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IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH IN FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS

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ABSTRACT

India's fast-food industry has evolved with the changing lifestyles of young Indians. Fast food and eating out are increasing dramatically in India. The advent of the technological economy and the adoption of modern life in India is fast contributing to this growth. According to CRISIL, foreign brands have grabbed 63% share of the India QSR market since McDonald's opened its first Indian outlet in 1996. Fast food is predicted to grow by a value CAGR of 8% at constant 2015 prices during the forecast period. This is expected to be driven by a younger population. E-word of mouth in the fast-food industry can be defined as the electronic dissemination of information, opinions, and recommendations about fast food establishments through online platforms such as social media, review websites, and blogs. the impact of eword of mouth on the fast-food industry is undeniable. Through the proliferation of social media platforms, customers now have the power to shape public perception with their reviews and recommendations. The crucial aspect for fast food companies to effectively utilize E-word of mouth for business growth is to actively engage with customers on various digital platforms. Companies should respond promptly to customer feedback, whether positive or negative, to foster trust and loyalty among consumers. Utilizing social media channels to showcase new menu items, promotions, and interactive content can also generate buzz and increase online engagement. Encouraging satisfied customers to share their experiences on social media by offering incentives or rewards can help spread positive word-of-mouth and attract new customers.

Key Words: Social Media, EWOM, Fast food, Consumer Purchase

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the fast-food industry was established as one of the largest and most dynamic sectors in the world. The fast-food industry is contributing to the global economy by generating \$ 3,145 billion in sales. In 2017, it increased by 3.17%, and the consumption volume reached 506.3 billion transactions (Marketline, 2018a). Most of the growth driven by this industry is led by emerging countries in the Asia Pacific region, with revenues of US \$ 1,277,444 million and , holding a 40.6% share of the global market. doing.

This branch is also known as the Quick Service Restaurant (QSR). Fast food consumers focus on taste, price, and quality in that order. These restaurants focus on a consistent experience, affordability and, most importantly, speed. Fast food has always been associated with urban development whenever historically densely populated areas emerge. Fast food too. Flatbread, falafel and other cooked hot meals can be found on the streets of the ancient and medieval world, and these types of vendors can beconsidered the first type of "fast food".

India's fast-food industry has evolved with the changing lifestyles of young Indians. Fast food and eating out are increasing dramatically in India. The advent of the technological economy and the adoption of modern life in India is fast contributing to this growth. McDonald's entered India in 1996, against the backdrop of a market that was hesitant to try fast food and was still dependent on the "tiffin" lunch boxes many lug to work. But eventually, in these two decades, there has been massive growth. According to CRISIL, foreign brands have grabbed 63% share of the India QSR market since McDonald's opened its first Indian outlet in 1996. Fast food is predicted to grow by a value CAGR of 8% at constant 2015 prices during the forecast period. This is expected to be driven by a younger population. Major players in the Indian fast-food market include Domino, McDonald's, Subway and KFC.

Electronic word of mouth marketing is a low-cost method of marketing that relies solely on consumers. Consumers perceive e-WOM as a reliable and unbiased source of product information. e-WOM conversations has become more accessible thanks to social media websites. People can now discuss brand products and services with their friends and acquaintances. As a means of social influence, an online customer review serves as both an informant and a recommender. As an informant, Online customer reviews act as a reference of additional user-oriented information. As arecommender, they send out either a positive or negative word about the popularity of a product.

Online restaurant review websites offer a quick view of each restaurant's

name, address, and the reviewer's complete view on the quality of food and services. As a result, electronic word of mouth tells potential consumers about a restaurant's possible strengths and weaknesses. When these potential consumers pick a fast-food restaurant, they take internet reviews as expert advice. Most studies discuss basic factors influencing consumer decisions, such as food quality, price, hygiene, food provenance, Service timing, and so on. For example, according to a Restaurant Insights survey, 68 percent of restaurant-goers in the United States visited a restaurant they had never been to before based solely on positive social media reviews.

