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Effect of Inbound Marketing Factors on Marketing Performance: The Case of Restaurant and Catering Industry in Rasht with an Emphasis on Restaurants with *Gilaki* Names

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Abstract

The present study explores the effect of inbound marketing factors on marketing performance. The statistical population was composed of all customers of six restaurants with *Gilaki* names in Rasht, which are active in cyberspace. A total of 400 individuals were selected by convenience sampling. The standard scales included visibility management, active listening, community building, word-of-mouth (WOM) intention, and purchase intention. Data were analyzed by structural equations modeling in AMOS (ver. 24) software package. The coefficient of determination for the dependent variables showed that active listening, community building, visibility management and WOM intention could account for 49 percent of the variance of customer purchase intention. Also, active listening, community building, and visibility management captured 28 percent of the variance of customer WOM intention. Therefore, it can be concluded that the active presence of restaurants in cyberspace is directly related to customer WOM and purchase intention and attention to inbound marketing tools will play a key role in the viability of their business.

Keywords:

Active listening, community building, inbound marketing, purchase intention, visibility management, word-of-mouth

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INTRODUCTION

After the city of Rasht was registered as the only Iranian city in UNESCO's Creative Cities Network on December 2015, a new wave of restaurant establishment commenced with reliance on the traditions and names taken from the Gilaki language, and a tough competition was created in this industry. At the onset, the restaurants have mainly focused on creating an atmosphere consistent with traditional architecture and also, on food quality. However, as the social networks developed, it has been recognized that customers play a crucial role in the success of the restaurants so that their role is essentially changing from individual passive consumers to the actors in the context of value creation, knowledge development, and competition. The modern science of economy places more importance on the provision of services (marketing) by organizations than on the products themselves. This means that a mere focus on having a transaction with customers is given its place to a customer-oriented approach. Most customers have a lot of choices when they are to choose a restaurant. Hence, marketing process is gaining an increasing importance in customer purchase intention as we can see that service enterprises and organizations have realized that the presence in the marketplace and offering lower prices do not guarantee their viability; rather, marketing and the use of modern marketing methods, such as inbound marketing, have a key role to play. Since the beginning of marketing, the focus on customers has been one of the main foundations so that the only goal was to concentrate on informing the customers in order to attract their interests to their own products and company and make them loyal to their own brand in addition to helping them in decision-making for a purchase. In traditional marketing, the focus on the products in the marketing strategies of the firms has sometimes deviated the focus from the customers. In digital marketing, it is tried to concentrate on customers and identifying their demands in order to develop

strategies for effective interaction with them. A strategy that is merely based on content marketing cannot improve the sale by itself because the experience and 80-20 rule show that the content marketing that 80 percent focuses on customers' information and awareness can increase sale only by 20 percent. Therefore, digital marketing creates a preliminary relationship with customers on the basis of trust and loyalty and the inbound marketing establishes the main aspect. Inbound marketing enables an open and smart relationship with a customer whose attention has been attracted to the product or service of the firm and creates a personal relationship by promoting the content tailored to the consumer's needs (Baltes, 2015). Since 2006, inbound marketing has been the main online marketing method that has replaced the traditional marketing techniques like the purchase of advertisement or email lists and has focused on creating quality content to attract people towards the firm and its products (Hubspot, 2016). All in all, inbound marketing tries to create conformity between the content and the personality of the buyer who approaches the products of the firms voluntarily. The personality of the customer is of crucial importance so that if it is not well understood, the marketing strategies will fail (Baltes, 2015).

Inbound marketing is a marketing technique that requires an accurate goal-setting for interaction with customers through quality content. Therefore, inbound marketing is a strategy to link with customers' abilities through experiences that they value. The use of the media, like blogs or social networks, enables marketers to get informed about the hobbies and entertainments they are looking for. By definition, HubSpot is a platform for inbound marketing software that enables the firms to attract searchers, interest them, and finally, build loyalty in them.

Inbound marketing occurs in diverse forms including thematic blogs, social network campaigns, email campaigns, search engine optimization, viral videos, web-based semi-

nars (webinar), and so on (Marketing-Schools, 2016).

