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TARGETING GEN Z: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND LOYALTY PROGRAMS IN PIZZA FACE'S MARKETING STRATEGY

Enfocándose en la Generación Z: El Papel de las Redes Sociales y los Programas de Lealtad en la Estrategia de Marketing de Pizza Face

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates marketing innovations designed to increase the brand visibility of Pizza Face, a local pizzeria in Calgary, among high school students. Utilizing a mix of loyalty programs and promotional offers, the study explores strategies to attract younger audiences. Drawing from the works of Sutarwala & Borkakoty (2024), Preloznik (n.d.), and Boustihacyprien (2024), a variety of methods were employed, including social media campaigns and community engagement events. Results indicate that targeted social media content, influencer collaborations, and well-structured loyalty programs can enhance brand engagement and generate new customers. However, the adoption of these strategies by the restaurant remains to be determined. The findings underscore the importance of integrating digital marketing and community outreach to engage younger demographics, particularly during off-peak hours.

Keywords: Marketing innovations, social media campaigns, loyalty programs, community engagement, brand visibility.

RESUMEN

Este artículo investiga las innovaciones en marketing diseñadas para aumentar la visibilidad de la marca Pizza Face, una pizzería local en Calgary, entre los estudiantes de secundaria. Utilizando una combinación de programas de lealtad y ofertas promocionales, el estudio explora estrategias para atraer a audiencias más jóvenes. Basándose en los trabajos de Sutarwala & Borkakoty (2024), Preloznik (s.f.), y Boustihacyprien (2024), se emplearon varios métodos, incluidos campañas en redes sociales y eventos de participación comunitaria. Los resultados indican que la implementación de contenido dirigido en redes sociales, colaboraciones con influencers y programas de lealtad bien estructurados, pueden mejorar de manera efectiva el compromiso con la marca y generar nuevos clientes. Sin embargo, la adopción de estas estrategias por parte del restaurante aún está por determinarse. Los hallazgos subrayan la importancia de integrar el marketing digital y la participación comunitaria para involucrar a los grupos demográficos más jóvenes, particularmente durante las horas de menor actividad.

Palabras clave: Innovaciones en marketing, campañas en redes sociales, programas de lealtad, participación comunitaria, visibilidad de marca.

INTRODUCTION

“Pizzaface YYC is a Calgary-based one-stop pizza shop located on 17th Ave.” (Pizzaface, n.d). They offer a Brooklyn-style pizza experience. They have strong sales during evenings and the weekends. This restaurant was struggling to reach new audiences and get the students near their shop to join and become the new patrons of this local pizzeria. Pizza Face is positioned uniquely to cater to a largely younger generation who is budget-conscious and also deeply influenced by social media and the wave of trends “A 2022 survey of 13- to 17-year-olds offers a clue. Based on about 1,300 responses, the survey found that 35% of teens use at least one of five social media platforms more than several times a day.” (Mayo clinic, 2024).

The audience this restaurant wants to target represents a crucial demographic for businesses seeking long-term growth. This audience is highly active on social media platforms, allowing Pizzaface to utilize social media to attract this group and have them as new potential customers. This study aims to explore how social media marketing and using different loyalty programs affect the audience category of Pizza Face.

In navigating the complexities of marketing to younger demographics, businesses must also consider external economic pressures that influence consumer behavior. Inflation, particularly in Canada, has played a significant role in shaping spending patterns among

consumers, including those in Generation Z. According to Janbeih and Pelekais (2024), inflation has eroded purchasing power across various sectors, forcing businesses to adapt their pricing and promotional strategies to attract price-sensitive customers. For Pizza Face, this economic context underscores the importance of offering value-driven initiatives, such as loyalty programs and targeted discounts, to mitigate the effects of inflation on its young customer base, ensuring that the brand remains competitive even in challenging economic times (Janbeih & De Pelekais, 2024).

