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EDITED BY

Joana Carmo Dias,
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REVIEWED BY

Albérico Rosário,
Universidade Europeia de Lisboa, Portugal
Halder Yandry Loor Zambrano,
Technical University of Manabi, Ecuador

*CORRESPONDENCE

Kamaladevi Baskaran
✉ kamaladevimba@gmail.com

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From clicks to quick bites—social media engagement and logistics efficiency as drivers of fast-food consumption in the United Arab Emirates

Gayatri Venugopal and Kamaladevi Baskaran*

Amity Business School Dubai, Amity University Dubai, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Introduction: The fast-food industry in the United Arab Emirates has expanded rapidly due to urbanization, a digitally active young population, and extensive use of social media for consumer engagement. Fast-food brands increasingly rely on digital touchpoints to influence purchase decisions, brand loyalty, and post-purchase satisfaction. This study examines how social media marketing attributes, consumer engagement, logistics efficiency, and sales platform usability affect fast-food purchase behavior among young adults in the UAE, with specific reference to major fried chicken and burger chains such as McDonald's, KFC, and Hardee's.

Methods: The study follows a positivist research philosophy with a deductive approach. A quantitative research design was adopted using a structured questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The target population comprised young adults aged 18 to 25 in the UAE. A total of 100 valid responses were collected. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS, applying regression analysis, correlation analysis, ANOVA, and chi-square tests to test the proposed hypotheses.

Results: The findings indicate that social media brand engagement and paid advertisements have a significant influence on fast-food purchase behavior. In contrast, influencer-driven content and promotional offers showed a comparatively lower impact. Frequent interaction with brands on social media platforms was positively associated with brand loyalty and repeat purchase intention. Logistics efficiency, particularly timely delivery and order accuracy, emerged as a key determinant of customer satisfaction and retention. The usability and convenience of digital ordering platforms significantly influenced consumer ordering behavior.

Discussion: The study highlights the interconnected role of marketing communication, logistics performance, and digital platform usability in shaping fast-food consumption among digitally native consumers in the UAE. The results suggest that fast-food brands should align social media engagement strategies with strong operational execution to enhance customer experience and loyalty. Emphasis on convenience, reliable delivery, and consistent brand interaction is critical for sustaining competitive advantage. Future research may extend this work by examining other geographical contexts, increasing the sample size, and adopting a longitudinal approach to capture evolving digital engagement patterns.

KEYWORDS

brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, fast food consumption, logistics, social media, UAE

1 Introduction

The fast-food industry has become a cornerstone of the global food service sector, known for its convenience, affordability, and wide variety of offerings. In the UAE, the food sector has witnessed exponential growth, driven by rapid urbanization, a multicultural population, and an increasing demand for quick-service dining options. The UAE's strategic location as a global hub for trade and tourism has further amplified the fast-food industry's relevance, attracting both international chains and local brands to cater to its diverse population. According to recent market research, the UAE's fast-food market is projected to reach \$4.5 billion by 2025, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.5% from 2021 to 2025 (Euromonitor International, 2023). This growth trajectory is significantly higher than the global average, highlighting the UAE's unique position in the quick-service restaurant ecosystem. The sector's expansion is particularly evident in the quick-service restaurant (QSR) segment, where fried chicken and burger chains like KFC, McDonald's, and Hardee's have captured substantial market share through strategic digital engagement and operational excellence (QSR Magazine, 2024).

1.1 Digital transformation and social media influence

The digital transformation of the UAE fast-food industry represents a paradigm shift in how brands engage with consumers. The country's exceptional digital infrastructure has facilitated this transformation, with internet penetration exceeding 99% as of 2023 and smartphone adoption reaching 97.6%. This high connectivity has created a marketplace where social media platforms—particularly Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat—have become primary channels for brand discovery, evaluation, and purchase decisions among younger demographics (Kantar, 2023). Recent research indicates that 89% of UAE residents aged 18–25 follow at least one fast-food brand on social media, with 72% reporting that they have made a purchase decision based on content encountered on these (Kemp, 2023). From 2020 to 2023, the sector witnessed a 62% increase in digital orders, with mobile apps accounting for approximately 38% of all fast-food purchases among young adults. Fast-food brands in the UAE now allocate approximately 65% of their marketing budgets to digital channels, compared to just 30% 5 years. This shift reflects the changing consumer landscape, where younger demographics increasingly rely on social media not just for product awareness but for the entire purchase journey from discovery to decision (Ali-Alsaadi et al., 2023).

1.2 The young adult demographic

Young adults between 18 and 25 years constitute a particularly significant consumer segment in the UAE market. This demographic represents approximately 17% of the UAE population yet accounts for nearly 36% of fast-food consumption by value. This exhibits distinctive behavioral patterns characterized by high social media usage (averaging 7.4 h daily across platforms), preference for convenience, and strong responsiveness to digital marketing stimuli. The

demographic is particularly important due to their significant purchasing power, with average monthly discretionary spending of AED 1,200–2,500 on food and entertainment, despite many being students or early-career professionals. Their digital nativity and formation of long-term consumption habits make them a strategic priority for fast-food brands seeking sustainable market positioning (Strategy and PwC, 2021).

1.3 Operational excellence and logistics efficiency

Beyond marketing aspects, the operational dimension of the fast-food industry plays a crucial role in sustaining consumer satisfaction and loyalty. The efficiency of logistics operations including timely delivery, order accuracy, and product quality preservation has become increasingly important in an era where consumers expect seamless service experiences. The average delivery time expectation among UAE consumers has decreased from 45–60 min in 2018 to 25–35 min in 2023, placing significant pressure on supply chain operations (Ken Research, 2024). This operational challenge is compounded by the UAE's unique geographical characteristics, including high-density urban centers with complex delivery routes and extreme climate conditions (with summer temperatures exceeding 45 °C) that affect food quality maintenance during transit. Despite the region's challenging climate and import-dependent food ecosystem, companies like McDonald's and KFC have developed sophisticated supply chain networks to ensure consistent product quality across their outlets. The rise of third-party delivery applications such as Talabat, Deliveroo, and Careem has further reshaped the industry, creating new competitive dynamics and customer service challenges while simultaneously expanding market reach (Ken Research, 2024).

