

ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS TO BUILD A POSITIVE, ETHICAL, AND SUSTAINABLE ASSOCIATION FOR THE BRAND IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY

Elena QUERCI

*Insubria University
Via Monte Generoso 71, 21100 Varese IT
elena.querci@uninsubria.it*

Virginia GAMBARDELLA

*Bocconi University
Via Roberto Sarfatti, 25, 20100 Milano IT
virginia.gambardella@studbocconi.it*

Abstract. *The world of marketing has changed dramatically and social media has played a crucial role in this transition. New web technologies and online media constantly challenge traditional media that stimulate participation, conversation, and a sense of community (Castronovo & Huang, 2012).*

Specifically, social media has become a pretty cool branding tool. It allows companies of all sizes to establish a communication channel with their customers, market their products, communicate an ethical approach, and increase customer loyalty. However, being a two-way channel, it requires commitment and care to manage this communication. Consumer purchasing criteria for food are increasingly health and sustainability-oriented and the internet and social media play an important role. As in other areas outside the food sphere, the Internet and social media are increasingly important in providing this information as this output is increasingly reliable. To avoid the risk of damaging the brand image rather than improving it, companies should choose a profile of people that matches their target segment and communicate with them accordingly, Saravanakumar and Sugantha Lakshmi (2012). Social media comes in many forms and one of them is social networks. The Metaverse is the evolution of these communities thanks to the possibility of organizing events with friends, virtual or otherwise. The crypto community has become passionate about food and its supply chain and through the blockchain, the food sector could be pushed towards choices aimed at ethics, transparency, and autonomy. Consequently, our research question is how the dietary content of social media performance and its economic value are influenced by ethical and sustainable choices. An application in the food sector will be analyzed through its impact report: Too good To go which deals with the reduction of food waste and the reduction of CO2.

Keywords: *social media; Instagram; communication channel; brand loyalty; food; Metaverse; Too Good to Go.*

Introduction

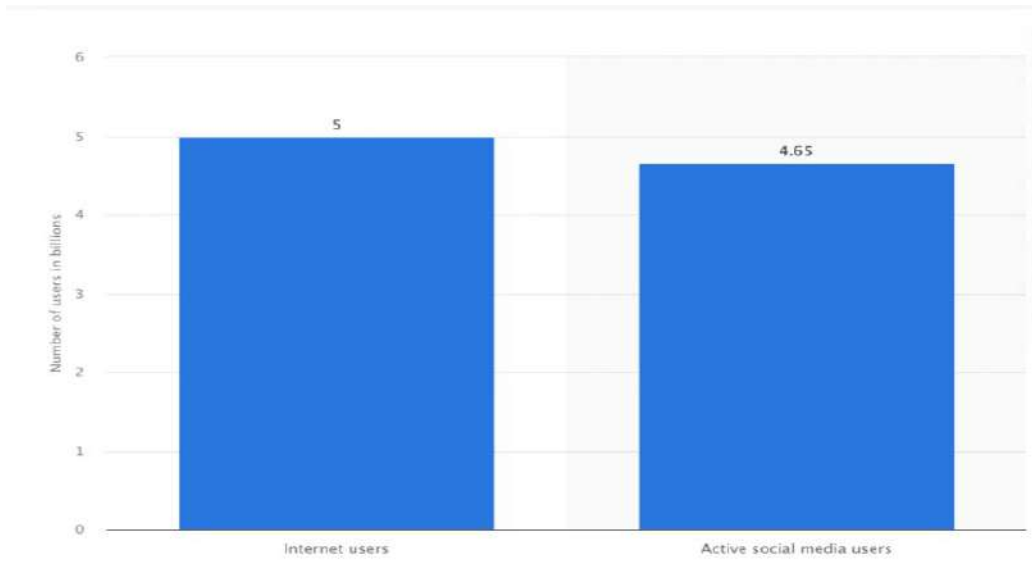
Traditional media such as television, newspapers, radio, and magazines are, in the new era, technologies for static shows and are constantly challenged by new web