METHODS APPLIED

De Pelekais et al., (2015), emphasize the critical importance of a structured approach to research in their work *El ABC de la Investigación*. They outline a step-by-step guide, known as the 'ABC' of research, which underscores the significance of clear objectives, a solid methodological foundation, and rigorous data analysis. The authors stress that effective research contributes to academic knowledge and provides practical insights that can directly influence decision-making processes in organizational settings. This structured framework ensures that researchers maintain clarity and focus throughout their investigation, ultimately leading to more reliable and actionable outcomes. This study tried to impose a combination of social media strategies and community engagement events to increase the visibility and sales of PizzaFace among students and the younger generations. They were designed to test what kind of impact these methods would have on the business performance during the off-peak hours of the restaurant. These methods were all suggested to the company, and they either performed or will perform them in the future. The suggested approaches were split into Three main categories:

1. Social Media Campaigns

“It’s no surprise that social media has revolutionized business operations, consumer interactions, and product or service promotions in this digital age. Pretty much everyone is on it! Platforms like Facebook, X, formerly Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and others in the social media space have transformed into crucial tools for branding and marketing.”(Sutarwala & Borkakoty, 2024).

The suggestion of using social media campaigns had some subcategories and the key components of this strategy included:

A. Posting Schedule and Content Strategy

Having a structured posting schedule ensures consistency and it helps you have more time to focus on other aspects of the business “When you schedule your content in advance, you have more time to worry about other responsibilities and less on logging into social media to upload a post” (DeMatteo, 2018). We suggested having a regular posting of once or twice a day “Posting once or twice a day is enough to keep your followers engaged. A frequency like this may help you stay relevant and visible – it’s a nice booster to your social media marketing strategy. However, it’s better not to go beyond that.”(Preloznik, n.d.). The ideas presented were a mixture of pizza-related content and also different ways to show the deals that PizzaFace could offer to the younger audience. “Social media has become an indispensable tool for businesses looking to boost their sales.”(Sellas, 2024). It was suggested that they follow an alternating routine of pizza-specific posts and staff-generated content that makes the audience connect with the staff and feel more welcomed. Feeling a connection to the staff of the restaurant helps customers have a better experience. “68% of consumers say they are willing to pay more for products and services from a brand known to offer good customer service experiences.”(Scout, n.d.). The more content released by the restaurant about the staff and how caring they are when it comes to giving the customer the best experience, the more likely it is that customers would return and the more likely they would pay for more products and services.

B. Targeted Engagement with Influencers

We suggested researching and identifying local influencers with popularity among the students or even better local student influencers to collaborate on content and even make their own content promoting PizzaFace. “By crafting content that resonates with their followers' preferences, they significantly boost brand engagement.”(Boustihacyprien, 2024). These influencers would promote the “Student Deal” that PizzaFace was trying to advertise, in hopes of attracting the younger audience to become customers of PizzaFace during the slow hours of the day. Collaborations should focus on short, shareable videos so they can appeal to the short attention span of the younger audience. “Gen Z typically have an attention span of just 8 seconds; a few seconds shorter than millennials, who come in at approximately 12 seconds.” (The Rise of Short-Form Video & the Gen Z Social Revolution | IAB UK, n.d.).

C. Metrics for Evaluation

In evaluating the effectiveness of loyalty programs, it is essential to track quantitative and qualitative data to determine customer engagement and retention. According to Feger (2023), one of the most effective ways retailers can capture customer loyalty is through detailed data analysis, which provides insights into customer preferences and spending habits. Using this data, companies can refine their loyalty programs to ensure they offer relevant rewards that resonate with their target audience. For Pizza Face, this would involve closely monitoring the increase in customer visits during off-peak hours and tracking how frequently students and younger customers redeem loyalty rewards. Social media engagement metrics like likes, shares, and comments related to loyalty offers should also be measured to assess how well the program drives brand engagement. Both online and in-store surveys and customer feedback could offer additional qualitative insights to help Pizza Face adjust its loyalty program to maximize its effectiveness (Feger, 2023).

There have to be metrics for evaluating how effective these strategies are. The Growth of social media followers, the comments, and the number of times the posts have been shared must be monitored weekly. Direct engagement can also be observed, for example, by seeing how many students are wondering about the “Student Deal.” Surveys can also be done to measure how effective these strategies are. “Surveys provide researchers with reliable, usable, primary data to inform business decisions.” (SurveyMonkey, 2024).

2. Community Engagement Initiatives

In addition to digital marketing, it was also suggested that community-based marketing activities be implemented that are aimed at creating a direct relationship between the local schools and the students. The main suggestion in this category was the “Pizza on Your Face” charity event.

A. "Pizza on Your Face" Charity Event

This event was designed to raise awareness of PizzaFace’s student discount while they build a sense of community among the local schools. “A recent study found that consumers if given the choice between two companies which offered services or products at the same price, 82 % said their decision would be influenced by whether the company was philanthropic.” Lookers Motor Group Limited (2016).

