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Social Media influence on food consumption

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Summary

ABSTRACT

Food has always been a primary and vital need for humans to survive. It deeply connects us to our culture, to our social heritage, and is part of our history. Over the centuries human beings have evolved and food with them. We have passed from the consumption of simple products, consumed directly without transformation, for example, the berries that were found, to more complex products, that were transformed by people, an example could be the production of a cake. If food was a mere form of sustenance at first, it assumes other meanings.

Over the years, society and humans' attention to food has grown more and more. This transformation of the food and beverage role has changed over the years and historical events. The aspects of historical and social change will be analysed in the first chapter, both at a global level and at an Italian level, with a change in consumption as a subsequent consequence. The scandals that happened in the last decades changed our food consumption and have led to the development of a new perception of food. Today, great importance is given to food quality and safety, two factors that have become decisive for the consumer. In the last part of the chapter, a paragraph will be dedicated to Coronavirus Covid-19 and its effects on food consumption. The lockdown hanged consumers purchases, the purchase of some products such as flours, wine, canned food increased, otherwise, some fresh food decreased. This change was a direct effect on the situation people lived, and their emotions.

After this, we are going to analyse consumption and its changes through the years. It is important to mention the social role of food in our society. Food is not just food, is something more, it is union, culture, identity, is a special moment that we spend with our family or friends. Food is the mirror of society. When we are eating, not only taste is primarily involved, but all the five senses. When we have a dish in front of us, first we look at it with our eyes, as a result, esthetical aspect is fundamental, because we decide to eat it or not if that product is beautiful and pleasant to our eyes. Moving forward there is the smell, a dish should smell delicious. Products consumption is influenced by our social class, ethnicity, and history. We will analyse customer characteristics, defining his habits and rules about food shopping. Nowadays the consumer is more concerned about the resources used to produce the good, the workers' exploitation, the environmental situation, for this reason, pay more attention to sustainability: consumers are trying to reduce their environmental footprint by buying local, seasonal food and reducing waste.

After the analysis on the consumer and the social contest, in the second chapter of the thesis I will focus on social media, starting with their historical background and moving to their connection with food. It's important to understand when we speak about social media what mean, which are its strength and weakness. The role of socials is so relevant for businesses because create interaction, the interaction with the customer is so important. Nowadays the consumer is part of the social media online community, in particular, he is connected to a social network, where it is possible to receive suggestions, support and information on food and its preparation. There are Instagram and Facebook pages, where people can share their home-made recipes and give and receive a suggestion from other members. In these contests, the consumers are influenced by the opinion leader. Here the consumer can express their opinion on brand and products and suggest to others to use it or not. Community online conversations are very important for companies because they represent the first step of a process called word of mouth (WOM). Word of mouth means every positive or negative opinion of people outside the companies about their products. WOM can influence the decision to acquire a product or a service and influence our perception. For companies is complicated to manage the WOM because is out of their control but at the same time they can try to gain a positive advantage. I will explain the kind of actions that companies can implement to have more benefits from the WOM and how important it is for companies to be on social media platforms because their target segment takes information. In this thesis I want to analyse the social media community structure, describing the process of how people receive information and how these influence them.

The fourth chapter involves the distribution and then the analysis of the data collected through surveys. This will allow us to understand what emotions consumers feel when they see content about food. We will understand how much consumers think they are influenced by what they see on social media and by the various food influencers, chefs, nutritionists they follow. Through the analysis of the data, we will try to understand if the theory coincides with the survey, it is not always sure that there will be a correlation as it depends a lot on how much the sample really represents reality.

CHAPTER I

THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1.1.1 Change of consumption in modern society.

Today the consumer is defined as a modern consumer because he has a wide choice in the food supply chain. This is possible because the market makes a wide variety of products available. When consumers go to any supermarket, they immediately realize the amount and variety of food available, from all over the world. The supermarket itself can be considered one of the best successes of the development of the modern system, in production and distribution. On one hand, the changes took place due to technological and scientific development in the food and beverage sector, but in the vast majority, the modern food system arises from a process of progressive evolution in the social system that has modified and continues to modify the way food is produced, distributed, and consumed. If we look at 2020, the year of the World pandemic, we understand how new eating habits were born, dictating a change in consumption.

The continuous interaction between humans and the territory, as well as the importance of social and political control of the production and distribution of food, shows us how the modern system of food has been changing throughout history. In the traditional system, production was a small-scale and concerned local production. The primary sector involved most of the population, distribution was limited to local borders and consumption depended on the seasons and quantity available, as well as social status.

The modern system, on the other hand, is based on a large-scale production, is not limited to the territory, but the production is delocalized, global, and very often industrialized, and the majority of the population is not involved in the primary sector. The distribution is international, and the consumption of food is always available independently from the seasons (Image 1.1). This phenomenon is called seasonal adjustment of consumption.

Image 1.1 Difference between the traditional and modern food system

Source: Beardsworth and Keil, 2011: p.62

Activity	Traditional Systems	Modern Systems
Production	* Small / limited * Based on local production except luxury goods * Population largely working in agriculture	* Large scale / highly specialized / industrialized * Decentralized / global production * Most of the population has nothing to do with food production
Distribution	* Within local boundaries * Shopping directed by relations and other social networks	* International / global * Money and market-driven food supply
Consumption	*Fluctuations between abundance and scarcity periods according to harvest and season * Limited and status-based selection *Nutritional inequalities between communities	* Price and seasonal independent / always accessible food * Width of choice for those with solvency * Nutritional inequalities between societies and societies
Beliefs	*People at the top of the food chain / environment is obligatory	* Discussion between those who advocate that human beings dominate the environment and those who oppose it

Reference: Beardsworth and Keil, 2011: p.62

"The processes of urbanization and industrialization were social evolutions that led to a change in the food sector, generating a significant increase in demand and moving the urban population away[1]" from food resources, or rather from the tillage of the land and the countryside. One example is Britain, where the first industrial revolution was born. It documents how the market and marketing of food changed. With industrialization the population had moved from the countryside to the cities, generating an increase in urban midpoint and a subsequent increase in the demand for food. The population was not self-sufficient, and demand couldn't be accepted by local resources, despite their organization. Such rapid growth in demand created pressure in the food production sector, encouraging the introduction of new production techniques and changing the appearance of landscapes to make the land even more productive.

