

Word-of-Mouth Advertising: Turning Customers into Ambassadors for Your Restaurant.

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Abstract- *Word-of-mouth advertising is one of the most effective marketing strategies, particularly in the food sector. This article explores not only the importance of turning customers into brand ambassadors but also tactics to encourage spontaneous recommendations and the impact of online reviews on business reputation and growth. Word-of-mouth occurs when satisfied customers recommend a restaurant to friends and family, thus influencing the decisions of new consumers. In a competitive industry, the ability to turn customers into brand advocates has become crucial (Keller, 2001). The dissemination of information through personal recommendations is perceived as more trustworthy than traditional advertising and can be a significant differentiator in attracting new customers.*

Indexed Terms- *Word-of-mouth advertising, brand ambassadors, spontaneous recommendations, online reviews, business growth.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Word-of-mouth advertising offers numerous advantages, as discussed in the marketing literature. Among these, the following stand out:

Building Trust: Personal recommendations generate greater credibility among consumers (Armellini & Villarejo-Ramos, 2011).

Increased Visibility: Each new customer who becomes a brand advocate has the potential to attract additional customers (Keller, 2001).

Cost Reduction: Word-of-mouth advertising can lead to significant savings on paid marketing campaigns (Harrison-Walker, 2001).

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is an essential marketing strategy in the restaurant sector, where personal recommendations play a vital role in establishing branding and reputation. This article examines the importance of transforming satisfied customers into brand advocates through memorable experiences, incentive strategies, and the impact of online reviews. Spontaneous testimonials can enhance a restaurant's visibility and generate trust, while digital platforms amplify these voices. Understanding the dynamics of recommendations and reviews is crucial for the sustainable growth of businesses.

Table of Relevant Articles: The Effect of Word-of-Mouth on Purchase Decisions

Title of the Article	Authors	Source	Year	Summary
The Effects of Word of Mouth on Consumer s' Purchase Intentions in a Restaurant Setting	Kahn, B. E., & Meyer, R. J.	Journal of Marketing Research	2008	Analyzes how word of mouth communication influences consumers' purchase intentions in restaurants.
The Impact of Online Customer Reviews on the Restaurant Industry	Luca, M.	Harvard Business School Working Paper	2016	Discusses how online reviews impact consumers' decisions and the performance of restaurants.

Customer Engagement and Its Impact on Brand Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Word of Mouth	Natarajan, T., & Rajeswari, R.	Journal of Business Research	2020	Explores the relationship between customer engagement, brand loyalty, and word of mouth communication.
Understanding the Role of Social Media in the Restaurant Industry: A Study of User Engagement	Mehdizadeh, S., & Abedini, M. A.	Journal of Foodservice Business Research	2018	Investigates the influence of social media on interactions between consumers and restaurants.
The Power of Word of Mouth in the Age of Social Media	Armellini, A., & Villarejo-Ramos, A. F.	Journal of Marketing Management	2011	Discusses the transformation of word of mouth with the advent of social media and its impact on marketing.

Source: Autor

To turn satisfied customers into ambassadors, several tactics can be implemented: Offer Memorable Experiences, Create Reward Programs, Encourage Sharing on Social Media, Customer Service Training, The Impact of Online Reviews, Credibility and Trust, Influence on Purchase Decisions, and Feedback for Improvements.

Experiences that go beyond customer expectations are essential. Quality service and high-quality food are crucial (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Several companies and organizations provide valuable information about the importance of customer experiences, quality service, and high-quality food, especially in the food and beverage industry. Here are some that may be useful for research and insights:

Nielsen: This is a global leader in marketing data and insights. It offers reports on consumer behavior and market trends that can help companies better understand customer expectations.

The Hartman Group: This company specializes in market research and consulting in the food sector. They publish studies on consumer behaviors and preferences regarding food and services.

Mintel: This company provides market research and insights across a wide range of industries, including food and beverages. Its reports help understand consumer expectations and market trends.