Marketing communications used to be usually in the form of one-way messages from companies sent via TV, radio, print photos, telephone calls, banners, emails, and so on. In this method due to the large number of unwanted advertisements, customers were struggling to find ways to block or filter the messages (Goldstein & Lee, 2005). Companies used to spend billions of dollars on advertisement every year, but they hesitated to attract customers through websites and Internet advertisement (Lages, 2004). Marketers are still seeking new ways to find and attract customers (Eckler & Bolls, 2011). Customers are faced with hundreds of advertising messages sent via diverse media in a single day (Eckler & Bolls, 2011). In recent years, search marketing has been a common component of content marketing programs of companies and organizations. They use webpages, weblog posts, photos, videos and other content types to solve their consumers' problems. This content may be their own ideas or guidelines and/or shared customer solutions. Search engine marketing tries to categorize advertisement websites by widening its view on the pages that present the results of search engines. Content marketing is a media campaign that commences in different ways, for example by making home movies to demonstrate how to use the items sold (Moran & Hunt, 2008). All these are oriented with the changes in how people make purchases or how they receive services. Presently, the Internet, search engines, blogging, and social media enable the customers to search for what they want electronically and whenever they desire, to make a two-way communication with the intended company, or to consult with people – either friends or strangers – before making the purchase in order to learn about their experiences about the consumption of the intended item/brand (Halligan & Shah, 2010). Social media are a set of programs that allows users to create and share content in the cyberspace on the

basis of the Web 2.0 technology. Social media exist in diverse forms, e.g. forums, blogs, and social networks (Kaplan, 2010). The challenging consequence for retailers is to shift from the old continuous non-consumer-interfered external-oriented marketing method to the modern customer-involved, attraction-based, inbound marketing method (Lusch & Vargo, 2009). The goal for companies is to illustrate the company's offerings to the audience in an appropriate time without impairing its attractiveness (Goldstein & Lee, 2005), for example when they are searching for an item. Halligan and Shah (2010) coined the term *inbound marketing* to describe this modern method, a term that is now commonplace among experts. They argue that inbound marketing involves attracting a customer to a website through search engines, blogs, and social media. In the present era, customers are burdened with a plethora of information and advertisement without having enough time to check all of them, so they prefer to receive brief information from the friends and people around them (Silverman, 2001).

Marketing via social networks

This kind of marketing exploits social media and the websites of social networks. The companies, even those that do not have a strong financial backing, can build their advertising messages and publish them through E-mails or social networking portals with a low cost (Madhoushi & Rezaei, 2013). The techniques of social networking marketing are generally used to enhance brand awareness, increase sales, optimize customer services, and implement marketing campaigns (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Consumer behavior may be influenced by various advertising methods. However, it has been documented that word of mouth (WOM) is more effective than other advertisement methods on consumers and their decision for purchase (Wangenheim & Bayon, 2004). Trusov et al. (2009) investigated new customers of a social website. They were exposed to both

WOM and marketing advertisement to compare their effects on the number of new members of the site. According to the results of this empirical study, WOM was 20 times more effective than marketing advertisement and 30 times more effective than other media. Most consumers believe that WOM is a reliable source of information and it can play a critical role in their intention for purchase (Lau & Ng, 2001; Leskovec et al., 2007). Wangenheim and Bayón (2004) argue that WOM affects the purchase decision-making process of consumers and can change their decisions. According to Parikh et al. (2014), online reviews act as an advertisement for the restaurant. For example, when online users read positive comments of customers about the good quality of a restaurant in the cyberspace, they are likely to be motivated to visit the restaurant and pay for its costs.

In addition, Prendergast et al. (2010) addressed the relationship between WOM in forums and customer purchase intentions. Participants' use of forums and their behavior intentions were measured in a survey. The results revealed that the similarity between forum theme and consumer purchase intentions directly influenced the customer purchase. The online forums of consumers about the products where the consumers can use the Internet to score the products and observe the reviews and comments about the products, companies or brands is growing (Sandes & Urdan, 2013). In fact, direct contact with an individual who has used a brand has never been easier so that just in a few seconds, for example, one can see the scores given by an individual who has visited a restaurant or in a few minutes, one can read people's opinions about a hotel only by a click on the relevant website. This kind of communications is regarded as out-of-control marketing communications or off-brand communications and they operate without the interference or direct control by the brand owner or the company (Krystallis & Chrysochou, 2014). In a study on how to have a successful inbound marketing, Belz et al.

