

**HOW SIGNIFICANT IS IT TO CONSIDER WOM
MARKETING TO DERIVE HIGHER CUSTOMER
ENGAGEMENT AND ACHIEVE SUCCESS? A CASE OF
MCDONALD'S UK**

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Abstract

Background: Consumer engagement refers to the ongoing cultivation of a relationship between consumers and a brand that goes far beyond the transaction.

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) can be considered an effective marketing technique that can help McDonald's improve their CSI score by enhancing its consumer engagement.

Rising from this ground, this work has explored the link between WOM and enhanced consumer engagement that caters to the brand success of McDonald's.

Purpose: This paper aims to explore how WOM marketing can derive customer engagement and improve brand success of McDonald's

Literature review: This section contains the knowledge proposed on Word-of-Mouth marketing, customer engagement, and brand success. Studies indicate that it is necessary for any organisation to effectively strategise and deliver quality products, proper services and good behaviour to consumers so that they can be persuaded to talk about certain brands and products. This chapter consists essential information regarding WOM strategies used by McDonald's and the way these impact this fast food supply chain business. A number of recommendations have been added as well for further improvements.

Methodology: A secondary qualitative method was appointed. Interpretivism was the philosophy. Inductive approach was followed to formulate study plans. Thematic analysis was used to analyse collected data.

Findings: Results obtained from the secondary data collection shows that

Discussion: This section mainly tends to analyse the results obtained from secondary data collection. The discussion has been made on areas like Contributions of customer engagement to McDonald's business success, the role of WOM marketing in deriving higher customer engagement and achieving business success for McDonald's, Implications for McDonald's managers for deriving higher customer engagement through WOM marketing, and Areas to be taken into consideration for improving the WOM operations.

Conclusion: In light of the produced results, it can be concluded that

Keywords: WOM marketing, consumer behaviour, consumer engagement, loyalty, and trust, brand awareness, brand image and trustworthiness.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This section tries to unfold the problem of investigation considered to develop some conclusive results on the proposed topic. In doing so, aim, objectives, and questions around which the investigation process is centred have been revealed. Moreover, the significant values this work is carrying for its intended audience have also been discussed.

1.2 Research background

Consumer engagement refers to the ongoing cultivation of a relationship between consumers and a brand that goes far beyond the transaction. The work of Bilro and Loureiro (2020) has affirmed that this engagement leads to enhancing consumers' interactivity that fosters benefits for the brand. One such benefit is mentioned in the work of Rather (2019), in which customer profitability accrued from engagement-led customer loyalty is considered an important aspect that is enhanced by consumer engagement. A survey by ImpacX (2022) reveals that a customer who is completely engaged with a brand is more likely to generate 23% more revenue for the brand than a customer who is less engaged with the brand. Revenue generation through consumer-centric profitability is one of the key pillars of organisational success. In the case of McDonald's, figure 1.2 shows that the "Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) of McDonald's has decreased in a short term period which indicates a negative influence of public perception on the company between 2017 to 2020. One such cause for this can be observed as poor consumer engagement:

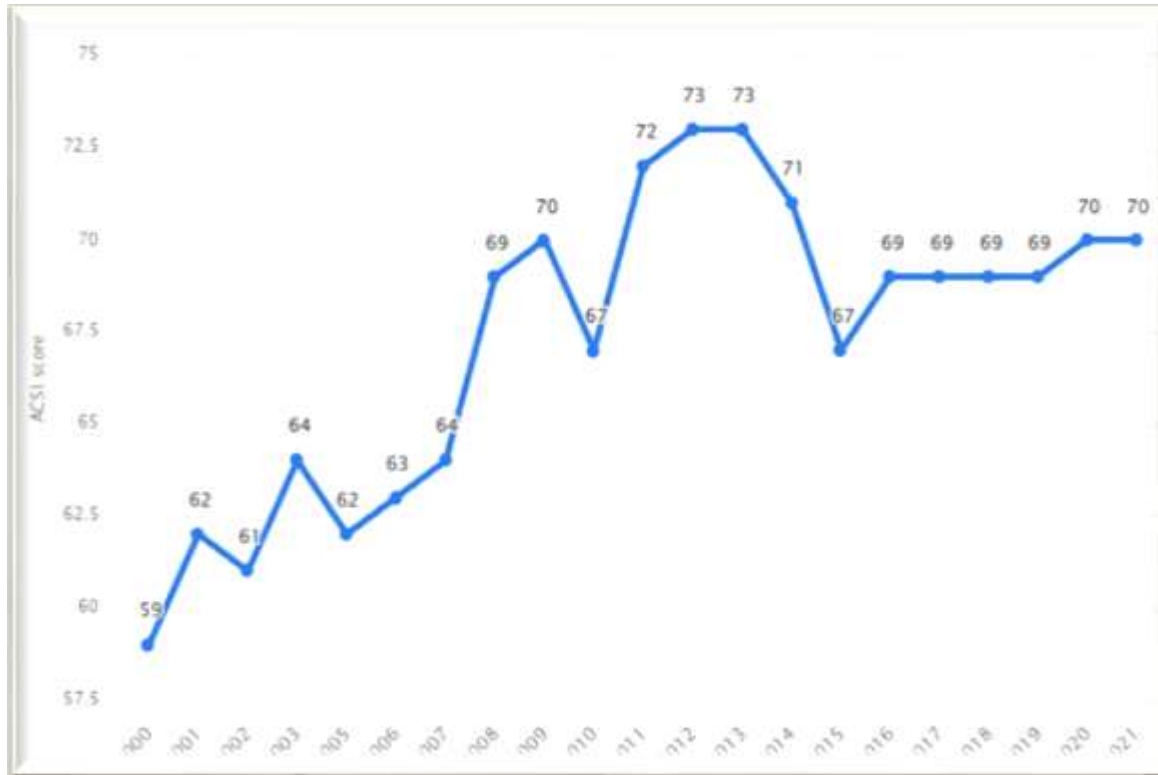


Figure 1.2: CSI of McDonald's

(Source: Statista, 2022)

Word-of-Mouth (WOM) can be considered an effective marketing technique that can help McDonald's improve their CSI score by enhancing its consumer engagement. WOM, a tactic used for generating natural discussions and recommendations for McDonald's products, can increase consumer trust and loyalty. Suhud (2021) has claimed that increased brand loyalty leads consumers in making repetitive purchases of the same brand on a specific service or product category. As a result, their sales revenue per consumer will also increase. Rising from this ground, this work has explored the link between WOM and enhanced consumer engagement that caters to the brand success of McDonald's.