The objective of the study are as follows:

- To understand the impact of e-WOM on fast food industry.
- To understand the Consumer preference about the different e-WOM platforms while choosing fast food restaurants.
- To analyse the factors of e-WOM impacting on the Consumer Purchase Intention in the Fast-Food Industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's digitally connected world, e-word of mouth has revolutionized the way information is shared and consumed. With the fast-paced nature of the fast-food industry, online platforms play a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and preferences. Social media, review websites, and online forums have become powerful tools for customers to voice their opinions and experiences. The instantaneous nature of e-word of mouth allows for information to be spread rapidly, influencing potential customers' decision-making processes. As the fast-food industry strives to adapt and cater to changing consumer needs and expectations, understanding the impact of e-word of mouth is essential for maintaining a competitive edge. This research aims to explore the effects of e-word of mouth on consumer behavior within the fast-food industry, providing valuable insights for businesses looking to harness the power of online platforms for strategic marketing and brand management.

E-word of mouth in the fast-food industry can be defined as the electronic dissemination of information, opinions, and recommendations about fast food establishments through online platforms such as social media, review websites, and blogs. This form of word-of-mouth communication has become increasingly influential in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors. With the rise of digital technology, consumers now have easy access to a plethora of information at their fingertips, allowing them to quickly share their experiences and recommendations with a wide audience. Research has shown that e-word of mouth can significantly impact consumer decision-making processes, influencing where individuals choose

to dine and what they choose to order. As consumers increasingly turn to online sources for information and recommendations, understanding and managing eword of mouth has become crucial for fast food companies looking to maintain a positive reputation and attract new customers.

E-word of mouth in the digital age plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions within the fast-food industry. With the widespread use of social media platforms, online reviews, and influencer marketing, word of mouth has transitioned from traditional word-of-mouth to eof mouth. Consumers increasingly relv on online reviews and recommendations to inform their choices, making it imperative for fast food companies to actively manage their online reputation and engage with customers on digital platforms. According to a , a positive online reputation can significantly impact consumer trust and loyalty towards a brand, ultimately driving sales and revenue. In contrast, negative e-word of mouth can quickly tarnish a company's image and lead to a decline in customer retention and acquisition. As such, understanding and leveraging e-word of mouth has become essential for fast food businesses looking to thrive in the digital age.

Research has shown that e-word of mouth plays a significant role in shaping consumer behaviour in the fast-food industry. Online reviews, social media posts, and recommendations from influencers can greatly influence consumer perceptions and decisions when it comes to choosing a fast-food restaurant. Positive e-word of mouth can act as a powerful endorsement, attracting new customers and reinforcing loyalty among existing ones. On the contrary, negative e-word of mouth can deter consumers from patronizing a particular fast-food chain and can even lead to a decline in sales. Studies have shown that consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from fellow consumers online rather than traditional advertising. Therefore, it is crucial for fast food companies to actively monitor and manage their online reputation to ensure positive e-word of mouth and maintain a competitive edge in the digital age (Alhamzah Alnoor et al., 2022).

Consumer decision-making in the fast-food industry is significantly influenced by online reviews and ratings. Studies have shown that consumers rely heavily on the experiences shared by others when making purchasing decisions, especially in the context of fast food where choices are abundant, and competition is fierce. Online reviews and ratings act as a form of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), providing potential customers with valuable information about a product or service. Positive reviews can enhance a brand's reputation and increase trust among consumers, ultimately leading to higher sales and customer loyalty. On the other hand, negative reviews can have a detrimental impact on a company's bottom line, as they can deter potential customers from making a purchase. Thus, it is evident that online reviews

and ratings play a crucial role in shaping consumer preferences and behaviours in the fast-food industry. (Alhamzah Alnoor et al., 2022)

2.1 Role of social media influencers in shaping consumer preferences:

Moreover, the exponential growth of social media has paved the way for a new breed of influencers who wield significant power in shaping consumer preferences within the fast-food industry. With millions of followers across various platforms, these social media influencers have the ability to reach a vast audience and promote particular brands or products with ease. Through sponsored content, product placements, or collaborations, influencers can effectively sway the opinions and behaviors of their followers, driving them to make purchasing decisions based on recommendations or endorsements. Research has shown that consumers often trust these influencers more than traditional advertising methods, making their impact on consumer preferences even more profound . As a result, fast food companies are increasingly investing in influencer marketing strategies to leverage the influence and reach of these social media personalities in order to stay relevant and competitive in today's digital age (Nripendra P. Rana et al., 2019).

