

Leveraging Technological Innovations in Cloud Kitchens: A Case Study on Enhancing Customer Retention

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ABSTRACT: The global food service industry has been impacted by the explosive growth of cloud kitchens—food production facilities focused solely on delivery. The purpose of this research, entitled "Leveraging Technology Innovations in Cloud Kitchens to Support Growing Customer Loyalty through Case-Based Approaches," is to explore how new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), IoT and Data Analytics, Automated Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems, Support Sustainability-Growth of Associated Businesses and Consumer Loyalty through Case-Based Analysis. The research utilizes a mixed-method approach (face-to-face interviews combined with quantitative survey data) to analyze and understand how predictive analytics improve the demand forecasting process, how automation can increase the operational efficiencies of businesses as well as how Personalized Algorithms can expand Customer Engagement with the Brand. Overall, this study found that the strategic implementation of these new technological innovations within Cloud Kitchens positively impacts creating a satisfied and re-purchasing clientele through providing enhanced customer services and creating a more ideal digital shopping experience for Clients. The study concludes with the proposal of a general framework for the technology-related growth of customer retention in Cloud-Based Food Enterprises.

Keywords: ai, customer relationship management, customer retention, cloud kitchen, data analytics , iot.

I. INTRODUCTION

Cloud kitchens, also referred to as ghost kitchens or virtual kitchens, have had a huge impact on the development of the food service business model. Cloud kitchens, which do not include an inside dining space, take advantage of the internet and digital technology to cater to the increasing demands for convenience and value placed on food by customers [1]. The growth of the digital economy and the use of technology-enabled delivery services, AI, and big data analytics will continue to develop and support the sustainability of cloud kitchens, positioning them in a meaningful way at the center of future food service business models [2].

Cloud kitchen operators are able to effectively utilize predictive analytics and machine learning technologies to not only predict customer tastes and adjust their production cycles based on changes in demand, but to reduce waste and improve accuracy when producing and delivering food orders [3]. Additionally, cloud kitchen operators have realized the benefits of using tools that enable them to automate and personalize interactions with customers through digital communication. These digital tools allow them to provide customer engagement experiences that are both effortless and customized, helping them build customer loyalty and commitment.

Cloud kitchens have significant growth prospects; however, they also encounter obstacles such as customer trust and brand differentiation due to limited face-to-face interaction with customers. The integration of superior digital technology that supports operational efficiencies, in addition to establishing customer-emotional (customer loyalty), and transactional bonds, will contribute to long-term repeat customer retention [1]. Therefore, this study will focus on how cloud kitchen businesses can capitalise on the

use of technological innovations, such as AI-based insights, Internet of Things (IoT)-based kitchen automation, and data-oriented customer relationship management (CRM) systems, to maintain their competitive edge and maximise customer loyalty in an increasingly digital consumer-driven environment.

II. INEFFICIENT ORDER MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONAL BOTTLENECKS

Before adopting digital and automated systems, cloud restaurants experienced multiple challenges when trying to effectively manage order fulfillment and operational coordination. Without using an integrated system for managing orders, orders were handled manually, causing poor communication between kitchen staff and delivery personnel. Consequently, cloud restaurants experienced delays in deliveries due to inaccurate order fulfillment or frequent mix-ups, resulting in decreased customer satisfaction and retention rates. Furthermore, operational bottlenecks, such as poor resource allocation, inadequate inventory monitoring and the absence of real-time tracking capabilities caused workflow congestion for cloud restaurants during busy periods, creating a decline in productivity. Additionally, the absence of IoT-enabled monitoring and AI-based scheduling caused cloud kitchens to struggle with coordinating orders across multiple online platforms. Consequently, the coordination and interaction between kitchen personnel and delivery aggregators became ineffective, leading to service delays and food quality degradation. These operational inefficiencies created more customer complaints and caused an increase in operational costs and waste due to poor demand forecasting. Research has shown that order accuracy and delivery punctuality are two major factors influencing customer loyalty in the digital food service industry. As a result, cloud kitchens that cannot operate in an accurate and timely manner will lose customer confidence and trust in the brand.