technologies and online media that stimulate participation, conversation, and a sense of community. The increasingly customer-centric perspective has given rise to new tools, marketing methodologies, and strategies that have led to the development and affirmation of new tools, giving enormous space to the potential of the Network. These tools are functional to develop your own network, commercial, analyze the market, and create offers based on a target to be reached that thanks to these tools it was possible to define and profile in a targeted way, in detail. The marketing world has deeply changed and social media has played a crucial role in such a transition. New web technologies and online media constantly challenge traditional media that stimulate participation, conversation, and a sense of community (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). It is evident, therefore, that the Internet inevitably expands the opportunities and horizons of human communication, contributing to the redefinition of part of the geography of our planet. The network is not only the result of a long series of scientific research and technological inventions: it is the cornerstone of the network society in which we live and permeates with its peculiarities of our cultural development.

Social networks connect people and brands directly, without the filters of the past and this is the great step that identifies social media marketing. Building a world of relationships on various social networks is the mission of the brands and the use of these tools allows entrepreneurs to have immediate feedback on the business and products, creating a sense of belonging in the user and stimulating him to get closer and then invite him to perform precise actions (sharing, interactions, evaluations, purchases). The possibilities of human communication have been expanded by the Internet. With the natural evolution of social media, there will be a fusion between social media and virtual reality. Through the Metaverse, there is an even more immersive development of the social world. A world parallels to the real one that flows daily and that will become a unique experience with an economy and customs of its own. Social media, websites, virtual reality, search engines, emails, and smartphones will be integrated and interconnected with each other with the connection between the physical and virtual worlds. John Smart (2007) defines this encounter through the Metaverse: "The Metaverse is the convergence of 1) virtually- enhanced physical reality and 2) physically persistent virtual space. It is a fusion of both, while allowing users to experience it as either".

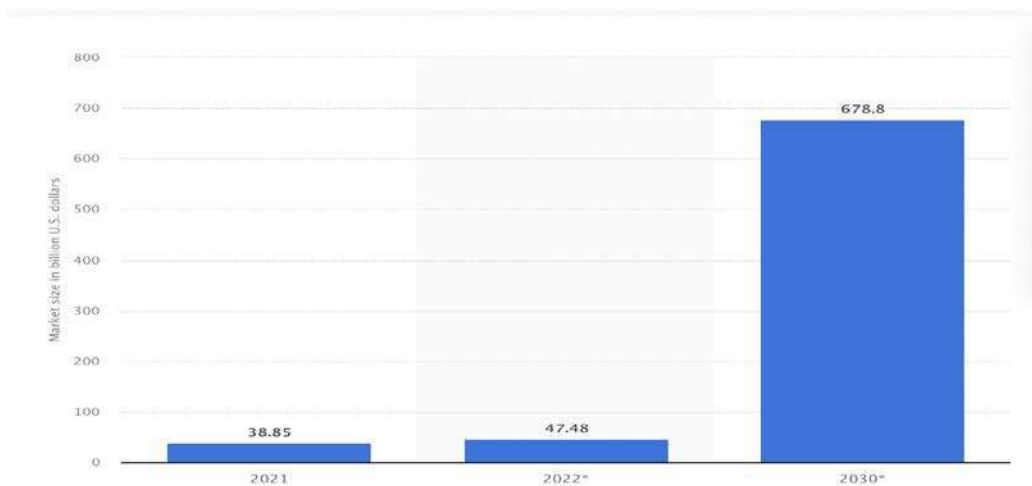
Social Media Marketing concerns those activities for promoting products, services, and brands through social networks that allow direct interaction between the user and the company. Social channels can become a powerful user engagement machine that directs them to your website. However, as it is a two-way channel, it requires effort and care to manage this communication. In order to avoid the risk of damaging the brand's image rather than improving it, businesses should choose a profile of people that matches their target segment and communicate with them accordingly (Saravanakumar & Sugantha, 2012).

From the analysis of Statista (2022), it is highlighted that in April 2022 there were five billion users with an Internet connection equal to 63% of the world population and 4.65 billion of this total were social media users, fig. 1.