1.3 Research problem and rationale

WOM is used as an effective marketing weapon that is well perceived and preferred by the consumer world. The below figure shows that 28% of consumers (compared to 4% of marketers) have considered WOM as a preferred method for learning about new products, brands, and services over other methods like social media, cable TV, and digital ads:

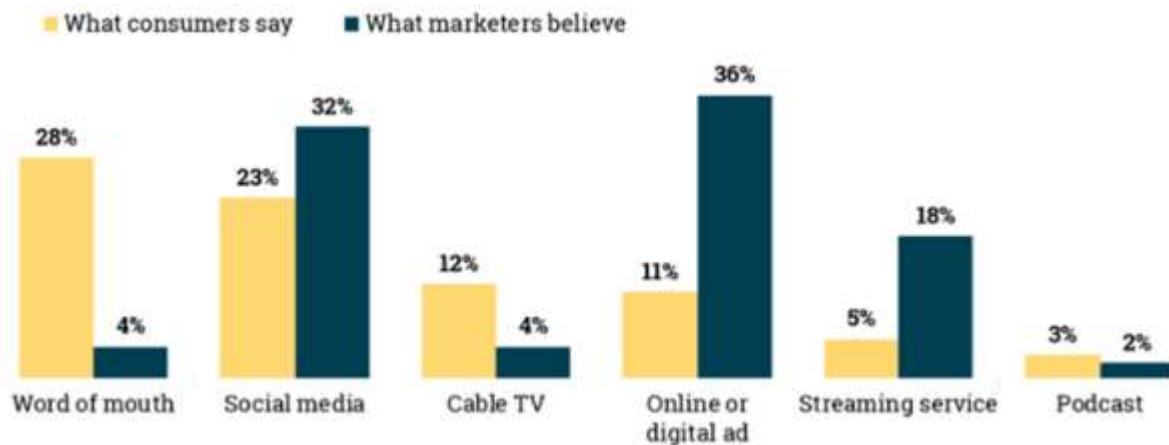


Figure 1.3: Consumer-preferred method to learn about brands, services, and products

(Source: Marketing Charts, 2021)

Therefore, the *issue of investigation* considered in this research is the upper hand of WOM marketing in helping McDonald's to reach new customers and enhance their consumers' knowledge and awareness of its products, in order to improve their engagement and gain success in improving sales volume and profitability per consumers. *This is an issue*, as this marketing technique makes a meaningful impact on consumers' minds through authentic discussion and recommendations about the brand, which in turn increases brand visibility and loyalty (Rialti *et al.* 2017). This improved loyalty of consumers directly leads them to be more connected to the brand that they can help organisations to generate more revenue and crack their long-term success criteria. *Now*, this research paper has tried to explore key implications for managers in applying the WOM technique to enhance their consumers' engagement. This is because inaccurate information triggered through WOM marketing can mislead organisations as well as customers negatively (Suhud, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary for managers to keep an eye on such implications that can restrict them to achieve the predetermined goals. *This study further sheds light on* areas like strategies for improving consumer engagement and recommendations for operational improvements of McDonald's to help the firm become successful on a long-term basis.

1.4 Aim and objectives

This research aims to explore the significance of WOM marketing in deriving higher consumer engagement and achieving success in light of McDonald's. In light of the ground cemented by this aim, this study is objectified:

- To understand the connection between WOM marketing and enhanced customer engagement
- To identify the strategies that can help McDonald's in creating customer engagement in the UK
- To find out managerial implications of WOM strategies
- To recommend McDonald's with some areas for improvement in their marketing operations

1.5 Research questions

Along with the stipulated objectives, the investigation works in this research paper have centred around four questions. These are as follows:

- What is the connection between WOM marketing and enhanced customer engagement?
- How can McDonald's create better customer engagement in the UK?
- What implications should managers of McDonald's consider while implementing the WOM marketing technique to marketing operations?
- How can the marketing operations of McDonald's be further improved to ensure long-term business success?

1.6 Significance

This research mainly focuses on exploring the advantages of WOM technique in improving customer engagement to allow giant firms like McDonald's in succeeding on a long-term basis. Therefore, the knowledge this study tends to produce on how customer engagement can be enhanced through WOM technique is highly significant for contemporary marketers who are finding it difficult to keep their customers connected to their brands and new offerings. Further, this study also implies managers with some recommendations by informing them about key implications to be considered during implementation of the WOM strategy. Consideration of such implications is necessary to direct the marketing program under WOM technique rightfully and strategically. This is another significant area in this research paper that will enhance the depth of knowledge of marketers regarding WOM marketing technique in contemporary days.

1.7 Dissertation structure



Figure 1.7: Dissertation structure

(Source: Self-developed)

1.8 Summary

Customer engagement is necessary for organisations to improve brand loyalty, generate more revenue per customer, and crack its long-term success criteria. WOM technique can be used to derive more customer engagement, as this marketing technique will create a meaningful impact of McDonald's product category on customers' mind to enhance their trust and engagement with the brand. On this ground, this research will further investigate some strategies to improve McDonald's customer engagement as well as their marketing operations.

2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This particular chapter of the research paper consists of relevant information related to given context. This information is collected from numerous literary sources, scholarly articles, newspaper reports, organisational websites and so on. Here, the concern is to identify how effectively McDonald's is running its business with Word of Mouth (WoM) marketing strategy. Multiple websites will be surfed to gather accurate information on the context. This section of this research work will consist of descriptive detail regarding ways in which McDonald's work with WOM approaches in its food chain business. Another thing that will be identified as well is Impact of these approaches on targeted audience within the UK marketplace.

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2.2 Concept of Word of Mouth (WoM) marketing strategy

WoM marketing strategy is the one strategy that includes people as primary subjects. It is necessary for organisations to satisfy targeted audience and make them talk about brands to other people so that they can get to know about new business ventures. This particular chain where people engage into verbal communication and get to know about a business or a product, service or anything else from other people is known as WoM marketing. This does not require making advertisements, pamphlets, advertisements and other related promotional objects (Ahmadinejad, 2019). There is only one necessity that is to make a prominent impact on consumers with good services so that they start talking about it frequently to others. This is how WoM marketing strategy works. This can work in both ways, good and bad which mean can affect people positively and negatively as well (Lee *et al.* 2020). Therefore, it is responsibility of organisational managers to use WoM strategy properly and plan related operations accurately to ensure best outcomes.

2.3 Significance of WoM marketing in improving consumer engagement

Word of Mouth strategy for marketing is considered to be one significant organic way of marketing. There is no requirement of additional financial investment or giving extra efforts to develop something. This only requires an organisation to deliver quality products and relevant services to its consumers in a proper manner. The agenda is to trigger consumers and meet their requirements so that they start talking about a particular brand. WoM is marked to be one of best organic ways to spread information regarding a company among targeted audience. Study conducted by Yaman (2018) states that customers themselves have admitted that 70% of their buying behaviour is influenced by things that other people say about a brand or product. They may hear of it from families, associates, friends or anyone else and get persuaded too easily to buy certain things.



Figure 2.3: Word-of-Mouth marketing strategy

(Source: Yaman, 2018)

For McDonald's or any other organisation that is putting focus on this strategy to improve engagement of customers within the targeted marketplace, it is important to provide something too effective and prominent to its customers so that they start talking about it in society. Only significant way to improve consumer engagement within this context is to provide positive experience to each buyer and strategically put a significant impact on them so that they start talking about particular products and services. A study done by Chen and Yuan (2020) indicates that nearly 92% of people or more than that give much priority to suggestions of their friend, family members or any other known person. Their trust on specific brands makes other believe on it rather than believing in something by watching a commercial advertisement (Acharya, 2020). Due to all these reasons stated above, WoM marketing option is significant to improve consumer engagement.

