaviors, thereby revolutionizing marketing practices within the fast-food sector.

Through data-driven and interactive communication networks, businesses can now engage customers more effectively, gather real-time feedback, and derive actionable insights. Online surveys and behavioral analytics enable firms to better understand consumer preferences, refine their marketing strategies, and enhance customer satisfaction. Consequently, digital marketing provides fast-food companies with a measurable and responsive system for improving performance, fostering customer loyalty, and achieving sustainable competitive advantage.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE
marketing practices

DEPENDENT VARIABLE Digital
Performance of fast-food companies

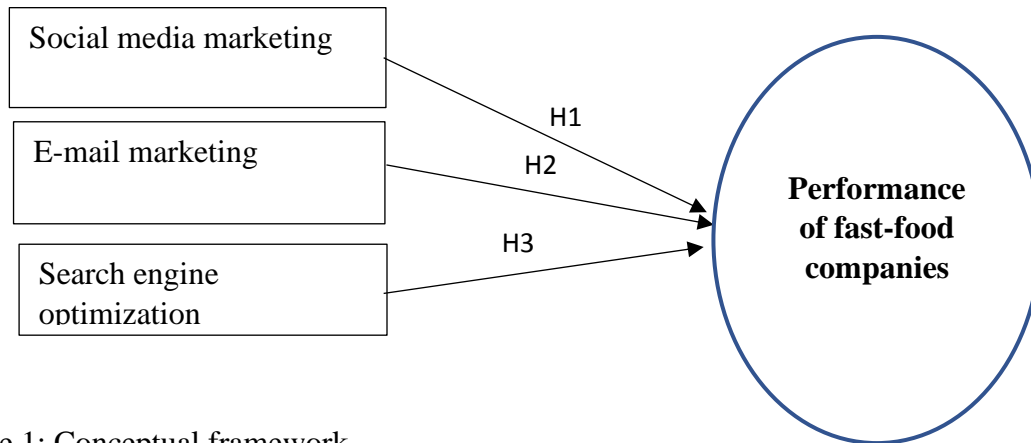


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Source: Researcher's conceptual framework, 2025

2.1 Conceptual Framework

In this study, digital marketing practices constitute the independent variable, while the performance of fast-food companies serves as the dependent variable. This framework reflects the operational context within which fast-food firms deploy strategic initiatives to achieve defined objectives. Social media, email, and search engine optimization (SEO) marketings are the independent variables, as they represent key digital tools that drive customer engagement and business growth. Within the fast-food industry, the effective adoption of these digital marketing strategies is vital for responding to market dynamics, improving brand visibility, and enhancing overall organizational performance (Mabrouk & Mamoghli, 2010).

The dependent variable, performance of fast-food companies, measures how effectively firms accomplish their strategic and operational goals. In volatile and competitive markets, performance is a multidimensional construct influenced by internal capabilities such as technological adaptability and marketing innovation (Moi & Birkinshaw, 2019). The performance indicators used in this study include employee growth, customer satisfaction, customer retention, return on investment, and market orientation. These metrics collectively determine a company's ability to adapt to changing environmental trends, harness technological innovations, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

2.2 SM and Fast-Food Companies' Performance

Social media marketing has been found to have considerable influence on fast-food companies' performance in developing economies. Digital marketing tools stimulate and enhance brand awareness, customer engagement, and stronger consumer relationships. Wisetsri et al. (2021) observed that customers who engage actively with brands on social media platforms tend to exhibit higher levels of loyalty and are more likely to recommend those brands to others. Similarly, email marketing campaigns featuring personalized offers have been shown to increase customer purchases and strengthen brand commitment.

Social media has fundamentally transformed consumer communication and information-gathering behaviors. Its immediacy, accessibility, and diversity of content make it a key source of product and brand-related information (Kochhar, 2021). A survey of 2,000 U.S. internet users revealed that over half of Generation Z and Millennials, 38% of Generation X, and 27% of Baby Boomers derive their fast-food preferences from social media interactions

(Hudders, 2019). This demonstrates that social media influences consumers across generations. Peer-generated content, customer reviews, and influencer endorsements are now perceived as more credible sources of information than traditional brand advertising (Kochhar, 2021).

In Nigeria, Siregar et al. (2023) found that approximately one-third of fast-food consumers make purchasing decisions based on influencer recommendations. Hagan (2021) further emphasized that online social interactions can stimulate new consumer needs and reshape purchasing intentions. The increasing desire for social validation, emulation of influencers, and participation in digital discussions about brands has redefined consumer behavior (Park & Chun, 2020).

