


## THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS ON FAST-FOOD CONSUMPTION

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## **Abstract**

*This study examines the influence of social media advertisements on fast-food consumption in Arusha city. The researchers adopted a case study research design with both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Questionnaires and interviews collected data from fast-food restaurants and customers. In data analysis, the study employed descriptive analysis for quantitative data, while content analysis was employed for qualitative data. The study used 92 samples from 1118 fast-food restaurants as representatives of the population selected randomly and customers frequenting the restaurants. Findings revealed that social media advertising influenced the majority of customers to consume fast foods. Moreover, the findings showed that fast-food businesses that do not use social media advertising lag far behind and struggle in the competitive industry. Therefore, this study recommends that all fast-food business owners use social media to advertise their products and communicate with potential customers to boost their sales and growth. Future researchers need to study other advertising strategies that influence fast-food consumption in Arusha and other parts of Tanzania.*

**Keywords:** *Advertisements, fast-food consumption, social media, social media advertisements, social media influence*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Advertising as an industry grew together with businesses during the industrial revolution in America (Pardun, 2013). Commercial television developed after World War II. By the late 1940s, cities like New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles had functioning local television stations (O'Barr, 2010). This history of advertising technique chronicles the movement from face-to-face selling messages to the stilted, repetitive, printed advertisements of early newspapers to the dynamism of mass communication by radio and television to the re-personalisation of messages via cable, internet, and direct mail (O'Barr, 2010). According to Kobayashi (2011), advertising began with sign painting and large advertisements painted on buildings and has developed rapidly in the last few years in Tanzania, along with television, radio, newspapers, magazines, the Internet, and cinema (El-busaidy, 2014).

Fast food originated in Southern Carolina during the late 1940s and later flourished all over the United States of America. Iranian people spend almost 366 million dollars on fast-food consumption yearly, although the citizens prefer to have home-cooked meals, and fast-food operations have an expensive menu (Ghoochani et al., 2018). The consumption of different types of fast food is increasingly growing in all parts of the world, both in developed and developing countries (Meza et al., 2020). Because of the changes and transitions in people's lifestyles and dietary habits, an increasing number of people from different age groups, particularly adolescents and young adults, are inclined toward consuming fast food (Majabadi et al., 2016). Fast-food businesses like Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Pizza Hut and Bugger House use social media and television for advertising and promoting their businesses to potential consumers (Meza et al., 2020). Consumers require on-demand and immediate access to information at their convenience and are turning more frequently to various types of social media to conduct their information searches and make purchasing decisions (Muoria, 2012).

Several studies have been conducted on social media and fast food consumption worldwide (Gaber et al., 2019; Franz et al., 2019; Janssen et al., 2018; Meza et al., 2020; Stieger, 2019). However, these studies mainly focused on one social media, Facebook and were conducted when the use of social media had not become common among Internet users. In addition, there are limited studies on the influence of social media advertisements on fast-food consumption in Tanzania. Therefore, this study investigates the influence of social media advertisements on fast-food consumption in Arusha city

since it is a cheaper and more modern advertising strategy.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section presents the review of literature related to the subject under study, presented by authors, scholars and other researchers. The section is organised into two main areas, namely theoretical and empirical literature reviews.

### **2.1 Theoretical Literature Review**

There are different theories developed to explain the relationship between advertisement and consumption of products. This study adopted cognitive response theory and consumer sovereignty theory.

#### **Cognitive Response Theory**

The theory was defined by Anthony Greenwald in 1968, assuming that advertising can influence the relative importance that individuals attach to various product attributes, purchase decisions being purely rational (Thorson & Moore, 1996). Cognitive response means the response in individuals generated on seeing an ad evaluated in the light of past experiences, knowledge and attitudes. The model considers two categories of goods: customer experiences and those related to the searching process (Nichifor, 2014). The theory links this study since it explains the ability advertising has to influence the importance a consumer can attach to a product and its attributes. The change in consumers' perceptions and beliefs results from learning through advertisements.

#### **Consumer Sovereignty Theory**

This study adopted the consumer sovereignty theory by William Harold Hutt in 1936. Under this economic theory, consumption was the sole end and purpose of all production, and the producer's welfare ought to be attended to as far as it is necessary for promoting the welfare of the consumer. Satisfaction of consumers' needs and wants is the ultimate economic goal, and that consumer desires rule the economy is called consumer sovereignty (Goodwin et al., 2018). The theory of consumer sovereignty implies that the consumer knows what is best for him, and his or her preferences will decide the allocation of scarce resources in the economy. It assumes that the consumer can decide which one is preferable to the others and then rank them in terms of preference. This theory is directly linked to the study on the influence of social media advertising on fast-food consumption, such that fast-food operators need to advertise their products to influence consumers' decisions since there are many choices a consumer can opt for.

