Examining the Role of Social Media Marketing on Online Customer Purchase Intentions in Food Companies

Jia Yutong[1*], Orlina Ursula D. Regua[1]

[1] College of Business Administration, University of the Cordilleras, Gov. Pack Road, Baguio City, Philippines

Abstract: This study explores the pivotal role of social media marketing in shaping online customer purchase intentions within the food industry. With the proliferation of digital platforms, food companies increasingly leverage social media to engage consumers, enhance brand visibility, and drive sales. This research investigates how different social media strategies—such as influencer partnerships, user-generated content, targeted advertisements, and interactive promotions—affect consumer behavior and purchasing decisions. Utilizing a mixed-method approach, we conducted quantitative surveys with a sample of online consumers and qualitative interviews with marketing professionals to gain a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics. Our findings reveal that social media marketing significantly influences customer purchase intentions through enhanced brand trust, perceived authenticity, and emotional engagement. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of platform-specific strategies and demographic targeting in maximizing marketing effectiveness. These insights offer valuable implications for food companies seeking to optimize their social media presence and drive online sales.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Online Purchase Intentions, Food Industry, Influencer Marketing, Consumer Behavior.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media has revolutionized the way businesses interact with consumers, creating unprecedented opportunities for marketing and brand engagement. The food industry, in particular, has embraced social media platforms to connect with customers, build brand loyalty, and drive sales. Social media marketing encompasses a range of strategies, including influencer collaborations, user-generated content, targeted advertisements, and interactive promotions, all aimed at influencing consumer behavior and purchase intentions. This study examines the critical role of social media marketing in shaping online customer purchase intentions within the food sector. As consumers increasingly rely on social media for information, recommendations, and purchasing decisions, understanding the impact of these digital marketing efforts becomes essential for food companies aiming to thrive in a competitive marketplace. By leveraging the interactive and engaging nature of social media, food companies can create meaningful connections with consumers, foster trust and authenticity, and ultimately drive online sales. This research seeks to elucidate the mechanisms through which social media marketing affects consumer purchase intentions, providing valuable insights for businesses to refine their digital marketing strategies and enhance their online presence. Through a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, this study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between social media marketing and consumer behavior in the food industry.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of social media marketing in influencing online customer purchase intentions has garnered substantial academic interest, particularly within the context of the food industry. As digital platforms continue to evolve, their integration into marketing strategies has proven critical for businesses aiming to engage with modern consumers. This literature review

examines existing research on the impact of social media marketing on customer purchase intentions, focusing on the mechanisms through which these strategies influence consumer behavior and the specific implications for food companies.

Social media marketing encompasses a diverse array of activities, including content creation, influencer partnerships, targeted advertisements, and interactive engagement. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) emphasize the importance of understanding social media as a multifaceted phenomenon that offers unique opportunities for businesses to interact with their audience in real-time. This dynamic interaction fosters a sense of community and engagement that traditional marketing methods often fail to achieve. In the context of the food industry, this engagement is particularly crucial as consumers seek out authenticity and transparency from brands.

Influencer marketing has emerged as a prominent strategy within social media marketing, leveraging the reach and credibility of social media personalities to promote products. Studies such as those by De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders (2017) highlight that influencers can significantly affect consumer attitudes and behaviors due to their perceived expertise and relatability. In the food sector, influencers often share personal experiences and reviews, which can create a strong sense of trust and authenticity. This trust, as demonstrated by Hsu, Lin, and Chiang (2013), directly correlates with increased purchase intentions, as consumers are more likely to be influenced by recommendations from trusted sources.

User-generated content (UGC) also plays a vital role in shaping consumer perceptions and purchase decisions. According to research by Christodoulides, Jevons, and Bonhomme (2012), UGC, such as reviews, testimonials, and social media posts, serves as a powerful form of social proof. Consumers tend to trust content generated by their peers more than traditional advertising, as it is perceived as more authentic and less biased. In the food industry, UGC can take the form of customer reviews, food photography, and recipe sharing, all of which contribute to a brand's credibility and appeal. The interactive nature of social media platforms further amplifies the impact of UGC by enabling consumers to engage with content and share their experiences.