2.4 Strategies developed by McDonald's to enhance consumer engagement

As a popular food supply chain McDonald's put significant focus on quality of its food items and delivery services. This organisation uses its digital software application to take online orders and use its own delivery partners and sustainable motor vehicles to deliver orders on

time (McDonalds, 2022). Considering distance of delivery address from stores shipping charges are applied or free deliveries are provided. There are different kinds of combo offers, discounts, and affordable range of food items that this company offers to its targeted audience. Its famous delicacy is a various range of hamburgers. This organisation believes that it is important to use fresh ingredients in food preparation so that consumers can have the best possible taste when consuming a certain food item from its menu. This will help in satisfying them and ensuring their returns to the stores.

On the other hand, this organisation uses an exceptional arrangement in its meal services. McDonald's provide numerous options for family meals and there is a particular menu known as happy meal. A number of combo items are also available so that people do not require to buy individual food items as they can have favourite combo options. All these things are prepared to grab significant attention of consumers within the marketplace of the UK. There are many other rivals of this company, such as Burger King which can significantly put impact on business of McDonald's (Roy *et al.* 2019). There are more or less same items that these two organisations sell within the same marketplace and to the same audience. This is why to have an innovative business approach McDonalds's uses all these strategies in its menu preparation. Another thing is this organisation offers affordable pricing so that customers coming from every economic group can purchase without any hesitation or dilemma. These things are beneficial to improve consumer engagement and persuade them to spread words further to other people regarding services and products of McDonald's.

2.5 Managerial implications of WoM strategies within McDonald's

Word of Mouth regarding strategies are connected with consumer satisfaction factors. It is necessary to put individual focus on each strategy so that the company can maintain quality performance on each department starting from taste of food to its presentation and then its delivery on table or at doorsteps. According to Ha *et al.* (2022), employees that work within this company are always instructed to maintain a polite and helpful behaviour within workspace so that no customer can experience a poor incident which may lead to a negative impact and dissatisfy a wide range of customers. This is a quintessential thing as this has direct impact on brand image and organisational culture. This is why managers and superior authorities of this company ensure that a positive working environment is maintained. This is the part of workforce management and organisational culture management (Babić Rosario *et al.* 2020). Everyone is given an equal opportunity to provide their opinions regarding

organisational structure so that necessary changes can be made as per requirements of employees.



Figure 2.5: Different food items served by McD

(Source: McDonald's, 2022)

This managerial aspect is maintained to satisfy employees. This is because only if employees are satisfied and working within a supportive environment then only, they will be able to provide the similar treatment to customers. Therefore, WoM strategies also include taking essential actions to satisfy employees so that they can satisfy consumers by delivering quality product and services in an appropriate manner. As per the research of YAMAN (2019), McDonald's also prefer taking essential notes from consumers at the time of their exits from stores so that their overall experience can be understood. In case, any misconduct is identified then immediate actions are taken to rectify situation and ensure that every customer is leaving stores with a happy heart. Making customers happy from every perspective starting from food services to dine-in experience and providing supportive behaviour, everything is essential to meet satisfaction level of customers (An *et al.* 2019). These things will ensure that they will consider returning on stores or exceptional good experiences will lead them in sharing things with other family members, co-workers or friends. Moreover, the ultimate goal of using WoM strategies can be met in this way.

2.6 Impact of current WoM strategies used by McDonald's on behaviour of targeted consumers

Considering all strategies that this company is currently using, it can be stated that this will be able to grab prominent attention of a lot of people within a stipulated timeline if keeps on maintain performance on a standard level. McDonald's consider giving importance to cultural attributes which is attracting customers from different cultural backgrounds. This is not only beneficial to increase rate of sales, however; this will also help in having a positive impact on brand image (Wijayaaet *al.* 2021). This is because a company receives additional appreciation within an international marketplace whenever it prioritises diversified interests. This is currently helping this company in creating a significant situation within the social structure in the UK marketplace. On the other hand, its economic growth is expected to be enhancing to a great extent in recent times. Its current strategies have been detected to be advantageous for attracting efficient suppliers and eminent investors (Hossny, 2022). These two stakeholders are highly essential within a business so that a proper flow of capital amount and essential raw materials can be managed within McDonald's.

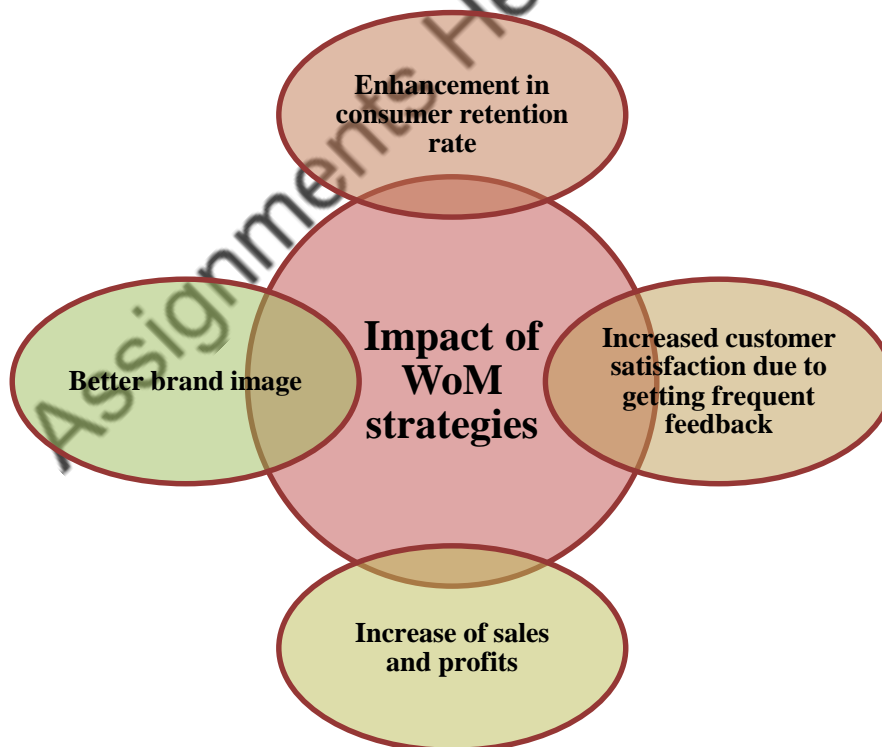


Figure 2.6: Impact of WoM strategies in McD

(Source: Self-created)

Moreover, it can be stated that all these current WoM strategies are providing good results to this company. However, there is a lot of pressure on workforce and organisational managers as many things are still under development. It is necessary for all responsible ones to do their individual works properly so that overall success can be ensured at present circumstances.

