

## Perceived Impact of Social Media on Brand Image, Reputation, and Equity: A Qualitative Study on the Food Industry in Bangladesh

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### Abstract

**Research purpose:** This study aims to identify the impact of social media on brand image, reputation, and equity and also explore consumers' responses to social media as a marketing communication and brand management tool.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The research is qualitative. It took 19 interviewers, which included six brand practitioners and 13 young customers. Data was gathered to know people's thoughts about social media and how it influences brand equity and image.

**Findings:** The findings revealed the challenges and experiences of social media marketing, brand promotion, and the impact of every step social media platforms take on the food industry. Besides, it also showed the challenges of continuous service and product development. Today's people mainly depend on social media. Social media significantly affects the image of a brand. Practitioners and consumers alike stressed the significance of online reviews, remarks, and feedback in influencing consumers' perceptions of brands. If a brand gets a negative review for anything, then it will be harmful to the brand. Positive reviews can increase the brand's image.

**Originality/value:** The research will give an actual opinion about building brand image and equity on social media and provide the positive and negative sides of social media on brand reputation in Bangladesh.

**Practical implications:** The findings of this research could help brands build their brand image through social media. They can also understand customers' demands and wants, which will allow them to serve their customers better and eventually increase brand equity.

**Keywords:** Social media, Brand equity, Brand reputation, Brand image, Food industry

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## 1. Introduction

In this era of digitalization, social media has become an indispensable part of our lives. The tremendous growth of social media allows marketers to access a broader market base and smartly manage their brands. In the business world, social media management represents creating strategic content, capturing the target audience, promoting one's brand, and achieving business goals by capturing profit from customers through generating sales. Millions of people in Bangladesh are attached to social media, and this number is predicted to increase in the upcoming years (Modi & Zhao, 2021). The active social media presence of a brand facilitates generating, preserving, and improving its brand image and reputation. It also helps to build trust and loyalty among target audiences through positive references. On the other hand, wrong handling of consumers on social media platforms may create negative opinions or even potential crises (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Nkegbe & Abor, 2023).

Setting up a clear goal and complementary objective is an important success factor in brand management through social media. Engaging content based on clear goals and specific objectives ensures a firm hold on the social media world. Besides, engaging with customers through participating in comment replies or query replies is also strongly encouraging for the customers. It provides a sense of empathy to them. This dynamic interaction and responsive nature of the brand enhances customers' overall experience. This community engagement approach helps to build a genuine and strong relationship with customers, which helps to make the brand loved and trusted by consumers. Moreover, regulating adequate information is also necessary, such as how many people your content reaches, how engaged they are, and what they are saying about your brand; these are considered key performance indicators. This constant approach of building relationships and maintaining an easy atmosphere helps the brand to stay active and ahead on social media handles (Guerrero, 2024; Nkegbe & Abor, 2023).

The research objective to be determined in this study is to identify the impact of social media on brand management and reputation. The basic concepts on which the conceptual framework of the study is created are the concepts of the fast food industry, brand image, social media platforms, engagements, consumers' and practitioners' perceptions, and social media influence. The goal of this study is to survey and figure out the impact of social media-based entertainment exercises on the value and impression of Bangladeshi brands among the interest groups, to examine how social media usage affects customers' perceptions of Bangladeshi brands in terms of legitimacy, trust, and brand loyalty, to find out how Bangladeshi businesses' brand equity is improved by looking at social media engagement indicators including likes, shares, comments, and brand mentions, to evaluate consumer behavior analyzing the ways in which social media brand interactions influence consumer behavior, mainly how they affect brand advocacy and purchase choices and to analyze competitors' strategies as well to find best practice and areas for development comparing the social media strategies used by top Bangladeshi businesses with those of their rivals. However, to the authors' best knowledge, no recent

study has been carried out investigating the impact of social media on brand reputation and equity in the Bangladeshi food industry.

Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to identify the impact of social media on brand image and equity in the context of the food industry in Bangladesh. There are five specific objectives. One of the objectives is to conduct a survey and determine the impact of social media-based entertainment activities on the perception and value of Bangladeshi brands within the target audience. Next, the study investigates the impact of social media usage on customers' perceptions of Bangladeshi brands, specifically in terms of legitimacy, trust, and brand loyalty. After that, it find out how Bangladeshi businesses' brand equity is improved by looking at social media engagement indicators, including likes, shares, comments, and brand mentions. Moreover, this study has been conducted to evaluate consumer behavior, analyze the ways in which social media brand interactions influence consumer behavior, mainly how they affect brand advocacy and purchase choices. Besides, this study focuses on analyzing competitors' strategies, finding best practices, and identifying areas for development by comparing the social media strategies used by top Bangladeshi businesses with those of their rivals. The primary data was collected through 19 interviews in total, where 6 participants were brand practitioners, and the rest of them were consumers. The customers' age range was 19-29 years. The findings revealed the challenges and experiences of social media marketing, brand promotion, and the impact of every step social media platforms take on the food industry. Today's people mainly depend on social media. Social media significantly affects the image of a brand. Moreover, the study findings have significant academic and industrial implications. The study findings shed light on customers' constantly changing demands and wants, which allow marketers to serve their customers better and eventually increase brand equity.

This research has gained a thorough awareness of how customers see Bangladeshi brands on social media platforms. This study help identify possible areas for brand growth and improvement. It also helps restaurants and cloud kitchen services gain practical knowledge about various social media control tactics, build closer bonds with customers, and obtain a competitive advantage. This paper tried to showcase how social media involvement can positively affect overall brand equity and customer trust, helping Bangladeshi companies become more reputable and sought-after options in the marketplace.

## **2. Literature Review**

Previous literature is the guideline for the study. A thorough and rigorous literature review has been conducted to get the most valuable support for the study structure. Every construct has been given equal attention to get the best output.

### **2.1 Social Media**

Social media has significantly transformed the way modern firms conduct business and interact with consumers (Karamian et al., 2015). Brands may strengthen consumer relationships and decrease bias and misunderstanding via two-way conversations with

customers on social media, similar to friends (Godey et al., 2016; Jayasuriya et al., 2017; Kim & Ko, 2012). More influential and interactive social media platforms are displacing traditional forms of one-way communication (Kim & Ko, 2012). After vetting potential clients using specific criteria, marketers may use social media to send them a personalized message (Rishi & Sharma, 2017). The efficacy of social media for selling products is further enhanced by the increasing amount of time buyers spend on the platform and the cheap cost of social media communication (Jayasuriya et al., 2017). Investing sufficient time and money into social media has become a priority for marketing managers as it has gained popularity in recent years (Sabuncu et al., 2021). Catching consumers' attention with promotional offerings is a challenge for traditional marketing strategists. Consumers no longer ponder the advertising messages sent by conventional ads because of changes in their lives, habits, and psychological and economic situations (Shareef et al., 2018). It is not easy to develop positive customer perceptions without marketing exposure (Alalwan et al., 2017; Kapoor et al., 2018). Here, the chance to contact customers is presented by social media platforms, which are essentially centers for social interaction.

Therefore, it is unsurprising to see modern business using social media more. This highlights the critical need for a qualitative study of social media's impact. Examining the impact of social media on the creation of brand equity is the main objective of this research. More than one study has looked at how social media affects brand equity through quantitative analysis. Instead of conventional media focusing on brand awareness, social media has been shown to influence brand image (Jayasuriya et al., 2017). When it comes to the communication mix, social media is an aspect that significantly affects brand equity (Godey et al., 2016). Using Keller's brand equity components, this research measures brand equity. Therefore, the researchers have taken brand image into account, and they encourage future studies to do the same with the other aspects of brand equity.

## *2.2 Brand Image*

A product includes both tangibles (i.e., design, features, packaging) and intangibles (i.e., brand image, goodwill, trademarks). However, a service includes only intangible aspects. Among the intangible aspects, brand image is the most important one (Mudambi, 2002). Brand image is a perception of a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in clients' memory (Sabuncu et al., 2021). These associations can originate from a client's direct experience with information obtained on a market offering or due to the impact pre-existing associations with an organization had on the client (Ogba & Tan, 2009). Therefore, brand image is a set of beliefs held by clients about a particular brand based upon some intrinsic and extrinsic attributes of a market offering, resulting in perceived quality and satisfaction (Aaker, 1994).