2.2 Strategies for leveraging E-word of mouth in the fast-food industry:

One effective strategy for leveraging E-word of mouth in the fast-food industry is through influencer partnerships. By collaborating with popular influencers who have a significant online following, fast food brands can reach a wider audience and generate buzz and excitement around their products. These influencers can create engaging content, such as reviews, tutorials, or challenges, that showcase the brand in a positive light and encourage their followers to try it themselves. Additionally, implementing social media contests or promotions can also help amplify E-word of mouth. For example, offering discounts or freebies to customers who share their positive experiences online can incentivize them to spread the word about the brand. By strategically utilizing influencer partnerships and promotions, fast food companies can effectively leverage E-word of mouth to increase brand visibility and drive customer engagement and loyalty (Kimberly A. Whitler, 2021).

2.3 Engaging with online communities and responding to feedback:

Engaging with online communities and responding to feedback is essential in navigating the digital landscape of the fast-food industry. By actively participating in online forums, social media platforms, and review websites, fast food companies can gain valuable insights into customer preferences and perceptions. This engagement allows companies to address customer concerns promptly and effectively, building trust and loyalty among their online fan base. Research has shown that customers are more likely to trust and patronize businesses that engage

with feedback and provide personalized responses . Furthermore, responding to feedback in a timely and transparent manner can help mitigate potential negative word-of-mouth effects and enhance the overall reputation of a fast-food brand (Nina Krey et al., 2017). In conclusion, by proactively engaging with online communities and responding thoughtfully to feedback, fast food companies can leverage e-word of mouth to their advantage and stay ahead in a competitive market.

2.4 Implementing targeted digital marketing campaigns to amplify positive word of mouth:

Furthermore, in order to capitalize on the power of positive word of mouth in the fast-food industry, implementing targeted digital marketing campaigns is essential. By utilizing data analytics and customer insights, companies can identify key influencers and strategically engage with them to amplify positive reviews and recommendations. Leveraging social media platforms, email marketing, and online advertising, companies can effectively reach their target audience and encourage them to spread the word about their positive experiences. Research has shown that consumers are more likely to trust recommendations from friends and family, as well as online reviews from influencers they follow. Therefore, by harnessing the reach and influence of digital platforms, companies can enhance their reputation, increase brand awareness, and ultimately drive sales through positive word of mouth (Nripendra P. Rana et al., 2019).

The pivotal role of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) in influencing consumer perception and behaviour within the fast-food industry is underscored by recent research findings. As highlighted in (Landré et al., 2017), a thorough investigation into the impact of e-WOM, stemming from platforms such as TripAdvisor and the Michelin Guide, on restaurant quality perception reveals the significant implications for customer decision-making processes. By elucidating the dynamics of recommendation influence from both professional reviews and e-WOM, the study offers valuable insights into how such feedback mechanisms shape the perceived quality of fast-food establishments. Moreover, (Dhewi et al., 2023) emphasizes the mediating function of e-WOM in amplifying brand equity through social media marketing, underscoring the interconnectedness between online discourse and consumer perceptions. These findings collectively underscore the profound influence of e-WOM on the fast-food industry, elucidating its potential for enhancing brand reputation and customer engagement.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology comprises of the following steps:

• Building a Research Plan:

Type of Research:

- Exploratory: Pilot survey was used as the initial exploratory step. It
 assisted me in determining whether or not our research would be
 heading in the right direction. Secondary research will also be
 conducted in this case.
- Conclusive: Following the completion of the exploratory research, efforts were directed toward conclusive research using a Closed ended Questionnaire.