1.4 Research gap and contribution

While substantial research exists on consumer behavior in mature markets like North America and Europe, the unique socio-economic context of the UAE warrants specific investigation. The UAE's distinctive characteristics including its highly diverse expatriate population (88.5% of total population), extreme wealth concentration, Islamic cultural context, and rapid technological adoption create a consumer environment that differs significantly from Western markets.

This research gap becomes particularly evident when considering the intersection of digital marketing, logistics operations, and consumer psychology in the fast-food sector. Existing literature has examined these elements in isolation, but few studies have investigated their integrated impact on consumption behavior, particularly in the context of emerging markets with high digital penetration. While the health implications of fast-food consumption have been extensively studied in Western contexts, limited research has examined how digital marketing influences nutritional awareness and consumption frequency among young adults in the Gulf region. This gap is particularly concerning given rising obesity rates among UAE youth and the potential for frictionless digital ordering to exacerbate unhealthy consumption patterns.

1.5 Study objectives and significance

This study aims to bridge these knowledge gaps by examining how social media marketing attributes influence fast-food consumption behavior among young adults in the UAE, while also considering the operational implications of digitally-driven demand and potential health consequences. By focusing specifically on the 18–25 age demographic and their interactions with fried chicken and burger chains (McDonald's, KFC, and Hardee's), this research provides valuable insights for both academic understanding and industry application. The findings will contribute to the growing body of literature on digital consumer behavior in emerging markets while offering practical recommendations for fast-food brands operating in the region.

1.6 Research aims and objectives

This study aims to evaluate the impact of social media marketing attributes on fast-food consumption behavior among young adults in the UAE, with a specific focus on fried chicken and burger chains such as McDonald's, KFC, and Hardee's. The research seeks to analyze how social media content influences brand preference, customer loyalty, satisfaction, and repeated purchases, while also considering how such digital engagement puts pressure on logistics and operational capabilities. The specific objectives include:

- To identify the most influential social media marketing elements (e.g., advertisements, influencer content, peer engagement) in shaping fast-food preferences.
- To assess how these digital marketing attributes affect brand loyalty, customer satisfaction, and platform usage among young adults.
- To explore how consumer engagement on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat leads to tangible business outcomes such as increased sales and logistics challenges.
- To analyze how logistics efficiency and customer service responsiveness influence the consumer's post-purchase satisfaction and decision to repurchase.

1.7 Research questions

- What specific social media marketing features are most influential in shaping fast-food consumption preferences among young adults in the UAE?
- Does increased social media engagement lead to brand loyalty and repeated purchases in the fast-food sector?
- How do marketing-induced surges in demand affect logistics and supply chain efficiency in fast-food brands?
- What role do demographics play in moderating the influence of social media content on food purchasing decisions?

2 Literature review

The S-O-R theory, developed by [Mehrabian and Russell in 1974](#), is a foundational psychological model that explains how external

environmental stimuli influence internal emotional states, which in turn shape behavioral responses. It offers a structured way to understand consumer behavior, especially in digitally saturated environments like social media. Social media marketing, especially in fast-food, is a carefully composed form of environmental stimulus designed to trigger a chain of internal processing that leads to specific consumer behaviors. Applying the S-O-R model allows us to understand not just what consumers do, but why they do it, by uncovering the emotional and cognitive mechanisms that connect visual content to purchase decisions. This is particularly important in a UAE context where digital exposure is high, and food decisions are increasingly shaped by screen-based interactions. In this study, the theory helps link fast-food marketing content (stimulus) with young adults' psychological responses (organism), which in turn influence actual consumer behaviors like ordering frequency, brand switching, or preference formation (response). This layered understanding is essential for both marketers and logistics managers trying to predict and manage demand based on online consumer interactions ([Ashok and Baskaran, 2022](#)).

2.1 Social media engagement

Social media engagement has been widely acknowledged as a driving force in shaping consumer behavior. [Belanche et al. \(2019\)](#), aimed to explore the psychological alignment between influencers and their audiences. Their findings revealed that engagement is most effective when the influencer's persona aligns with consumer values, enhancing trust and response. However, the study was not region-specific and focused more broadly on psychological congruence rather than platform-based features. [Rainu and Baskaran \(2025\)](#), investigated Instagram content types and their roles in consumer decision-making. Their findings confirmed that stories generate more engagement than static posts, particularly during early awareness and interest stages. This study aligns closely with this thesis, although it does not extend to post-purchase behavior. [Kumawat and Baskaran \(2023\)](#) further supported this view, where they observed that visually engaging and interactive content significantly drives social media engagement among Gen Z users. The primary gap in their study was its focus on tourism, rather than fast food or product-based engagement.

2.2 Product preference

While few studies directly explored product preference in a fast-food context, some offered relevant parallels. [Gupta and Baskaran \(2024\)](#) contributed insights on how Instagram aesthetics influence consumer preference. Although [Cyriac and Baskaran \(2021\)](#), focused on tourism, the study demonstrated that immersive and visually appealing content leads to stronger preferences, a principle that translates well to fast food marketing where visual temptation is key. [Vellaichamy et al. \(2022\)](#), explored how social media drives food curiosity and choice-making among young adults. Their study found that exposure to food content on social platforms heightened interest in trying new or trendy food items. The gap lies in their broad focus on all food types without isolating fast food specifically or examining brand-driven content.

2.3 Sales platform

The ease and efficiency of the platform used for ordering were found to be key influencers in consumer decision-making. [Baskaran \(2023a,b\)](#) aimed to evaluate how well tourism websites move users through the AIDA funnel. Their findings emphasized that high attention and action stages were strongly correlated with simple, intuitive digital platforms. While the context was tourism, the principle of platform usability applies directly to online food ordering environments. [Rainu and Baskaran \(2025\)](#) also indirectly highlighted the impact of platform interaction in their Instagram-based analysis, reinforcing that user experience with content formats (posts vs. stories) alters engagement and decision progression. The limitation here is again the lack of direct linkage to purchase platforms like apps or websites.