A positive brand image can enhance client experience and satisfaction for a long-term commitment. As a mediating role, brand image significantly influences brand equity dimensions' brand satisfaction, and brand commitment, except for brand engagement. Previous research explored brand image as a powerful driving force for commitment in service industries such as telecommunications and the airline industry (Ogba & Tan, 2009;

Seo & Park, 2018). To determine whether this situation is similar or not, it is crucial to concentrate on the food business.

### 2.3 Brand Equity

Brand equity is the collective assets and liabilities associated with a product or service's name, symbol, and brand, which have the power to increase or decrease the value of the product or service for both the firm and its customers (Aaker, 1994). Additionally, brand equity is the amount of information consumers have about a brand as a result of the marketing efforts made by the brand to elicit a specific reaction from the business (Keller, 1993). Brand equity was described as the additional value that a product or brand has that consumers associate with it, which they may recognize and attribute to a higher price point compared to competing brands (Rios & Riquelme, 2008).

According to some researchers, brand equity may be a valuable tool for marketers, as it provides an explanation of their previous marketing efforts and a framework for planning their future marketing strategies (Keller, 2001). It is also a crucial notion for brand managers when it comes to understanding and controlling client behavior. Some researchers have hypothesized that similar to brand image, lower brand equity may necessitate more marketing and promotional activity on the part of the brand in question in order to keep it at the top of customers' minds (Arora et al., 2009) because ads have the potential to pique consumers' interest, which in turn means that marketing campaigns can contribute to the formation of positive consumer perceptions of the brand, which in turn boosts the brand's equity. Building online or offline brand equity relies on customers being able to identify and remember the brand (Rios & Riquelme, 2008).

Previous studies focused on studying social media platforms focusing on small businesses (Odoom et al., 2017), social media group communication (Shareef et al., 2020), and the fashion industry (Jayasuriya et al., 2017). Studies also focused on brand image (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Musa et al., 2016) and brand equity (Hou & Wonglorsaichon, 2011; Sasmita & Suki, 2015; Zia et al., 2021). However, these studies accepted quantitative approaches. More research is needed since researchers have neglected this subject within the context of Bangladesh and have opted instead to rely on qualitative methodologies. That is what this research is trying to do, focusing on the food industry.

### 2.4 Conceptual Framework

Based on previous studies, the following assumptions have been developed for this study,

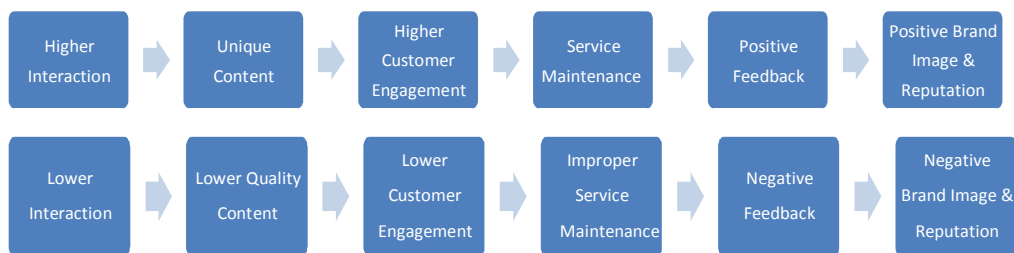


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Following the variables, a greater rate of activities on social media may result in better reach and favorable customer interaction to create a positive brand image. Marketers may create content with informative and unique topics that involve the customers more and more. Through these activities, they may gain a significant amount of positive reviews to increase the trust of the customers in their brand. However, to retain these customer engagements and acquire positive feedback, brand services must be provided with sufficient qualities. It may help to furnish the brand's reputation. Visual marketing content can be beneficial for faster customer engagement. Practical marketing content and activities may create a strong emotional bond between the customers and the brand. By getting more than expected services from the brands, the customer may keep this bond strong. Before making plans for marketing activities, evaluating the target audience's culture, age, gender, and preference is a crucial part of creating brand image and reputation. To connect with the customers, these factors must be appropriately analyzed to build up a loyal customer base. In addition, the brand should emphasize offering, producing, preserving, and developing the quality of goods and services. As per the comprehensive review, an investigative qualitative study on analyzing social media impact on brand image, reputation and equity is not much covered in the Bangladeshi food industry; the paper aims to explore this portion and find new knowledge sections to cultivate.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### *3.1 Research Approach*