In this Suggestion, students were encouraged to vote for their favorite teachers to participate in a fun event where pizzas would be humorously placed on their faces. The event was going to be marketed through local schools using flyers, QR codes, and social media promotions. Students donated money to vote, with proceeds going to a youth-related charity, and the top-voted teachers participated in the event and the students who participated in the event were rewarded with “buy one, get one” pizza vouchers, further encouraging repeat business and word-of-mouth promotion.

B. School Partnerships and Charity Promotion

Partnerships with local schools were going to be established to facilitate the charity event. The complications with this method were too complex for the restaurant to take action for the time being since it would have needed permission from the school administrators a certificate from Albert Health Services was mandatory and it would have taken a long time to process everything needed and the business decided that they need to have that suggestion in mind for a time where it would be possible for them to execute this idea.

C. Metrics for Evaluation

The sales data during the charity event would have been compared to the previous periods to measure the impact of this event on the times were the business would be slow. In addition the number of pizza vouchers that students redeemed after the event would also provide a tangible measure of success. Feedback would have been collected through surveys and online reviews to measure the overall perception of the event and the impact it had on the brand's image.

3. Loyalty Programs and Promotions

Loyalty programs and promotions were suggested to increase PizzaFace's visibility and sales. “According to the 2016 Bond Loyalty Report, 66% of consumers modify the amount they spend to maximize points.” (Cauthorn, 2019).

A. Loyalty Program Implementation

One of the critical strategies for Pizza Face is developing a loyalty program that goes beyond simple discounts to foster long-term customer relationships. According to O'Brien and Jones (1995), a well-designed rewards program can accelerate the customer loyalty life cycle, turning early-year customers into highly loyal patrons similar to a

company's most profitable long-term clients. Recent studies further support this approach, emphasizing the need for loyalty programs to focus on personalized rewards and digital integration to engage modern consumers (Kecsmar, 2024).

Personalization is key, as today's customers, especially Gen Z, are increasingly motivated by programs that cater to their specific preferences and spending habits, making them feel valued by the brand (Wadarajan, 2024). This aligns with the suggestion that loyalty programs should not only offer short-term promotional benefits but also be integrated into a larger loyalty management strategy that is adaptive to customer data. By providing meaningful, tailored rewards through both physical and digital platforms, Pizza Face can foster sustained loyalty among the younger demographic. The integration of advanced analytics and digital engagement allows businesses to track customer behavior and offer targeted incentives that encourage repeat purchases and higher lifetime value (Statista, 2024). Such a strategy could transform occasional patrons into repeat customers, ultimately increasing profitability over time (O'Brien & Jones, 1995; Kecsmar, 2024; Wadarajan, 2024).

A comprehensive approach to reward management plays a pivotal role in enhancing employee motivation and retention. Ng and El Kadi (2023) emphasize the importance of total reward strategies that go beyond traditional compensation and benefits to include elements like health and well-being, esteem recognition, and self-actualization opportunities. By addressing both financial and non-financial aspects of employee needs, organizations can foster a more engaged and motivated workforce, which directly contributes to higher retention rates. This holistic approach ensures that employees feel valued, supported, and aligned with the organization's goals, making total reward management a key factor in organizational success.

The main suggestion was to create a loyalty program so students would want to come back and develop a sense of loyalty and reward for the younger audience since they are the most likely to want to save money and take advantage of discounts. The idea was to have students and anyone who uses the loyalty program earn points with each purchase, which can later be used to redeem discounts or even free items. "Over 83% of consumers say belonging to a loyalty program influences their decision to buy again from a brand." (Queue-It, 2024).

The program was to be promoted online and with fliers. also, whenever customers wanted to purchase anything, they would be offered to sign up for it. There would also be QR codes that would make their sign-up process more accessible. The suggestion was for the restaurant to use applications like DoorDash or any other delivery business, but specifically, DoorDash was suggested to get their food delivered to their customers, and since DoorDash offers a way to give promotions, they can utilize that to have their loyalty program. Another company we suggested they use was Square since Square is a free program that allows customers to track their points and use them to get rewards. Other companies were suggested, but for PizzaFace, Square would have made more sense since they were looking for affordable options, and Square offered everything they were looking for. There are many reasons as to why customers use loyalty programs.