Consequently, numerous fast-food companies—such as Crunches, Domino’s, De-Choice, Apples, and Crispy Chicken—have integrated social media into their marketing and communication strategies. The appeal lies in social media’s affordability, vast reach, and ability to foster continuous engagement with target audiences (Godey, 2016). These platforms provide opportunities for real-time interaction, targeted advertising, and enhanced customer relationship management, all of which contribute to improved performance and market competitiveness.

2.3 Email Marketing and the Performance of Fast-Food Companies

Email marketing emerged in the 1990s as a form of direct marketing, serving not only to initiate customer relationships but also to strengthen existing connections and enhance loyalty (Khuu & Do, 2018). Over time, it has evolved into a central component of digital marketing, enabling organizations to deliver personalized promotional messages and advertisements directly to consumers’ inboxes (Etale & Uranta, 2021). According to Khuu and Do (2018), email marketing remains one of the most efficient tools for customer acquisition, providing a seamless channel for promotional and transactional communication.

McCloskey (2016) underscores that email marketing plays a critical role in building and maintaining customer relationships, particularly for fast-food companies seeking to cultivate repeat patronage. Its effectiveness lies in its affordability, low setup costs, and capacity for targeted communication. Furthermore, Moustakas, Ranganathan, and Duquenoy (2016) noted that online marketing also allows the SMEs to distribute discounts, coupons, and special offers efficiently, leading to increased brand engagement and improved performance.

2.4 SEO and Fast-Food Companies’ Performance

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) represents one of the most integral forms of digital marketing, designed to enhance a company’s online visibility and ranking across search engine platforms. The process involves a range of techniques, including technical website optimization, link-building, blogging, and the creation of high-quality content. Etale and Uranta (2021) define SEO as a subset of Internet marketing aimed at improving a website’s prominence and driving organic traffic.

Hudders (2019) described Search Engine Marketing (SEM) as a broader concept encompassing strategies for improving website ranking and increasing user traffic through paid and organic means. Radionova and Praude (2016) emphasized that SEO and SEM are critical because consumers increasingly depend on search engines for product information and purchasing decisions, while marketers view these platforms as cost-effective promotional channels.

According to Godey (2016), SEO has a substantial impact on the performance of fast-food businesses by ensuring that their websites appear prominently during key stages of the

consumer decision-making process. Effective SEO targets various types of searches—text, image, and video—and aligns marketing efforts with user intent and keyword trends. By understanding how search engines function and how consumers search for information, businesses can position their brands more effectively, attract relevant audiences, and ultimately strengthen market performance.

So, digital marketing practices serve as vital instruments for enhancing customer engagement, brand visibility, and organizational growth. For fast-food companies operating in developing economies, these strategies offer measurable pathways to improved performance, competitive differentiation, and long-term sustainability.

3.1 Methodology

The study design that was used in conducting this work was the survey method. The study population was made up of management and staff from fast-food companies in developing countries. The companies were Crunches fast-food, Dominos' fast-food and De Choice fast-food. The total number of management and staff was two hundred and fifty (250) at the time of this study.

The Taro Yamane's (1967) statistical method was used to arrive at the sample size of 244 respondents. Data collection was by questionnaire, based on the Likert scale. Two levels of validity were used to check that the instrument was actually fit for the study. The supervisor is determined the face validity of the research instrument, and with the principal component tool the content validity was determined.

For the instruments' reliability, the subjects of the study were drawn from fast-food companies in developing countries, while Cronbach Alpha was used to test and ensure the stability and consistency of the instrument.

The questionnaire was administered to the respondents in their workplaces at the various fast-food companies. The data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, after which, the (PPMC Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient) was employed to evaluate and test the formulated hypotheses.

4.1 Presentation of results

The independent variable of the study was digital marketing practices, which is sub-divided into three sub-independent variables, which are: email marketing, social media marketing, and search engine optimization. The dependent variable of the study was performance of fast-food companies. Two hundred and twenty-four (224) respondents were used for the study. The Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of the study.

Table 1: Research Descriptive Statistics Summary

Variables	N	Mean	Std deviation
Social media marketing	224	16.92	1.11
Email marketing	224	16.05	1.87
Search engine optimization	224	17.46	2.19
Search engine optimization	224	16.52	1.58
Performance of fast-food companies	224	21.26	1.83

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no considerable relationship between social media marketing and fast-food companies' performance.