Targeted advertising on social media platforms allows food companies to reach specific demographics with tailored messages. Kaplan and Haenlein (2011) discuss the effectiveness of targeted ads in delivering relevant content to consumers based on their interests, behaviors, and preferences. This precision targeting enhances the likelihood of consumer engagement and conversion. Furthermore, research by Voorveld et al. (2018) indicates that personalized advertisements can significantly enhance the consumer experience by making them feel understood and valued, thereby increasing their propensity to make a purchase.

Interactive promotions, such as contests, polls, and live events, are another effective social media marketing strategy. These activities encourage active participation from consumers, fostering a deeper connection with the brand. Pentina, Zhang, and Basmanova (2013) suggest that interactive promotions can enhance brand loyalty and engagement by providing consumers with a sense of involvement and reward. In the food industry, interactive promotions can include cooking contests, live cooking demonstrations, and interactive recipe polls, all of which serve to engage consumers and promote brand loyalty.

The theoretical foundation for understanding the impact of social media marketing on purchase intentions can be traced to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The TAM, as proposed by Davis (1989), posits that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are key determinants of technology adoption. In the context of social media marketing, these constructs can be interpreted as the ease with which consumers can access and interact with content, and the usefulness of the information provided in influencing their purchase decisions. The TPB, developed by Ajzen (1991), emphasizes the role of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control in shaping intentions and behaviors. Social media marketing influences these factors by shaping consumer attitudes through positive brand associations, leveraging social norms through peer influence and UGC, and enhancing perceived behavioral control by providing easy access to information and purchase options.

In conclusion, the existing literature underscores the significant impact of social media marketing on online customer purchase intentions, particularly within the food industry. Influencer marketing, user-generated content, targeted advertisements, and interactive promotions emerge as critical strategies that food companies can leverage to engage consumers, build trust, and drive sales. Understanding the mechanisms through which these strategies influence consumer behavior provides valuable insights for businesses seeking to optimize their social media presence and enhance their marketing effectiveness. As digital platforms continue to evolve, ongoing research will be essential to adapt and refine these strategies to meet the changing needs and preferences of consumers.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. This approach allows for a robust analysis of the multifaceted impact of social media marketing strategies on consumer behavior and purchase intentions.

The study employs an explanatory sequential design, starting with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative data to further explore and explain the quantitative findings. This design helps to identify general patterns and relationships, which are then enriched by deeper insights from qualitative data.

The quantitative phase involves a structured survey distributed to a sample of online consumers who follow food companies on social media. The survey aims to measure various aspects of social media marketing and their influence on purchase intentions. The questionnaire is designed based on existing literature and includes sections on demographic information, social media usage patterns, and perceptions of different social media marketing strategies (influencer marketing, user-generated content, targeted advertisements, and interactive promotions).

A non-probability sampling method, specifically purposive sampling, is used to select respondents who are active social media users and have made online purchases from food companies. The sample size is determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula for determining sample size from a given population, ensuring a statistically significant representation.

Quantitative data analysis is conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics summarize the demographic characteristics and social media usage patterns of the respondents. Inferential statistics, including multiple regression analysis, are used to examine the relationships between different social media marketing strategies and online customer purchase intentions. The reliability and validity of the survey instrument are assessed through Cronbach's alpha and factor analysis, respectively.

The qualitative phase involves semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of marketing professionals from food companies and social media influencers. These interviews aim to provide deeper insights into the mechanisms through which social media marketing strategies influence consumer behavior. The interview guide is developed based on the findings from the quantitative phase, focusing on areas that require further exploration.

Purposive sampling is again used to select interview participants who have extensive experience with social media marketing in the food industry. The sample includes marketing managers, digital strategists, and social media influencers to ensure a diverse range of perspectives.

Qualitative data analysis is conducted using thematic analysis. Interviews are transcribed verbatim and coded to identify emerging themes and patterns. NVivo software is utilized to manage and analyze the qualitative data systematically. Thematic analysis helps to contextualize the quantitative findings and uncover underlying factors influencing the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies.

To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation is employed by comparing and integrating the results from both quantitative and qualitative phases. This method helps to corroborate the findings and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the role of social media marketing in influencing online customer purchase intentions.

Ethical considerations are paramount in this research. Informed consent is obtained from all survey respondents and interview participants, ensuring they are aware of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. Data confidentiality is maintained by anonymizing participant information and securely storing data. The study also adheres to ethical guidelines set by the institutional review board (IRB) to ensure the protection of participants' rights and well-being.