Figure 1. Global digital population as of April 2022

Source: Statista (2022)

Also important are the estimates of the numbers of users in the Metaverse who moved the global market in 2021 for 38.85 billion U.S. dollars, with forecasts in 2022 of 47.48 billion U.S. dollars rising to 678.8 billion U.S. dollars by 2030, fig.2.

Figure 2. Metaverse market revenue worldwide from 2021 to 2030 (in billion U.S. dollars)

Source: Statista (2022)

Through the analysis of the literature and of the characteristics of social platforms, we will try to answer the question of whether they support the choices made by companies in the food sector to build a positive, ethical and sustainable association.

Literature Review

Over the last decades, branding critics have demonstrated how brands rely not only on the data but also on the content that consumer participation generates on social media platforms (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Hearn, 2008; Zwick et al., 2008).

The practice of branding is typically understood as a complex economic tool, a method of attaching a social or cultural meaning to a commodity, as a means to make the commodity more personally resonant to the consumer. In this era, brands are about culture as much as economics. Brands are nothing more than a story told to consumers. When this story is successful, it goes beyond the simple identification with the product or the service and becomes familiar, intimate, and personal (Banet-Weiser, 2012). The spread of social marketing, the engagement of consumers through user-generated content online, and the coproduction of brands by consumers have created a new relationship between the buyer and the seller.

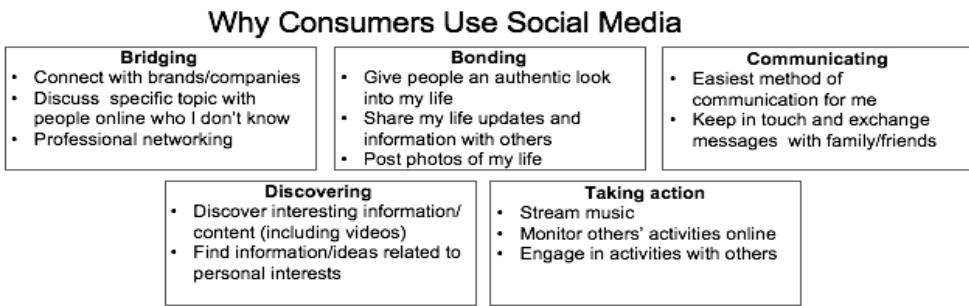
In an effort to more effectively manage such a peculiar relationship, businesses' use of social media has increased, resulting in several companies having started a personal Facebook or Instagram page.

Pursuing social media strategies, a brand aims at (a) building a sense of membership, (b) building greater awareness of the brand to audiences it has not yet reached, (c) building positive brand associations, (d) encouraging the acceptance and communication of brand values, and (e) encouraging the audience to engage in dialogue and eventually promote the brand. This dialogue can in more strategic terms, (f) help the business to find and maintain a competitive advantage, (g) act as a check to understand whether the brand is properly communicated and understood by the target audiences, and finally (h) inform the vision behind the brand and build differentiation for it (Yan, 2011).

The first rule for brands to survive and eventually succeed within the context of social networks is to be genuine. Brands that are fake or sketchy are soon uncovered. The second rule is that brands should not bet on a single social network, instead, they should build a truly integrated social media ecosystem. Needless to say, the most successful brands are those that create the right content for the right channel, as audience expectations vary from platform to platform. This means that what evokes engagement on Facebook does not necessarily generate the same response on other social media platforms, like Instagram.

Research conducted in 2018 by Nicole Votolato Montgomery, a professor at the University of Virginia, aimed at understanding why consumers use social media and how businesses can choose social channels in alignment with their goals. From such research, consumers' motivations for using social media channels fall into five distinct categories: bridging, bonding, communicating, discovering, and taking action (Montgomery, 2018), as summarised in table 1.