2.4 Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty emerged as a direct result of consistent engagement and alignment between brand identity and digital communication. [Belanche et al. \(2019\)](#) focused on the relational aspect of influencer-brand-consumer dynamics and found that when influencer and product identities align, consumers demonstrate increased brand trust and repeated engagement. However, this was tested across general products and not specific to service brands like fast food. [Rainu and Baskaran \(2025\)](#) added that higher frequency and consistency in Instagram stories directly influenced consumer loyalty by reinforcing the brand message over time. The study, while insightful, did not test actual loyalty metrics such as repeat purchase behavior.

2.5 Customer satisfaction and repeat purchases

Customer satisfaction in this context was primarily linked to the fulfillment side of the consumer journey. [Baskaran \(2022\)](#) addressed the AIDA model's "Action" phase, where they found that failure to deliver a seamless final step (e.g., booking or purchase) reduced overall satisfaction. While this study was tourism-based, the implications for fast food are clear - the fulfillment phase must be frictionless. The gap in their research is the lack of direct consumer satisfaction data, relying instead on site analytics. Additionally, [Kazim and Baskaran \(2025\)](#) in their logistics-focused study indirectly contributed to this category by showing how efficient systems reduce breakdowns in the supply chain, supporting long-term satisfaction.

2.6 Logistics efficiency

Logistics efficiency including order accuracy, speed, and product availability has been shown to play a critical role in customer retention. [Kazim and Baskaran \(2025\)](#) investigated how fast food chains can optimize procurement and delivery. Their findings showed that better forecasting and inventory systems lead to improved reliability. While highly relevant, the study lacked a marketing or consumer-focused dimension. [Moncey and Baskaran \(2020\)](#) also contributed, showing that IoT and cloud-based systems reduced spoilage and improved delivery timelines. However, the focus was operational without tying logistics performance to consumer behavior outcomes.

2.7 Fast-food consumption patterns in the UAE

The UAE's food consumption patterns have undergone significant transformation over the past decade, influenced by rapid urbanization, internationalization, and changing lifestyles among younger generations. Understanding these patterns provides essential context for examining fast-food consumption behaviors within the broader landscape of dietary choices and cultural practices.

Fast-food consumption in the UAE is shaped by demographic pressures, a modernized retail landscape, and rapid digitalization of food access. The country's heavy reliance on food imports 86.8% of total consumption in 2023 has led to the development of highly efficient supply chains that also support the availability and expansion of global and regional fast-food brands. Between 2019 and 2024, per-capita food consumption increased by 10%, reaching 928 kg per person, a trend largely driven by the UAE's predominantly expatriate population, which accounts for approximately 88% of all residents. This population diversity fosters strong demand for international fast-food formats and convenience-oriented dining options.

The UAE's modern retail environment further fuels fast-food consumption. Modern trade formats accounted for 87% of the grocery market in 2023, reflecting a mature retail infrastructure that enhances accessibility to fast-food outlets, branded products, and ready-to-eat options. Retail expansion remains significant, with modern store openings increasing by 86% since 2020, including 147 new stores in 2023 alone. These retail developments are complemented by widespread digital adoption: the on-demand grocery market is projected to grow from USD 1.7 billion in 2023 to USD 5.2 billion by 2028, mirroring parallel growth in app-based food delivery platforms and cloud-kitchen ecosystems ([Ardent Advisory & Accounting, 2025](#)).

The UAE is the regional leader in food sector growth, digital transformation, logistics, and innovation. While the entire GCC food sector is expanding, the UAE stands out for its higher per capita consumption, advanced infrastructure, and proactive sustainability and food security strategies. The UAE's food service market is growing faster than the GCC average, and its digital adoption rates are the highest in the region. Regional trends mirror those in the UAE, but the UAE is often cited as the benchmark for modernization and innovation in the food sector ([Ardent Advisory & Accounting, 2025](#)).

2.8 Shifting dietary patterns and fast-food prevalence

Recent studies have highlighted a dramatic shift in eating habits among UAE residents, particularly young adults. [Cheikh Ismail et al. \(2023\)](#) study revealed over 80% of UAE adults surveyed reported using social media for more than 2 h per day. Greater time spent on social media, being female, younger age, following influencers, and more leisure screen time were all associated with a higher influence of social media on eating behaviors. Participants who had been infected with COVID-19, or who reported increased screen time, food intake, body weight, and number of meals per day during the pandemic, also showed a stronger association between social media use and eating behaviors. Not eating breakfast and spending more time on screens for leisure were linked to a greater effect of social media on eating behavior. Lower social media influence scores were found among older adults, males, those spending less time on social media, and