(2009) found that the control and examination of consumers' activities and responsiveness through diverse communication channels are of crucial importance for inbound marketing. Goldstein and Lee (2005) concluded that given customers' increasing concern for their privacy, companies should consider "appropriate time" in making contact with customers in the first place in order to be in a better place for competition. Lu et al. (2013) demonstrated that WOM advertisement had a direct, positive impact on sales, and Larson and Watson (2011) reported that, in addition to traditional activities that included business-to-customer (B2C) and customer-to-business (C2B) activities, social networks allows communications between customers (C2C), the control of C2C activities, and the building of B2C forums. Finally, Chaffey and Smith (2013) describe inbound marketing as a mix of search-oriented marketing, satisfaction-oriented marketing, and social network-oriented marketing.

Variables of inbound marketing

Visibility management

Search engine marketing is a type of online marketing that aims to enhance the visibility in the result pages of search engines to increase the visitors to a site (Ramos & Cota, 2008). Visibility management includes the activities of a company focused on managing its online visibility to customers so that its products are found when customers are browsing and searching the Internet (Purcell, 2011).

Active listening

Interaction cannot be made if there is no listening, and listening typically cannot be passive because speakers or message producers always need audiences who provide evidence that they have received and comprehended the message (Clark & Brennan, 1991). Since most interactions among the customers happen freely in the Internet networks or forums and the owner of the forum, network, or page cannot support all addressees, so companies

need to actively listen to the messages if they want to know what people like and what they do not, what opinions or complains they have about them, or if their opinions adversely affects other audience or concern them (Kriplean et al., 2007). The most common evidence of active listening is customer service, i.e. "responsive, helpful, willing service that responds to customer inquiries quickly" (Wolfenbanger & Gilly, 2003).

Community building

Community building is one of the main ideas of relationship marketing in cases marketers face the challenge of toughness of making a one-by-one relationship with individual customers (Berry, 1995). Community building includes online initiatives of a firm to engage customers in their products/brands in order to foster or create online forums (Kozinets et al., 2010). In the era of social networking, customer trust to firm brand depends on building a community and gaining customers' participation (Habibi et al., 2014).

Purchase intention

Consumers make plenty of purchase decisions every day (Kotler et al., 2017). Purchase intention reflects a consumer's willingness to purchase an item (Belch & Belch, 2004). The purchase decision is made by a consumer through a series of social and cognitive processes (Armstrong et al., 2014). Purchase intention refers to a customer's willingness to buy a certain product/service. Consumer prediction is measured by indicators such as product/service statements (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

Word-of-mouth (WOM) intention

Oral advertisement, and thereby the exchange of empirical knowledge, is regarded as one of the important information resources for consumers (Goyette et al., 2010).

Word-of-mouth (WOM) advertisement intention refers to a customer's willingness to make positive remarks and recommenda-

tions and motivate others to purchase a product/service in an offline or online way. This is measured by indicators such as saying positive things about a product/service to others, recommending the use of a product/service to others, and motivating friends and relatives to use a product/service (Babin et al., 2005).

Conceptual Model

According to the review of the literature and the relationship between the variables, the conceptual model of the research can be drawn as Figure 1 (derived from Casas, 2015). Overall, the present study measures the effect of visibility management, active listening, and community building on purchase intention directly and via the mediator variable of word-of-mouth (WOM) intention.

According to the conceptual model, it is hypothesized that:

H₁: Online visibility management of a firm positively influences a consumer's purchase intention,

H₂: Online visibility management of a firm positively influences WOM intention,

H₃: Active listening positively influences a consumer's purchase intention,

H₄: Active listening positively influences WOM intention,

H₅: Community building positively influences a consumer's purchase intention,

H₆: Community building positively influences a consumer's WOM intention, and

H₇: An individual's WOM intention positively influences his/her purchase intention.