Table 1.: Social Media Platform Use Motivations



Source: Montgomery, (2018)

Among these reasons, the ones with a psychological root play a crucial role. People feel the need to be socially connected (Sarason, 1974) and joining social media and connecting with others satisfies their need for belongingness (Gangadharbhatla, 2008). As a matter of fact, social interaction is defined as one of the main motivations for consumers to engage in content generating activities on online platforms (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

The analysis conducted by Montgomery also revealed different kinds of behaviors consumers might take in response to brand content (Table 2), which fall into three different categories:

1. Brand investigation ,i.e. behaviours related to learning about a brand
2. Brand advocacy, i.e. behaviours related to deepening a relationship with a brand
3. Blocking content, i.e. a voiding any brand content

Table 2.: Consumer Behavioural Responses to Brand Content

Behaviour Category	Description and list of behaviors
Brand investigation	<p>To learn about a brand</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do a web search to find additional nformation about the brand 2. Visit the brand/company website 3. Click/swipe on the content 4. Follow the brand/company on the platform 5. «Like» or «Favorite» the content 6. Subscribe to a brand channel or podcast 7. Follow the brand on another social media 8. Purchase a product/service from the brand
Brand advocacy	<p>To deepen a relationship with a brand</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Share the content on the platform 2. Share the content on another social media platform 3. Tell one or more friends about the content 4. Take a screenshot/save the content 5. Write a review for the brand or its products 6. Use hashtags related to the company in your own posts 7. Geotag own content with the company's location 8. Interact with the company via a chat or a messaging site/app 9. Tag people 10. Subscribe to receive emails from the company
Blocking content	<p>To avoid content from the brand</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Block content from the company

Source: Montgomery, (2018)

As a series of regression analyses showed, the motivation dimensions drive the varying behaviour towards brand content. For instance, when consumers' use of the platform is based on connecting with other users or brands (Bridging) and discovering new information (Discovering), it is more likely that they will respond to brand content. Additionally, businesses have to consider the type of content to create for any given channel. The research conducted by Montgomery identified eight different categories of content (Table 3), which fall into three macro categories: Identity content, Info/Utility content and Emotional content.

Table 3: Content Categories

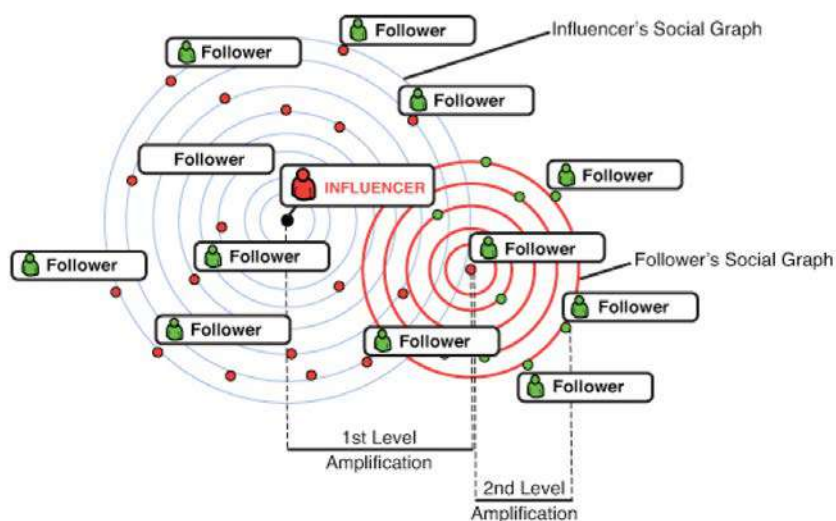
Identity	Info/ Utility	Emotional
Reflects who I see myself as	Educational	Humorous
Reflects who I want to be	Informs about news/current events	Warm and fuzzy
Relates to my hobbies/personal interests		Sympathetic

Source: Montgomery, (2018)

Social media platforms and brand in the food industry

Online consumer reviews are a major source of information that drives purchasing decisions. Potential consumers are more likely to rely on other real consumers' recommendations rather than a marketing message. Before the era of social networks, unsatisfied consumers were less likely to complain as the costs of complaining were seen as exceeding the benefits (Gafni & Golan, 2016). However, online sharing platforms have made complaining much easier (Gregorie et al, 2015). Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) stated that, through social networks, complaints and dissatisfied experiences can be communicated and distributed almost instantly and this can cause substantial damage to the company and the brand. The two scholars also found that negative electronic Word of Mouth (eWoM) (Kirby & Marsden, 2006) may have strong effects on consumer behavior, on all phases of their decision-making process, including brand evaluation, brand choice, purchase behavior, and brand loyalty. The current paradigm of influence marketing places the influencer at the center of the marketing strategy, which requires marketers to identify people with a wide/ deep reach within communities, understand the nature of communities and the role of the influencer within the community (Brown & Fiorella, 2013), fig.3.