1900 was a century of great changes: modernization, mechanization, and social progress were only some of the consequences of urbanization and industrialization. These events also had a major impact on the production and distribution process of the food sector. One example, the

[1] How Does Industrialization Lead to Urbanization?

creation of a faster and more efficient rail system that improved the freight transport time. In parallel with the transport system, the method of food preservation was also modified, and in addition to traditional methods such as salt and marination, additives were introduced. There was also the mechanization of the food system, to increase the level of specialization, standardization, and simplification of the entire production chain, (introduction of the assembly line). The goal was to maximize production, focusing on a single type of product, and at the same time to reduce costs. “The mechanization of the food sector has also led to major transformations in workers' work: the workforce is becoming increasingly specialized[2]”. It is with the birth of these new methods of production that the concept of economy of scale is born, whose production of food reached great volumes with efforts and minimal costs.

In 1929, following the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange, the United States and the whole world were hit by a severe recession, thus creating poverty and malnutrition in the entire society. With the beginning of World War II (1939), the male population was forced to enlist and go to war, while the women had to replace men in their work. This social change had a strong impact on the economy, technology, and social situation in many countries. Food was processed industrially and then sent to the front line. In those years in the United States were invented the microwave, the oven, and plastic containers, these instruments were particularly useful, so later they spread also overseas.

In the post-war period, the role of the woman within the exchange family was no longer a housewife but a real worker. The fact that women have also started to work has led to a huge change in society. The time that the woman used to dedicate to the family and the care of the house was reduced, thus arose the need to offer to invite and quick snacks to be consumed in short work breaks and ready-made food were introduced, which represent a time-saving in the kitchen. Another good alternative was fast lunches at the bars or restaurants, which allowed to optimize the time of the lunch break. It is from the idea of fast food that the first fast-food chains (McDonald’s, KFC, America Graffiti) were born in the 1950s. These companies offered their customers a fast, good, and low-cost lunch. The great changes in consumer habits regarding food have always reflected the economy, society, and culture changes, that characterized them, of different countries over the years and the historical events.

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[2] Industrialization of Agricolture

1.1.2 Consumption in Italy after the Second World War

The end of mass poverty has laid the foundations for the take-off of well-being, which has become the engine of development and transformer of the socio-economic structure of the country. The families of the time went through a previously unknown stage, with increasing income shares. In the post-war period, people find a country exhausted both from an economic and social point of view and obviously from an infrastructural point of view, due to the war conflict. The production system had been severely hit and society was on the verge of misery.

After the end of the Second World War, Italy must start again. The departure wasn't so simple to access to food turns out to be a much more complex operation than expected. The State undertook to reorganize the supply of food and to distribute aid, mostly from the United States, which imported new foods into Italy, such as Coca Cola, crackers, chewing gum, canned food. Until the 1950s, Italian people fought for survival, conditioned by the fear of hunger and the struggle for food. It is the following years that bring Italy to leap forward, developing and modernizing itself and bringing it to an era of well-being in terms of food. The factors that led to this evolution were essentially three (De Bernardi, 2015), :

- Growth in Italian household consumption during those years that were named "economic miracle".
- Development and modernization of society at a fast pace.
- Radical transformation of the food balance, with a sharp increase in meat imports.

Between 1946-1961, food consumption increased in real terms by + 293.6%, when from 1926 to 1941 it had grown only by + 14.3%.[3] In particular, it should be emphasized that the consumption growth, including food consumption, was characterized by an unprecedented rise, in fact, between 1951 and 1970 food consumption increased by two and a half times. Only in the following decades did a slowdown due to the crisis and inflation occur.

In the years between 1951 and 1983, there was an increase in the quantity of food consumed by families, in parallel with the quantitative increase in consumption, there was also a change in the quality of the diet. The consumption of cereals stabilized, pasta established itself as the main food in the diet of the Italians and there was an increase in the consumption of beef, poultry, and pork. There was also an increase in the consumption of olive oil and seeds,

[3] www.largoconsumo.info/102011/DOCAbitudinialimentaricensiscoldiretti-1011.pdf

vegetables, sugar, milk, fresh and preserved fish. The corn and foods considered poor that previously had been fundamental for the diet slowly start to disappear, among them: lard, rice, potatoes, dried legumes, but at the same time new foods such as beer and seed's oil started to be consumed. It is from these innovations that people can have two different ideas of diet: the first one is the European-style diet characterized by the high level of animal protein and the second one the Mediterranean diet, rich in pasta, fruit, and vegetables.

During this period, television and the first commercial spot were born, bringing an idea of ostentation as well as well-being, also referred to the rapid spread of household appliances, canned, frozen, and homogenized food. Advertising takes on an increasingly important role, it serves to discover new products and give information about their use, such as where, when, and with whom to consume a particular product (Conner, 2008). It was the 3rd of February 1957, when the Carosello was broadcast for the first time by Rai and thus the first form of advertising in our country was born (Pastore and Vernuccio, 2016).

According to the data drawn up by Censis[4], the Seventies turn out to be years of great socio-economic modernization and strong migrations from the countryside to the cities. In Italy, there was the phenomenon of mass schooling and there was an increase in disposable income for food expenditure, this was also due to the entry of women into the world of work. In 1979 the food income for per capita expenditure reached 1.626 [5]euros (Censis 2011, Istat 2009).