2.7 Recommendations to improve WoM operations

A number of recommendations that may help McDonald's in bringing more positive outcomes from its WoM strategies include utilising social media platforms more to make it easier for customers to get engaged and adding a feedback option on its online application. First recommendation will help in spreading words related to organisational values, services, vision, mission and so on to a wider area (Guo *et al.* 2022). On the other hand, second recommendation is beneficial for taking frequent feedback from customers after placing an order online or after experiencing any particular service that this company provides even on offline mode. It is recommended to implement advanced technologies within different outlets so that food preparation, billing and delivery of services can be done faster than usual. This will help in serving more customers than usual within a stipulated time frame. All these things are essential for organisational development within the targeted marketplace. According to Roy *et al.* (2019), quality is one thing that must not be compromised and organisation may consider following all food and safety aspects critically so that better health of people can be ensured. Keep on using fresh products and no usage of preservatives, additional taste enhancers are suggested so that it can also be marked as a responsible fast food supply chain.

Another thing that is not the least one to be suggested is that McDonald's must use sustainable food packaging and recyclable containers to serve and pack food materials. This will help in contributing toward environmental concerns significantly and creating an exceptional brand image as well. As per research of Mansoor and Noor (2019), sustainable factors are primary concern of every person within a global marketplace and prioritising that will help in enhancing consumer engagement significantly. This will also help in receiving more customers and ultimate goal can be reached faster with better efficiency.

2.8 Theoretical framework

Cognitive dissonance theory

Cognitive dissonance theory is applied to identify behavioural aspects of consumers. As per the research conducted by Vardhan (2022), it has been identified that whether customers will be satisfied or not with a particular product that is ensured when they are using those products. It is difficult to assert with assurance that a customer is going to like a product that he or she is purchasing at current moment. In case, there is anything wrong with product or outcome of using certain products fails to match expectations of a user then they may develop a negative opinion regarding such product. No matter even if that product has some good effect on any other person, then this behaviour remains the same until and unless personal experience gets better. Therefore, it must be stated that it is necessary to develop products that can meet expectation levels of most consumers so that consumer loyalty and retention rate can be enhanced significantly. According to Maet *al.* (2022), usage of cognitive resonance theory helps in understanding behaviour of different customers very specifically, which is essential to get an idea regarding their likings and disliking. This data may help further to produce more relevant products that can satisfy consumers adequately.

Word of Mouth theory

Word of Mouth theory is a relevant theory that is used for WoM marketing system specifically. Considering main idea of this theory communication is preferred to be a primary option to influence buying behaviour of consumers. Organisations can develop more effective strategies by using this particular theory to put prominent impact on purchasing decisions of targeted audience. According to Tjet *al.* (2022), the motive here is to persuade consumers by delivering quality products and services so that they will automatically start discussing on particular products and brands to their family members, colleagues, friends and any other known person. This helps in spreading word regarding a specific business more effectively without investing time or money on marketing programs. Wider range of audience can be reached out by satisfying one customer only. Moreover, it helps in creating a prominent chain of customers and increases rate of repeat customers (Tangkumanet *al.* 2020). Both these things are essential for development and growth of a brand within any international marketplace.

2.9 Conceptual framework

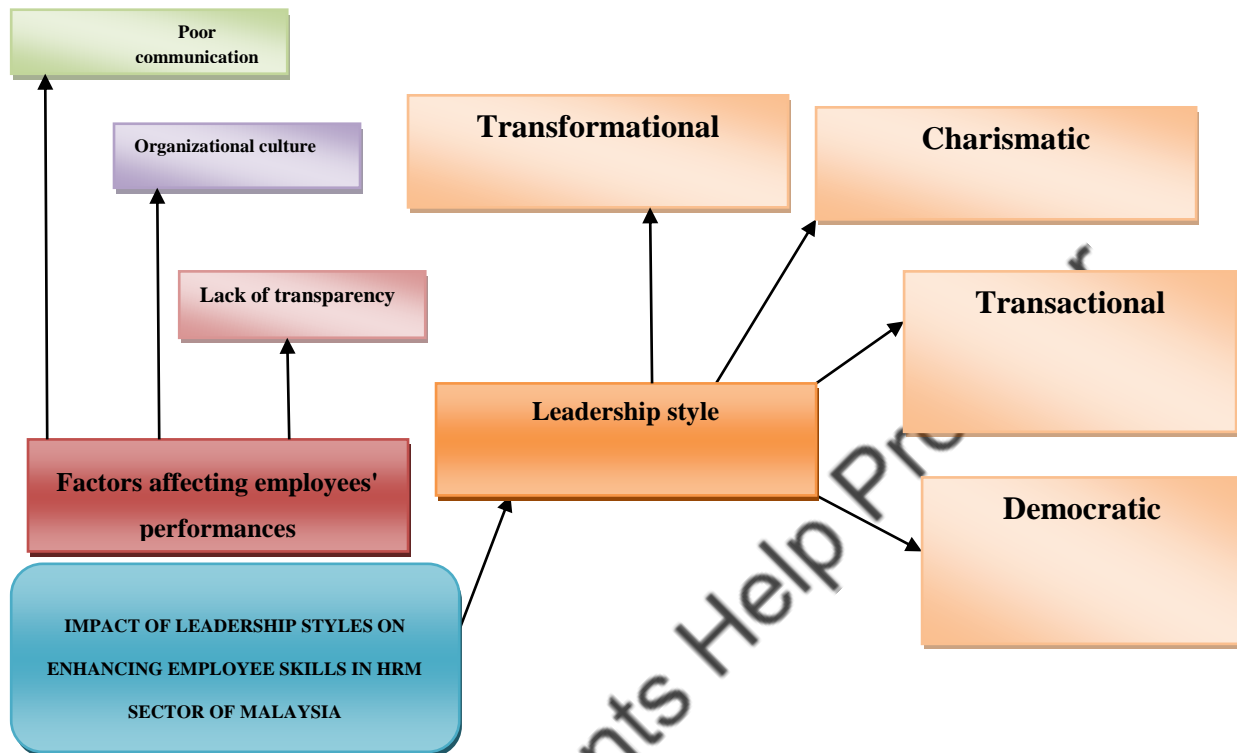
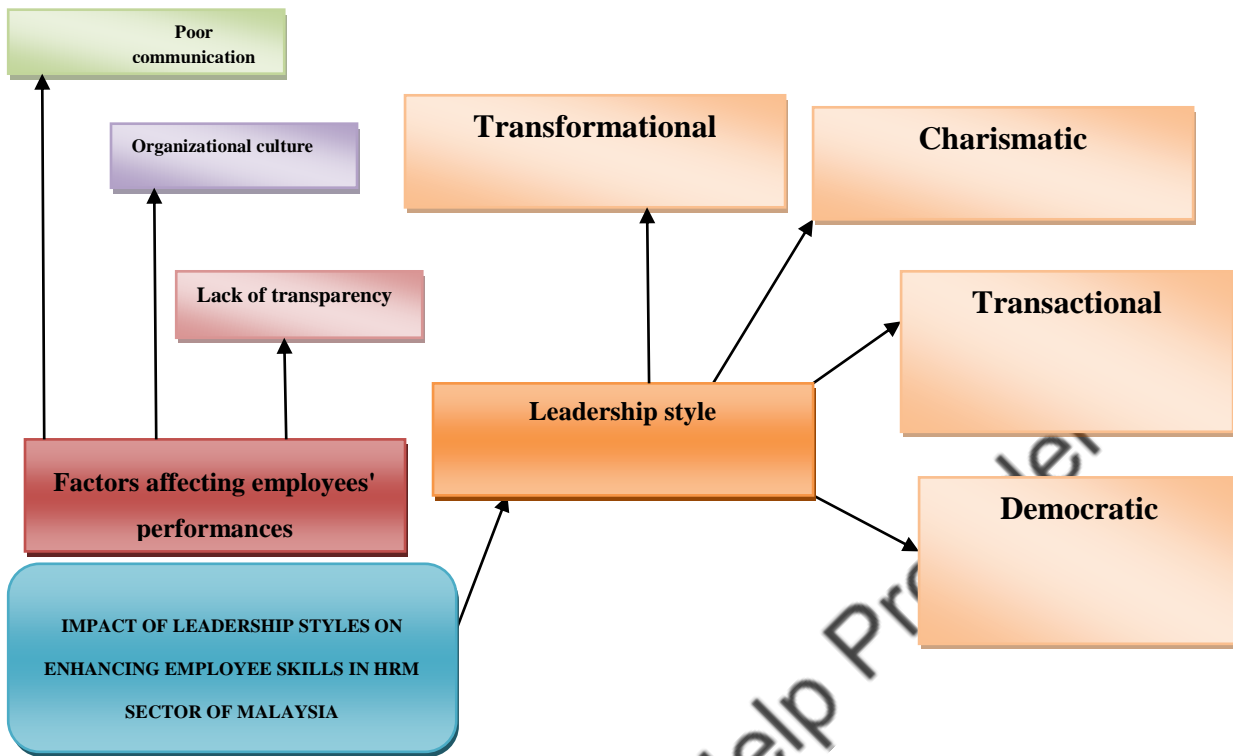