Hospitality Technology: This publication offers information, analysis, and trends on technology in the hospitality sector, including how experiences and services are evolving to meet customer expectations.

Pew Research Center: Although not specific to the food industry, Pew Research provides data on consumer behavior trends and shifts in preferences, which can be applied to customer experience.

American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) : The ACSI is a source of data on customer satisfaction across various industries, including food and beverages. Its surveys provide insights into what consumers value.

Euromonitor International: This market research company provides detailed reports on consumption trends, including the food and beverage sector, helping companies better understand customer demands and expectations.

The world of marketing is vast and continually evolving, and with changes in how people consume information and make purchasing decisions, marketing strategies have had to adapt as well. In this article, we will explore the differences between inbound and outbound marketing, discussing their

main approaches and providing examples of companies that effectively utilize these strategies.

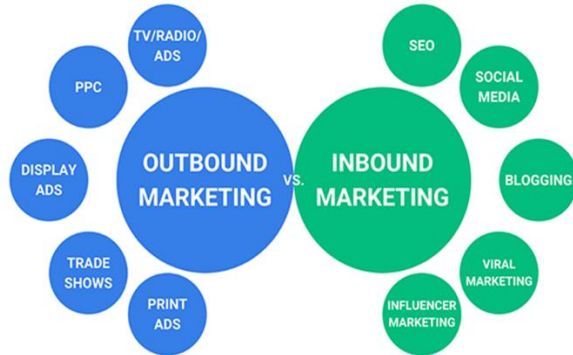


Figure 1: Inbound vs. Outbound Marketing
Source: ANDRE, M (2023)

Reward programs that encourage recommendations can be extremely effective. Offering discounts to customers who refer friends provides benefits to both the referring customer and the referred individual, which has proven to be an effective strategy (Greve, 2009). This approach not only incentivizes existing customers to share their positive experiences but also helps to attract new customers, as referred individuals typically come with a higher level of trust in the brand. Additionally, such programs can foster customer loyalty and enhance brand advocacy, ultimately contributing to the long-term success of the business. Social media platforms are essential for encouraging word-of-mouth. Strategies include running contests that offer prizes for those who share their experiences on their social networks (Hoffman & Fodness, 2010). Training staff to directly ask for feedback and recommendations can enhance the likelihood of positive word-of-mouth (Heskett et al., 1994).

Online reviews play a crucial role in a restaurant's reputation and growth. With the increasing use of platforms like Yelp and TripAdvisor, consumer opinions have become a significant influence. Positive reviews can boost the restaurant's credibility and attractiveness (Luca, 2016). Studies show that consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Online reviews often serve as a critical determinant in restaurant purchasing decisions (Zhang et al., 2014). Having a good rating can be decisive for attracting new customers.

Furthermore, online reviews provide valuable feedback that can be used to enhance the customer experience. Restaurants that respond to reviews, both positive and negative, demonstrate their commitment to customer satisfaction (Furman & Parker, 2018).

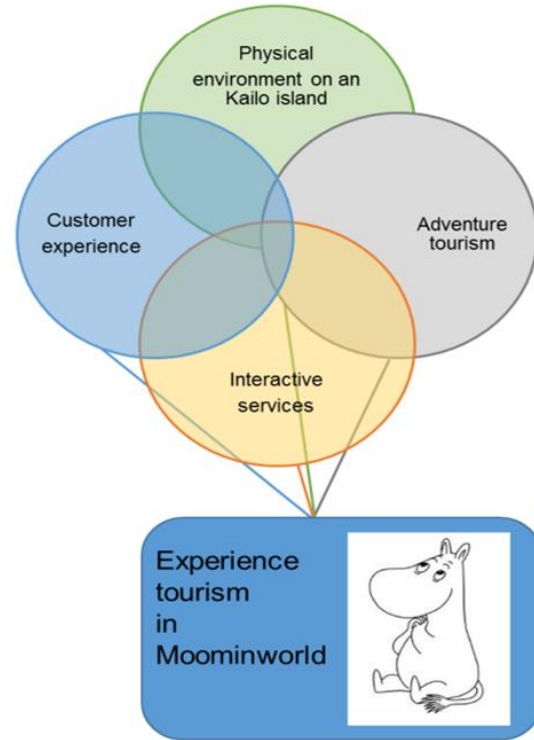


Figure 2: Frame of reference ((©Moomin Characters).