The data used in this study has been collected from a survey of students, working professionals and households across India. The questionnaire was composed of three sections,

- The first section asks the respondent about their demographic attributes which includes factors age, occupation, and income.
- The second section asks the respondent to identify his/her social media usage.
- The third section asks the respondent to identify his or her stated preferences among various Characteristics of different e-WOM platform.

• Sampling

- o Sample Frame Social Media users in search of fast-food restaurants.
- o Sampling Technique: Non-Probability sampling.
- Research Instrument: Questionnaire
- Data Collection:
 - o Primary Data: Surveys.
 - Secondary Research: Reading and gaining relevant insights from research papers.
- Scale of Measurement: Likert Scale

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Demographic analysis is a technique used to develop an understanding of the age, gender, marital status, education and monthly income.

Table I Demographic variable

Variables	Category-1	Category- 2	Category-3	Category-4	Category- 5
Age	15-20 years	21-25 years	26-30 years	31-35 years	

Marital status	Single	Married Without children	Married with children		
Education	Ph. D or higher	Master's degree	Bachelor's degree	High school	
Gender	Male	Female			
Monthly Income	Less than 10000	Rs. 10,000- 30000	Rs. 30000- 50000	Above 50000	No Income

Age

38.8% of all the respondents come under the 15-20 years of age.

Table II Age Count

Row Labels	Count of Please specify your age:
15-20 Years	70
21-25 Years	56
26-30 Years	29
31-35 Years	25
Grand Total	180

Marital status

75% of all the respondents comes under the Single category.

Table III Marital Status count

Married with children	35
Married without children	10
Single	135

Education

47.2% of all the respondents have completed the master's degree.

Table IV Education count

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Bachelor's Degree	17
High School	68
Master's Degree	85
Ph.D or higher	10

Gender

52.7% of all the respondents were Female

Table V Gender Count

Row Labels	Count of What is your Gender?
Female	95
Male	85
Grand Total	180

Monthly Income

48.89% of all the respondents are earning Between 30,000-50,000/month.

Table VI Monthly Income Count

Row Labels	Count of Monthly Income
Above Rs. 50,000	12
Less than Rs. 10,000	10
No Income	64
Rs. 10,000 - Rs. 30,000	6
Rs. 30,000 - Rs. 50,000	88

Reliability Test

Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency, that is, how closely related a set of variables are as a group. It is considered to be a measure of scale reliability.

Table VII Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.748	17

The alpha coefficient is 0.748, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency.

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The results of both tests show that your data is suitable for structure detection. The Kaiser MeyerOlkin measurement of sample adequacy is a statistic that shows how much of your component's variance is explained by the underlying variables.

Table vill Ki	Table vill Kivio and Dattlett's Test					
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin	.611					
Measure of Sampling	g					
Adequacy.						
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1430.850				
	df	66				
	Sig.	.000				

Table VIII KMO and Bartlett's Test

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy is 0.611, indicating that a factor analysis with your data would be useful. High values (near 1.0) suggest that a factor analysis might be relevant for your data. If the value is less than 0.50, the factor analysis results are unlikely to be meaningful.

Factor Analysis:

Factor analysis is used to reduce data or detect structure.

- The goal of data reduction is to remove unwanted (highly correlated) variables from the data file, possibly replacing the entire data file with fewer uncorrelated variables.
- The purpose of pattern detection is to examine underlying (or latent) relationships between variables.

Total Variance:

The eigenvalues, or number of variations of the original variables taken into account by each component, are shown in the Total column. The percentage variance column displays the ratioof the variance explained by each component to the overall variance of all variables, expressed as a percentage. The percent variance explained by the first n components is given in the Cumulative Percent column.