METHODOLOGY

The present research is descriptive-analytical in terms of design and applied in terms of objective. The statistical population was composed of all customers of six restaurants, which were actively present in the cyberspace, with Gilaki names across the city of Rasht. The samples from these restaurants were taken from the city of Rasht. According to what the restaurants expressed, they had 10,000 customers every month. The sample

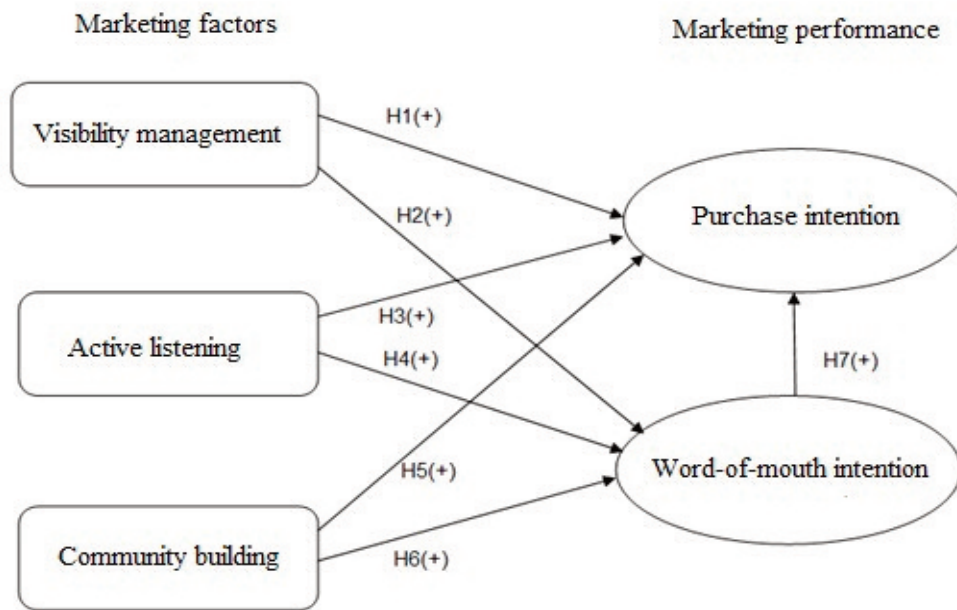


Figure 1. The Conceptual Model Derived from Casas (2015)

size was estimated to be 370 individuals by Cochran's formula. Finally, 430 questionnaires were administered to customers selected by convenience sampling techniques. After the questionnaires with missing data were removed, 400 questionnaires remained for the analysis. The profile of respondents is presented in Table 1.

Data on the research variables were collected by a standard questionnaire derived from Casas (2015). It was composed of three items on the variable of visibility management, three items on active listening, three items on community building, three items on WOM intention, and three items on purchase intention. The items measured the agreement on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 'completely agreed' to 'completely disagreed'. To check the face and content validity of the research instrument, the parameters were provided to the faculty members and experts of marketing. Then, after all items of the questionnaire were adjusted, their content and face validity was confirmed and it was established that the research constructs were valid. The reliability of the research instrument was estimated by Cronbach's alpha that

was estimated to be 0.846 for visibility management, 0.850 for active listening, 0.821 for community building, 0.839 for WOM intention, and 0.831 for purchase intention. It is known that the closer the Cronbach's alpha to 1, the higher the internal consistency. Then, confirmatory factor analysis or factor loads show that when this indicator is equal or greater than 0.4, the variance between constructs and their indicators is greater than the variance of the measurement error of that construct and so, the validity of that measurement model is acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999). In the present work, factor loads were greater than 0.4 for all studied scales. Convergent validity examines the correlation between the scores of the tests that measure a common attribute (Hu & Bentler, 1999). We found that the coefficients for this index all were greater than 0.5, supporting the validity of the research instrument. Divergent validity should be estimated by checking if the average variance extracted is smaller than the maximum shared variance. As divergent validity showed, the research instrument had optimal discriminant validity. Then, with respect to the indicators of reliability