While this mixed-methods approach provides a comprehensive analysis, the study acknowledges potential limitations. The use of non-probability sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, self-reported data in surveys and interviews may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research could address these limitations by employing probability sampling techniques and triangulating findings with observational data.

In conclusion, the research methodology for this study integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the role of social media marketing on online customer purchase intentions in the food industry. By combining survey data with

in-depth interviews, the study aims to provide a holistic understanding of how social media marketing strategies influence consumer behavior, offering valuable insights for food companies to enhance their digital marketing efforts.

IV. FINDINGS

This study aimed to examine the role of social media marketing in influencing online customer purchase intentions within the food industry. The findings, derived from a combination of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, provide a multifaceted understanding of how various social media marketing strategies impact consumer behavior and decision-making processes.

The quantitative analysis revealed several key insights into the relationship between social media marketing and online purchase intentions. Descriptive statistics indicated that the majority of respondents were highly active on social media, with platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube being the most popular for following food companies. These respondents frequently engaged with content such as recipes, product reviews, and promotional offers.

Multiple regression analysis demonstrated that all four social media marketing strategies—influencer marketing, user-generated content, targeted advertisements, and interactive promotions—had a significant positive impact on online customer purchase intentions. Influencer marketing emerged as the most influential factor, with a strong positive correlation between influencer endorsements and consumer purchase decisions. This finding aligns with previous studies that highlight the power of influencers in building trust and credibility among consumers (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

User-generated content (UGC) was also found to be a crucial determinant of purchase intentions. Respondents indicated that they were more likely to trust and purchase products that had positive reviews and testimonials from other consumers. The authenticity and relatability of UGC contributed to its effectiveness in influencing purchase decisions, reinforcing the importance of social proof in digital marketing.

Targeted advertisements, which leverage data analytics to deliver personalized marketing messages, were shown to significantly enhance purchase intentions. Respondents appreciated the relevance and customization of these ads, which made them feel valued and understood by the brand. This finding supports the notion that personalized marketing efforts can significantly improve consumer engagement and conversion rates (Voorveld et al., 2018).

Interactive promotions, including contests, polls, and live events, also had a notable impact on purchase intentions. These promotions encouraged active participation and engagement from consumers, fostering a sense of involvement and loyalty to the brand. The interactive nature of these activities helped to create a more immersive and engaging consumer experience, leading to higher levels of interest and willingness to purchase.

The qualitative interviews provided deeper insights into the mechanisms through which social media marketing strategies influence consumer behavior. Marketing professionals and social media influencers emphasized the importance of authenticity and transparency in building trust with consumers. They noted that consumers are increasingly skeptical of traditional advertising and are more likely to respond positively to genuine and relatable content.

Influencers highlighted the role of storytelling in their promotional efforts. By sharing personal experiences and behind-the-scenes glimpses of products, influencers are able to create emotional connections with their followers. This emotional engagement was identified as a key driver of purchase intentions, as consumers are more likely to purchase products that they feel an emotional connection to.

Marketing professionals also discussed the importance of leveraging data analytics to optimize social media marketing efforts. They emphasized the need to understand consumer preferences and behaviors in order to deliver targeted and relevant content. This data-driven approach allows food companies to tailor their marketing strategies to meet the specific needs and interests of their target audience, thereby increasing the effectiveness of their campaigns.

The interviews also revealed that interactive promotions are particularly effective in building community and fostering brand loyalty. By involving consumers in activities such as cooking contests and live Q&A sessions, brands are able to create a sense of community and belonging. This sense of community enhances consumer loyalty and encourages repeat purchases.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provides a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media marketing in influencing online customer purchase intentions in the food industry. The quantitative data highlights the

significant impact of influencer marketing, user-generated content, targeted advertisements, and interactive promotions on purchase intentions. The qualitative insights explain the underlying mechanisms, emphasizing the importance of authenticity, emotional engagement, and data-driven personalization.