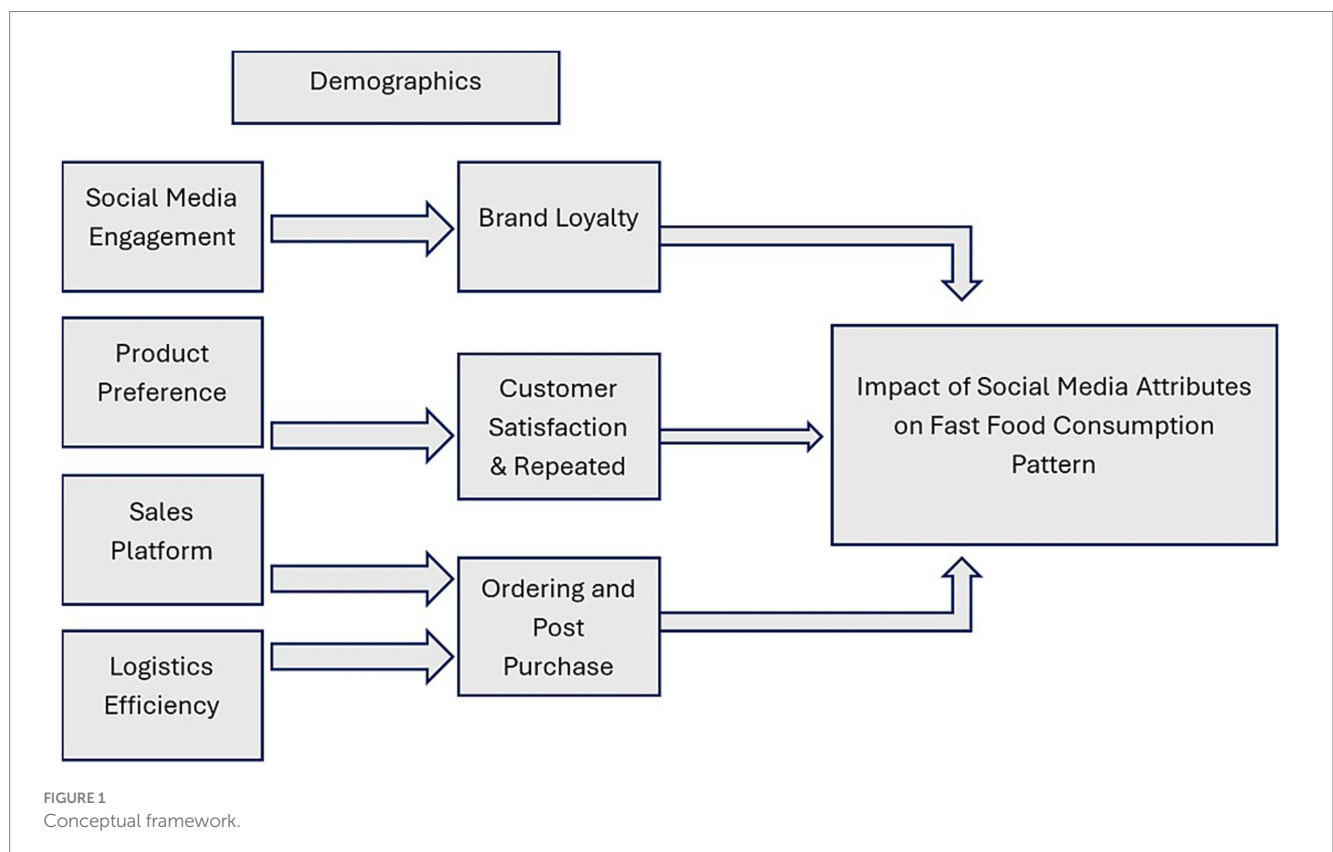
those not following influencers. The findings suggest that social media is significantly associated with dietary habits among UAE adults, particularly among women and those with higher screen time (Choudhary and Baskaran, 2022). The study highlights the need for targeted awareness programs to promote healthy lifestyle choices in the context of high social media use. The frequency of fast-food consumption among UAE youth has increased by approximately 47% since 2015, a rate of change that exceeds most other food categories including traditional Emirati cuisine, home-cooked meals, and casual dining. This acceleration has been attributed to multiple factors including increased time constraints due to academic and professional obligations, growing availability of delivery services, and the normalization of fast food through social media exposure (Cheikh Ismail et al., 2023).

2.9 Health and quality of life considerations

Al Sabbah et al. (2024) study aimed to investigate the associations between lifestyle, eating habits, food preferences, consumption patterns, and obesity among female university students in the UAE. The findings revealed that there was a notable correlation between the intake of high-sugar beverages (such as milk, juices, soft drinks, and energy drinks) and an increased risk of overweight and obesity among both Emirati and non-Emirati populations. Milk consumption was particularly associated with obesity in non-Emirati students a significant preference for fruits and vegetables was observed among overweight and obese students, indicating a trend toward healthier food choices. However, there was also a clear preference for high-calorie, low-nutrient foods like processed meats, sweets, and

salty snacks. Fast food items, especially shawarma, were significantly correlated with increased body weight status, with shawarma showing a notably high correlation with both obesity and overweight statuses. Factors such as physical activity, sleep patterns, and eating habits (including eating speed and quantity) were also linked to weight status. For instance, engaging in physical activity was associated with a reduced likelihood of being overweight or obese. Al-Rethaiaa et al. (2010) study assessed the prevalence of overweight and obesity among male college students in Saudi Arabia and to correlate their body weight status and composition with their eating habits. Most students reported eating irregular meals, with 55.7% consuming only two meals per day. Frequent consumption of snacks and fried foods was highlighted, while vegetables and fruits were not commonly consumed, except for dates. Significant correlations were found between body mass index (BMI), body fat percentage (BF%), and visceral fat level (VFL) with eating habits, indicating that eating with family and the frequency of snacks had a negative effect on BMI. There is a high prevalence of overweight and obesity among male college students in Saudi Arabia, highlighting the need for strategies to promote healthier eating habits.

The framework shown in Figure 1 integrates key components of social media marketing, consumer behavior, sales platform, and operational performance to examine how digital engagement influences fast-food consumption patterns among young adults in the UAE. Specifically, it proposes that social media engagement, product preference, and the use of various sales platforms act as independent variables that directly affect brand loyalty, customer satisfaction and repeat purchases, and logistics efficiency, respectively. These pathways are influenced by demographic characteristics, which mediate the strength and nature of these relationships. The cumulative effect of



these linkages ultimately contributes to understanding the broader impact of social media attributes on fast-food consumption behavior in a digitally driven marketplace.

2.10 Hypotheses

H1: Social media marketing attributes positively influence fast-food purchase behavior among young adults in the UAE.

H2: Engagement with social media marketing leads to greater brand loyalty and repeat purchases.

H3: Logistics efficiency positively impacts customer satisfaction and repeat purchases.

H4: Different sales platforms significantly impact fast-food purchase behavior.

3 Methodology

This study adopts a positivist philosophical approach, where the objective can be measured through empirical observation and quantitative analysis (Saunders et al., 2019). This orientation allows for systematic, unbiased measurement of relationships based on real-world data. The logical structure of this study is deductive, meaning that it begins with a theoretical foundation and established hypotheses drawn from existing literature and models. The methodology follows a quantitative approach, using structured, closed-ended questions to measure the influence of independent variables (Social media marketing attributes, engagement with social media marketing, logistics efficiency, fast-food purchase behavior, social media marketing attributes) on dependent variables (Fast-food purchase behavior, brand loyalty and repeat purchases, customer satisfaction and repeat purchases, sales platforms). The target population for this research comprises young adults aged 18–25 years currently residing in different Emirates of the UAE, including Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and others. This population was selected due to high digital engagement (99% social media penetration in this age group), growing purchasing power and influence on market trends and formation of long-term consumption habits during this life stage (Kemp, 2025). A non-probability convenience sampling method was chosen due to the accessibility and willingness of participants on social platforms and is appropriate for exploratory research aiming to identify trends within a specific demographic. Although this method may limit the generalizability of results, it is suitable for exploratory research aiming to identify trends within a specific demographic. 100 samples were gathered using Google Forms, which enabled digital distribution and easy compilation of responses. For data analysis, Microsoft Excel was used for basic sorting and coding, while IBM SPSS was employed for advanced statistical analysis, including regression, correlation, ANOVA, and chi-square tests. These tools support accurate, efficient, and replicable data interpretation, aligning with the study's positivist and quantitative framework (Majji and Baskaran, 2021).

