NEWS LESSON

Would the Potato Be Worth It Without the Camera?



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	**converted**	☐	A	changed so that it can be used in a new way
2	**portions**	☐	B	very excited and interested
3	**pavement**	☐	C	the amounts of food that are given to one person
4	**viral**	☐	D	spreading very quickly between people online
5	**following**	☐	E	advice telling people that something is good
6	**recommendation**	☐	F	connected with how people think and feel
7	**enthusiastic**	☐	G	the path at the side of a road where people walk
8	**psychological**	☐	H	the people who regularly watch what you post online

3 Read

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

Jacob and Harley Nelson sell baked potatoes from a converted tram in Preston. Their videos brought the crowds, and the crowds became the attraction.

1 SpudBros is a business run by brothers Jacob and Harley Nelson from a converted tram in Preston, Lancashire. It sells baked potatoes piled high with fillings, which is hardly the kind of food you would normally travel across the country for. Yet the brothers say that people have queued overnight and waited almost 24 hours to buy one.

2 The brothers began posting videos when business was difficult during the pandemic. Their clips showed potatoes being prepared, customers reacting and enormous portions being served. The format was simple, entertaining and easy to share. As their following grew, so did the crowds. Visitors arrived from distant towns and overseas, hoping to taste the potatoes they had already watched countless times on their phones. The brothers now operate in the strange space between running a food business and being internet personalities.

3 SpudBros is part of a much wider trend. A recommendation from the right content creator can transform an ordinary café into the place everybody suddenly wants to visit. In London, popular bakeries, frozen yoghurt shops and takeaway businesses have found themselves dealing with queues that stretch along the pavement. For owners facing rising rents and food costs, this kind of attention can be a lifeline. Free publicity may achieve what an expensive advertising campaign could not.

4 But going viral creates problems of its own. Staff may struggle to keep up with demand, regular customers can feel pushed aside, and neighbourhoods have to deal with crowds that arrive almost overnight. Restaurants also risk disappointing visitors whose expectations have been raised by carefully filmed videos. A perfectly good meal may seem underwhelming after somebody has travelled three hours and then queued for hours.

5 There is a psychological element to all this. People are more likely to become interested in something when they can see that others want it. A long queue acts as a public recommendation, while posting a photograph proves that you were part of the moment. Some customers probably care just as much about the story they can tell afterwards as the meal they have bought. Restaurants are not simply selling food; increasingly, they are selling an experience that can be shared online.

6 The Nelson brothers have shown how much a small business can achieve by understanding that world. But their success also reveals its limits. Online attention is unpredictable, and even the most enthusiastic followers eventually drift away. For customers, the more interesting question is whether the potato would still be worth buying without the camera, the famous visitors or the queue. Perhaps the test of a good lunch is whether you would return for more when nobody is filming.

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. Online attention is reliable and lasts for years. T F NG
2. The brothers started posting videos during the pandemic. T F NG
3. Preston council has complained about the crowds. T F NG
4. The text suggests that some customers care about the story they can tell as much as the meal. T F NG
5. The brothers began filming because business was going well. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

campaign **countless** **Demand** **expectations** **format** **overseas** **publicity** **underwhelming**

1. The film got such good _____ that the studio did not need to pay for adverts.
2. The restaurant had been praised so much online that it could not live up to the high _____ of its guests.
3. The concert had looked amazing in the advert, but the real thing was rather _____ .
4. She has listened to that song _____ times and still loves it.
5. Many students who study _____ return home with a second language.
6. _____ for the new phone was so high that shops sold out in an hour.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time the queue reached the corner, many people _____ for hours. (WAIT)
2. Visitors _____ from distant towns and overseas. (ARRIVE)
3. Baked potatoes _____ from a converted tram. (SERVE)
4. If the video had not gone viral, the stall _____ quiet. (STAY)
5. The stall _____ famous across the country since the videos spread. (BECOME)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. These pairs are fixed. Look at the noun that follows the gap and choose the verb that normally goes with it.

boost	draw	gain	hold	lose	pay	spend

1. A well-known chef can _____ crowds to a new restaurant.
2. A single video can _____ sales overnight.
3. Fans soon _____ interest when a new trend appears.
4. Many visitors _____ a high price for a dish that is not special.
5. A café can _____ thousands of followers in a week.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 T · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 publicity · 2 expectations · 3 underwhelming · 4 countless · 5 overseas · 6 Demand

6 Verb forms

1 had been waiting · 2 arrived · 3 are served · 4 would have stayed · 5 has become

7 Language focus

1 draw · 2 boost · 3 lose · 4 pay · 5 gain

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