Figure 2.9: Conceptual framework

(Source: Self-created)



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2.10 Literature gap

This part of the research paper consists of essential information regarding importance of word of mouth approach within marketing system of McDonald's. Strategies that are used by this company to perform WoM operations have been discussed in descriptive manner. A number of suggestions are added as well that may help in improvising quality and structure of operations. However, there is no particular mention regarding ways that must be followed to implicate those recommended strategies. There is no specific data that may prove effectiveness of recommendations within the food supply chain business of McDonald's. Further studies must focus on these factors to overcome mentioned study gaps.

2.11 Summary

This particular chapter includes essential data that helps in understanding significance of WoM marketing approach in satisfying customers. There are different kinds of marketing approaches considering Word of Mouth a fixed criteria that are used by McDonald's so that it may grab a significant attention of customers within the marketplace of the UK. They all may not be prominently effective which is why managerial implications of strategies have been discussed as well. In later part of discussion, a number of recommendations have been discussed vividly so that current operations within WoM marketing system can be improvised. This might be beneficial for bringing out more positive outcomes and meet organisational objectives faster by satisfying a wide range of customers. Moreover, information added in this chapter will be beneficial for McDonald's to enhance its reachability to a wider range of consumers. On the other hand, theoretical context that have been discussed toward the end of discussion of this chapter will help in amplifying quality of performance if incorporated with operations appropriately.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This section reveals all methods used to collect, analyse, and interpret data. In doing so, the type of philosophy, design, strategy, data collection and analysis method, and considered ethics are mentioned. The approach followed to formulate plans and procedures of this research is also mentioned.

3.2 Method outline

Method(s)	Chosen
Philosophy	Interpretivism
Approach	Inductive
Design	Descriptive
Data type	Secondary qualitative
Data collection tool	Document review
Data analysis method	Thematic analysis

Table 2: Method outline

(Source: Self-developed)

3.3 Philosophy

This research paper has maintained interpretive philosophical assumptions about the development of knowledge in a subjective way. Therefore, this study has mainly interpreted the social reality on the link between “WOM marketing” and “higher customer engagement”. A study by Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) affirms that this research philosophy considers circumstances that lead to developing a certain social reality. In this research, circumstances that required McDonald to apply the WOM marketing technique to trigger their customer experiences and improve their engagement have been considered to understand the link between these two study variables. As a result, the phenomenon underlying the link has been well understood.

3.4 Approach

An inductive approach has been followed to develop the plan and procedures of this research. Liew *et al.* (2018) have informed that this approach involves generalising existing information to novel situations or instances. Here, the novel situation considered to collect information was based on WOM application to win customer engagement, whereas a systematic strategy was followed to develop the plan to generalise that information [see figure 3.4]:

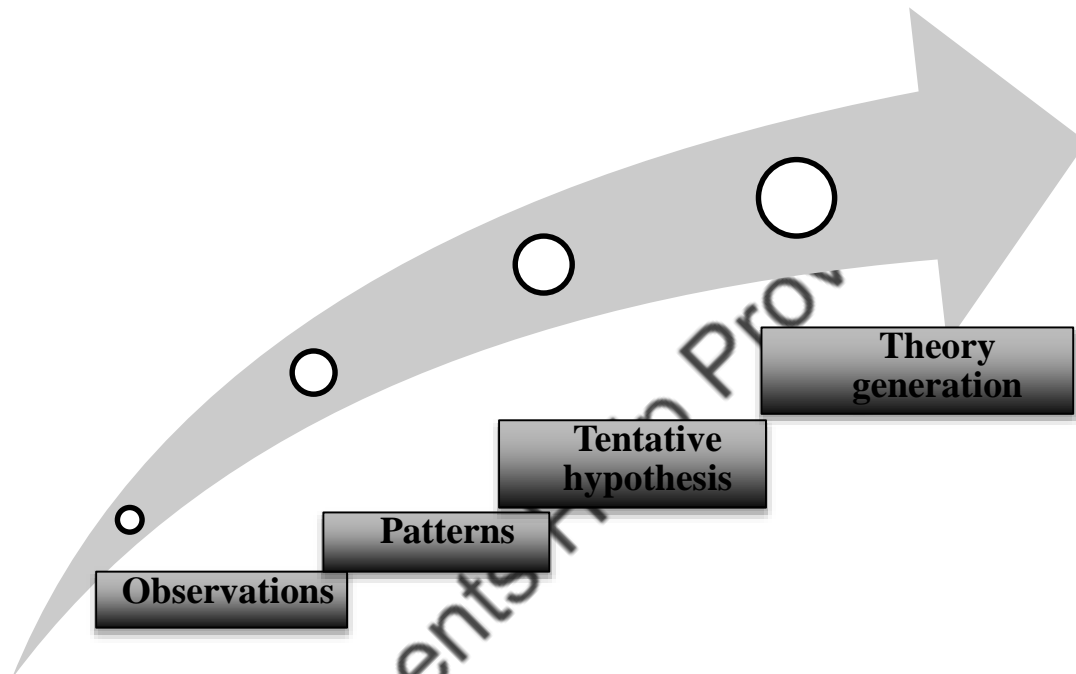


Figure 3.4: Steps followed to generate theoretical knowledge on the study phenomenon

(Source: Self-developed)

Therefore, this study began by developing a set of assumptions on the research phenomenon. Through a collection of data related to WOM strategy and customer engagement, patterns underlying the data were identified and generalised to implicitly develop a tentative hypothesis that could qualify the stipulated study aim. In light of the hypothesis, theoretical knowledge pertaining to the said phenomenon has been produced in detail.