A qualitative approach has been employed to conduct this study, using phenomenology to find the accurate live perception and experience of the impact of social media on brand equity, reputation, and image in the food industries of Bangladesh. For an in-depth understanding of how individuals experience and expound the impact of social media on their decisions to make purchases, brand perceptions, and overall market engagement, the phenomenology approach can be chosen (Rashid et al., 2021). In contrast, phenomenology is able to read the mind of the service providers.

#### *3.2 Methods and Data Collection*

The methodology part discusses the methods used to collect data in the research and creates a justification for the impact of social media on brand management and reputation. As mentioned, the qualitative research method has been used as it best fits in this research. This research demands an in-depth analysis of the opinion of some brand practitioners related to various types of restaurants and cloud kitchen services. The study conducted 19 interviews in total, where 6 participants were brand practitioners, and the rest of them were consumers. The customers' age range was 19-29 years. Data was collected through interviews using qualitative questions based on the research topic. For this type of perception based study a qualitative approach with the assigned number of interviewee is adequate in nature (Osborne and Grant., 2021).

The interviews were taken through face-to-face interviews. There were some focus group discussions with the concerned participants as well. The entire interview was recorded with the participants' previous permission. There was a set of open-ended questions related to this research topic, "Influences of Social Media on Brand Image and Brand Equity". Data was collected to obtain information concerning the context, gradual changes, and various internal and external factors that brought such changes.

### 3.3 Rationale for Using Thematic Analysis as a Data Analysis Technique

Thematic analysis is being used to analyze the data by following the phenomenological framework. Transcribed and coded interview methods have been used to place recurring themes related to the role of social media in brand image, reputation, and equity, but the main focus remains to understand how individuals experience and explain the impact of social media on their decisions to make purchases, brand perceptions, and overall market engagement of food brands. On the basis of the above mentioned notion, use of thematic analysis can be well justified (Squied., 2023).

### 3.4 Participants' Selection

The following table shows the characteristics of the research participants.

| Participant    | Details                                   |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Participant 1  | Brand Practitioner (Restaurant Owner)     |
| Participant 2  | Brand Practitioner (Restaurant Owner)     |
| Participant 3  | Brand Practitioner (Cloud Kitchen Owner)  |
| Participant 4  | Brand Practitioner (Cloud Kitchen Owner)  |
| Participant 5  | Brand Practitioner (Cloud Kitchen Owner)  |
| Participant 6  | Brand Practitioner (Restaurant Owner)     |
| Participant 7  | Consumer ( Undergrad Student & Jobholder) |
| Participant 8  | Consumer ( Undergrad Student & Jobholder) |
| Participant 9  | Consumer ( UndergradStudent )             |
| Participant 10 | Consumer ( UndergradStudent )             |
| Participant 11 | Consumer ( Corporate Jobholder)           |
| Participant 12 | Consumer (Graduate Student)               |
| Participant 13 | Consumer ( UndergraduateStudent )         |
| Participant 14 | Consumer (Undergraduate Student )         |
| Participant 15 | Consumer (Undergraduate Student )         |
| Participant 16 | Consumer (Undergraduate Student )         |
| Participant 17 | Consumer (Undergraduate Student )         |
| Participant 18 | Consumer (Undergraduate Student )         |
| Participant 19 | Consumer (Undergraduate Student )         |

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1 *Perception of Practitioner*