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), serves as a foundational model in understanding consumer behavior, particularly in digital marketing. This framework delineates how external stimuli (S), such as marketing

messages and platform designs, influence internal cognitive and emotional states (O) of consumers, which in turn drive their behavioral responses (R). In contemporary research, the S-O-R model has been effectively utilized to analyze how various marketing stimuli ranging from social media content to interactive website features shape consumer perceptions and decision-making processes. The model emphasizes the importance of the organism component, which encompasses the psychological and emotional responses of consumers to these stimuli. It is crucial in digital marketing contexts, where the design and presentation of content can significantly impact consumer engagement and purchase intentions (Mohamad et al., 2024). This theoretical structure has been successfully applied in similar contexts, including research Digital innovation in industry 4.0 (Baskaran and Rajavelu, 2020), Artificial intelligence in FinTech (Belanche et al., 2019), Predictive Analytics in Recruitment (Baskaran, 2023a,b), e-commerce efficiency in UAE retail sector (Kazim and Baskaran, 2025). A similar study was conducted in the UAE by Al Sabbah et al. (2024), which investigated the associations between lifestyle, eating habits, food preferences, consumption patterns, and obesity among female university students in the region. Their findings provided valuable insights into how these factors interplay and contribute to obesity risk within this demographic. In addition, Al-Rethaiaa et al. (2010) highlighted the significance of eating habits and lifestyle choices in shaping health outcomes among young adults in the Gulf region.

3.1 Instrument reliability

To ensure measurement reliability, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for all multi-item scales. The results showed acceptable to excellent reliability:

- Social media marketing attributes ($\alpha = 0.88$)
- Brand loyalty measures ($\alpha = 0.91$)
- Logistics efficiency evaluations ($\alpha = 0.84$)
- Platform usability assessments ($\alpha = 0.87$)

These values exceed the commonly recommended threshold of 0.70 indicating strong internal consistency of the measurement items.

4 Results

The results are interpreted in the context of the research objectives, linking consumer's digital engagement to operational responsiveness and brand performance. This will help confirm or reject the proposed hypotheses and provide strategic insights.

The demographic profile of the respondents provides critical context for understanding the findings of this study. A total of 100 participants were surveyed, and the distribution of their basic characteristics is summarized in Table 1.

The sample is predominantly composed of individuals aged 21–23 years (72%), with the majority being employed (57%) or students (21%). This employment distribution aligns with UAE labor market statistics for this age group. Dubai (46%) and Sharjah (31%) residents constitute the largest geographical segments, reflecting the urban concentration of the UAE's young adult population. The income distribution skews toward the lower end of the spectrum, with 49% earning 0–10,000 AED monthly, consistent with entry-level positions and student status common among this age demographic. Social

TABLE 1 Demographics of the respondents.

Demographic factor	Frequency (N = 100)	Percentage (%)
Age group		
18–20 years	7	7%
21–23 years	72	72%
24–25 years	21	21%
Occupation		
Employed	57	57%
Self-employed	19	19%
Student	21	21%
Unemployed	3	3%
Current emirate of residence		
Abu Dhabi	7	7%
Ajman	5	5%
Dubai	46	46%
Fujairah	4	4%
Ras Al Khaimah	1	1%
Sharjah	31	31%
Umm Al Quwain	6	6%
Income level		
0–10,000 AED	49	49%
10,000–20,000 AED	30	30%
20,000–30,000 AED	13	13%
30,000–40,000 AED	7	7%
Above 40,000 AED	1	1%
Social media usage frequency		
A few times a week	21	21%
Multiple times a day	54	54%
Once a day	12	12%
Rarely	13	13%

media usage is high among the sample, with 54% reporting multiple daily engagements with platforms. This high frequency of social media interaction exceeds the global average for this age group (42% reporting multiple daily usage) and aligns with previous UAE-specific digital behavior studies.

4.1 H1: social media marketing attributes positively influence fast-food purchase behavior among young adults in the UAE

The hypothesis tested in this section was whether different components of social media marketing—such as advertisements, influencer content, promotions, and interactive engagement—have a significant influence on fast-food purchase behavior. The model tested in Table 2 demonstrated a strong positive relationship between these predictors and consumer purchase behavior, with an R value of 0.669 indicating a substantial correlation. The R^2 value of 0.448 signifies that approximately 44.8% of the variance in fast food purchase behavior is

explained by the selected marketing attributes, while the Adjusted R^2 of 0.425 adjusts this estimate based on the number of predictors, making it more generalizable across the population. Further support for the model's reliability is seen in Table 3, where the F -statistic (19.256) with a significance level of $p < 0.001$ confirms that the overall regression model is statistically significant. This suggests that the independent variables, when taken together, meaningfully predict the likelihood of fast-food purchases.

Detailed coefficients are presented in Table 4, where the standardized beta (β) values represent the relative influence of each variable on the dependent outcome. The hypothesis stating that social media advertisements positively influence fast-food purchase behavior was accepted. The regression output showed a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.260$, $p = 0.028$), confirming that advertisements are a strong predictor of purchasing intent. This aligns with findings from Belanche et al. (2021), who argued that psychological congruence between digital content and consumer identity enhances purchase motivation. On the other hand, the hypothesis that influencer content significantly influences fast-food choices was rejected, despite a positive beta value ($\beta = 0.218$) that fell just short of statistical significance ($p = 0.068$). This partially diverges from Rainu and Baskaran (2025), who found influencer content impactful at the initial decision-making stage. However, in the context of fast food, consumers may place more trust in direct brand engagement rather than third-party endorsements. The hypothesis that online promotions drive purchase decisions was also rejected, with a weak coefficient ($\beta = 0.033$, $p = 0.754$). While this contrasts with general findings in digital marketing literature such as Prathapan et al. (2018), who found that discounts attract attention, the lack of significance in this study suggests that impulse offers may not outweigh habitual or trust-based decisions in the food sector. The hypothesis that interactive engagement (e.g., polls, comment responses) increases purchase likelihood was accepted. This variable showed a significant influence on purchase behavior ($\beta = 0.264$, $p = 0.019$), supporting the argument that two-way communication and active digital presence boost consumer trust and conversion. This is consistent with the work of both Belanche et al. (2021) and Rainu and Baskaran (2025), who emphasized the role of conversational engagement in building loyalty and increasing intent to purchase.