The Eighties marked a notable change in the eating habits of Italians. Consumers are no longer oriented to quantity but for the first time, they are interested in the quality of products, more attention to healthy foods, to the variety of products. There is a shift from the old consumer always looking for abundance to a mature consumer. Increase the consumption of foods considered healthy such as fish, fruit, vegetables and decrease the consumption of bread, cheese, eggs, cereals, and milk. The Eighties are presented as the decade of conscious well-being. It is no coincidence that the meaning of poverty also changes. Serpellon wrote: "Poverty no longer means survival but refers to inclusion, participation, acceptance of social processes", (Serpellon, 1983). Per capital, food consumption recorded a percentage increase of almost 10% compared to the previous decade, a sign of incessant growth. The different trend of the Engel curve between North and South remains marked. Southern families used more income for basic needs than they used in the North. The idea still prevails that to show one's level of

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[4] Censis is an Italian socio-economic research institute founded in 1964, based in Rome, Piazza di Novella, 2.

[5] Expressed in values of the year 2000.

well-being one must rely on the quantity and quality of food, even if the consumer slowly begins to have greater capacity in independently identifying the necessary products according to their needs.

In the 1980s there was also an increase in imports and an internal growth in production, accompanied by a subsequent productive reorganization of the country. With the industrialization of the country, the food sector also began to be increasingly mechanized, introducing ready-made and frozen dishes; all this is helped by the presence of the microwave which allowed the food to be heated in a short time. These are the years in which companies like Barilla and Ferrero begin to flourish, but also the years in which is trying to bring the message of rediscovery of "Good, clean and fair" (Petrini, 2007), the food as well as being of quality had to evoke emotions, territoriality, memories, etc. According to the food and wine expert Carlo Petrini, the industrialized system (typically American with its fast-food chains) had to be rejected to return to the origins, the land. All this is helped by the presence of the microwave which allowed the food to be heated in a short time. These are the years in which companies like Barilla and Ferrero begin to flourish, but also the years in which they try to bring the message of rediscovery of "Good, clean and fair", the food as well as being of quality had to evoke emotions, territoriality, memories, etc. According to the food and wine expert Carlo Petrini, the industrialized system (typically American with its fast-food chains) had to be rejected to return to the origins, the land.

In these years, the first scandals concerning the food chain occur, such as that of wine with methanol or that of the “mad cow”. These events also had effects on the consumer, making him more aware. The consumer wanted to have more information about the foods he consumed for this reason the companies were obliged to give it to him. Small companies were born on the national territory that promotes the "earth markets", linked to the territory, and purchased directly from farmers or producers.

Over the decade, food expenditure increased by + 4.8% compared to the previous decade, while its increase, in the years from 1990 to 1999, was + 4.2% (Censis, 2011). It remains a growing trend, but consumers can perceive its slowdown compared to the 1980s. Advertising is becoming more and more important, as Schutz and Diaz-Knauf affirm, its importance is threefold:

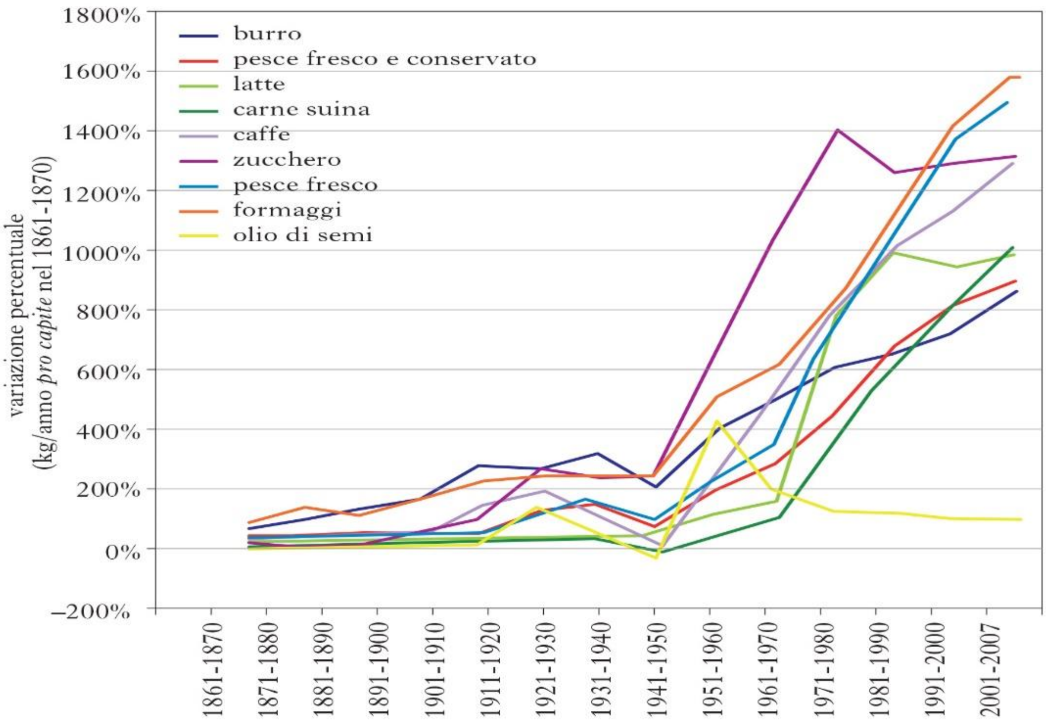
- Maintains and retains current consumers of the product,
- It brings new customers to the brand,

- Advertised and activates new classes of individuals towards new products,

Foods thus begin to be advertised through emotional appeals, positive or negative. The advertised had also important testimonial as Totò, Vittorio Gassman, Alberto Sordi, Sandra Mondaini, Mike Bongiorno etc.

Image 1.2: Food consumption in Italy (1861-2007)

Source: I consumi alimentari in Italia: uno specchio del cambiamento, Treccani



In the image, it can be seen the evolution of some products: butter, fresh and conserved fish, milk, pork meat, coffee, sugar, fresh fish, cheeses, and the last one seed's oil. The first one (blue line) is butter, can be observed that after the Second World War the consumption of this food is increasing till 2007. If we observe the line of the sugar (the purple one) it is clear that after the Second World War the consumption of this food is increased very much but only till the Eighties, during those years started to decrease because people understand the necessity of a healthy diet.