III. LACK OF CUSTOMER DATA AND PERSONALIZATION

Prior to the utilization of digital technology and data analytics, cloud restaurants had insufficient insight into their customers' tastes and patterns of consumption, and consequently could not create customized offerings, nor target their marketing campaigns. As such, cloud restaurant's earlier models of order tracking functioned primarily as transactional records, rather than sources of information. Consequently, cloud restaurant operators used generic menus and cut-rate promotion strategies that were ineffective by way of attracting various customer segments. The absence of tracking customer history, feedback, and order frequency also impeded the ability to create loyalty programs and develop personal engagement strategies; therefore, resulting in weak customer relationships, and declining customer retention.

Without a CRM or data-driven analytics system, cloud kitchens were unable to identify and segment their customers or foresee what demand would be in the future. This detrimental lack of visibility resulted in significant an inability to make informed decisions regarding inventory management and menu innovation. As a result, a high percentage of cloud kitchens waste resources, deliver inconsistent levels of service, and fall short of being competitive in a marketplace increasingly defined by customization and personalization due to the increased use of digital technology [1].

IV. INCONSISTENT QUALITY AND BRAND TRUST ISSUES

There were a number of issues that cloud restaurants encountered that made it difficult for them to maintain a constant level of food quality, accuracy of deliveries, and reliable service—these were all vital factors that had a direct impact on building customer confidence, trust, and retention levels before the implementation of advanced technologies. Many cloud restaurants operated a large number of brands or outlets without any type of centralized system to manage and track the stores, making it nearly impossible to provide consistency regarding taste, presentation and portioning across multiple customers. The inconsistency of these elements led to decreased perceived credibility from the brand and customer satisfaction in a marketplace where repeat purchases are heavily dependent on high rates of reliability and perceived quality. The absence of digital applications like Internet of Things-based temperature monitoring and continuous kitchen monitoring created difficulties for operators to keep up with the variety of equipment styles required by many of the cloud kitchen setups across large geographic service areas. In

many instances, due to lack of appropriate monitoring systems, customers were unable to rely on their previous experiences at one store to base their expectations of another store within the cloud brand.

In addition to the limitations created by lack of digital applications, the lack of standardized feedback management systems contributed to the inability of cloud kitchens to resolve issues associated with poor service due to not addressing customer reviews and criticisms in a timely manner. The lack of communication between customers and brand representatives created a significant gap in perceived trust levels (as demonstrated by low online ratings and unfavorable social media presence) and led to decreased customer confidence. The presence of multiple third-party delivery services created additional discrepancies in service delivery, most commonly in terms of late delivery, poor packaging and failure to properly handle the order—all of which resulted in low confidence in the cloud kitchen's ability to provide consistent quality.

One of the main reasons for the lack of consistency within kitchens was the lack of real-time digital monitoring or feedback systems. The absence of technology integration such as IoT enabled sensors, or a centralized kitchen management software solution, limited the operators' ability to effectively manage their supply of ingredients based on freshness, hygiene, and timelines of delivery [4].

V. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

By drastically altering the methods used to prepare food, manage incoming orders and perform delivery operations, Digital Transformation has become an integral part of Cloud Kitchen Companies' ability to operate effectively through its use of Cloud Kitchen Management Systems, Internet of Things (IOT) devices, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Digital Transformation has created a seamless workflow between the supplier to kitchen/warehouse to retailer/restaurant. Additionally, through digital transformation, companies are able to automate many areas that previously required hands-on employee effort. For example, IOT sensors can monitor and record temperature, cooking time, equipment, etc., in real-time; also IOT sensors eliminate anxiety about missing an order or creating low-quality products due to outdated cooking methods. Automated POS systems connected to the Centralized View provide a platform for dozens of Virtual Brands to coordinate their deliveries and orders from the same kitchen location, improving throughput and reducing waste.

Digital Transformation Technologies Play a Key Role in Reshaping Operational Efficiency in The Cloud Kitchen And Restaurants By Addressing Speed, Accuracy, And Scalability Issues That Have Plagued The Industry For Years. Cloud kitchens had inefficient workflows, lack of real-time tracking for orders, and poor coordination between kitchen operations and delivery logistics prior to The Transition To Digital Transformation Technologies. With The Rise Of Automation Tools, Artificial Intelligence (AI), And The Internet Of Things (IoT), Cloud Kitchens Now Have The Opportunity To Use These Technologies To Monitor Performance, Analyze Trends, And Maintain Control Over Their Operations In Real-Time, Thus Supporting The Ability To Improve Operational Performance And Reduce Waste [5].