Table IX	Total	Variance	Explained

Comp onent	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		Rotation Sums of SquaredLoadings			
	Total			Total	% of	Cumu lative	Total		Cumul ative
		Vari ance	ative %		Vari ance	%		Vari anc	ative %

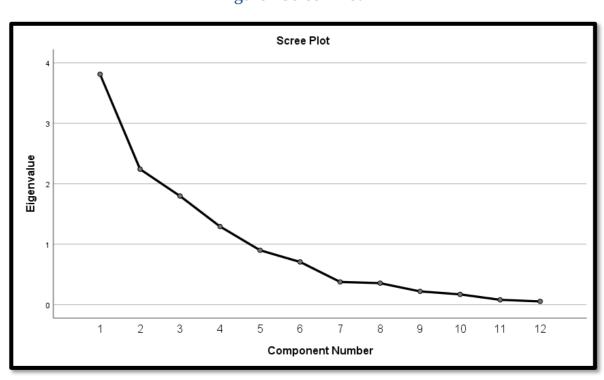
								e	
1	3.811	31.758	31.758	3.811	31.758	31.758	2.995	24.958	24.958
2	2.241	18.674	50.432	2.241	18.674	50.432	2.377	19.811	44.769
3	1.796	14.965	65.398	1.796	14.965	65.398	2.124	17.696	62.466
4	1.292	10.765	76.162	1.292	10.765	76.162	1.644	13.697	76.162
5	.900	7.497	83.659						
6	.706	5.887	89.546						
7	.376	3.130	92.676						
8	.356	2.963	95.639						
9	.220	1.830	97.469						
10	.170	1.416	98.885						
11	.080	.666	99.550						
12	.054	.450	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Only four factors in the initial solution have eigenvalues greater than 1. Together, they account for almost 76.162% of the variability in the original variables.

Screen Plot: The scree plot confirms the choice of four components.

Figure I Screen Plot



Rotated Component Matrix: The rotated component matrix helps you to determine what the components represent.

Table X Rotated Component Matrix^a

		Component			
	1	2	3	4	
Ratings	.736	.403	089	.175	
Follower Count	.762	.139	007	.184	
Comments on the post	.507	.645	333	003	
Pictures/videos/reels of food making or consuming	.209	.908	.177	141	
Restaurant paid ads	056	.914	.063	.269	
Blog posts about the restaurant	.529	252	.476	.007	
Reviews on food deliveryapps	347	083	.807	.059	
Blogs	.888	.041	037	036	
Discussion Forums	.589	.051	.016	.747	
Consumer Review Websites	.021	.062	.145	.918	
Social Media Sites	.179	.203	.759	103	
Specific Video/Photos hosting sites	027	.027	.702	.265	
Extraction Met	hod: Princi	pal Compone	nt		
Analysis. Rota	tion Metho	d: Varimax wi	th		
Kaise	r Normaliz	ation. ^a			

The rotated component matrix shows 4 components. The 1^{st} component is correlated with 4 variables. While 2^{nd} , 3^{rd} and 4^{th} component are correlated with 3, 3, and 2 variables respectively.

a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.

Chi-square cross Tabulation: The Chi-square test is a statistical test used to compare observed results with expected outcomes. The purpose of this test is to determine if the difference between observed and expected data has a relationship between the variables being studied.

Null Hypothesis : If there **does not exist** a consistent level of impact throughout Different e-WOMplatform.

Alternate Hypothesis : If there **exists** a consistent level of impact throughout Different e-WOMplatform.

Pearson's chi-squared value was 0.011 (significant data), less than 0.05. Therefore, we reject null hypothesis. And we can conclude that there is a consistent level of impact across different e-WOM platforms.

Table XI Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance(2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.845 ^a	5	.011
Likelihood Ratio	17.853	5	.003
N of Valid Cases	180		

a. 1 cells (8.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.10.

Table XII Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by	Phi	.287	.011
Nominal	Crame r'sV	.287	.011
N of Valid Cases	6	180	

Perceptual Mapping Using Discriminant Analysis: Perceptual mapping is a very important concept that can guide marketers to identify relevant attributes required for their functioning in the market. The standardized coefficients make it possible to compare variables measured on different scales. Coefficients with large absolute values correspond to variables with greater discriminatory power. The standardized canonical discriminant's function coefficients values were taken to plot attributes whereas the unstandardized canonical discriminant functions at group centroids were taken to plot SMPs.

The Perceptual Map represents the trajectory of the 5 attributes of Content Length, Content Quality, Shareability of Content, Content Reliability, and Easily Saveable Content. This chart shows the layout of 5 different eWOM platforms based on attribute ratings.