### **2.2 Empirical Literature Review**

According to Muoria (2012), the adoption of social media networks as an innovative new market entry in Kenya realised that KFC was able to access a large audience due to social media marketing and other marketing tools in Kenya and other countries it exists. The study successfully showed the relationship between social media advertising and fast-food consumption but was based in Kenya and only on KFC and no other parts of East Africa and other fast-food businesses other than KFC.

Leonidou et al. (2014) conducted a study on the contribution of an advertisement to increasing sales performance and discovered that advertisement plays a great role in promoting products of Nyanza Bottling Company Limited to create awareness and boost sales of their products. However, the study showed the contribution of advertisements to sales performance but failed to evaluate customers' perceptions of social media advertising strategy on consumption and boosting sales.

According to Chaubey, Sharma and Pant (2013), 63.2% of women consumers decide to purchase the advertised product after watching television advertisements. Kaur and Hundal (2017) stated that one of the major techniques used by advertisers to influence consumers' perception includes the repetition of advertisements where a product is advertised frequently to give the product popularity.

According to Anand (2011), determinants impacting consumer's food choice concerning fast-food consumption in India, people prefer eating out or buying fast food since it is cheap, convenient, tasty and above all, heavily promoted. The researcher concluded that fast-food marketers drove a huge part of the shift in consumer patterns. However, the research did not explain to what extent advertising affects consumption compared to other influencing factors. A study by Sharma and Sharma (2019) indicated that 96% of urban Indians consume food from takeaway restaurants once a month and 37% of these adult Indian consumers do so at least once a week, making India one of the top ten countries among 28 surveyed across the globe in terms of frequency of eating fast-food.

Jaiswal and Gupta (2015) stated that people tried certain products after watching a celebrity advertise that particular product. The informants acknowledged that the appeal of the celebrity in the advertisement was instrumental in their trying out and in the eventual adoption of these products. The findings revealed how advertising flares up the desires of most consumers (Jaiswal & Gupta, 2015).

Another study on the determinants of takeaway and fast-food consumption by Janssen et al. (2018) discovered that multiple techniques and channels, including advertisements and television, deliver food messages to a wide demographic. Fast food has been seen as a key aspect of youth identity, a way of expressing a youthful self and lifestyle image, whereas healthy food has shown to conflict with the normal image of being young (Janssen et al., 2018). A study based in western countries restricts comparability with consumption in middle-income countries.

Ghoochani et al. (2018) analysed the factors influencing Iranian consumers' attitudes toward fast-food consumption. This study realised that even though television and other mass media have a wider reach, consumers trust government publications more and can be used more effectively in educating consumers. However, in this study, advertising was not explained clearly as one of the factors influencing fast-food consumption in Iran.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

#### **The Area of Study**

A study area is a location for data collection (Daniel & Harland, 2017). This study was conducted in Arusha city, Tanzania. The study area provided easy access to where the researchers reside and work. The location of the study area was of great importance since it minimised the research costs and saved time (Mbise, 2014).

#### **Research Approach**

This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. This mixed research approach provided a stronger understanding and interpretation of the results, explored and collected detailed information from natural settings and achieved satisfying results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In addition, applying qualitative and quantitative methods in data collection and analysis allowed for efficient maximisation of results and minimised defaults (Dubey & Kothari, 2022).

## **Research Design**

A research design means the arrangement of conditions for the collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in the procedure (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Kothari, 2013). The researchers used a case study since it allows an in-depth investigation of the problem in more than one case and enables the discovery of a variety of factors potentially related to the study (Dubey & Kothari, 2022).

## **Target Population and Sample Size**

The targeted population was 1118 registered fast-food restaurants in Arusha city (Arusha City Council, 2021). The researchers targeted the fast-food operators in the city and their respective customers to obtain all the information relevant to this study. The study used 92 samples from 1118 restaurants using the formula by Yamane (1973), as seen in Equation (1). The formula provides the sample size (n) using the known population size (N) and margin of error (e) as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)} \quad (1)$$

## **Data Collection**

The researchers employed quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data and used an explanatory sequential design procedure (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The study administered a semi-structured questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions to obtain data from respondents. The researchers also conducted face-to-face interviews to collect additional data from participants that could not be captured via a questionnaire (Lubua, 2018). Key informants included fast-food restaurants' management, staff and fast-food customers.