3.5 Design

This study has employed descriptive design to arrange research conditions and data collection. As per the comment of Atmowardoyo (2018), this research design allows researchers to describe the research problem as appropriately as possible. By describing the research problem in detail, it has become possible to observe the underlying phenomenon in a

completely natural environment where organisations apply the WOM technique for achieving a better customer experience. Apart from that, the effect of the WOM technique on the behavioural aspects of customers has also been understood from the context of a customer engagement strategy. Thus, considering all these advantages offered by the descriptive design, it can be said that the use of this design in this work is truly justifiable.

3.6 Strategy

This work has followed a qualitative research strategy to focus on detailed knowledge development on the proposed study phenomenon. The paper of Mohajan (2018) mentioned that qualitative research explores insights and meaning in a given situation. In this work, insights and the meaning of WOM marketing, its relevance to achieving higher customer experience and customer engagement, and the link between customer engagement and organisational success have been explored. As a result, deeper knowledge about all these phenomena have been obtained and presented in this paper. Furthermore, the generation of knowledge around the study variables in light of the insights obtained by reviewing data patterns has also been possible using this strategy.

3.7 Data types and collection

This paper has mainly used a secondary data collection method followed by the document/literature review method to collect research data. Sources reviewed under this purpose-driven data collection are McDonald's official websites, Google Scholar, ProQuest, and credible Internet sources containing industry information. Some of the most used keywords used to collect data include WOM marketing, Customer experience, customer engagement, McDonald's customer retention, and customer behaviour.

3.8 Data analysis method

A thematic analysis method has been employed to analyse the research data in an organised and logical manner. As pointed out by Kiger and Varpio (2020), thematic analysis is powerful, yet the flexible method used to analyse qualitative data. In this work, flexibility was mainly noticed while collecting relevant data from the mentioned sources according to research objectives as well as developing themes by qualifying the mentioned research questions. The process followed to analyse research data include raw data extraction, data familiarisation, coding, theme generation, and defining and naming themes. The aim was to

develop themes and provide logical analysis that could satisfy every objective followed in this research.

3.9 Timeline

[Refer to Appendix A]

3.10 Ethics

Consideration of ethics is one of the key aspects of a credible research work that improves its acceptability and applicability. In this work, Data Protection Act 2018 has been followed to make the activities involved in data handling and use legally obliged. This regulation addresses making use of the data of others lawfully, fairly, and transparently (UK Government, 2022). Although the work did not involve any primary data that could create risks related to data breaches, it was necessary to acknowledge the used secondary data to avoid copyright-related concerns. Each data source consulted throughout the knowledge development and presentation process has been acknowledged (through in-text citations) by the surname of the authors, under the Harvard Referencing Convention.

3.11 Summary

This research has followed interpretivism philosophy to understand the study phenomenon in a subjective way. The plans and procedures followed to make this type of exploration were developed using an inductive approach. The generation of knowledge has been done by starting with a set of observations about the study phenomenon, whereas descriptive design was employed to describe the study phenomenon in detail. The document review method was used to collect data from ample secondary sources, while thematic analysis was assigned to this work to perform the data analysis task. In order to make the data handling works legally obliged, data acknowledgement was done as a key ethical consideration.

Chapter 4: Findings

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The section focuses on making a detailed analysis of the findings obtained from reviewing, studying, and analysing research data. The knowledge reflected throughout the section is a combined form of personal knowledge about the study phenomenon and the knowledge obtained during data familiarisation.

5.2 Analysis of Findings

5.2.1 Contributions of customer engagement to McDonald's business success

A business's success highly depends on how customers perceive the brand, its service quality, overall business value, and its level of engagement with the brand. As per the work of Harmeling *et al.* (2017), in the marketing domain, customer engagement is achieved by firms through putting deliberate effort for the sake of deriving higher customer motivations, and empowerment as well as measuring their contributions to marketing functions. The fundamental purpose of undergoing all these aspects and serving customer engagement is to improve their loyalty and trust. Similarly, the work of Bilro and Loureiro (2020) presented in the literature section supports this claim by mentioning that consumer interactivity can easily be fostered once customers are engaged with a brand, which in turn leads to higher customer loyalty. This purpose is objectified by firms to improve their sales volume, along with enhancing the overall reputation of the brand.

The result obtained from reviewing published studies presented in the literature and findings sections indicates that customer engagement obliquely increases awareness of a brand. For example, a study conducted by de Oliveira Santini *et al.* (2020) has contended that it is based on the trust and commitment of customers toward a brand, which leads to generating greater satisfaction and positive emotions of customers toward the brand. Similarly, Bilro and Loureiro (2020) have opined that higher customer engagement influences customers' repetitive purchase behaviour. Therefore, it is well evident that satisfied customers are more likely to engage with a brand than customers who have less satisfaction with a brand. As a result, this engagement leads customers toward relative purchasing of the brand's product and

service, which in turn improves the organisation’s sales volume per customer. A survey conducted on this phenomenon has revealed that an engaged customer is more likely to generate 23% more revenue through repetitive purchases for an organisation than a customer who is less engaged with the organisation (ImpacX, 2022). Therefore, it is quite clear that customer engagement is highly important for an organisation to achieve the height of business success (mainly financial success supported by constant marketing efforts).