1.1.3 Food consumption in Italy nowadays

Over the years beauty's female idea has changed, if in the '50s the typical ideal woman was curvy in the 90's the concept of beauty was represented by a tall and slender woman. The food industry had to adapt to this change, starting to produce a large amount of dietetic and slimming products useful for obtaining slender shapes. Slimming diets have become a fashion, necessary to achieve those forms that were so much advertised by the media. Fortunately, there has been a subsequent change in the vision of well-being in which it is preferred to associate the healthy not directly to the physical appearance of an individual. In those years ready meals have increased since people spent a lot of time away from home and there has been an increase of divorce, turning into children having just one parent, therefore reducing the time for preparing meals. The necessity of saving time has been key to the success of fast foods. However, what is a value is also a defect, if, on the one hand, the consumer saves his time, on the other hand, people wonder what is the quality of food that is produced so quickly. The deconstruction of meals was a consequence of the new need of the individual to save time. The meals have been simplified, are characterized by a single dish containing the necessary intake of calories and accompanied by snacks to be consumed during breaks. This has led to an evolution of packaging companies that have had to face this new requirement of single servings. As previously said, in response to the spread of fast food, a movement called "Slow Food" was born in 1986, an association that aims to promote the culture of traditional food and the pleasure of staying at the table. The aim is to make consumers more aware of their choices by promoting healthier food consumption. In 2018-2019 the most frequently bought products were fresh and ready. In addition, according to the Coop 2019 report, 13% of food expenditure was spent on fruit and vegetables, 27% on groceries, and 10% on fresh packaged products. There is a greater increase in snacks, baked goods, and seasonings. In short, foods linked to health, personal well-being, and products with a high service content, that is with a saving of time, are growing. The most consumed ready dishes are risotto, soups but also sushi, 1 out of 3 Italians admits buying fresh sushi at the supermarket (Coop report, 2019), Ready2eat is always more growing. The data of the Immagino Observatory testify that in this trend the sales of modern distribution in 2018 exceeded the share of 1.3 billion euros and grew by +12.3% compared to 2017[6]. The “ready” fruits, so single portion, already cut and washed, but also the dry, sold, shelled, and portioned are very appreciated. Even the fruit-based snacks recorded a real surge, with a +84.2% in sales and volume in the last year.

[6] https://osservatorioimmagino.it/

Image 1.3: Coop Report 2019. Source: Study's Office ANCC-Coop.

Italians are focusing their attention on the nutritional principles included in the foods that they consume daily. Medium-high protein and fibre products have also increased. According to data collected by Nielsen-Gsl, fibres have increased by +2.4% and proteins by +0.4%. But why all the attention for healthy foods? As previously stated, this is partly due to the scandals in the 1980s and partly because people have a good chance of being judged by the food they eat. Professor Mark Conner in his book "The Social Psychology of Food" said: according to a survey of 500 samples, 71% believed that the shopping cart content sent powerful messages about the person pushing it. Food is used to indicate our status, to express our identity, our social class, to communicate information about ourselves. If in the past the consumption was directed to the product currently, but the research seems more oriented to the experience than to the product, to the emotions and the sensations more than to the value of use, generating consumption models little linear or predictable.

The consumer, according to Fabris, wants customized products, unique in their kind, wants to differentiate from the mass, and for this reason, it is increasingly selective and demanding. This requirement makes it always ready for new experiences and difficult to retain loyalty. In the purchasing process, emotion is increasingly important, and in this context, there is space for experiential marketing, which supports the need to satisfy the consumer by moving him. In this context, "the brand becomes an increasingly abstract element that is based on shared social values and emerging cultural identities, in search of a representation of consumer principles" (Caiazzo et al., 2009).

1.2 New understanding of food in terms of safety and quality

Following the scandals of the 1980s, a new understanding of food based on safety and quality has emerged among consumers. The study carried out by Klaus G. Grunert: "Food quality and safety: consumer perception and demand" (2005), analysed the perception of food quality and safety, as characteristics linked to the consumer's food choices and demands. In recent years, food safety and quality have become important topics in the political, public, industrial, and research spheres. An example is EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) founded in 2002, as a result of the European Community Commission in 1999, where food safety was one of the main topics on the political agenda. This increase in attention to the food sector is also due to the increased interest of citizens in food production methods. In the more developed countries is that consumers are most interested in receiving information on the quality and production methods used to produce food. In addition, to have more choice, consumers also want more information. Competition at a global level is increasingly high, so the manufacturer, to remain on the market, must differentiate itself, must be able to provide a product with added value.

In food quality and safety research, there are three "important points" that have to do with: consumer demand, concerns distribution, and consumer perception. Let's start with the first point, consumer demand: research must be done to understand what levels of quality and safety correspond to consumer preferences, i.e., what are the minimum levels of safety that a product must-have for the consumer to want to buy it. The second point concerns distribution. To be able to guarantee safety and quality to the consumer, it may be necessary for changes to take place in the organization of agricultural and food production. “Whenever issues of quality and safety cannot be addressed at the level of final processing but must pervade the entire value chain, the relationships within this chain may change[7]”. An example of safety is closely linked to product traceability. When quality is already differentiated at the farm level, new forms of contractual arrangements between farmers and processors may be needed, and this goes a long way to changing the relationships between members of the value chain. The first two points analysed, on food quality and safety, constitute the traditional economic approach. Recently, a third point has been added, how food quality and safety are