Table 1
Profile of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	203	50.8
Female	197	49.2
Age (year)		
<30	81	20.2
30-40	117	29.3
40-50	129	32.3
>50	73	18.2
Education Level		
Diploma	58	14.4
Associate degree	127	31.8
B.Sc.	119	29.8
M.Sc. and Ph.D.	96	24.0
Social network used		
Facebook	15	3.8
Instagram	137	34.2
Telegram	140	35.0
Tweeter	72	18.0
Etc.	36	9.0
Go to restaurant (month)		
1	143	35.8
2	105	26.2
3	84	21.0
	68	17.0

and Cronbach's alpha, the average correlation was estimated between the individual pairs of the items in order to reach stability and consistency. The higher correlation implies that all items of the test measure a common construct. Cronbach's alpha of greater than 0.7 shows the acceptable reliability. This was reported to be greater than 0.7 for all items of the research questionnaire, showing their good reliability. Unlike Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability addresses the likelihood of a heterogeneous relationship between the items of the constructs and calculates the coefficient of reliability as a function of factor load between each item and the pertaining construct. The composite reliabilities of greater than 0.7-0.8 imply acceptable reliability (Hu & Bentler, 1999). In our research,

composite reliability was >0.7 for all research items (Table 2).

RESULTS

Test of direct relationships

As the summary of reported beta (direct) coefficients of the model show in Table 3, active listening (0.231), community building (0.222), visibility management (0.194), and WOM intention (0.426) influenced purchase intention significantly and directly. Looking from another perspective, active listening (0.301), community building (0.343), and visibility management (0.274) had a significant and direct impact on customers' WOM intention.

Table 2

Summary of Coefficients of Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument

	Confirmatory factor analysis		Divergent validity	Convergent validity	Compositer reliability	Cronbach's alpha
	Item	Factor load				
Word-of-mouth intention	1	0.72	0.549<0.621	0.621	0.830	0.839
	2	0.89				
	3	0.74				
Purchase intention	1	0.86	0.549<0.613	0.613	0.824	0.831
	2	0.62				
	3	0.85				
Active listening	1	0.83	0.179<0.643	0.643	0.844	0.850
	2	0.84				
	3	0.74				
Visibility management	1	0.79	0.176<0.644	0.644	0.844	0.846
	2	0.77				
	3	0.85				
Community building	1	0.78	0.232<0.593	0.593	0.814	0.821
	2	0.75				
	3	0.78				

Note: Confirmatory factor analysis has been reported as first-order confirmatory factor analysis.

The divergent validity was calculated as the extent to which average variance extracted was smaller than maximum shared squared variance.

Table 3

Table of Direct Coefficient of the Research Model

			Direct coefficients of research model				
			b value	Critical ratio	β value	p value	Path result
Active listening	→	Purchase intention	0.214	6.09	0.231	0.001	Confirmed
Community building	→	Purchase intention	0.219	5.75	0.222	0.001	Confirmed
Visibility management	→	Purchase intention	0.173	5.17	0.194	0.001	Confirmed
WOM intention	→	Purchase intention	0.409	10.09	0.426	0.001	Confirmed
Active listening	→	WOM intention	0.290	7.10	0.301	0.001	Confirmed
Community building	→	WOM intention	0.352	8.09	0.343	0.001	Confirmed
Visibility management	→	WOM intention	0.254	6.64	0.274	0.001	Confirmed

Test of indirect effects

As the coefficients of beta (indirect coefficients) show in Table 4, active listening (0.128), community building (0.146), and visibility management (0.117) directly and sig-

nificantly influenced WOM intention, thereby affecting customer purchase intention indirectly.

Then, the coefficients of determination of the dependent variables indicated that active

listening, community building, visibility management, and WOM intention could account for 49 percent of the variance of customer purchase intention. Also, 28 percent of the variance of WOM intention was captured by active listening, community building, and visibility management.

Model developed by research and coefficients of model fit

The adequacy of the presented model fit with data was determined by the following fit indices: normed chi-square (χ^2/df), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA).