The research of Grewal *et al.* (2017) affirms that customer engagement is built upon three levels: outstanding customer experience, emotional connection, and shared identity. Catering to all these three levels means improved customer engagement and higher sales. On the other hand, lower or slow growth in sales means lower customer engagement, resulting from a brand's inability to cater to the needs of its customers. In the case of McDonald’s, the company has experienced a little decline in their revenue supported by sales volume, compared to the volumes achieved between FY-2010 to FY-2016. Figure 5.2.1 represents the sales revenue of McDonald’s from 2005 to 2021:

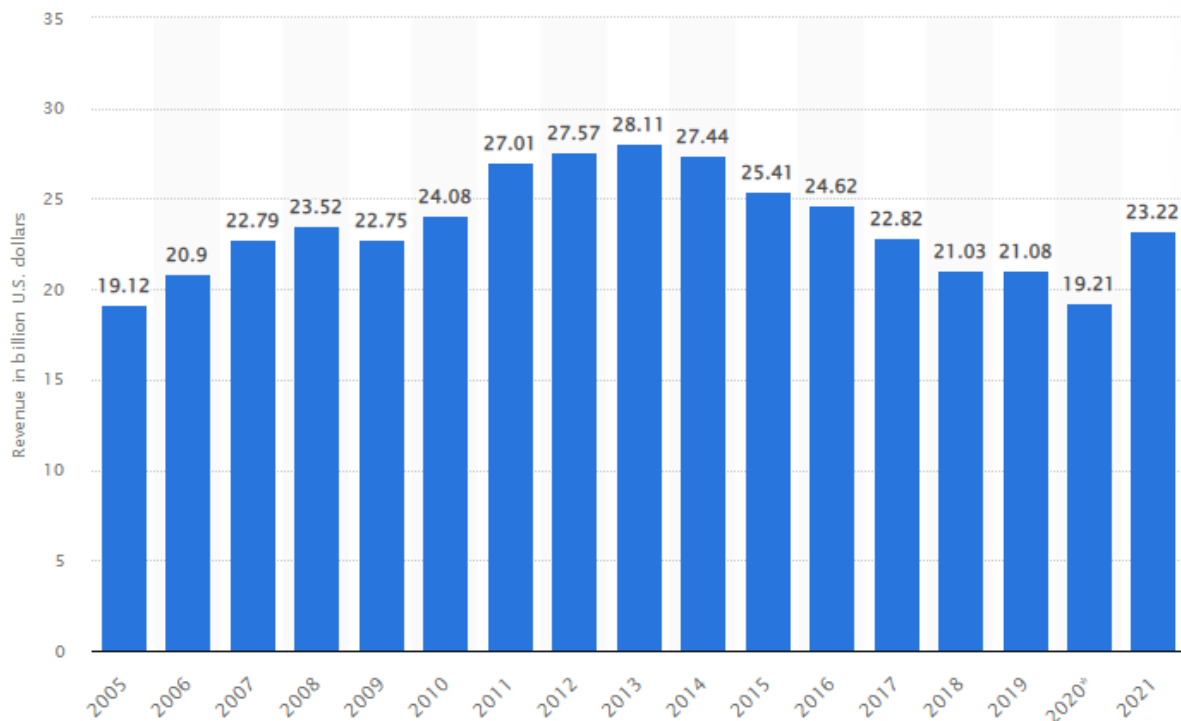


Figure 5.2.1: Sales revenue of McDonald’s from 2005 to 2021

(Source: Lock, 2022)

The revenue (\$19.21) generated by McDonald’s from its 2020 sales is the lowest revenue that the firm has earned since 2006. A close review of the diagram would help to track that the revenue supported by its sales volume has declined gradually since 2014. This leads to the

understanding that the customer engagement of McDonald's is declining gradually. From the point of view of business management, it is evident that the satisfaction level of McDonald's is insufficient to increase its sales volume and bring financial success to the brand. From this point of view, it is observable that catering to the perceptions of customers would have helped McDonald's to enhance their customers' satisfaction and drive their engagement level positively, as Grewal *et al.* (2017) have opined that fulfilling customers' satisfaction-related needs lead to improving their engagement level. Therefore, by enhancing the loyalty and satisfaction level of customers, higher customer engagement always plays a crucial role in bringing success to an organisation like McDonald's whose sales performance is descending and/or moderate, compared to the performances in the last 10 years.

5.2.2 Evaluation of the role of WOM marketing in deriving higher customer engagement and achieving business success for McDonald

WOM marketing has always been a crucial marketing tool for organisations since they come from sources familiar to customers and induce a buzz through user-generated content. This buzz presents the brand as more valuable and trustworthy that attracts the intrinsic motivation of customers. As found in the literature section by reviewing the study of Roy *et al.* (2019) WOM marketing is a potential marketing technique that can assist organisations to derive higher customer engagement. In the findings, the reason is implied by the research of Chen and Yuan (2020) that affirms WOM has become a vital and popular source of information about brands for consumers. This is because consumers find those brands highly valuable and trustworthy that are suggested by friends, families, or any known people. Supporting this argument, Yaman (2018) has proven that 70% of customers have admitted that their purchasing behaviour is highly influenced by suggestions given by their known people. This is why the viewpoints of Chen and Yuan (2020) presented in the literature section indicate that approximately 92% of people give higher priority to the suggestions of their family members, friends, and other people they are familiar with in everyday life. This is why many companies are found to employ more strategic approaches for the sake of promoting customers to recommend their products and services and share positive experiences.

The above discussion that takes place in light of the results presented in both the Literature and Findings section indicates the upper hand success of WOM marketing in building a satisfied and engaged customer for any brand like McDonald's. In order to understand the ways WOM marketing derives consumer engagement and caters to brand success, it is

necessary to understand the process in a detailed manner. A study by LE *et al.* (2022) presented in the findings section has pointed out that organisations and their marketers are aware of the fact that customers often rely on the references of others while making decisions for purchasing a product or service. Similarly, the work of Acharya (2020) reviewed earlier has argued that Consumers' trust in a particular brand based on the referral of a known person is more severe than the trust in a brand that is known from watching commercial advertisements. This has been well observed by contemporary organisations. Organisations try to create an epic first experience for customers through strategic gestures that prompt them to recommend the brand to others. Selling quality products, seamless order processing to create an outstanding user experience, and meeting consumers' expectations and unexpressed needs with a sound approach are some activities that organisations perform to set a ground for prompting new customers to recommend others about their brand's products and services.

Once consumers are satisfied with the brand's offering on their first visit, they become so influenced that they tend to suggest to their families, friends, or close people to enjoy the same experience. In this regard, the study of Mahapatra (2021) has claimed that the buying behaviour or the purchasing behaviour of a customer is largely influenced once he or she receives a compliment, comment, or recommendation from other customers about their experience of a product or service quality. As a result, they found the brand highly trustworthy and engaged with the brand to a greater extent. The contributions of WOM marketing are not only limited to deriving higher customer engagement but also extended to building brand awareness, increasing sales & conversions, and increasing the customer base. An organisation like McDonald's, which is finding difficulties in boosting their sales volume, can unlock all these benefits through WOM marketing, which in turn will cater to their overall business success.

5.2.3 Implications for McDonald's managers for deriving higher customer engagement through WOM marketing

A substantial amount of studies published on WOM marketing and consumer experience have claimed that it is a communication process accomplished in the form of recommendations both in group and individually for a service or product that aims to provide personal information. The effort is made by someone to introduce and recommend a brand offering to others by providing information related to the recommended product or service's

functions, advantages, prices, and drawbacks as well. This is why the presented study by Mahapatra (2021) has firmly claimed that WOM marketing is related to brand awareness, and thus, doing WOM promotion, awareness of a brand will be positively affected. However, the level of positive or negative awareness depends on the organisational employees' customer service approach, as the one who recommends the brand to others will receive the first information from organisational employees. This is the reason why Ha *et al.* (2022) have recommended in their study that employees should be instructed to maintain helpful and polite behaviour while handling customers for the sake of removing any scope that may provoke negative experiences for consumers. Therefore, managers of legendary organisations like McDonald's as well as other organisations relying on WOM marketing to derive higher customer engagement must address their employees to possess a calm behaviour while handling customers. Such calm behaviour will directly influence the inner satisfaction and perceptions of customers toward the brand.