4.2 H2: engagement with social media marketing leads to greater brand loyalty and repeat purchases

This hypothesis was tested through bivariate correlation analysis using five Likert-scale variables that captured aspects of engagement and consumer loyalty. As shown in Table 5, strong correlations were observed between positive interactions ($r = 0.648$), frequent updates ($r = 0.655$), promotional posts ($r = 0.583$), and repurchase intentions. These findings support Role of Social Media Engagement in Driving Brand Loyalty and align with literature that emphasizes the importance of social media engagement in influencing brand loyalty. The Pearson correlation analysis demonstrated several strong positive relationships between social media engagement strategies and consumer loyalty outcomes. A significant correlation was observed between positive social media interactions and repurchase intentions ($r = 0.648$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that responsiveness and

brand-customer interaction directly influence brand loyalty. Frequent brand updates also showed a strong correlation with repurchase likelihood ($r = 0.655, p < 0.001$), followed by engaging content ($r = 0.547, p < 0.001$), and promotional posts ($r = 0.583, p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that consistent, engaging, and interactive digital communication enhances brand trust and repeat purchase behavior among fast food consumers. These results confirm that social media engagement strategies such as frequent updates, promotional posts, and responsive communication significantly enhance brand loyalty and the likelihood of repeat purchases. The findings strongly support Role of Social Media Engagement in driving brand loyalty and align with previous literature emphasizing the role of engagement in fostering consumer retention and trust (Baskaran and Rajavelu, 2020).

4.3 H3: logistics efficiency positively impacts customer satisfaction and repeat purchases

The hypothesis was tested using one-way ANOVA, evaluating whether customer satisfaction and repeat purchase behavior significantly differ across levels of perceived logistics efficiency. Table 6

TABLE 2 Model summary: regression analysis.

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate
1	0.669	0.448	0.425	0.928

TABLE 3 ANOVA results: regression analysis.

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	66.317	4	16.579	19.256	0
Residual	81.793	95	0.861		
Total	148.11	99			

TABLE 4 Coefficients: regression analysis.

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	0.757	0.356	–	2.129	0.036
Social media advertisements	0.262	0.117	0.26	2.238	0.028
Influencer content	0.217	0.118	0.218	1.846	0.068
Online promotions	0.033	0.104	0.033	0.314	0.754
Brand engagement through interactive content	0.284	0.119	0.264	2.39	0.019

TABLE 5 Correlation analysis for role of social media engagement in driving brand loyalty.

Variables	Frequent updates	Engaging content	Promotions	Positive interactions	Repurchase likelihood
Frequent updates	1				
Engaging content	0.605	1			
Promotions	0.646	0.546	1		
Positive interactions	0.482	0.69	0.648	1	
Repurchase Likelihood	0.655	0.547	0.583	0.648	1

shows statistically significant differences, particularly with timely delivery ($F = 11.462, p < 0.001$) and order accuracy ($F = 19.682, p < 0.001$), both of which positively influenced customer satisfaction and retention. The ANOVA analysis showed that trust in fast food brands was significantly influenced by logistics-related variables, particularly the timeliness and accuracy of order delivery. The effect of timely delivery on trust was statistically significant ($F = 11.462, p < 0.001$), as was the accuracy of the order ($F = 19.682, p < 0.001$), indicating that efficient fulfillment strongly enhances consumer trust. Furthermore, the likelihood to reorder from the same brand was also significantly impacted by two key logistics factors: the availability of favorite menu items ($F = 11.462, p < 0.001$) and timely delivery. These findings support the conclusion that logistics efficiency plays a critical role in shaping customer satisfaction and driving repeat purchase behavior. These results suggest that logistics efficiency is a key driver of customer satisfaction and repeat purchase behavior in the fast-food sector. Consumers who consistently receive their orders correctly and on time and can depend on availability are more likely to trust and repurchase from the same brand (Cyriac and Baskaran, 2020). The strength of the findings supports Impact of Logistics Efficiency on Customer Satisfaction and Retention and aligns with established service quality models, where reliability, timeliness, and order accuracy are foundational to building long-term customer relationships (Ahmed et al., 2020).

4.4 H4: different sales platforms significantly impact fast-food purchase behavior

The chi-square tests evaluated the association between consumers' likelihood to order from different platforms and their perceived convenience of using each platform. As detailed in the above Table 7, all four platforms tested (Instagram/Facebook, mobile app, third-party apps, official website) yielded significant results ($p < 0.001$), confirming that usability significantly influences ordering behavior. The chi-square test revealed significant associations between the sales