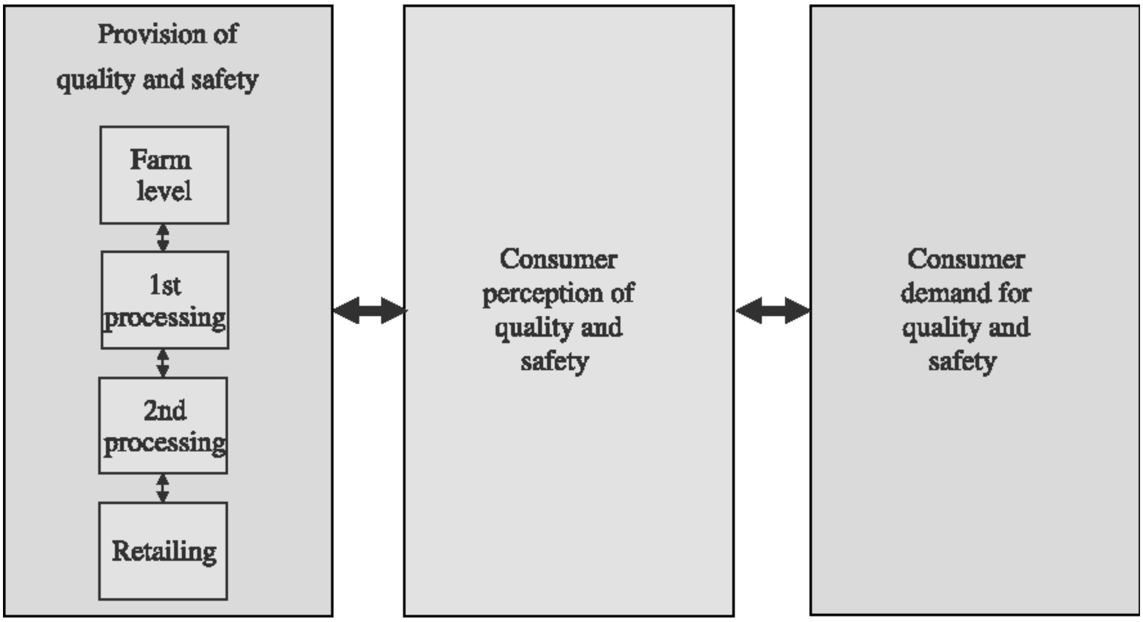
[7] Ibidem

perceived by the consumer, and how these perceptions can influence purchasing choices. This means that consumer preferences are not only related to demand but also to their formation in interaction with the supply of goods, which becomes a separate investigation.

This research area can be seen as a mediator between distribution and demand, as it is the perception of the supply of goods that leads to the demand for these goods.

Image 1.4 Food quality and safety: consumer perception and demand

Source: Grunert K. (2005), "European Review of Agricultural Economics"



Moreover, quality is a characteristic that has two dimensions: an objective one, i.e., having to do with the "constructed" physical characteristics of the product, and a subjective one, i.e., that perceived by the consumer. The relationship between these two dimensions is at the heart of the economic importance of quality. In addition, there is another "horizontal" aspect to consider, the one of time, which distinguishes the perception of quality before and after purchase. While the "vertical" aspect concerns the inference process, how consumers infer quality from different "signals" and how consumers discover which properties of a product are desirable by linking them to basic motivations of human behaviour. About food safety, as with food quality, it can be distinguished between an objective and a subjective dimension: "the objective dimension is based on the assessment of the risk of consuming a particular food by scientists and food experts, while the subjective dimension is in the mind of the consumer[8]". From the research of Klaus G. Grunert's research shows that the perception of food safety plays a predominant role in situations where "food fears" are perceived, which can condition food choices and lead consumers to avoid certain categories of brands for a certain period. The second case in which food safety plays a predominant role are situations that concern safety in certain production technologies, examples of which are food irradiation or GMO products, which are seen as unsafe productions. As previously stated, this aspect of food safety has become one of the major topics in public policy, as has food quality.

1.3 Coronavirus and its effects on food consumption.

In January 2020 in Italy, a new economic phase begins. The period is unfortunately marked by the well-known Coronavirus Covid-19. On 11 March 2020[9], the World Health Organization proclaims the pandemic, generating a halt in the European economy, FTSE (Italian index[10]) touches historic lows. In the first half of 2020, it's assumed a loss of GDP of -6% and then a slow recovery. A partial recovery is expected[11] for 2021. Due to a more asphyxiated economy, in Italy compared to other European countries, such as Germany, it is assumed to be more difficult to recover. Deutsche Bank predicts that the Italian economy will slow down by 3-4% during 2021, considering the pre-virus period. The economic crisis that it can call Black Swan has changed not only the normality and everyday life of Italian citizens but also their food consumption. In the first months of the pandemic (March-April 2020), consumers, overcome with fear and unable to leave the house except for valid reasons, had stocked up on canned and long-life products. During these months the availability of long-life products was at its lowest. Many shelves in supermarkets were empty. According to the recent Coop survey, the products most demanded by consumers during that period were sugar, flour, peeled tomatoes, canned fish, the unobtainable brewer's yeast, and toilet paper, all of which are long-life products[12]. This behaviour, as said before, was most likely dictated by the fear of being confined in the house for a long time without being able to shop.

[8] European consumers and beef safety: Perceptions, expectations and uncertainty reduction strategies
[9] https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/l-oms-dichiara-pandemia-allarmante-inazione-governi ADMTudC
[10] https://www.startingfinance.com/news/coronavirus-petrolifero-cigno-nero/
[11] https://www.repubblica.it/economia/2020/03/31/news/confindustria_pil_coronavirus-252768868/
[12] https://rep.repubblica.it/pwa/generale/2020/03/12/news/supermercati_presi_d_assalto_e_spesa_online_moltiplicata_per_300_no_a_psicosi_da_scaffali_vuoti-251080837/?ref=drac-1

Surveys have shown that there have been "winner" products whose purchase has increased significantly and "loser" products where the percentage of purchase has decreased. The categories that benefited from this are different, one example being dietary supplements. During Covid, many consumers purchased vitamins or antioxidants, to strengthen the body's immune system. As we know, fresh food is richer in vitamins and nutritional properties than packaged products or frozen food; however, the consumption of frozen and packaged products has increased. Moreover, in the last week of February, sales in pet stores increased, compared to the average of the previous 30 days, by 20% in Lombardy and 1% in Italy[13]. During the Pandemic, people not only had to worry about themselves but also about their pets. Consumers went to the supermarket to buy, in large quantities to have their stock at home, products such as disinfectants and sanitisers that were becoming scarce. This trend is also supported by data provided by Corriere. In the first two weeks since the start of the pandemic, there was a +12.8% increase[14] in sales in supermarkets in Italy compared to the average figures for the period. With the fear of endless quarantines and driven by the idea of sanitizing and staying at home, citizens have poured their concern on purchases. Among the products of the anti-Covid kit, the protagonist, necessary for every Italian was the disinfectant. Amuchina was the most requested and popular product during this period. Product recorded a sales increase of +547%[15] compared to the average of the period, making real stocks. Numerous purchases of products such as disinfectant wipes, wet wipes but also thermometers, used to monitor the possible onset of symptoms of Covid-19. In the shopping cart, there was no lack of alcohol used to sanitize and disinfect. In the following table, can be seen an increase in sales of some products.