VI. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS IN DEMAND FORECASTING

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) and predictive analytics to forecast demand and develop an operational strategy for Cloud Kitchens has changed how Cloud Kitchens function. Traditional food service operations typically utilize historical sales data, along with an operator's ability to manually estimate, to estimate demand levels. Conversely, Cloud Kitchens utilize AI-based algorithms that allow for the analysis of large amounts of data (i.e., historical order frequency data, consumer preference data, demand changes based on seasonal patterns, etc.) and may also include external factors (i.e., weather and regional events) that affect overall consumer demand [1]. By utilizing this data-driven method, Cloud Kitchens can better predict consumer demand and respond appropriately by improving their resource planning and inventory management strategies. For example, using machine learning models to identify trending preferences in meals enables Cloud Kitchens to prepare larger quantities of popular dishes or ingredients during peak demand, resulting in reduced time spent preparing meals and increased consumer satisfaction [2].

Predictive analytics enable businesses to adjust their pricing dynamically based on the customer's buying habits and, thus, enhance the company's ability to increase sales and decrease food waste. AI technology, integrated with CRMs, groups customers by behavior, allowing businesses to provide customized offers,

encouraging loyalty and return purchases [3]. Furthermore, cloud-based dashboards display key performance indicators, including order lead time, fulfillment accuracy, and delivery performance, enabling decision-makers to base their operations on data leading to better operational decisions aligned to forecasted demand.

Through the use of AI, cloud kitchens can achieve accurate forecasts of potential demand, along with the ability to rapidly change their menu, labor and supply chain based on real-time data. By providing these insights to management, AI provides the ability to reduce the amount of food that is wasted or overstocked, which again creates a financially viable and environmentally sustainable, collaborative business model with respect to the food industry. The combination of AI and predictive analytics provides a foundation for cloud kitchens to create a consistently delivered, timely and personalized dining experience, which will ultimately provide a means to increase customer loyalty in an increasingly competitive digital delivery landscape.

VII. PERSONALIZATION AND CRM AUTOMATION

As the cloud kitchen industry rapidly evolves, the importance of Personalization and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Automation cannot be overstated as tools to develop customer loyalty and long-term retention. The trend of consumers moving away from ordering food using traditional means to utilizing Digital Platforms has caused the shift to Personalized Interactions to be a Competitive Differentiator that drives Customer Satisfaction and Repeat Purchases. With AI technology, cloud kitchens can leverage CRM automation to gather, process and utilize Real-time Consumer Data to transform One-time Purchasers into Repeat Patrons. Advanced analytic techniques allow Customer Profiles to be developed based upon Historical Order Patterns, Spending Habits, Feedback Patterns and even geolocation data enabling Businesses to offer Personalized Products/Services that align perfectly with the preference of each Individual Customer.

AI-Enhanced CRM Systems also provide businesses with automated methods to engage Customers through Multiple Touchpoints, including Mobile Applications, Chatbots and Personalized Email Marketing Campaigns, creating an Integrated and Consistent Omnichannel Customer Experience. One example of how the AI Systems create Predictive Recommendation Engines that suggest Favored Meals at Times when they are most Likely to be Ordered, while Loyalty Programs and Special Offers Incentivize Customers to Return. In addition, this Seamless Omni channel Interaction fosters a deeper emotional attachment between the Customer and the Brand, progressing to Experiential Loyalty, as opposed to Traditional Transactional Engagements. Automation reduces Human Error on the part of Business through Streamlined Communication Processes, and increases the chance of Successful Recovery from Service Failures through Timely Customer Service Recovery Mechanisms.

VIII. DATA SECURITY AND CONSUMER TRUST

Maintaining More than Just Technology: Protecting Data to Build Systematic Trust. Digital data security is a critical need in the cloud kitchen marketplace, which relies heavily on digital processes and tools (Data). Cloud kitchens will collect and store large quantities of customer sensitive information over time (Data). And with more reliance on Artificial Intelligence analytics, Extended Reality (VR/AR), and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) applications and services, the customer relationship will continue to rely heavily on data about the customer (Data). Customer perception of a company is based on the information shared with that company to establish that company's reliability and safety (Data). A single instance of data security breach or the use of an individual customer's sensitive personal data can destroy a company's reputation and undermine the foundation of trust necessary for a relationship between the customer and company (Data).