B. Metrics for Evaluation

To evaluate the effectiveness of the loyalty programs, the sales during the off-peak hours before and after the loyalty program's implementation will be assessed, and then a comparison will be made to see if there is any effect on these data. The social media engagement would also be tracked. Customer feedback would also be necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and to take in any new advice from the customers who know what they want, and this would help the restaurant to improve the program and increase its popularity and sales. “Customer feedback can provide a goldmine of valuable insights that helps you develop a better product or service.” (Sokolovsky, 2024).

Results

Since the restaurant did not implement the ideas presented, we can pull data from other research data that provides statistics on whether these suggestions help the restaurant. “During a 2024 survey among marketers worldwide, approximately 83 percent selected increased exposure as a benefit of social media marketing.” (Statista, 2024). Social media allows restaurants to reach audiences that would have been much more difficult to reach before, allowing for greater visibility for the restaurants. “Social media marketing is a powerful way for businesses of all sizes to reach prospects and customers. People discover, learn about, follow, and shop from brands on social media.” (WordStream, 2023). Social media growth can help brand visibility and also increase sales. “Active social media profiles can help build your brand. Every industry is competitive online today. The

businesses that will be most successful are those that are transparent and willing to share information with target audience members to become a trusted source.” (Stamoulis, 2020).

The effect of the charity event would have been to create a trusting environment between the customers and the business and create a memorable experience so that this experience would be connected to the brand's image. Also, the visibility that the event would have made would help the restaurant be in the view of other potential new customers. “Research shows that 88% of customers who trust a brand will buy from them again. Therefore, establishing relationships with your target audience is crucial for earning and maintaining that trust. Engaging with your community members is a great way to form relationships.” (The Role of Community Engagement in Small Business Success, 2024).

The impact of loyalty programs is vast. “A study by McKinsey, for example, found that customers who are members of a loyalty program are 59% more likely to choose a brand over a competitor and 43% more likely to buy weekly. The study found that customers who are members of a loyalty program are 62% more likely to spend more on the brand.” (Wadarajan, 2024). Loyalty programs tend to have a positive return on Investment (ROI). “According to our Global Customer Loyalty Report 2024, 90% of program owners reported a positive return on investment”. (Kecsma, 2024).

CONCLUSION

As seen in various sectors, loyalty programs can create significant economic advantages when implemented properly. The Canadian housing market crisis provides an interesting parallel, as explored by Janbeih and Pelekais (2024), who demonstrated that a shortage in housing supply had substantial impacts on economic stability and business profitability. Similarly, in the context of Pizza Face's marketing strategy, increasing loyalty among its customer base, particularly younger consumers, can stabilize revenue streams, much like the housing market's effect on wage stability. By offering consistent value through loyalty programs and promotional offers, Pizza Face can ensure long-term customer retention, creating a more predictable and stable revenue model. This mirrors the economic principles that apply to the housing market, where supply and demand dynamics dictate profitability and business growth (Janbeih & Pelekais, 2024).

The findings in this study show that combining digital engagement through social media like TikTok, Instagram and etc with community engagement events is an effective

strategy in increasing brand awareness and raising sales, specifically during off-peak hours among the younger audience, and this dictates the importance of understanding the unique preferences of the younger demographic and utilizing the platforms and approaches that they would respond to the most. However, these results also show the challenges that need to be addressed before being able to approach any of these ideas.

Gen Z's Preference for Digital Content

The younger generation consumes more digital content and likes it in shorter forms, such as TikTok or YouTube shorts. According to the findings in this paper, by utilizing this fact, the restaurant can gain many followers and attention from the generation they want to attract to their products.

Loyalty programs and rewards

Our research found that younger customers need deals the most and are always looking for deals. Also, the sense of belonging or being a brand, member helps people feel closer to the brand, which is why any restaurant needs to have a loyalty program so its customers want to come back for the rewards.

To assess how organizations can leverage the potential of loyalty programs, understanding the core competencies of staff in service-related businesses becomes essential. As outlined by Ramírez Molina, Páez Puerta, Vera Arenas, and El Kadi (2022), the classification of competencies plays a crucial role in human talent management, especially in service industries where employee engagement and skills significantly impact customer satisfaction. The study's methodology mirrors this approach, focusing on identifying and enhancing the skills and competencies that are hardest to detect yet most valuable in fostering long-term customer loyalty. Applying this competency classification model to a retail or hospitality setting could guide businesses like Pizza Face in their talent development strategies, ensuring that they have the right team to drive customer engagement and loyalty (Molina et al., 2022).

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