Almost all the participant practitioners (six) shared positive thoughts about social media's influence on brand image. They all have similar points of view on this issue. According to them, practitioners' first choice of method to create a positive brand image is social media influence rather than traditional media. Social media tremendously influences the exposure of a brand image. All the 6 practitioners agree that word of mouth is an essential factor in social media, and it can be used as a benefit. They also think that negative publishing of brands through online platforms is threatening. They emphasize that cultural uniqueness matters for growth on social media. They consider consumer psychology, age, and income to be essential factors for targeting the online audience. To them, social media is the fastest method to share innovative ideas. Along with these points, this study also found some variance in the perspectives about social media influences on brand image from the viewpoint of practitioners. From their point of view, it is clear that billions of people use different types of social media platforms. However, not all platforms have a high reach. So, before choosing a platform for brand promotion, the trafficking rate should be analyzed. As most brands use online platforms, product uniqueness is a must to cope with a competitive market. In the food industry, cultural factors like native recipes with different cooking processes might help create a strong, unique brand. Negative publishing can be handled strategically with genuine brand quality. In the digital world, brand image transparency has increased more than before. For example, if a restaurant or cloud kitchen service provides authentic foods with adequate services and maintains its tasks properly, its brand image will be strong through reviews.

On the other hand, if that restaurant or cloud kitchen fakes its services with very attractive or fancy content, the business will collapse soon. Besides, negative reviews can also be a way to improve services. Promotional content should relate to the atmosphere and cultural diversity and be furnished with detailed knowledge or intelligence. For example, to promote sophisticated restaurants' food services, aesthetic content should be created. For the other general food services, funny or comedic content can be used to promote products. Besides, all types of cultural sensitivity should be maintained in online promotion. At present, native consumers also adopt Western culture. It can be a way for them to promote activities on social media.

Destination is another factor for the target audience online. Out of 6 participants, most of the interviewee think that most consumers want online services in remote places, and food services can capitalize on this opportunity on online platforms. Consumers' tendency to follow trends through social media is another concerning factor. Currently, young people follow trends very much. Social media is an easy path to know which trend is finding a fad and which is not. Choosing brand promoters or influencers on social media requires caution because they will be connected to brands. For cloud kitchens, pricing system maintenance on social media is a challenging task. Thus, consumers should engage

more with brands so that they may have positive thoughts regarding this issue. Before starting promotional activities on social media, the consumer's mentality should be appropriately analyzed. Consumers' choice of restaurants varies to get recognition on social media from others. So, they want to be engaged with a brand that will help them do so. That is why promotional activities should be made to engage the reality of customer behaviors.

#### *4.2 Perception of Customers*

Out of 13, many customers say that if the brand's reputation is good, then it has a positive impact. Customers' trust companies that continuously provide their food quality and quantity on their social media pages. They say that they depend on online comments, reviews, and feedback. Again, they influence online reviews and comments. They say that social media content, such as YouTube videos, influences them. Brand reputation depends on social media. They said that the consumer perspective significantly impacts a brand's reputation and influences customer decisions. Restaurant food may get negative publishing. For example, some biryani hotels get dog meat. So, their reputation went down. Later, they proved that there was wrong information. They proved that their biryani's meat was not dog meat. They proved positive things. However, negative things may impact people negatively if they are not managed positively.

Cloud Kitchen Services have a popular social media brand image. Some customers order food through cloud kitchen services. They are satisfied because it is safe, hygienic, and pure. Customers said that they ordered homemade food in a COVID-19 situation. They order homemade food through Food Panda, Pathao, and Uber. They also depend on online comments and reviews. The participant customers focused on some specific issues on social media, which connected them with the brand—pricing matters before observing reviews for customers. When the price is high, they read reviews first; when it is low, they try the food themselves before judging. They get more scope to know about restaurants on social media and connect with customers more frequently. According to the customers' judgment, influencers can be both positive and negative for the brand. People's psychology about health is influenced by online reviews or promotional content. For environmental queries, social media is a convenient option for consumers. Reviews are beneficial to unknown consumers who are trying the food of a new restaurant or cloud kitchen. A restaurant or a cloud kitchen may offer after-sale service, like delivery service and membership services, which helps to get more positive feedback online. Promotional activities like discounts from different restaurants online attract young people very much.