Transforming customers into brand ambassadors through word-of-mouth advertising is a powerful strategy for restaurants. By implementing tactics that encourage spontaneous recommendations and monitoring the impact of online reviews, restaurant owners can not only improve their business reputation but also ensure sustainable growth. In a landscape where consumer opinions are rapidly shared, investing in a word-of-mouth culture and managing online reviews is essential for long-term success.

The frame of reference (Figure 2) shows that there are several factors that affect experience: the physical environment, the theory of adventure tourism, interactive service and a customer. The physical environment is already existing, and the location on the island and the sensitivity should be considered, when designing new services. The unique nature is an added value for customers from abroad. (Lohikoski &

Nieminen 1.October 2017.)

The theory of adventure tourism shows that customer experience is unique. With service, Moominworld creates an atmosphere and gives value for money. With interactive services, the experience can be affected and bring new dimensions to them. The thesis aims to concentrate on the value generated through services. Without customers there cannot be any experience. The experiences are personal and happen in a mind of a person (Räikkönen 2014, 46). Therefore, there are as many experiences as there are visitors. In order to understand the customer's mind better literature of adventure travel is used as a theory base. These three factors have the same effect and have to be taken into account.

Word-of-mouth advertising has several advantages, one of the most significant being the credibility it provides. According to Keller (2001), personal recommendations are generally perceived as more trustworthy than advertisements, and when a customer recommends a restaurant to a friend, that recommendation carries an emotional weight that is difficult to replicate digitally. Additionally, word-of-mouth can generate organic reach, as positive experiences quickly spread through communities, especially when customers share their experiences. According to Harrison-Walker (2001), this strategy can be quite cost-effective, as it primarily relies on customer satisfaction and service quality without incurring direct costs. On the other hand, word-of-mouth advertising also has its disadvantages. Its nature is less predictable and more challenging to manage, as it depends on the individual customer experience. Armelini and Villarejo-Ramos (2011) note that additionally, the reach is generally more limited compared to social media campaigns, which can quickly target a larger audience. Social media, in turn, offers significant advantages, such as broad reach. These platforms allow businesses to access a much larger audience, potentially on a global scale. A single post can be seen by thousands or even millions of people. As noted by Kotler and Keller (2016), another benefit of social media is interactivity. They encourage engagement, allowing customers to share feedback and interact directly with the brand in real time. Additionally, these platforms provide ease in

measuring the success of campaigns, enabling real-time adjustments to optimize results.

However, social media also has its disadvantages. The intense competition makes it difficult for brands to stand out. Luca (2016) highlights that, in addition, brands may become reliant on algorithms that limit organic reach, meaning that it may be necessary to invest in paid advertising to promote content and reach a larger audience. Furthermore, the fast-paced nature of social media can lead to negative feedback being amplified quickly, making brand reputation management more challenging. Brands must continuously adapt to changing trends and consumer preferences to maintain their presence and effectiveness on these platforms.

In summary, the best strategy may be a combination of both. Utilizing word-of-mouth to build a solid base of loyal and satisfied customers while maximizing reach and interactivity through social media can create a positive cycle of promotion and growth. Brodie et al. (2011) argue that positive experiences shared on social media can enhance word-of-mouth and vice versa. Therefore, the choice between word-of-mouth and social media should be considered in the context of the business, evaluating the target audience and specific goals to determine the ideal balance between the two strategies. This integrated approach allows for leveraging the strengths of both channels, ultimately leading to more effective marketing outcomes.

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