Figure 3: Fisherman's Influence Marketing Model



Source: Brown, D. & Fiorella, S. (2013)

Nowadays, social media has become an important source of information for all types of consumers, (Gazzola et al., 2017). The role of social media, in fact, is more relevant for those businesses in which word of mouth plays a central role, such as food and catering. According to Leung et al. (2013), social media can overcome the “problem” of intangibility as it is linked to the fact that the quality and the potentially favorable outcomes of a food product cannot be evaluated ex-ante but only ex-post, that is, once consumed. Consequently, to avoid making and regretting a wrong choice, consumers tend to gather information in advance from various sources - not just friends and family but also other internet users around the world - and often make a decision based on this. ... that others suggest. User-generated content on social media, which can take the form of messages, videos, images, and so on, is an important source of information in decision-making. Burgess et al. (2009) suggested that user-generated content is reliable because it is a “real experience shared by real individuals”. However, Leung et al. (2013) stated that this type of content is not always reliable as it may be posted by someone with a business interest.

Social media can be a powerful and often inexpensive marketing tool, especially in the food sector. Positive comments on social media platforms can favorably improve the image of a food product and attract more consumers. Mhlanga and Tichaawa (2017), for example, report that 44% of first-time restaurant consumers are motivated to try a restaurant by the positive comments they read on social media. Given the greater number of people that can be reached on social media, the echo that specific comments received on that platform is quite intense. If consumer feedback is positive, this mechanism creates a clear advantage for companies operating in the food sector, improving their reputation and attractiveness in the eyes of other consumers. However, if the comments are negative, the results can be detrimental. Out of 100 dissatisfied consumers, only 4 express their dissatisfaction and in three out of four cases it is possible to recover these consumers. The remaining 96 consumers will not only go

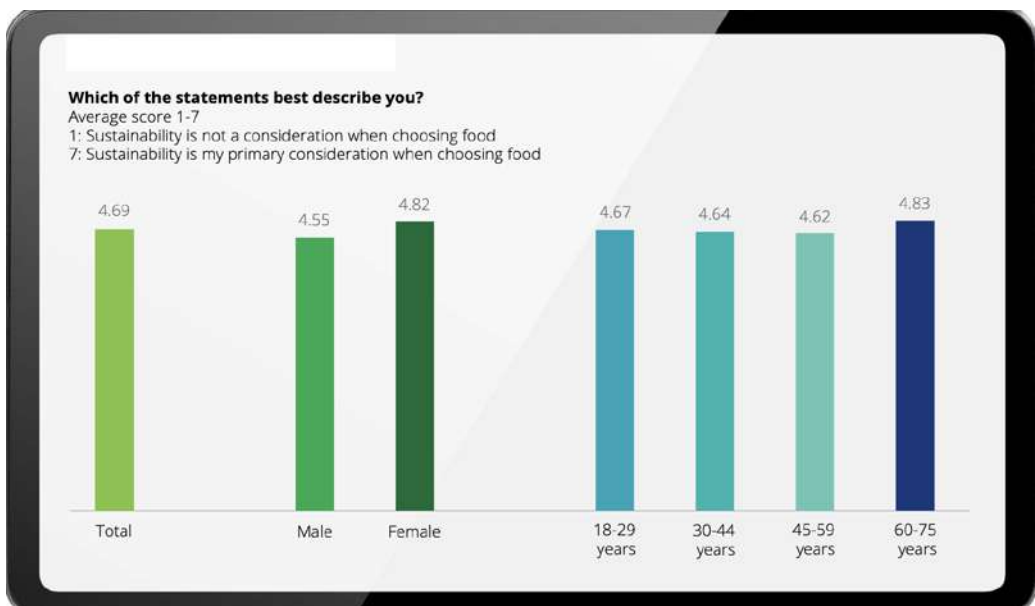
elsewhere but may also spread negative comments and suggest other potential consumers make different choices. According to Buscall (2015), "one bad tweet or negative comment on social media can cause up to thirty customers to lose your business." in the restaurant business