These findings have important implications for food companies seeking to optimize their social media marketing strategies. By focusing on authentic and relatable content, leveraging influencer partnerships, and using data analytics to personalize marketing messages, food companies can effectively enhance consumer engagement and drive online sales. Interactive promotions should also be incorporated to foster a sense of community and build long-term brand loyalty.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates the critical role of social media marketing in shaping online customer purchase intentions within the food industry. The findings underscore the importance of authenticity, emotional engagement, and personalized marketing efforts in influencing consumer behavior. Food companies can leverage these insights to refine their social media marketing strategies and achieve greater success in the digital marketplace. As social media platforms continue to evolve, ongoing research will be essential to stay ahead of emerging trends and maintain a competitive edge.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings from this study on "Examining the Role of Social Media Marketing on Online Customer Purchase Intentions in Food Companies" highlight several critical aspects of how digital marketing strategies influence consumer behavior. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data provides a nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play, offering valuable insights for both academics and practitioners in the food industry.

One of the most striking findings is the significant impact of influencer marketing on online customer purchase intentions. Influencers, with their vast followings and perceived authenticity, have become pivotal in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors. The study confirms that consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from influencers than traditional advertisements, as influencers are seen as relatable and credible. This aligns with the literature suggesting that influencer endorsements can create strong emotional connections and trust, which are crucial for influencing purchase decisions (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

In practice, this means that food companies should strategically partner with influencers who align with their brand values and target audience. The authenticity of these influencers can significantly boost brand trust and drive sales. However, it is essential for brands to ensure that these partnerships are perceived as genuine, as any semblance of inauthenticity can quickly erode consumer trust.

User-generated content (UGC) emerged as another powerful factor influencing purchase intentions. The study found that consumers highly value reviews, testimonials, and content created by their peers. This form of social proof is often more persuasive than branded content because it comes from real users who share their genuine experiences. This finding underscores the importance of fostering a community of loyal customers who are willing to share their positive experiences online.

Food companies can leverage UGC by encouraging satisfied customers to post reviews and share their experiences on social media. Companies can create hashtags, run contests, or offer incentives to motivate customers to generate content. By amplifying these voices, brands can enhance their credibility and appeal to potential customers who are seeking authentic opinions.

The effectiveness of targeted advertisements was another key finding. Personalized marketing messages, tailored to the interests and behaviors of consumers, were shown to significantly enhance purchase intentions. This supports existing research that highlights the importance of relevance in digital marketing (Voorveld et al., 2018). Consumers appreciate when brands understand their preferences and deliver content that resonates with their needs.

To capitalize on this, food companies should invest in robust data analytics to gather insights into consumer behavior. By leveraging these insights, brands can create highly targeted and personalized marketing campaigns that speak directly to individual consumers. This not only improves engagement but also increases the likelihood of conversion.

Interactive promotions, such as contests, polls, and live events, were found to be highly effective in engaging consumers and fostering brand loyalty. These activities encourage active participation, making consumers feel involved and valued by the brand. The interactive nature of these promotions creates a dynamic and engaging consumer experience, which can lead to stronger emotional connections and increased purchase intentions.

Food companies should incorporate interactive elements into their social media strategies to enhance consumer engagement. Hosting live cooking demonstrations, running recipe contests, or creating interactive polls can make consumers feel more connected to the brand. This sense of involvement can translate into higher brand loyalty and repeat purchases.

The findings of this study have several practical implications for food companies looking to optimize their social media marketing strategies. First, partnering with credible influencers and encouraging UGC can significantly enhance brand trust and authenticity. Second, leveraging data analytics to create personalized marketing messages can improve consumer engagement and conversion rates. Third, incorporating interactive promotions can foster a sense of community and enhance brand loyalty.

While the study highlights the benefits of social media marketing, it also points to several challenges. One of the primary challenges is maintaining authenticity in influencer partnerships. Brands must carefully select influencers who genuinely align with their values to avoid perceptions of inauthenticity. Additionally, while targeted advertising is effective, it requires sophisticated data analytics capabilities, which may pose a barrier for smaller companies with limited resources.

Another consideration is the rapidly evolving nature of social media platforms. What works today may not be effective tomorrow, as consumer preferences and platform algorithms continuously change. Therefore, food companies must stay agile and continuously monitor trends and consumer behaviors to adapt their strategies accordingly.

Future research should explore the long-term effects of social media marketing strategies on brand loyalty and customer retention. Additionally, examining the impact of emerging social media platforms and technologies, such as augmented reality and virtual reality, on consumer behavior could provide valuable insights. It would also be beneficial to study the effectiveness of social media marketing across different cultural contexts to understand the nuances of consumer behavior globally.