Table XIII Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

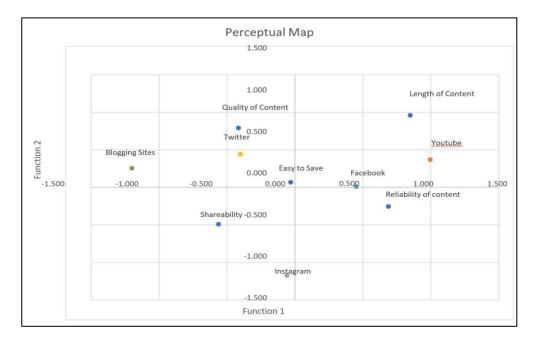
	Function			
	1	2	3	4
Shareability of content	563	491	223	-1.132
Length of Content	.849	.960	627	.719
Quality of content	414	.793	.435	070
Easy to save Content	032	.067	272	.761
Reliability of Content	.688	255	.896	273

Table XIV Functions at Group Centroids

		1		
Social Media Platforms	Function			
	1	2	3	4
Youtube	.996	.369	.094	.174
Instagram	058	-1.173	.211	.033
Twitter	403	.439	.595	122
Facebook	.452	.007	580	193
Blogging Sites	-1.201	.254	455	.148
Unstandardized canonical discriminant functions evaluated at				

group means

Figure II Perceptual Map



5. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Recommendations for fast food companies to effectively utilize E-word of mouth for business growth. The crucial aspect for fast food companies to effectively utilize E-word of mouth for business growth is to actively engage with customers on various digital platforms. Companies should respond promptly to customer feedback, whether positive or negative, to foster trust and loyalty among consumers. Utilizing social media channels to showcase new menu items, promotions, and interactive content can also generate buzz and increase online engagement. Encouraging satisfied customers to share their experiences on social media by offering incentives or rewards can help spread positive word-of-mouth and attract new clientele. Additionally, implementing a robust online reputation management strategy to monitor and address any negative comments or reviews swiftly is essential in maintaining a positive brand image. By leveraging E-word of mouth effectively, fast food companies can amplify their reach and ultimately drive business growth in a competitive industry landscape.

6. CONCLUSION

First, the factorization of 12 variables was examined. Several recognized criteria for calculating correlation were used. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling relevance is 0.611, which is above the generally recommended value of 0.5. Confirm that each item shares a common variance with the other items. For these global indices, factor analysis is deemed appropriate for all 12 items. Initial eigenvalues

indicate that the first four factors account for the variance of 32%, 18%, 14% and 10%, respectively.

While the other factors had initial eigenvalues less than 1. In the final step, a principal component factor analysis of 12 items, using varimax rotation, was conducted, with 4 explanatory factors. 76.16% variance. All items in this analysis have a value greater than 0.5.

Factor 1- Credibility
Ratings
Follower Count
Blog Post about Restaurant
Blogging Site (platform)
Factor 2- Engagement & Awareness
Comments on the Post
Pictures/Video/Reels of Food making or consuming
Restaurant Paid Ads
Factor 3 - Exploration
Reviews
Social Media Sites
Specific Video/Photos hosting sites
Factor 4- Critic Evaluation
Discussion Forum
Consumer Review Sites

In conclusion, the impact of e-word of mouth on the fast food industry is undeniable. Through the proliferation of social media platforms, customers now have the power to shape public perception with their reviews and recommendations. As discussed in this paper, positive e-WOM can lead to increased brand awareness, customer loyalty, and ultimately, sales. However, negative e-WOM can have damaging effects on a company's reputation and bottom line. It is essential for fast food companies to actively monitor and manage their online presence to harness the benefits of e-WOM while mitigating potential risks. Future research could delve deeper into the specific strategies that companies can employ to leverage e-WOM to their advantage. By understanding and harnessing the power of online word of mouth, fast food companies can adapt and thrive in the ever-changing digital landscape (Elvira Ismagilova et al., 2017).

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