[13] Ibitem
[14] https://www.corriere.it/economia/consumi/cards/come-cambiano-consumi-italiani-effetto-coronaviruscarrello-spesa/effetto-coronavirus-carrello-spesa_principale.shtml
[15] https://www.italiani.coop/la-spesa-ai-tempi-del-covid-19-pasta-legumi-passate-e-carne-in-scatola/

Table 1.1 Specific products increase during Pandemic situation

Source: Personal elaboration from Corriere's data

AMUCHINA	+547%
DISINFECTANT WIPES	+478%
WET WIPES	+361%
THERMOMETER	+189%
ALCOHOL	+203%
SURFACE DISINFECTANT	+197%
DISPOSABLE GLOVES	+123%

Life seemed to be paused, waiting to pick up where everything left off, to return to normal. With routine interrupted and sporting activity at their minimum, the risk was eaten badly. The forced sedentariness and stress could induce to eat excessively. Various kinds of snacks and fatty food were the perfect accompaniment to days on the couch, and to reduce stress, sweet foods were the perfect treat. The term "nervous hunger" refers to situations in which food intake depends more on emotional stimuli than on a real biological need to eat or a specific sense of hunger. Research conducted by Michaud on the general effect model has shown that stress usually generates an increase in food consumption, since those who are more vulnerable react to stress with a psychological change, defending themselves through food (Conner and Armitage, 2008). The inability to manage negative emotions leads consumers to take refuge in food to combat feelings of sadness, disappointment, frustration, and anxiety. Nervous hunger does not necessarily depend on a situation of serious stress but can also depend on small events that generate an emotional imbalance. The following table illustrates the percentages of increases in the so-called "gone hungry" products.

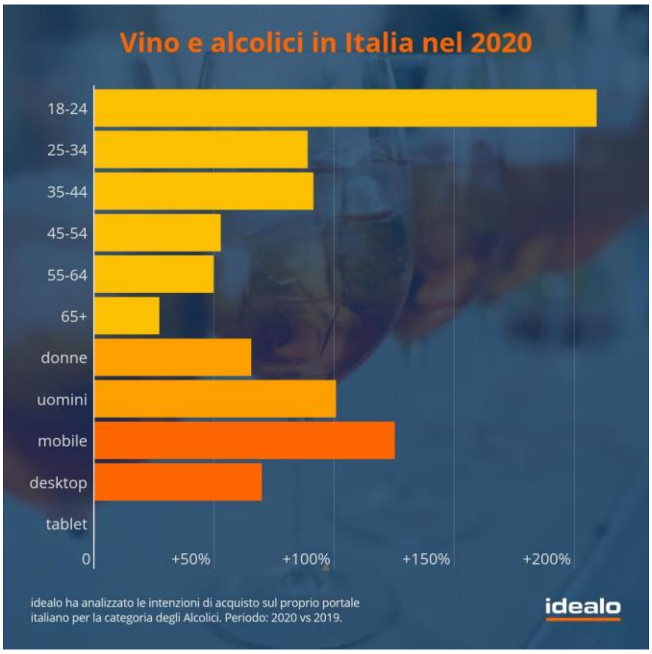
If we consider food consumption, in this period there has been talking of the "emergency pantry". As previously has been talked about, Italians have changed their habits, buying simple foods, ready to eat but above all with a long shelf life. There has been a return to the origins, making pasta, homemade bread, Italian dishes, rediscovering the old values such as family and conviviality. There has been a reduction in the consumption of spices such as ginger, turmeric, goji berries[16], in favour of typical products. Surveys have reported an increase in

[16] https://www.italiani.coop/la-spesa-ai-tempi-del-covid-19-pasta-legumi-passate-e-carne-in-scatola/

canned meat by 60%, canned pulses by 55%, and flour. While the fresh produce industry slowed down, a report published by Sole 24ore, regarding data from Confagricoltura, showed an increase in consumption of products such as rice (33%), pasta (25%), tomato derivatives (22%), sauces[17], and gravies (19%). The canning factories, therefore, had to modify their schedule of deliveries of goods, increasing sales in February and March. The food stocks purchased were then consumed in the following months, leading to a decrease in purchases in June and July 2020, a period when purchases also began to return to normal to some extent. During the lockdown period, there was also a significant increase in alcohol purchases, especially those that could be purchased online from sites with home delivery and not subject to the lockdown. The main product purchased was wine, where sales grew by 446%. On the Idealo site wine sales rose by 110%, the main buyers are university students or in any case young people in the 18-24 age bracket with a purchase percentage of +200%. The second group is that of 35-44 years (+91%), while the least active in the over 65 (+27%), perhaps because of the difficulty of having to order online. To increase purchases are mainly men with +101% while for women the increase is +65%. As previously mentioned, the protagonist is wine, followed by cognac and brandy +248% and vodka. Orders were placed from mobile devices mainly on Sunday evenings. The graphic below represents the data about wine sales.