5.2.4 Areas to be taken into consideration for improving the WOM operations

Organisations need to understand that everything that has some viable commercial values comes with some drawbacks, so is WOM marketing. In the case of McDonald's, the decision-making board as well as marketing managers need to assess the drawbacks associated with this marketing technique while relying on it to drive higher consumer engagement. One of the potential drawbacks of WOM marketing is found as spreading misinformation, which can negatively drive the sales volume. The study of Consiglio *et al.* (2018) has informed that WOM marketing can occur spontaneously, as marketers give consumers an opportunity to comment on their experiences offline and online. In case, any consumers are found unsatisfied with the brand's offerings or any aspects of the customer services, they share negative reviews via online platforms or through online mode. This negative reviews can poorly hamper the perceptions of potential customers base regarding the brand in the pre-purchasing period, as Yuan (2020) has already pointed out that approximately 92% of people or more prioritise the referral given by their known people. Therefore, organisations like McDonald's must ensure that its customer service operations are enough to satisfy both said and unsaid needs of consumers as well as their products or services carry the required quality & standard to drive their consumers' experiences positively.

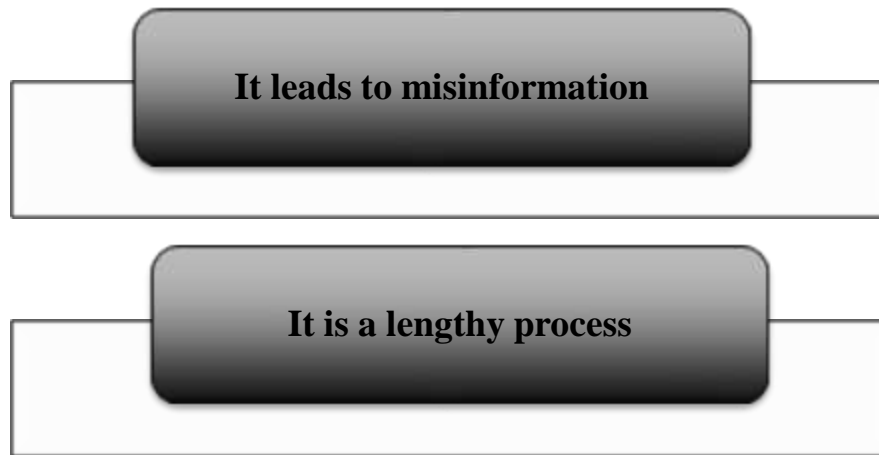


Figure 5.2.4: Drawbacks of WoM Marketing

(Source: Self-developed)

Apart from that, the entire process that WOM marketing takes to derive customer engagement and boost product sales is longer than the time invested in any other forms of marketing. Hence, without completely relying on this marketing form, organisations should simultaneously win consumer engagement through other marketing forms like digital marketing and direct marketing. This will help them keep their customers' engagement level ascending.

5.3 Summary

Working on improving customer engagement is always beneficial for McDonald's in terms of influencing customers' repetitive purchasing behaviour and generating more sales. WOM marketing can assist the firm to derive higher customer engagement with the help of other customers who will do the brand advocacy. In order to secure such an advantage, organisations must offer quality products as well as managers need to address their employees working as customer representatives to show gestures of politeness when tackling customer queries. Inability to do this might result in spreading misinformation about the brand, which in turn will provoke negative perceptions of the brand to potential customers. Moreover, the entire process is quite long, therefore, McDonald's need to equally keep an eye on other marketing forms to keep their customers' engagement level ascending. As a result, the firm can bring about significant improvement to its current sales performance.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendation

6.2 Linking with objectives

Below discussion tends to show the areas and the ways the stipulated research objectives have been met through inclusion, presentation, and argumentation of collected data while examining the study phenomenon:

Objective 1: To understand the connection between WOM marketing and enhanced customer engagement

This objective was developed with the purpose of examining the upper hand of WOM marketing in deriving higher customer engagement. Requirements demanded by this objective have been met in 2.3 of the literature section and 4.2 of the findings section by emphasising customers' reliance on the referral of others and organisational technique used to create positive customer experience via WOM marketing. Organisations concentrate on delivering quality products and relevant services according to consumer perceptions. Having been influenced by the offered quality in accordance with their expectations, consumers recommend the brand to others by providing information related to the product or service. By elaborating on this phenomenon, this study has satisfied the need of the mentioned objective.

Objective 2: To identify the strategies that can help McDonald's in creating customer engagement in the UK

This objective demanded the work to understand the strategies that can/adopted by McDonald's to create consumer engagement. The discussion takes place in 2.4 of the literature section and the mentioned findings section has fulfilled this demand. Areas like the focus on McDonald's in improving their product quality, digitalisation for order processing, and consideration of distant delivery are developed in respect to the requirements of this stipulated objective. As the task of creating positive customer engagement requires firms to improve their product operations, such a discussion made in those mentioned sections has been thematized in light of McDonald's current product offering approach.

Objective 3: To find out the managerial implications of WOM strategies

The fundamental purpose of this objective is to consider published data for recognising potential implications for McDonald's managers to take into consideration while implementing the WOM strategy. There are two specific sections (2.5 & 4.2) in this research paper that adhere to the requirements of this objective sufficiently. Both sections find and argue that McDonald's managers must instruct their employees to maintain calm behaviour while dealing with customers and their queries. Showing up for such gestures will directly influence the inner perceptions of customers toward the brand.

Objective 4: To recommend McDonald's with some areas for improvement in their marketing operations

As WOM marketing possesses some drawbacks that can hinder the intended success, this objective has tried to bring up some arguments regarding those drawbacks to give McDonald's a lease for survival during WOM implementation. Requirements of this objective has been fulfilled in the 2.7 of the literature section as well as 4.3 of the findings section. Key discussion has taken place in areas like long process that WOM takes to show its impact on consumer engagement, the scope of creating a ground to spread misinformation, the need for utilising social media platform, and improving product quality through sustainable food packaging.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Timeplan

Activities	Week 1-2	Week 2-3	Week 3-5	Week 5-7	Week 7-10	Week 10-12
Identification of research topic						
Literature review						
Designing methodology						
Finalisation of proposal						
Collection of information						
Data analysis and interpretation						
Preparation of dissertation						
Final submission						

Table 3.9: Research timeline

(Source: Self-developed)



Pictorial description of the Ansoff model

Aroca, P., Kourtit, K., Nijkamp, P., & Stough, R. (2021). *Prosilience trajectories of phoenix regions: a narrative on intelligent transformation of old mining areas*. *Eastern journal of european studies*, **12**. Retrieved 19 01, 2023, from https://ejes.uaic.ro/articles/EJES2021_12SI_ARO.pdf

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