platforms used and the likelihood of consumers ordering fast food. For Instagram/Facebook, the association was statistically significant, $\chi^2(16) = 87.104, p < 0.001$, suggesting that platform usability may influence purchase behavior. Similarly as per Table 8, the brand's mobile app showed a strong association, $\chi^2(16) = 90.794, p < 0.001$, indicating that consumers are more likely to place orders through user-friendly brand-specific applications. Table 9 states that third-party delivery apps such as Talabat and Deliveroo also yielded a significant result, $\chi^2(16) = 85.811, p < 0.001$, highlighting their continued relevance in consumer decision-making. Likewise in Table 10, the brand's official website demonstrated a significant association with ordering behavior, $\chi^2(16) = 85.352, p < 0.001$. Collectively, these results indicate that the convenience and accessibility of sales platforms significantly influence purchase decisions in the fast food industry. The chi-square test examined the relationship between sales platforms (IV) and fast food purchase behavior (DV), focusing on how platform convenience influences consumers' likelihood to order. For Instagram/Facebook Shop, $\chi^2(16) = 87.104, p < 0.001$. This indicates that convenience plays a significant role in whether consumers use these social media shops. Higher ease of use corresponds with higher likelihood of ordering, confirming that social commerce success relies on user-friendly design. For the brand's mobile app, $\chi^2(16) = 90.794, p < 0.001$. This result suggests that well-designed, intuitive apps lead to higher engagement, while clunky or confusing apps discourage usage. App convenience clearly drives order behavior. For third-party apps like Talabat or Deliveroo, $\chi^2(16) = 85.811, p < 0.001$. Consumers are more likely to use platforms that offer a fast, seamless experience. Differences in platform usability significantly affect consumer preference and usage. For the brand's official website, $\chi^2(16) = 85.352, p < 0.001$. Even on a brand's own site, consumers expect convenience (Moncey and Baskaran, 2020). A slow or outdated interface lowers the likelihood of ordering, showing that brand identity alone is not enough to retain customers. All results support Hypothesis 4. Platform convenience has a clear and statistically significant effect on fast food ordering behavior, reinforcing the importance of digital usability in consumer decision-making.

5 Discussion

This study examined how social media marketing attributes, customer engagement, logistical efficiency, and sales platform convenience influence fast-food purchase behavior among consumers in the UAE, with a focus on the younger, digitally active demographic. The demographic data revealed that a significant majority of the respondents were aged between 21 and 23 years (72%), and most were either employed (46%) or students (21%), residing primarily in urban centers like Dubai and Sharjah. These characteristics are crucial for interpreting the study's outcomes, as they reflect a segment of the population that is highly engaged with digital media, tech-savvy, and accustomed to convenience-driven consumer behavior. Alanazi et al. (2023) study results states that the average daily usage of social media and the choices and behaviors related to fast food were found to be strongly correlated. Social media has a negative impact on people's relationship with food and how they view their bodies. The regression analysis demonstrated that social media advertisements and interactive brand engagement significantly predicted purchase

TABLE 6 ANOVA test.

Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
38.004	4	9.501	11.462	0
78.746	95	0.829		
116.75	99			

TABLE 7 Chi-square test for Instagram/Facebook.

Test statistics	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	87.104	16	0
Likelihood Ratio	73.711	16	0
Linear-by-linear association	17.943	1	0
N of valid cases	100		

TABLE 8 Chi-square test for Brand's mobile app.

Test statistics	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	90.794	16	0
Likelihood ratio	76.325	16	0
Linear-by-linear association	23.167	1	0
N of valid cases	100		

TABLE 9 Chi-square test for third-party apps.

Test statistics	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	85.811	16	0
Likelihood ratio	77.496	16	0
Linear-by-linear association	19.254	1	0
N of valid cases	100		

TABLE 10 Chi-square test for brand's official website.

Test statistics	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	85.352	16	0
Likelihood ratio	75.163	16	0
Linear-by-linear association	18.671	1	0
N of valid cases	100		

behavior, whereas influencer content and promotions did not. Social media engagement to image-related content may negatively impact food choice in some healthy young adults. Health professionals designing social media campaigns for young adults should consider image-related content, to not heighten body dissatisfaction (Rounsefell et al., 2020). This aligns with the finding that most respondents are young professionals or students who are exposed to, but also selective about, the kind of digital content that drives their consumption

choices. These individuals may value authenticity and direct communication from brands more than influencer endorsements, which could be perceived as commercialized or inauthentic. This pattern reinforces literature such as [Belanche et al. \(2021\)](#), which supports the role of brand-consumer congruence in driving engagement. The correlation analysis revealed strong associations between social media engagement and brand loyalty outcomes. Frequent updates, engaging content, and responsive brand interactions all positively correlated with trust and repurchase intentions. These results emphasize the importance of maintaining an active and customer-centric digital presence - especially for a generation that expects constant interaction and rapid feedback online. The strong preference for promotional content also highlights that, while promotions may not predict initial purchase behavior (as seen in regression), they remain a critical factor in brand switching and consumer preference. Findings from the one-way ANOVA confirmed that logistical efficiency - including timely delivery and order accuracy significantly affects customer satisfaction and loyalty. This result highlights the operational side of the digital consumer journey, where marketing alone is insufficient to retain customers. Particularly in the UAE's competitive food delivery market, brands that can execute flawlessly post-click (after the order is placed) are better positioned to win repeat business. The logistics efficiency complements broader service quality frameworks which puts forward that satisfaction and loyalty are strongly influenced by reliability and responsiveness. Chi-square test results indicated that consumers' fast-food ordering behavior varies significantly depending on the convenience of the digital platform - whether social media shops, mobile apps, third-party apps, or websites. This finding highlights that platform usability and speed are essential in influencing consumer preference. [Goodyear et al. \(2021\)](#) demonstrates the importance of contemporary social media features including gamification, multi-modal applications, image sharing and editing, and group chats which can be strategically utilized by policymakers, practitioners, organizations, and researchers to inform the design of future social media-based health interventions. While aesthetic or brand familiarity might attract users, it is convenience that converts interest into actual transactions. These findings are aligned with the AIDA model discussed in [Mohan and Baskaran \(2021\)](#), where attention and interest must be followed by ease of action to lead to purchase.