As can be observed in Table 5, the research model exhibited a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Figure 2 depicts the sum of standard estimations for regression weights including factor loads and impact factors. The independent variables affected the dependent variables positively and significantly ($p < 0.05$). All factors loads were considered

to differ from zero significantly (Qasemi, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The main objective of the present study was to explore the effect of inbound marketing factors on marketing performance. More precisely talking, the present study focused on the effect of main factors of inbound marketing (visibility management, active listening, and community building) on the success of marketing (WOM intention and purchase intention of customers) in restaurants with Gilaki names across the city of Rasht, Iran.

According to the results, the restaurants that performed optimally in visibility management influenced customer purchase intention significantly (H1). This is consistent with Casas (2015), Rutz et al. (2012), Ghose and Yang (2009), and Baye et al. (2009). So, service organizations that can work in accordance with their customers' requirements and preferences and provide desirable services can perform better in marketing and manage the purchase intention of their prospects more readily. For example, restaurants with a desirable performance in visibil-

Table 4

Table of Indirect Coefficients of the Research Model

Path	Direct coefficients of research model			
	b-value	β value	p-value	Path result
Active listening → Purchase intention	0.119	0.128	0.001	Confirmed
Community building → Purchase intention	0.144	0.146	0.001	Confirmed
Visibility management → Purchase intention	0.104	0.117	0.001	Confirmed

Table 5

Coefficient of Determination of the Research Model

Model fit indicators	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	TLI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Model estimation	1.769	0.995	0.973	0.982	0.995	0.988	0.044
Acceptable level	<3	Close to 1 = complete fit					<0.08

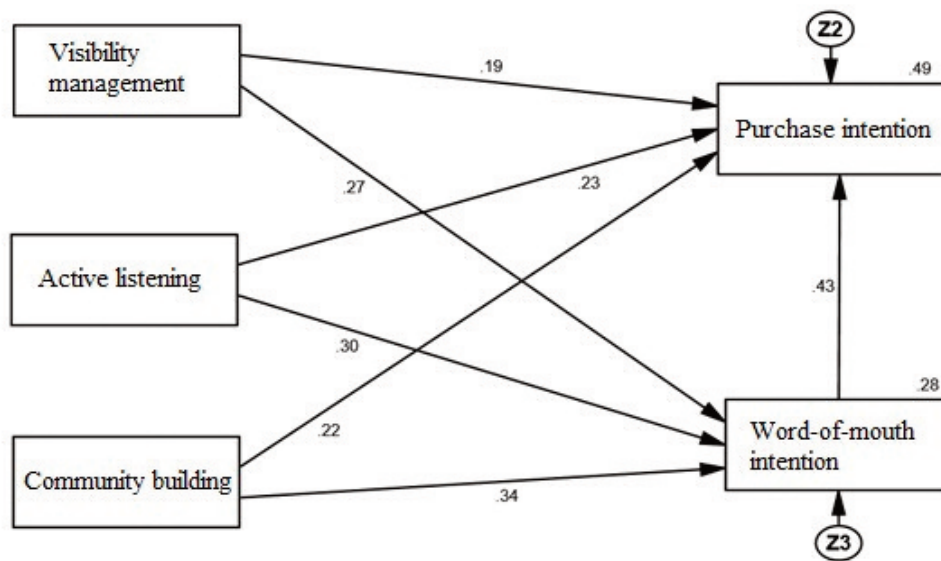


Figure 2. The standard model of the impact of inbound marketing on customer purchase intention mediated by word-of-mouth

ity management can attract wandering customers. Customers who are looking for good foods that can satisfy their personal expectations always search the Internet. Organizations that can well manage visibility can readily attract these customers because they care for food taste, subjective preferences, and behavior patterns in the context of food. Also, we found that WOM intention is the mediator of the relationship between visibility management and customer purchase intention. If customers who are active in cyberspace perceive that the service brand X is optimum in food quality and practices a suitable visibility management, then they may try to inform people around them about the performance of the organization and use (oral or electronic) WOM (H 2). The factors that push a customer towards WOM about the desired restaurant include, among all, the customer's satisfaction with the interaction with the restaurant in cyberspace, the customer's willingness for social interaction, caring for the taste of friends, and the enhancement of self-image and self-value among others (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Kim et al. (2011) suggest that visibility in cyberspace is an integrated component of visibility in new marketing. In this view, service