Image 1.5: Wines and alcohol in Italy 2020

Source: Idealo, 2020



[17] https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/confagricoltura-raddoppiano-marzo-consegne-cibo-scatola-ADTiDeD

In Italy 2020 was the year of digital wineries, wineries seeing the decline in physical purchases had to react, organizing themselves to allow online purchases. They had to set up a site to take orders and they had to organize themselves to be able to guarantee delivery. Not all spirits have had an increase in sales, because of the coronavirus, Aperol has seen its purchases stop and decrease by 5.3%. Campari Group is an Italian business that works in the food and beverage sector. The company has an active role in the production of non-alcoholic but also alcoholic beverages, where is one of the biggest leaders. The Campari Group to try to revive sales caused by the lockdown has pointed the expansion to China[18]. A slowdown in sales has also occurred in confectionery and beauty care products. It is not difficult to understand why this has happened, during the period at home people have re-evaluated the necessity and the need for certain products, understanding what the real needs are.
Online sales are increasing dramatically. Queues are not only forming in front of supermarkets but also virtually. Amazon Prime and Esselunga's home shopping service, as well as other web platforms, which sell necessities, have been invaded by orders. After running to supermarkets to build up their stocks, consumers have preferred to place their orders directly at home, with home delivery. The lockdown has in some ways stimulated technological development, opening the doors to digital even for the most reluctant businesses. Many grocery stores have organized themselves to ensure home delivery and order taking via electronic devices. So, grocery stores have witnessed an exponential growth in online shopping. Neighbourhood shops have seen a strong increase in sales, due to the impossibility of moving but also to the consumer's choice to buy local, 0 km products. After lockdown, there was a decrease in this trend.
Il Sole 24ore reports that the Coop chain in Lombardy in the first week of March marked +90% compared to the same week in 2019 with 900 home shopping per day on average. The request for home delivery was so numerous that the waiting time was about ten days. Not a few are the inconveniences that have also affected the big players in the sector such as Supermarket24, a marketplace specializing in home deliveries that operates with all the major retail chains. Being forced to close, so are bars, restaurants, ice cream parlours, pizzerias, and neighbourhood bars to survive have improvised with the delivery to domicile. The survey by

[18] https://www.winemag.it/campari-punta-sulla-cina-per-recuperare-il-calo-dovuto-al-lockdown/

Coldiretti/ixe' said that with the Covid-19 emergency almost 4 Italians out of 10[19] the 38%, have stocked up on food and beverages, for fear of not finding them anymore available on the shelves of shops, supermarkets, and discounters. The way of shopping has changed, with 11% increasing online while 7% have turned more frequently to home delivery services. According to Nielsen data, flours have increased by 82%.[20] Probably because families are finding themselves at home, and having more time, they have decided to rediscover those family values that had been somewhat lost, preparing cakes, pasta, pizza, bread together, proud of their Italian traditions.

1.4 Online shopping and food delivery

The development of digital technology has changed many aspects, even confusing social pyramids. Older people often rely on their grandchildren, who are more flexible and receptive to technological innovations, to handle their smartphones. Nowadays, mental flexibility is more important than experience. The main consequences of digitalisation are twofold: democratisation, meaning people have had free access to information, which has led to a reduction in costs, and the other consequence has been to bypass intermediaries and make purchases directly online, without the intervention of third parties (Kotler, 2018).

An example of the mentioned case is Sweetgreen, an American chain of fast-casual restaurants. The company has decided to cut out the middlemen and go directly to the final consumer. It has a fully vertically integrated food system in which around half of the company's daily orders are placed via smartphone[21]. People are no longer surprised by the combination of mobile and addiction, a recent survey carried out by Italians Coop on smartphone use states that on average each person spends around five hours a day in front of the phone[22]. The survey reveals different profiles, some in contrast to others. There are the 'Flight mode', i.e., Italians who have a very detached relationship with the phone they use it much less than the average, making fewer phone calls and interactions. Then there are the 'Silent modes', people who use the phone quite a bit but have limited voice communication. And finally, there are the "Well balancers", those who find a balance between virtual and real

[19] https://www.lastampa.it/economia/2020/03/14/news/coronavirus-coldiretti-4-italiani-su-10-hanno-fatto-scorta-di-cibo-1.38593017/
[20] Ibidem
[21] https://www.retexspa.com/digest/sweetgreen-modello-ristorazione
[22] https://www.italiani.coop/gli-italiani-e-lo-smartphone/

relationships. Referring to data from the Coop Report (2019) can be observed that compared to France and the United Kingdom Italian citizens are less dependent on the web. In Europe, Italians are the least frequent users, and their use of the web has not increased in the past few years. The main actions carried out on the internet are first of all the use of social networks, then online purchases, subsequently e-commerce, listening to music, and finally the search for information mainly on health-related questions (Coop report, 2019). Often the first source to consult in case of symptoms and pain is the Internet because it is easy, fast and gives an immediate answer. Up to 97.6% of people search for health information online themselves. Self-diagnoses are not the most accurate and truthful, so there is a risk of landing on unsafe sites and making incorrect diagnoses. Being able to distinguish correct information from fake news is often difficult, especially for non-experts. The spread of fake news is one of the most common problems in online information mechanisms[23]. Another surprising finding is the one concerning e-grocery. The number of people deciding to do their shopping online is growing. Today, 1 in 3 families decide to do their shopping online, with a virtual shopping cart. In Italy, e-grocery has a turnover of 1.5 billion euros[24]. Out of the total B2C e-commerce, Food&Grocery is still marginal, but thanks to the development of home delivery and the increase in digital payments, the basis is there forever greater growth.

Nielsen calculates that 4.2 million Italians have used a meal delivery service at least once a year and that 30%[25] have done so via online and social channels. Lack of time or desire to cook or do the shopping drives these people to order their food online, not just talking about millennials or digital natives but also businessmen with limited free time. Nowadays, life tends to be more hectic and stressful rather than in the past, with little time to devote to oneself, hence the need for immediate satisfaction. This satisfaction is sought in food, cosmetics and many other sectors, companies reorganise themselves to meet the needs and wishes of their customers. Today, more than ever, the policy of the customer at the centre of everything applies. The theoretical principle of customer-centricity was developed by Peter Drucker. At present, mobile devices are within everyone's reach, and it is through these devices that major brands have successfully merged the digital and physical, generating a hybrid nature. With the help of personal shopping assistants and QR codes, the smartphone the customer has the

[23] https://magazine.santagostino.it/sintomi-ricerche-online-internet/
[24] https://www.italiani.coop/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/coop-consumi-2018-web-definitivo.pdf
[25] https://www.beverfood.com/secondo-nielsen-64-italiani-mangiato-fuori-casa-42-scelto-locali-etniciwd112081/

necessary information at the click of a button and directly at home. Various models containing the word click have come into being, such as click and subscribe, which allows the customer to subscribe to a good or service without having to repeat the order. An example is Cortilia, a start-up of mainly fresh produce, the service consists of a subscription that sends us a box with personalised products or products chosen by the company directly to our home, the size of the box varies according to the members of the household. Then there is click and collect where the purchase is made online and the collection is in a physical shop owned by the company or for third parties, but also click and commute, try and reserve (Stigliano and Kotler, 2018). Speaking of subscriptions, an article in the Sole 24ore mentioned the so-called 'Flat food', a monthly subscription to eat as much as you want at a restaurant, so customers are enticed to come back regularly to the restaurant[26].