Social media and sustainable choices in the food sector

The criteria for the purchase of food by consumers are increasingly oriented towards health and sustainability and the internet and social media play an important role. As in other areas outside the food sphere, the internet, and social media are increasingly important in providing this information considering this output increasingly reliable. Deloitte (2021) launched a survey on consumers regarding sustainability and health and their choices in purchasing food products in 15 European countries. From Figure 4. research reveals the extent of consumers' sustainability choice when purchasing food. The mean score is 4.69 with a range of 1 to 7.

Figure 4. Consideration of sustainability

Source: Deloitte (2021)



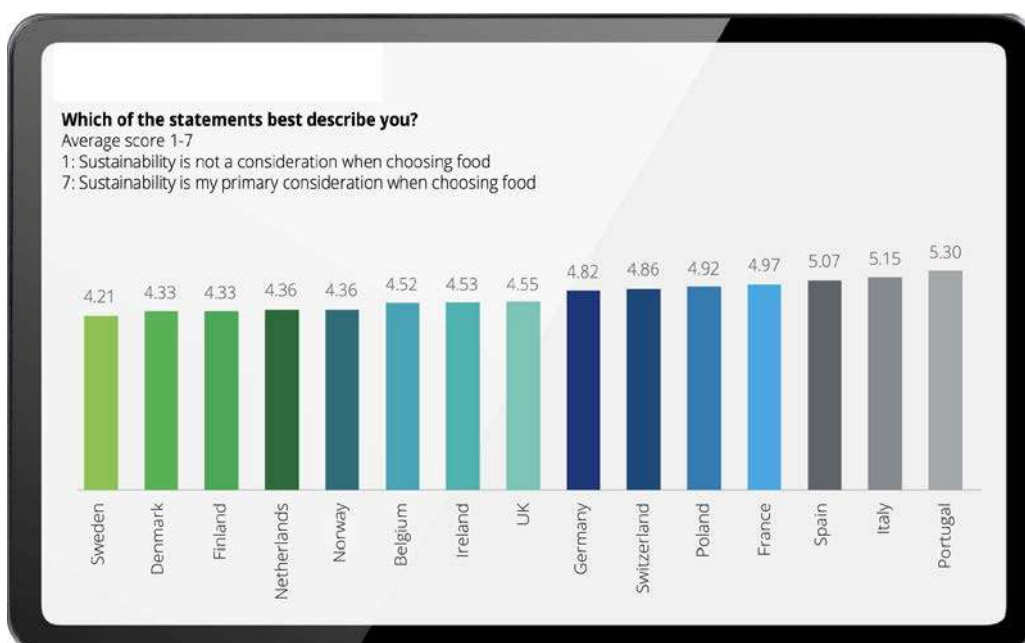
Ethical and sustainable purchases are derived from the environmental propensity that consumers have towards protection and social.

The willingness to consume foods with a lower environmental impact also depends on the price, generally chosen from the lowest even if the relationship between this and foodstuffs is not always negative, since a price higher is assumed to have a higher quality and a better product image. Consumers associate two types of attributes to food products: one defined as selfish, linked to the economic aspect e therefore to the price, and the other, defined as green, associated with the propensity to purchase ecological

products. The valuation analysis of each product attribute will depend on the decision to consume it or not and then proceed with the trade-off.

If the consumer attributes positive characteristics to the food under investigation, the green aspect will prevail and the phase will end with the purchase of the product, if instead, he considers the food not suitable to satisfy his needs and requirements, then it will not proceed to purchase it despite the fact that it has the ethical, social and characteristics environmental, (McCluskey & Loureiro, 2003). To the question of how sustainability affects food purchasing decisions, it is highlighted that southern European, (Italy Spain, and Portugal), countries are more careful, with choices aimed at the use of reusable bags, avoiding too much waste, and favoring recyclable packaging and the use of local products, Fig.5.

