NEWS LESSON

Is the Queue Part of What People Are Buying?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. What food would you queue an hour to try?
2. Does a long queue make something look better to you?
3. Would you travel for a snack you had seen in a video?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**phenomenon**	☐	A	short meetings between people
2	**virality**	☐	B	the way something spreads very fast online
3	**visibility**	☐	C	something that suddenly makes everyone excited
4	**entrepreneurial**	☐	D	how easy it is for people to see or notice you
5	**desirability**	☐	E	the business of hotels, restaurants and cafés
6	**hospitality**	☐	F	how much people want something
7	**sensation**	☐	G	good at starting and running a business
8	**encounters**	☐	H	something unusual that happens and interests many people

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Viral queues can bring fame and pressure to small restaurants. What do 24-hour waits for a baked potato say about social media and food?

1 A baked potato from a converted tram in Preston has become a destination. The brothers behind SpudBros say some customers have slept outside and waited almost 24 hours for their loaded jacket potatoes. Videos helped draw visitors from far beyond Lancashire. Now lunch comes with a second attraction: being part of the queue everyone has seen online.

2 Jacob and Harley Nelson built up their following by filming the everyday business of preparing and selling potatoes. Their videos captured generous toppings, lively encounters with customers and the brothers' own on-camera personalities. The approach came about during a difficult period for the business and eventually attracted audiences far beyond Preston. Visitors began arriving from other parts of Britain and overseas, drawn not merely by the promise of lunch but by the opportunity to participate in a story they already knew from their screens.

3 The phenomenon extends well beyond potatoes. Restaurants and bakeries across Britain have discovered that a single enthusiastic online recommendation can generate queues that traditional advertising would struggle to produce. During a period of rising costs and precarious margins, sudden visibility can rescue a struggling business. It can also transform a small operator's relationship with customers, employees and the surrounding neighbourhood. Virality delivers attention at remarkable speed, without necessarily providing the time or resources required to accommodate it.

4 That is where the bargain becomes less appealing. Staff face exhausting peaks of demand, loyal customers lose easy access to businesses they helped sustain, and residents must put up with unexpected crowds. Nor does the customer always benefit. A meal that might have been entirely satisfying after a short wait can become a disappointment once inflated expectations, travel expenses and hours of queueing are taken into account. The camera is very good at capturing melted cheese; it is less interested in the practical inconvenience of obtaining it.

5 Queues also change what people think they are buying. Research into consumer behaviour suggests that visible approval from others can influence food choices, while social platforms reward places that photograph well and generate strong reactions. Waiting becomes a signal of desirability, and posting about the wait turns an ordinary purchase into a small performance of cultural participation. The experience is self-reinforcing: a crowd attracts attention, the attention attracts more people, and the expanding queue provides fresh evidence that the attraction must be worthwhile.

6 None of this means the food is poor or that customers are foolish. SpudBros has shown entrepreneurial skill, and there is something pleasing about a simple potato enjoying its moment in the spotlight. The concern is a hospitality culture in which survival increasingly depends on being noticed, preferably all at once. Small businesses need loyal customers and sustainable margins, not merely a brief spell of internet celebrity. Once the cameras turn towards the next sensation, a restaurant must still persuade people to return for the less glamorous reason that its food is worth eating.

Sources: The Guardian. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer suggests that a crowd can make a restaurant look better than the food alone would. (T) (F) (NG)
2. The text implies that a customer who waits only briefly is likely to be disappointed. (T) (F) (NG)
3. SpudBros now employs more than twenty people. (T) (F) (NG)
4. The text presents the potato queue as one example of a pattern found at other British businesses. (T) (F) (NG)
5. The writer believes sudden fame matters more to a small business than loyal customers. (T) (F) (NG)

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

accommodate	bargain	inflated	margins	merely	peaks	spotlight	sustain

1. The restaurant had to move premises because the original dining room simply could not _____ the weekend crowds.
2. Customers who had travelled for hours left with _____ hopes that no ordinary lunch could satisfy.
3. Independent cafés often operate on such narrow _____ that a single bad month can threaten their future.
4. Occasional bursts of fame cannot _____ a business; only repeat custom can.
5. The owner insisted that the viral clip was _____ a lucky break, not a plan for the future.
6. Fame in return for being overrun by crowds is a poor _____ for a quiet family business.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The restaurant's _____ depends almost entirely on word of mouth. **(SURVIVE)**
2. Reviewers found the food perfectly pleasant but _____ . **(REMARK)**
3. The _____ of online attention makes long-term planning almost impossible. **(PREDICT)**
4. Her _____ to queue for hours in freezing weather was widely admired. **(WILLING)**
5. Many small firms suffer from a _____ to sudden shifts in online fashion. **(VULNERABLE)**

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At C1, a precise verb or adjective is chosen for the noun beside it. Test each word in the box against the noun it must sit with.

fleeting	**fuel**	**meteoric**	**mounting**	**reap**	**tentative**	**wield**

1. Owners who go viral may _____ the rewards quickly, but struggle to keep them.
2. The café enjoyed a _____ rise, going from empty to fully booked in a fortnight.
3. Internet fame is notoriously _____ : today's sensation is tomorrow's forgotten trend.
4. Rising rents have put _____ pressure on independent restaurants.
5. Pictures of overflowing plates help to _____ demand for the product even further.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. When does the queue become part of the experience?
2. Would you trust local advice or a viral food review more?
3. What would persuade you that a famous food was worth the wait?

9 Role-play: the famous queue

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the friend who wants to go

You've seen a famous food stall online. The queue is very long and some people wait all night. Ask your friend to come with you. Explain why you want to go and how you'll make the wait easier.

Student B · the friend who isn't sure

Your friend wants to wait a very long time for a famous snack. You think it's too much. Ask at least two questions, then say yes, say no, or suggest a different plan.

Useful phrases

I'd love to try it, it's all over my feed.

Isn't it a bit silly to wait that long for a potato?

We could go on a weekday, when it's quieter.

I don't mind queuing if we take chairs and snacks.

That's a lot of time for one meal.

Let's compromise: we'll wait two hours, not twenty-four.

Afterwards, tell the class: did your friend agree to go, and was the plan fair?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 H · 2 B · 3 D · 4 G · 5 F · 6 E · 7 C · 8 A

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 accommodate · 2 inflated · 3 margins · 4 sustain · 5 merely · 6 bargain

6 Word forms

1 survival · 2 unremarkable · 3 unpredictability · 4 willingness · 5 vulnerability

7 Language focus

1 reap · 2 meteoric · 3 fleeting · 4 mounting · 5 fuel

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