### **5. Research Findings**

Social media significantly affects the reputation and image of a brand. Practitioners and consumers alike stressed the significance of online reviews, remarks, and feedback in influencing consumers' perceptions of brands. The finding is consistent with the existing studies (Al Abdallah et al., 2024). A brand's reputation might suffer significantly from negative social media publicity. However, if brands are open about their problems and

make improvements, they may bounce back. Consumers give internet reviews and ratings much weight when choosing what to buy, especially for unknown businesses. Getting new customers is boosted by positive ratings. The genuineness and caliber of the goods or services are essential. Promises established by brands through branding and social media marketing must be fulfilled. Younger generations are more likely to get branded information via social media. A brand's engagement strategy should be customized for the age groups of its target audience. Cultural values and ideas shape brand choices. Localized or culturally relevant branding appeals to customers more.

Out of 19 participants, some of the participants also revealed some limitations of social media in creating a brand image; false information spreads very quickly on social media platforms. It may cause the downfall of a brand very easily and quickly. After that, regaining the former position of the brand is really difficult. Keeping the customers satisfied is a complex job on online platforms. The findings are also consistent with existing literature of the field (Sabuncu et al., 2021). The slightest mistake can be the reason for the loss of customers by gaining negative reviews or feedback about the brand and its products. Failing to manage customers in customer servicing can cause negative feedback as well, which is harmful to the brand. Marketers need to keep the online platforms interacting from time to time for reach. If online interaction is reduced, the reach of the social media platform will go down very quickly, causing a decrease in sales and customers. Marketers need to create content that follows the trends on social media. Nowadays, trends can be both long-lasting and temporary. Currently, customers are looking for trendy issues. So, to keep up the pace with the competitive market, marketing activities and managing changing trends are complex tasks. There are industries in which social media does not impact the creation of a brand image much. These organizations mostly have some critical factors, such as confidential issues and regulation issues. These types of organizations focus on service development rather than promotion, such as law firms, B2B services, and others. Capturing the attention of audiences who are not quite active on online platforms is another challenge for marketers. For example, the older adults are less active on social media than the youth.

Like all other studies, this research has also some limitations. It would have been better if the study approached the mixed methods. Apart from social media, an inclusion of some other determinants in studying brand equity can be a topic of future research. Having said that, the study will give a clear milieu to the stakeholders by providing a clear picture of the impact of social media in developing brand image and equity in the growing industry of a developing nation.

## **6. Recommendations and Conclusion**

The objective of the paper is to figure out the impact of social media on brand image and the brand equity of the emerging food industry of developing nations like Bangladesh. The study finds that to maintain a brand image and equity successfully, brand practitioners must be careful when monitoring internet reviews, comments, and feedback. They must

respond to any negative media coverage or consumer concerns as soon as possible. Producing captivating social media content that focuses on the brand narrative above direct promotion is necessary. Moreover, they should ensure that consistent and reliable messages are provided across all social media platforms, including Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram. They also need to create genuine relationships with customers. If influencers are carefully screened, influencer marketing may be quite successful. One adverse event has the power to destroy brand confidence. They can share backstage content to foster customer trust effectively. They must contrast the optimal target consumer's attention with the platform's reach. They need to make sure their social media activities reflect their brand identity on all platforms. Constant monitoring of customer preferences and attitudes through social media surveys may help brands adjust their positioning and brand image appropriately.

This study indicates that there is incipient evidence of social media's impact on building brand reputation on social media platforms. This demonstrates that researchers in the food industry are beginning to study this area. In this research, some brand practitioners and customers talked about their thoughts. They share their honest opinion. They talked about the positive and negative sides of social media's impact on building brand image and equity. People will accept a brand that will expose them efficiently. As this research is about the food industry, which primarily depends on visual appeal, in this industry, social media plays a vital role in reputation. If one restaurant cannot serve high-quality food, then customers will give negative reviews on social media and create a negative impression on other customers. So, one food brand should be focused on its food quality, hygiene, and delivery system and should be on budget. Brand familiarity could also be improved through advertisement and promotion to let consumers know that the brand exists. Social media content, therefore, can be seen as a way to increase consumers' brand awareness and brand attitudes rather than to compete with user-generated social media content. Future discussions should be expanded with other social media platforms' coverage, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others, to compare the effectiveness of each of these social media platforms in increasing brand equity and brand awareness.

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