Figure 5. Consideration of sustainability



Source: Deloitte (2021)

Consumers are informed in the food sector, through information shared on social media. Interacting with an active online company encourages their involvement by being able to express interests and emotions, interacting and contributing to the formulation of products through active participation (Stefanidis et al., 2013). For companies, careful use of social media in promoting their products facilitates the development of the company's reputation. Consumers choose and give preference to companies and brands that respect environmental sustainability. There are variables whose correlation creates a positive and direct effect on environmental sustainability as consumers in the choice phase favor companies that respect environmental sustainability, (Mendleson et al. 1995). Therefore, to achieve environmental sustainability objectives through social media, companies, must analyze several variables: perceived value, future prospects,

trust, and satisfaction, (Chen et al. 2015). A satisfied customer is an economic asset to the company with high returns and low risk, (Fornell et al., 2006).

Fight against food waste: Too Good to Go

An application of the food sector born in Europe and active in many countries of the world has as its mission the sustainability and the achievement of some UN 2030 targets with social media interaction.

The Too Good To Go app project is based on four entrepreneurial pillars: consumption, correct use of resources, respect for the environment, and awareness of food waste, in order to contribute to the achievement of goal number 12 "Sustainable production and consumption" of SDGs 2030. TCTG declares "Our mission is to inspire and involve everyone in the fight against food waste. To achieve our goal, we want to translate our words into concrete actions and help at different levels to build a movement against waste", (Too Good To Go UK). App is certified "B Corporation" which measures a company's social and environmental impact (Grimes et al., 2018).

Too Good to Go is an app with a long-term project aimed, through its marketplace, to sensitize companies and public institutions to change in the fight against food waste to protect the planet. The App's mission is: "Our mission is to inspire and empower everyone to take action against food waste. We know that to live and breathe this daily, we need to turn our words into actions. With this in mind, we have set out a new ambition - to contribute in every way we can to build the global food waste movement. Only when we all come together to fight food waste will we be able to generate a positive change in society."

The Magic Box is a bag containing food products and fresh dishes left unsold at the end of the day and which cannot be put back on the market or served the next day. The box is considered magical because the end user doesn't know what's inside until the purchase process is complete. The purchase process is simple and takes place via the downloaded App on your phone once geolocation is activated, the users can view participating stores and select a retailer in them nearby and buy a Magic Box which costs only a third of the full price. Once the store and the Magic box have been identified, payment via the App and the pick-up time is communicated. At the end of the purchase cycle, our planet has benefited from it since for each magic box purchased, it is avoided on average the emission of about 2.5 kg of CO₂, Fig.6.

Figure 6. Average emission CO2



Source: Too Good To Go, Impact Report 2021

There are many brands and stores that have joined the Too Good to Go project in the world, in figure 7 we see some of them.