organizations including restaurants should manage their behavioral patterns in cyberspace because as virtual networks are expanding and the Internet and e-commerce are gaining an ever-increasing attention, customers surf the channels and social websites to find better and more quality services. It has been reported that building virtual channels and sites for service supply by an organization increased its new customers (Halligan & Shah, 2010). This study shows that the restaurants that are more active in cyberspace and establish constructive interactions with their customers perform better in marketing.

We also found that active listening of the restaurants to customers affects their re-purchase intention significantly (H 3) as reported by Casas (2015) and Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2003), too. In this view, customers will show more willingness to purchase the products if the organization listens to their critiques and suggestions. Active listening to customers in cyberspace and caring for their concerns and interests, and above all, satisfying their reasonable demands can enhance their satisfaction with the quality of restaurant services and subsequently, increase their purchase intention significantly. Casas (2015)

reported that active listening plays a significant role in shaping customer purchase intention and WOM. Similarly, [De Matos and Rossi \(2008\)](#) found a significant correlation between customer response service and customer WOM intention. When customers perceive that their intended restaurant has an active presence in cyberspace to satisfy their demands and consider their remarks, they show more willingness for WOM. Customer-oriented is one of the necessary elements of marketing viability so that higher customer-oriented and response to customer requirements in online and virtual channels increase WOM advertisement as well as repurchase intention ([Casas, 2015](#)). In this sense, service organization like restaurants should not only respond to their customers in cyberspace but they should also develop strategies and mechanisms to manage the virtual networks and online websites where their customers surf and discuss the quality of the services provided by them and by competitors. Awareness of customers' demands and preferences enables restaurants to provide the correct and optimal services as fast and efficient as possible. As [Weinberg and Pehlivan \(2011\)](#) showed, customers' intention for repurchase and WOM can be increased by studying their demands, expectations, and needs in cyberspace, examining the informal online communication among customers, and responding to customers in formal website and channels of the organization (H4).

With respect to community building, it was found to influence WOM and repurchase intention of customers significantly (H 5 and 6). This is in agreement with [Casas \(2015\)](#), [Lu et al. \(2013\)](#), [Olbrich and Holsing \(2011\)](#), [Powers et al. \(2012\)](#) and [You et al. \(2015\)](#). The customers who perceive that their intended restaurant has an active presence in cyberspace and is passionate and innovative in the management of its virtual and online channels show more willingness to make a long-term relationship with that restaurant. Similarly, [Lee and Youn \(2009\)](#) reported that customers' awareness of community building

by their intended service organization affects their WOM intention significantly. Customers lend themselves to WOM more easily when they are satisfied with the products/services of the concerned organization. Sending the address or link of the organization's website to friends and relatives and viewing the list of services in cyberspace are easier and this can increase their willingness for WOM ([Casas, 2015](#)). In this sense, customers' WOM and purchase intention can be escalated by sound management along with the behavioral norms of the community – providing a platform for e-commerce and awareness of the fact that virtual networks enhance advertisement and commerce – and active presence in virtual networks, building formal channels for the organization, inviting customers to these channels, creating an online forum, and updating the products/services. It should be noted that as the online activity of a service organization slacks and the organization is reluctant to build virtual communities and interact with customers, the visibility management and active listening levels of the organization are reduced to an extent that the organization is unable to provide online products/services to the customers anymore and on the other hand, it cannot respond to their wants and needs correctly. As a result of unawareness of customers' response to the services (in particular, the awareness of the information that the customers share in their informal communications), WOM and customer repurchase intention start to decline.