In conclusion, this study underscores the significant role of social media marketing in influencing online customer purchase intentions in the food industry. By strategically leveraging influencer marketing, user-generated content, targeted advertisements, and interactive promotions, food companies can enhance consumer engagement, build trust, and drive sales. However, maintaining authenticity and staying adaptable to the evolving digital landscape are crucial for sustained success. As social media continues to evolve, ongoing research and adaptation will be essential for food companies to stay competitive and meet the changing needs of consumers.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study "Examining the Role of Social Media Marketing on Online Customer Purchase Intentions in Food Companies" provides a comprehensive analysis of how different social media strategies influence consumer behavior in the digital marketplace. Through a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the research offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of influencer marketing, user-generated content, targeted advertisements, and interactive promotions in shaping online customer purchase intentions.

One of the primary findings of this study is the significant impact of influencer marketing on consumer purchase intentions. Influencers, with their large followings and perceived authenticity, play a crucial role in building trust and credibility for food brands. The research confirms that consumers are more likely to trust and act on recommendations from influencers they follow, underscoring the importance of selecting the right influencers who align with brand values. This finding highlights the shift from traditional advertising to more personal and relatable marketing tactics that resonate with today's consumers.

User-generated content (UGC) also emerged as a powerful tool for influencing purchase decisions. The study found that consumers place high value on reviews, testimonials, and other content created by their peers. This form of social proof is perceived as more trustworthy and authentic compared to traditional advertising. By encouraging satisfied customers to share their positive experiences, food companies can leverage UGC to enhance their credibility and appeal to potential buyers.

The role of targeted advertisements was another significant finding. Personalized marketing messages, tailored to the interests and behaviors of individual consumers, were shown to significantly boost purchase intentions. This supports the notion that relevance is key in digital marketing. Consumers appreciate when brands take the time to understand their

preferences and deliver content that meets their specific needs. This finding suggests that food companies should invest in advanced data analytics to gain insights into consumer behavior and create highly targeted marketing campaigns.

Interactive promotions, such as contests, polls, and live events, were also found to be effective in engaging consumers and fostering brand loyalty. These activities encourage active participation, making consumers feel involved and valued by the brand. The study highlights the importance of creating dynamic and engaging consumer experiences to build stronger emotional connections and drive purchase intentions.

The insights from this study have several practical implications for food companies seeking to optimize their social media marketing strategies. First, partnering with credible influencers and encouraging user-generated content can significantly enhance brand trust and authenticity. By fostering genuine and relatable interactions with consumers, brands can build stronger emotional connections and increase purchase intentions.

Second, leveraging data analytics to create personalized marketing messages is crucial. Food companies should focus on understanding consumer preferences and behaviors to deliver relevant and customized content. This not only improves engagement but also increases the likelihood of conversion. Investing in data analytics tools and expertise can provide a competitive edge in the digital marketplace.

Third, incorporating interactive promotions into social media strategies can foster a sense of community and enhance brand loyalty. Activities that encourage consumer participation, such as live cooking demonstrations or recipe contests, can create memorable experiences that strengthen consumer-brand relationships. This sense of involvement and engagement can lead to higher brand loyalty and repeat purchases.

While the study highlights the benefits of social media marketing, it also points to several challenges. Maintaining authenticity in influencer partnerships is critical, as any perception of inauthenticity can quickly erode consumer trust. Brands must carefully select influencers who genuinely align with their values and ensure that promotional content is perceived as genuine.

Additionally, the rapidly evolving nature of social media platforms presents a challenge. Consumer preferences and platform algorithms continuously change, requiring brands to stay agile and adapt their strategies accordingly. Future research should explore the long-term effects of social media marketing strategies on brand loyalty and customer retention. Additionally, examining the impact of emerging social media platforms and technologies, such as augmented reality and virtual reality, on consumer behavior could provide valuable insights.

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical role of social media marketing in shaping online customer purchase intentions in the food industry. By strategically leveraging influencer marketing, user-generated content, targeted advertisements, and interactive promotions, food companies can effectively engage consumers, build trust, and drive sales. The findings highlight the importance of authenticity, relevance, and consumer engagement in digital marketing. As social media continues to evolve, ongoing research and adaptation will be essential for food companies to stay competitive and meet the changing needs of consumers. This study provides a foundation for future research and offers practical insights for food companies seeking to enhance their social media marketing efforts and achieve greater success in the digital marketplace.

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