## **Data Analysis**

The study analysed quantitative data using the descriptive analysis method with the help of SPSS. In addition, the study used figures to summarise the obtained data for easy analysis and interpretation (Marczyk, DeMatteo, & Festinger, 2005). Also, the study analysed data collected from interviews using qualitative content analysis.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Researchers introduced themselves to respondents using a letter from the Institute of Accountancy Arusha. This study also acknowledged the work of others by citing and referencing. Also, the researchers avoided offensive and discriminatory words throughout the study. Additionally, the researchers observed respondents' confidentiality to give them confidence in providing all related information that helped get results.

## **Validity and Reliability**

To ensure the validity of this study, the researchers used more than one data collection method and involved different sources of information in allowing valid data usage and good results (Lubua, Semlambo & Pretorius, 2017). In addition, to ensure the reliability of the study, the researchers identified the study's limitations and how to address them and conducted a pilot study before the actual research.

## **4.0 FINDINGS**

This study examined the influence of social media advertisements on fast-food consumption. The study organises the findings into two parts, namely quantitative and qualitative. Figures represent quantitative findings to ensure wide readability and understanding. Illustrative quotes accompany the

presentation of qualitative findings.

### **Influence of Social Media Advertisement on Fast-Food Consumption**

Through questionnaires, the study asked respondents if they followed fast-food restaurants on social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The results unveiled that the majority of the fast-food customers, 81%, followed the fast-food restaurants on social media. On the other hand, 19% of the respondents did not follow these restaurants on social networking sites. Figure 4.1 summarises the findings of the following fast-food restaurants on social media.

**Do you follow fast food restaurants on social networking sites?**

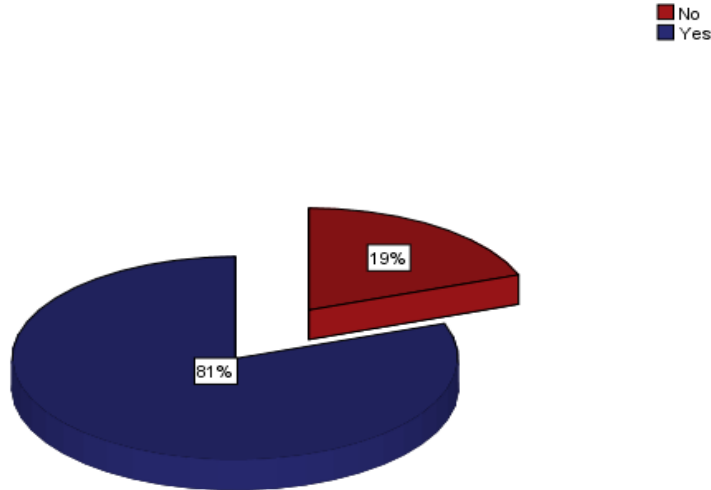


Figure 4.1: Social networking sites following  
Source: Authors' Field Data (2021)

The study asked the respondents how often they visited the restaurants they saw on these networking sites. The results indicated that 41% of the participants visited the restaurants often after viewing their social networking sites, 26% always visited, 31% rarely, and only 3% never visited the restaurants after seeing adverts on social media. Figure 4.2 provides a summary of the results.

How often do you visit the restaurants you see on social networking sites sites?