In the next dimension, WOM intention significantly affects customers' purchase intention (H 7). [Shin and Thai \(2015\)](#) argue that WOM is one of the main factors contributing to the marketing viability and that the service organizations that are satisfied with their customers can use their human resource in WOM as a competitive advantage. In this view, WOM is the process of sharing of information and experiences about the services of a restaurant – e.g. food quality, service provision, behavior with customers, and relaxing

atmosphere – among the customers. This can remarkably interact with the decision-making process of other customers (Moliner-Velázquez et al., 2015). According to Zhang et al. (2017), WOM shows either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with unpleasant experiences and in the latter case, customers share their negative experiences with others. Jalilvand et al. (2017) suggest that customers who are satisfied with the services are more willing to do WOM. In this case, the satisfaction and service quality are so favorable that customers intend to receive the services of the organization again in future and to establish a deep and long-term relationship with the organization. It has been documented that WOM influences re-purchase of products/services significantly (Shin & Thai, 2015). According to Hsu et al. (2015), customers who show more willingness for WOM advertisement of the products/services of a certain brand have more intention for the re-purchase of the products/services of that organization. Hsu et al. (2017) showed that WOM had a significant impact on re-purchase intention. Md Husin et al. (2016) reported that WOM in social networks plays a significant and important role in a product/service purchase. Baker et al. (2016) concluded that WOM about products/services of a certain brand influences the willingness to re-purchase the products/services significantly. Shin and Thai (2015) revealed a significant, direct relationship between the willingness for WOM and the intention for re-purchase. In other words, we found that WOM intention was the strongest factor underpinning the customer intention for re-purchase (Hypothesis 7) from the restaurants of Rasht actively present in the cyberspace. Looking from another perspective, the effect of customer purchase intention is a mediator of the relationship of inbound marketing in different aspects of marketing including active listening, visibility management, and community building. Casas (2015) demonstrated that WOM intention was the mediator of the relationship between inbound market-

ing and customer purchase intention. According to the results, if service organizations like restaurants want to be actively present in the context of marketing, they should invest in WOM in the first place and explore the factors persuading customers to use WOM. WOM advertisement is so important than in You et al. (2015)'s meta-analysis, electronic WOM has been regarded as the most important component of the marketing mix.

The fact that there is a direct relationship between active presence in the online platform and WOM intention and customer purchase intention implies that customers are changing their behavioral norms in the new era – in which virtual networks are expanding. Presently, most customers surf the virtual networks to find quality services and try to utilize cyberspace, which is characterized by ease of use, accessibility, customizability, perceived usefulness, and pleasure. With respect to the contribution of the present study, it can be said that it is the first research on inbound marketing that focuses on behavioral preferences of customers. Our findings answer the question as to why some service organizations outperform others in marketing. These findings enable customer service managers to orient themselves with customers' behavior patterns, take full advantage of the opportunities, and improve profitability and sale by more viable performance in cyberspace.

Given the effect of visibility management on WOM and purchase intention of customers, it is recommended that service organization, e.g. restaurants, create formal online channels on platforms like Telegram or Instagram. Since active listening affects WOM and purchase intention of customers, service organizations including restaurants are suggested to manage cyberspace and consider the responses of customers to the services and their wants and needs in order to improve their satisfaction and thereby increase their WOM and repurchase intention. We found that community building affects WOM and purchase intention of customers. So, it is rec-

ommended to service organizations to build online communities for the exchange of ideas in order to improve their inbound marketing levels.

The main limitation of the present study is that it is cross-sectional so that the researchers could only collect data for a certain time period. It is recommended to conduct longitudinal and multi-sectional research in order to extend the generalizability of the findings. The lack of a comparison of the service organization with a financial organization like insurance and financial and credit institutions is another limitation of the present work. It is necessary to conduct similar studies on diverse organization so as to allow the comparison of the results among various organizations. For example, the present study focused only on restaurants with *Gilaki* names in the city of Rasht. Undoubtedly, comparison with other service organizations will add to the reliability of the research findings. Another limitation of the study was the fact that the mediator variables, such as the history of restaurant activity, restaurant brand image, and restaurant reputation, were not controlled. Researchers are recommended to control these variables in similar works. It should be remembered that these variables can play a key role in customers' WOM and re-purchase intention.

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