In this hypothesis, social media marketing served as the independent variable, while the performance of fast-food companies represented the dependent variable. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) technique is utilized as the test statistics.

As presented in Table 2, the computed r -value of 0.56 exceeds the critical r -value of 0.137 at the 0.05 significance level, with 222 degrees of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. Consequently, the finding indicates that a statistically significant relationship exists between social media marketing and the performance of fast-food companies.

Table 2: Social media marketing and performance of fast-food companies (N=224)

Variable	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Social media marketing	3217	6296	74712	0.56*
Performance of fast-food companies	3091	5462		

*Significant at .05 level, critical $r=137$, $df=222$

Hypothesis Two

H_{02} : There is no substantial relationship between email marketing and fast-food companies' performance.

In this hypothesis, email marketing served as the independent variable, while the performance of fast-food companies was the dependent variable. The PPMC analysis was again applied to assess the relationship between these variables.

As presented in Table 3, the calculated r -value of 0.46 exceeded the critical r -value of 0.138 at the 0.05 level of significance with 222 degrees of freedom. Based on this outcome, the null hypothesis was rejected. This finding therefore indicates that email marketing has a statistically significant relationship with the performance of fast-food companies.

Table 3: Email marketing and performance of fast-food companies (N=224)

Variable	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Email marketing	3375	6374	73925	0.46*
Performance of fast-food companies	3091	5462		

*Significant at .05 level, critical $r=137$, $df=222$

Hypothesis Three

There is no appreciable relationship between search engine optimization and the performance of fast-food companies.

In this hypothesis, search engine optimization (SEO) was designated as the independent variable, while the performance of fast-food companies served as the dependent variable. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis was utilized to examine the relationship between these variables, as presented in Table 4.

The results in Table 4 indicated that the computed r -value of 0.58 exceeded the critical r -value of 0.137 at the 0.05 level of significance with 222 degrees of freedom. Consequently,

the null hypothesis was rejected. This finding therefore demonstrates that search engine optimization has a statistically significant relationship with the performance of fast-food companies.

Table 4: Search engine optimization (SEO) and fast-food companies' performance (N=224)

Variable	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value
Search engine optimization	3175	6153	74646	0.58*
Performance of fast-food companies	3091	5462		

*Significant at .05 level, critical $r=137$, $df=222$

5.1 Results' Summary

Drawing from the research objectives, the study yielded some key findings:

1. On Social Media and Fast-Food Companies' Performance

The study established a statistically significant relationship on this. This outcome agrees with the findings of Wisetsri *et al.* (2021), which observed that social media marketing significantly influences the performance of fast-food businesses in developing economies. They noted that digital marketing strategies enhanced brand's visibility and customers' engagement. Their research further revealed that customers exhibit greater loyalty and advocacy toward brands that actively engage them on social media, while email campaigns featuring personalized offers and incentives significantly contribute to increased sales.

2. Email Marketing and Performance of Fast-Food Companies

The analysis revealed a substantial correlation between email marketing and the performance of fast-food companies. This finding corroborates McCloskey (2016), who emphasized that email marketing serves as a vital communication channel for fast-food enterprises aiming to establish and sustain close relationships with their customers.

3. SEO and Fast-Food Companies' Performance

The study also found a significant positive relationship between SEO and fast-food companies' performance. This supports the argument by Godey (2016), who asserted that SEO enhances an organization's online visibility, positioning its website strategically at crucial points in the consumer purchasing process, thereby improving accessibility and conversion.

5.2 Conclusion

The central aim of this research was to examine the relationship between digital marketing practices and the performance of fast-food companies in developing economies. The findings demonstrate that digital marketing practices play a pivotal role in improving business outcomes. The study concludes that there exists a substantial positive correlation between these online marketing strategies and the overall performance of fast-food enterprises. Companies that effectively adopt and integrate these digital marketing approaches are more likely to experience enhanced customer acquisition, retention, and satisfaction, leading to improved organizational performance and competitive advantage.

5.3 Recommendations

Hence, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Fast-food companies should actively leverage social media platforms to establish interactive communication channels that foster engagement and relationship-building with customers.
2. Organizations should develop efficient and responsive customer complaint-handling mechanisms to ensure prompt feedback and improved service satisfaction.
3. Fast-food companies should invest in robust search engine optimization strategies to enhance online visibility, facilitate customer interaction, and strengthen their understanding of customer needs and preferences.

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