Protecting consumer data is increasingly seen as an essential driver of digital food service industry consumer trust. With the reliance of cloud kitchens on the internet to manage orders, process payments, and connect with customers, it is critical for cloud kitchens to take measures to protect their customer's personal information from data breaches, improper use, and/or unauthorized access in order to build customer loyalty [6]. A lack of cybersecurity infrastructure as detrimental to the reputation of food delivery companies, ultimately preventing repeat purchasing by consumers [7]. Using data encryption and the establishment of

a culture of data transparency enhances the ability of food delivery companies to avoid the risks associated with data breaches, as well as provide evidence of their reliability to their clients [8]. The complex ethical issues faced by Artificial Intelligence (AI) kitchens managing consumer analytics and predictive logistics in compliance with various privacy regulations such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which impact consumer confidence in the brands [9]. Applauding the link between trust in data security and customer retention, customers are more likely to repurchase from providers that are transparent with respect to data protection efforts [10], [11]. The use of blockchain technology as an innovative way to provide an increased level of credibility through traceability of orders and transaction security [12].

Cloud kitchen operators are investing in the development of quality and comprehensive cybersecurity frameworks (Data) including end-to-end encryption, tokenization, and blockchain technologies (Data) to protect customer data through the life cycle of digital interaction. Developing and Implementing Secure Customer Data Infrastructure: The Development of Customer Trust. Implementing secure digital infrastructures is not just a compliance obligation but rather an integral component of a strategic initiative to build and retain customers through bolstered consumer confidence (Data). As an example, blockchain technology will allow for transactions to occur and verify authenticity within the supply chain process, allowing consumers to have the assurance that their supply chain transactions are legitimate and able to be traced back to the supplier and its product (Data) [13] [14].

Ensuring consumer trust is fundamentally established through an organisation's open, honest and sincere practice of collecting and using consumers' data. Companies that communicate their data policies clearly, ask for consent and give consumers control of their own online activity will be viewed more favourably, resulting in higher levels of credibility and loyalty from consumers. Thus, the transparency of a company's data policies provides consumers with the assurance that they can confidently purchase from a company and create a positive experience for others via word-of-mouth referrals. Consequently, in a cloud kitchen's business environment where all points of contact with their customers are conducted online, data security is not just an IT issue, it is a significant component of managing the overall customer experience and creating and maintaining trust and engagement with the brand long term. Therefore, the relationship between secure technology and consumer perceptions of the brand must be viewed as an essential component for creating a long-lasting connection between the cloud kitchen and its customers in an ever-evolving digital marketplace.

IX. SUSTAINABILITY AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

Sustainability plays a vital role in driving innovation in the cloud kitchen sector, integrating environmental responsibility, excellent service, and customer loyalty. As digital food companies continue to grow, they are looking to leverage technology to support global sustainability and minimize environmental impacts while improving resource efficiency. Cloud kitchens can use IoT technology to monitor energy use, water usage, and waste generation in real time; thus, providing them with the data necessary for effective intervention to mitigate their environmental impact. For example, energy management systems that use smart technology enable cloud kitchens to use their equipment when it is least likely to incur peak electricity charges. Moreover, models based on predictive algorithms developed through AI will allow cloud kitchens to procure their ingredients according to demand, reducing unnecessary overproduction and food waste [15].

Moreover, Blockchain Technology is fundamentally altering how Sustainable Supply Chain Management (SCM) operates. Blockchain Traceability enables consumers to see where their products were sourced from and ensures that all suppliers follow good ethical and environmental practices. This increases consumer trust among consumers who are concerned about the environment [16] [17]. Cloud kitchens that openly display their Sustainable Practices through a digital dashboard or using Eco label(s), improve their brand image, and also increase their customer retention rates with this growing segment of socially conscious consumers.

Technological innovations in Sustainable Packaging and Delivery Logistics are included here as well. By using biodegradable or recyclable materials in their packaging, Cloud kitchens are lowering their Carbon Footprint. Additionally, the introduction of AI-assisted Routing Optimisation for Delivery vehicles reduces the overall environmental impact of both the delivery itself as well as the Product that is being Delivered. These environmentally conscious practices are appealing to the two largest Consumers of today (Millennials

and Gen Z). Both of these groups are placing much more value on Economics and Finance than on Sustainability, so the combination of an Innovative Product with a Sustainable Supply Chain provides Business with an increase in Operational Efficiency and Consumers with an increase in Ethical Satisfaction [18].

X. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

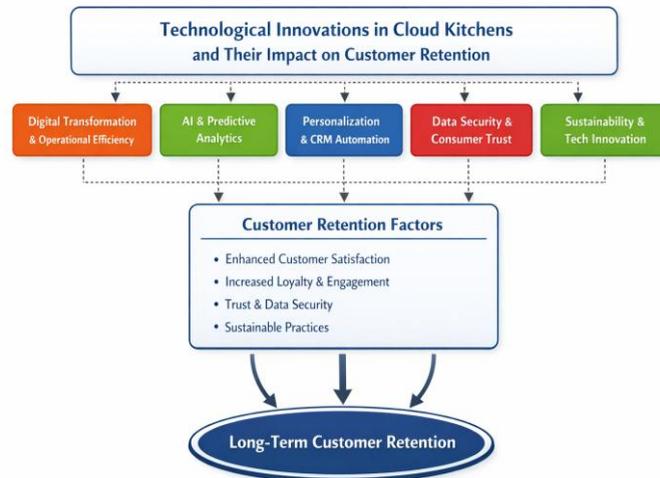


FIGURE 1. Technological innovation in cloud kitchen (Author Self Sourced).

XI. CUSTOMER RETENTION FACTORS

Figure 1 shows the combined influence of technology, experience and ethics leads to an increase in customer loyalty in cloud kitchen settings. The most critical element of this combination is customer satisfaction created through operational efficiencies, consistency in the quality of food, and the timely delivery of food as a result of digital transformation. Real-time tracking of customer orders; AI-based quality control systems; and automated back-office operations provide greater reliability, convenience, and accuracy to the customer, thus enhancing the perception of cloud kitchen delivery service.

The second element that leads to increased customer loyalty and engagement is enhanced customer loyalty through customer relationship management (CRM) technology. The personalization of promotional offers, rewards programs for loyal customers, and timely customer engagement messaging via predictive technology create a unique relationship between cloud kitchens and their customers. Personalizing customers' experience will foster an emotional connection to the brand, which will increase the likelihood of long-term loyalty from a customer.

Thirdly, trust and security of customer data play a critical role in maintaining digital customer relationships. With the increasing sensitivity of customer's personal data, customers prefer to do business with companies that practice ethical and secure data handling. Encryption technologies, transparent privacy policies, and blockchain-based verification systems enhance customer trust and strengthen the credibility of a cloud kitchen brand.

Sustainability has become a significant factor in retaining environmentally aware customers. Customers today are looking for ethically sourced products and expect eco-friendly packaging, energy savings by using energy-efficient appliances in the kitchen, and a commitment to transparency throughout the supply chain. When cloud kitchens implement sustainable practices into their operation, they not only meet their obligations to the environment but improve upon their brand image and create a stronger sense of loyalty among customers.

Conclusion

Cloud Kitchens have experienced dramatic shifts in their growth trajectory as the result of technological innovations which have improved a Cloud Kitchen's efficiency, personalization and sustainability. The use of AI, IoT and CRM Automation allow companies to anticipate and understand their customers' needs and preferences, as well as provide a more personal experience to create long-term relationships of trust with customers. In terms of retaining customers in Cloud Kitchens, this case study has shown that it is not just about product quality but rather how you leverage technology is equally as important for providing convenience, transparency and connection. In today's extremely competitive digital food marketplace, using technology is no longer simply an option; it is critical for remaining successful and continuing to engage with your customers over the long haul.

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Questions for Discussion

- What are the best methods by which cloud based food service providers will be able to provide customized dining experiences based on their customers' data while being mindful of increasing consumer demand for enhanced privacy and data security? What limits would you set to serve these two competing demands?
- If technology-driven personalization, quality control, and sustainability increase operational costs, how can cloud kitchens maintain affordable pricing for diverse customer segments?
- As technology now became commonplace in foodservice, what will be the next advantage to compete on? How will the cloud kitchen industry meet changing expectations of consumers?
- The research provides a general framework that can apply to most cloud kitchens. In what ways will the technological requirements and strategies of a single-restaurant operation differ from those of a network of multiple brands in a cloud kitchen?