The findings confirm that fast-food decisions are shaped by a blend of digital engagement and operational reliability. Social media advertisements and direct brand engagement were more influential than influencer content or general promotions. High engagement levels through frequent updates, interactive posts, and responsive communication—significantly foster brand trust and loyalty. Logistical factors such as timely delivery and order accuracy were essential in driving customer satisfaction and repeat purchase behavior. The findings of [Mkumbo and Mbise \(2022\)](#) reveal that social media advertising significantly influences the majority of customers to consume fast foods. Also it highlights that fast-food businesses which do not utilize social media advertising tend to lag behind and face challenges in remaining competitive within the industry. It recommends that all fast-food business owners adopt social media platforms for advertising their products and engaging with potential customers to enhance sales and foster business growth. Meanwhile, the convenience of ordering platforms strongly influenced consumer decisions, with mobile apps and third-party platforms being favored when perceived as

fast and user-friendly. By integrating marketing communication, service delivery, and digital access, this research provides a more comprehensive understanding of what drives fast-food purchasing behavior in today's market. The value created through this research lies in its holistic view: not just what attracts a customer (social media), but what retains them (service quality) and where they prefer to transact (platform usability). The integration of marketing, logistics, and digital platform design into a unified customer journey is essential for success in a digitally saturated, hyper-competitive consumer environment. The primary limitation of this study is its reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce social desirability bias. Additionally, the sample was skewed toward young adults in the UAE, limiting generalizability to older age groups or different cultural regions. The cross-sectional nature of the survey also prevents long-term behavioral tracking. Furthermore, while the study included core business disciplines like marketing and logistics, other potential influences such as pricing strategies, product innovation, or cultural preferences were not explored. [Sadom et al. \(2024\)](#) indicate that social media marketing (SMM) elements such as entertainment, interaction, trendiness, customization, and word of mouth have a positive impact on both consumer trust and brand reputation, which in turn foster a stronger intention to purchase fast-food products. It suggests that a strategic focus on these SMM dimensions can enhance consumer purchase intention. The study recommends that marketers in the fast-food industry reassess and refine their social media marketing strategies to better leverage these influential factors and drive consumer engagement and sales.

6 Conclusion

The fast-food purchase behavior among young adults in the UAE is shaped by a combination of direct social media engagement, reliable logistics, and user-friendly digital platforms. Interactive brand communication and frequent updates build stronger trust and loyalty than influencer-driven marketing, while timely delivery and accurate orders are critical for satisfaction and repeat purchases. Seamless mobile apps and third-party platforms further influence buying decisions, especially among digitally active Gen Z and young millennials. Businesses are advised to focus on direct engagement, consistent promotions, operational reliability, and mobile-first design to capture this segment. Future research should adopt longitudinal and qualitative approaches, expand to diverse demographics, and examine evolving digital tools like AI, gamification, and real-time service to deepen understanding of consumer behavior.

6.1 Theoretical and practical implications

The results extend the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework in the context of digitally-mediated food purchasing. The varying impact of different stimuli (advertisements, interactive content, influencer marketing, promotions) suggests that the S-O-R framework may need refinement to account for stimulus-specific processing pathways. The findings contribute to emerging theoretical perspectives on multi-platform consumer journeys. The significant impact of different ordering platforms suggests that contemporary consumer behavior involves complex navigation across interconnected digital touchpoints rather than linear pathways.

The findings from this research offer several actionable insights for fast-food brands operating in the UAE market, particularly those targeting the 18–25 demographic. The findings from this research offer several actionable insights for fast-food brands operating in the UAE market, particularly those targeting the 18–25 demographic. For marketing strategy, brands should prioritize direct brand communications and interactive content over influencer partnerships, given the significant impact of brand advertisements ($\beta = 0.262, p = 0.028$) and interactive engagement ($\beta = 0.284, p = 0.019$) compared to the marginal effect of influencer content ($\beta = 0.217, p = 0.068$). The strong correlation between frequent updates and repurchase likelihood ($r = 0.655, p < 0.001$) suggests that maintaining consistent presence across digital platforms should be prioritized over periodic campaign activities. Additionally, the weak effect of promotions ($\beta = 0.033, p = 0.754$) indicates that brands may benefit from shifting resources from discount-driven marketing to experience-focused content.

For operations management, the significant impact of logistics efficiency ($F = 11.462, p < 0.001$) highlights the need for continuous optimization of delivery operations and robust order verification systems. The comparable strength of marketing and operational factors suggests that resource allocation should be balanced rather than skewed toward customer acquisition, with operational excellence representing a sustainable competitive advantage that justifies substantial investment. For platform strategy, the strong association between mobile app convenience and purchase behavior ($\chi^2(16) = 90.794, p < 0.001$) emphasizes the need for exceptional mobile experiences, while the significant effect of Instagram/Facebook Shop convenience ($\chi^2(16) = 87.104, p < 0.001$) supports investment in direct purchasing capabilities within social platforms. Brands should optimize their presence on major delivery aggregators while simultaneously developing competitive direct ordering channels to balance reach and margin considerations.

6.2 Limitations

While appropriate for exploratory research, this study's non-probability convenience sampling approach limits generalizability beyond the specific demographic studied. The sample size of 100 respondents provides a margin of error of $\pm 9.8\%$ at a 95% confidence level, which is higher than the ideal $\pm 5\%$ threshold for conclusive research. The sample showed some demographic imbalances, with greater representation of respondents from Dubai (46%) and Sharjah (31%) relative to other emirates, potentially skewing results toward patterns specific to these urban centers.

The study's focus on quantitative methodology, while providing statistical validation, lacks the depth and contextual understanding that qualitative approaches might offer. Without accompanying qualitative insights, the underlying motivations, decision processes, and emotional factors influencing consumption choices remain partially unexplored.

The findings' applicability to contexts beyond the UAE is limited by the country's unique characteristics, including its high per capita income, exceptional digital infrastructure, multicultural population composition, and distinctive cultural values. Even within the GCC region, significant variations in market development, consumer preferences, and digital adoption may restrict the transferability of specific findings.

6.3 Scope for future research

- Future research would benefit from employing probability sampling techniques with larger sample sizes (400 + respondents) to achieve greater statistical power and representativeness.
- Mixed-methods approaches incorporating qualitative elements such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, or digital ethnography would complement quantitative findings by illuminating underlying motivations and decision processes.
- Expanding research to other GCC countries would enable regional comparisons and identify which patterns are UAE-specific versus common across Gulf markets.
- Future research should more explicitly address the relationship between digital marketing exposure, ordering convenience, and health outcomes, including consumption frequency, portion size decisions, and nutritional choices.

6.4 Ethical considerations

Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research, participated on a voluntary basis, and retained the right to withdraw at any stage. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Only data provided by consenting participants were included in the study.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research, participated on a voluntary basis, and retained the right to withdraw at any stage. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Only data provided by consenting participants were included in the study.

Author contributions

GV: Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. KB: Supervision, Resources, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Software, Validation.

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