Figure 7. Brands that have joined the Too Good to Go project

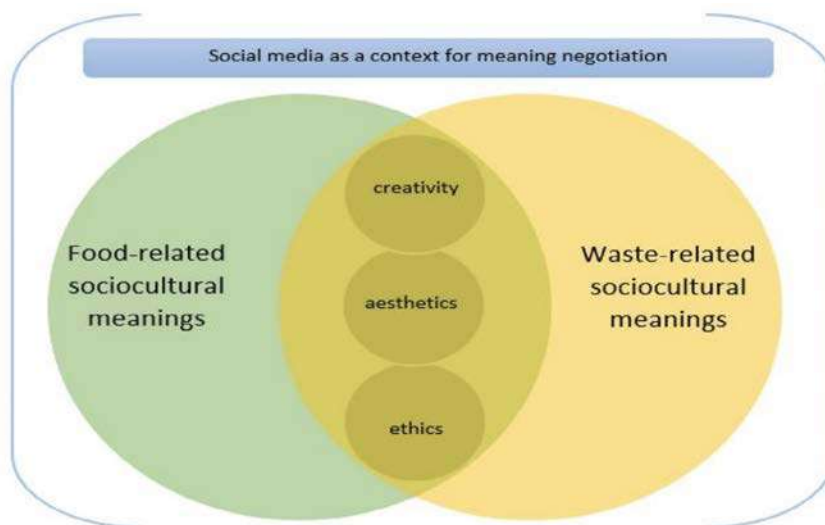


Source: Too Good-To Go, Impact Report 2021

The Too good to Go platform was initially the solution for some partners dealing with food waste, such as large retail brands. The work done to expand the number of member companies has brought together small retailers and large food industries. For the big food brands, the advantages are many, from managing the warehouse and their surpluses to increasing their reputation by adhering to good practices for reducing food waste. So we have Brands like Ikea that come together to create magic boxes with the famous meatballs, Danone, and Nestlè, without neglecting the catering sector where an analysis conducted on 114 out of 12 restaurants showed that almost every business records a positive return, with an average of \$ 7 saved per \$ 1 invested in reducing food waste in the kitchen, Clowes et al (2019). For restaurateurs who join Too Good To there are sustainable solutions to reduce waste due to the unpredictability of demand, to recover the costs incurred for the production of dishes and to increase their visibility by customers increasingly sensitive to this type of choice, and using smartphones and digital services to search and order meals.

Too good to go, it communicates with users through its presence on social networks: Facebook, Instagram, tweeter, LinkedIn, and YouTube, but also on the spontaneous aggregation to form groups of buyers on Facebook. who post photos of the contents of the Magic box and related comments. The app's function is also informative on good practices related to food and its recycling with downloadable ebooks, insights, interviews, blogs etc. According to Närvänen et al. (2018), social media is an increasingly important platform where consumers share information, interact and create new meanings. As shown in fig. 8. creativity generates new ideas and solutions. Aesthetics denote meanings related to multi-sensory knowledge and emotions. Aesthetics plays an important role in social media platforms. Visual aesthetics have become an important aspect of food, the presentations on social media platforms such as cooking blogs and "food porn", and online food images on social media have made food and eating public and shared collectively.

Figure 8. Framework depicting the interrelations of food, waste, and social media



Source: Närvänen et al., (2018)

Ethics relates to the practical behavior of a man with respect to what is the true good and what are means to achieve it. Ethical concerns in the area of sustainable consumption and therefore also waste-related practices help to create virtuous circles of management of the same.

Conclusions

The creation of business value has changed through social media, as have the structural forms of transfer of bargaining power and the reduction of the information asymmetry in favor of consumers. With the interaction of three factors: social media, community, and purpose (the value proposition), communities will share the brand and purpose through photos, videos, and little snippets of the company's personality. Consumers ask companies to consider the environment as corporate stakeholders. This can be achieved by integrating corporate goals with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and addressing climate change. Given the complexity of contributing and achieving these goals, embracing a collaborative mindset that opens up to a start-up, individuals, civil society, and competitors are essential to creating a more sustainable and equitable future. According to Kotler and Sarkar. (2017) companies must achieve a purpose superior to the simple pursuit of profit by proposing themselves as promoters of new ideas and interests in environmental protection. The use of social media and the Internet, in general, can help brand purpose to work for the common good and the duty of companies to make a positive contribution to people's lives. Therefore, companies must be aware that consumers interact with each other and the companies themselves, interacting and contributing to creating the products and services offered (Romero & Molina, (2011). Word of mouth of experience leads to increase notoriety, knowledge, and promotion of the brand. Word of mouth is more credible than traditional communication carried out by businesses, as it is generated by people, from people (Rakic & Rakic, 2018). From word-of-mouth marketing to word-of-mouth in traditional and digital media. Through the eWOM, everything is communicated quickly and instantly and a real community is created between consumers-consumers and consumers-businesses, where businesses do not have the ability to control the contents and the frequency with which dialogues take place between users, Vollmer, Precourt, (2008).

Consumer purchasing criteria for food are increasingly health and sustainability-oriented. In the food sector, the internet and social media are increasingly important for providing information, and the con is Too good to go, it communicates with users through its presence on social networks: Facebook, Instagram, tweeter, LinkedIn e YouTube, but also on the spontaneous aggregation to formed groups of buyers on Facebook. Who posts photos of the contents of the Magic box and related comments? Sustainability affects food purchasing decisions together at using reusable bags, avoiding too much waste, and favoring recyclable packaging and the use of local products. Joining Too Good Togo affects the impact report and the social balance sheet.

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