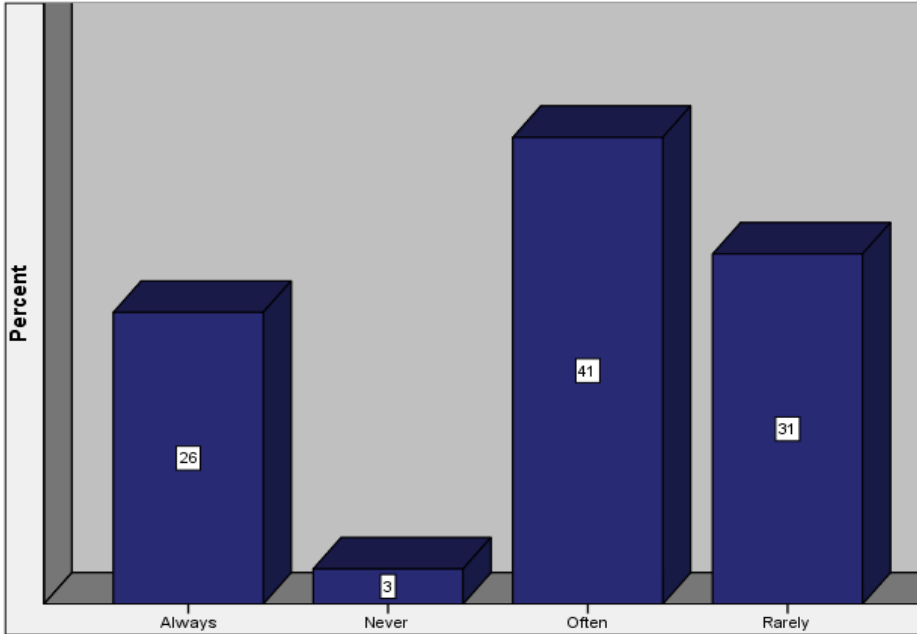


Figure 4.2: Fast-food restaurant visits  
Source: Authors' Field Data (2021)

The study also asked the respondents to indicate how social media advertising influenced fast-food consumption. Results indicated that 35% of the respondents consumed fast food due to the influence of social media by 76%-100%. Furthermore, 28% of the respondents stated that the influence of social media made them consume fast food by 51%-75%, 21% agreed that social media influenced them to consume fast food by 26%-50%, and lastly, only 16% fell into the 0%-25% category as the extent to which social media influenced them to consume fast-food. Figure 4.3 represents the results.

To what % do social media advertising influence you to consume fast food?

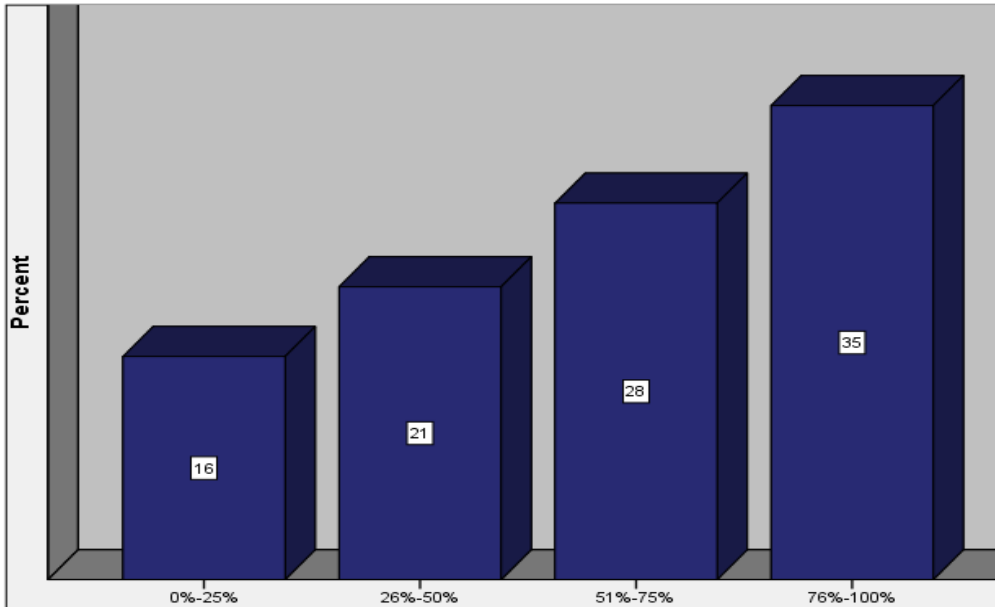


Figure 4.3: Influence of social media advertising  
Source: Authors' Field Data (2021)

### **Advertisement Knowledge and Usage**

Using interviews, most restaurant owners and managers reported that they were aware of advertising and its importance in increasing consumption and boosting sales. The findings revealed that fast-food business owners understand the power of advertisement in influencing consumption and changing customers' choices and preferences. One of the informants explained that:

*"...You know there are so many people in the city who prepare and sell fast food. Others even prepare them at home and do deliveries to customers at home and their offices. So, if I do not advertise my business to people, it will be difficult to survive in the fast-food business."*

### **Influence of Social Media Advertisements**

Most study informants commented that they favoured social media advertising compared to other advertising methods. Respondents revealed that using social media to advertise their businesses was less costly and covered a large audience. Interviewees also iterated that traditional advertising methods such as television and radio commercials, outdoor advertisements, printed adverts and participating in promotional events were costly for their businesses besides creating monotony in highly competitive media. They also explained that social media is very instant and interactive. One respondent from the restaurants said:

*"...We use other means like flyers and magazines, but our main focus is on the Instagram social media account. Through Instagram, we can reach many people and use visual displays to attract customers into visiting our restaurants without incurring much cost."*

Another informant stated:

*"...Everyone now searches for places to visit and eat online or asks a friend to share a page displaying good food on social media. When a customer visits and is satisfied, he or she can comment on social media positively, and only that comment is enough to convince many other readers to visit our restaurant and call for delivery."*

A manager from a restaurant also explained:

*"We use social media ads for advertising, and we get many customers from there. When people with influence, such as celebrities, post our business on their social media platforms, it is enough to obtain the public's trust and see growth. Social media is the most used advertising tool nowadays. Everyone opts for the Instagram and Facebook accounts to connect with customers and compete with other businesses ..."*

Another informant from one of the restaurants asserted:

*"...we advertise using all the means possible. Social media advertising offers much more results, but the rest of other methods help, and we do not take them lightly."*

Also, staff commented:

*"Since we started advertising our business on social by posting pictures of the interior design and décor, presentable food serving and display affordable prices, and our business has grown..."*

## **5.0 DISCUSSION**

The fast-food business is undoubtedly a growing sector in the Tanzanian economy and does contribute to the country's economic growth. As Anand (2011) discussed, people prefer eating out or buying fast food since it is cheap, convenient, tasty and, above all, heavily promoted.



The Cognitive Response Theory indicates that advertising can influence the relative importance individuals attach to various product attributes, making purchase decisions purely rational. Therefore, social media advertising is crucial in giving the importance of their product in the minds of consumers and affects their purchase decision.

The findings unveiled a positive relationship between social media advertisement and fast-food consumption. Most business operators know the importance advertisements hold in increasing consumption and boosting sales. Kaur and Hundal (2017) indicated that the positive attitude of consumers assesses consumers' switching behaviour and purchase behaviour towards advertising strategies used by marketers. Even small, fast fast-food businesses must become well informed on the affordable advertising strategies they can use to boost sales. Due to massive competition, it is becoming almost impossible to survive in the industry without an effort to secure a productive share of customers through advertising.

The research findings indicate that most customers are the youth and middle-aged individuals who prefer to eat these types of foods, have no time to cook at home or find joy in eating out with family and friends. The ready availability, taste, low cost, marketing strategies and peer pressure make them popular with children, adolescents and the youth (Kaushik et al., 2011). Due to this age dominance, it becomes important for business owners to use an adequate advertising method that can reach a large audience.

Study findings also unveiled that social media advertising effectively reaches more customers and creates a good public image. The fast-food business operators and customers spoke highly of social media advertising as an appropriate strategy for advertising fast-food products and services. Due to technological advancements and in a world where many people use smartphones, social media accounts have become effective platforms for communicating with potential customers (Mbise, 2021). The findings are in line with Muoria (2012), who discussed the adoption of social media networks as an innovative new market entry in Kenya and realised that KFC was able to access a large audience due to social media marketing and other marketing tools in Kenya and other countries it exists.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This paper assessed the influence of social media advertisements on fast-food consumption. Due to the mushrooming of fast-food businesses in Arusha city, social media advertising has become necessary to boost sales and survive in the competitive industry. The study established that using advertisements has resulted in more consumption and business growth. Advertisement has also allowed consumers to have a wide range of choices and has made it easy to decide where to visit and what to consume. The paper concludes that social media advertising has much more influence on fast-food consumption than other advertising strategies such as print and outdoor advertising due to technological advancement. However, using more than one advertising strategy results in much more of the expected outcomes. Therefore, even small fast-food businesses must become aware of the effective means of advertising and use them to grow and contribute to the city and Tanzanian economies.

Based on the findings of this study, the government and policymakers at various levels of management can use these findings to develop policies that would promote the adoption of social media advertising

by companies. The policies may serve as guidelines in assisting the management in knowing what procedures to follow when deciding to adopt a social media advertising strategy. The researchers recommend that there is a need to use other advertisement strategies with social media to maximise the results advertisement has on fast-food consumption and change customers' perception towards a product or a particular fast-food restaurant. The researchers also recommend further studies on other advertising strategies such as broadcasting, marketing agencies, and outdoor advertisement and assess their influence on fast-food consumption.

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