The spread of smartphones and the mass use of social media has also led to a change in standards, forcing businesses to adapt to these changes. Before going to eat in a new restaurant people usually look for information online, read reviews from other customers to understand what to expect and decide if it is worth eating in that restaurant. Social opinions comfort and drive individual decisions, it is unlikely to decide to eat at a restaurant with lots of negative reviews. All sectors, including the food sector, have had to recreate themselves to keep up with the times. Innovation and technological development have led to changes in consumer preferences, behaviour, and habits. To survive, companies have changed, but much more slowly than people. Today they have to adapt to new mental schemes, try to create the desired experiences, just to be able to stay on the market.

Covid19 reorganised business models which had remained unchanged for decades, and the catering sector has reacted by reinventing itself and proposing, no longer the sociality of the location but the experience directly in the customer's home. In 2020, the Food&Grocery[27] department is worth €2.5 billion, a growth of +55% (almost a billion in absolute value) compared to 2019. Services are concentrated in northern cities but the gap with the South and small towns is narrowing with the digitisation of neighbourhood shops. In 2019 Food&Grocery was a very dynamic department online, with a growth of +40% however it had a low penetration rate, 1.1% of the total value of Italian consumers' retail purchases says

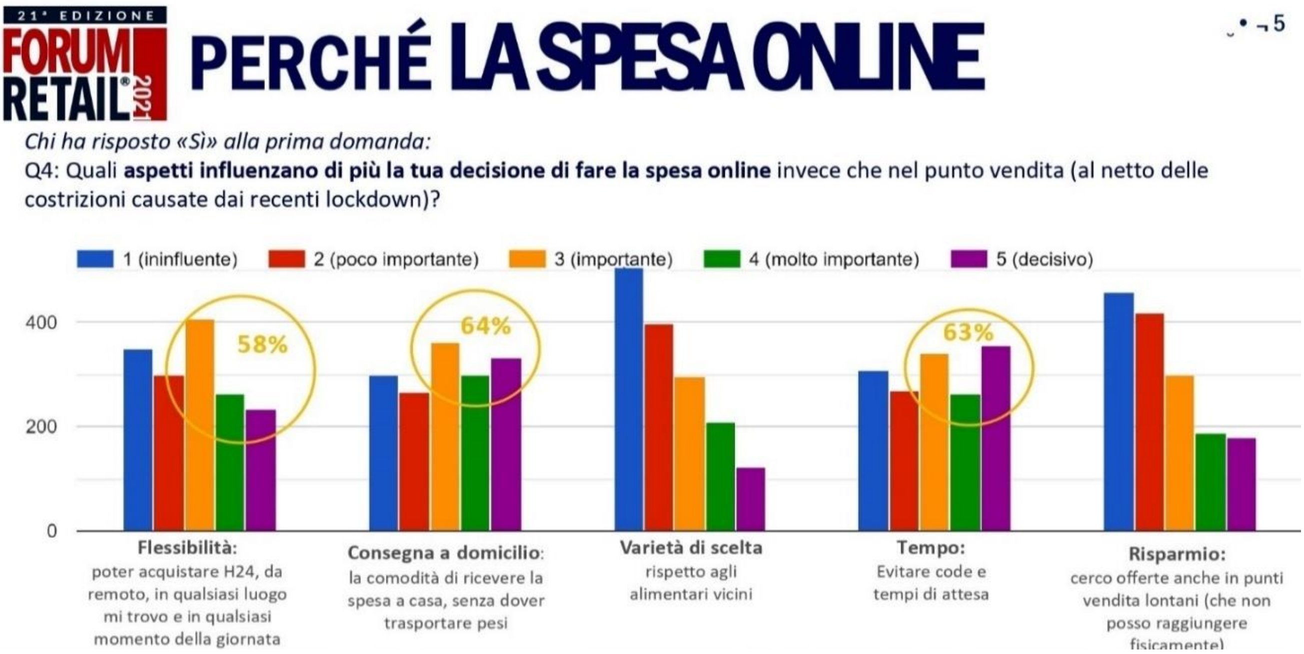
[26] https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/arriva-flat-food-l-abbonamento-mensile-mangiare-volonta-ristorante-ACgSXrDB

[27] https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/la-spesa-online-italia-vale-25-miliardi-il-lockdown-balzo-55percento-nell-ecommerce-alimentare-ADHyfrT

Riccardo Mangiaracina[28]. The pandemic has put strong pressure on e-commerce, forcing even the most reluctant retailers to make a change, expanding their online offerings. The digitalisation process has accelerated, for those who were not present and for those who were present but not adequately, forcing a logistical/distributional reorganisation. The main ones are marketplaces, such as amazon, eBay etc., which are chosen by 32% of consumers. Then there is the app or the site of the specific supermarket chain, chosen by 31% of consumers, and the remainder is divided between the small local shop, the direct producer, or a particular shop. What are the main reasons for buying online? The following chart shows that the three main factors are: in third place (58%), flexibility, i.e., the possibility of making one's purchase 24 hours a day and remotely. For 63% of customers, time is the most important factor, i.e., avoiding queues and waiting times. In the first place as the most important factor is home delivery, the possibility to receive shopping directly and conveniently at home, without having to carry loads[29](64%).

Image 1.6: Why online shopping

Source: Forum Retail 21 edition, (2021)



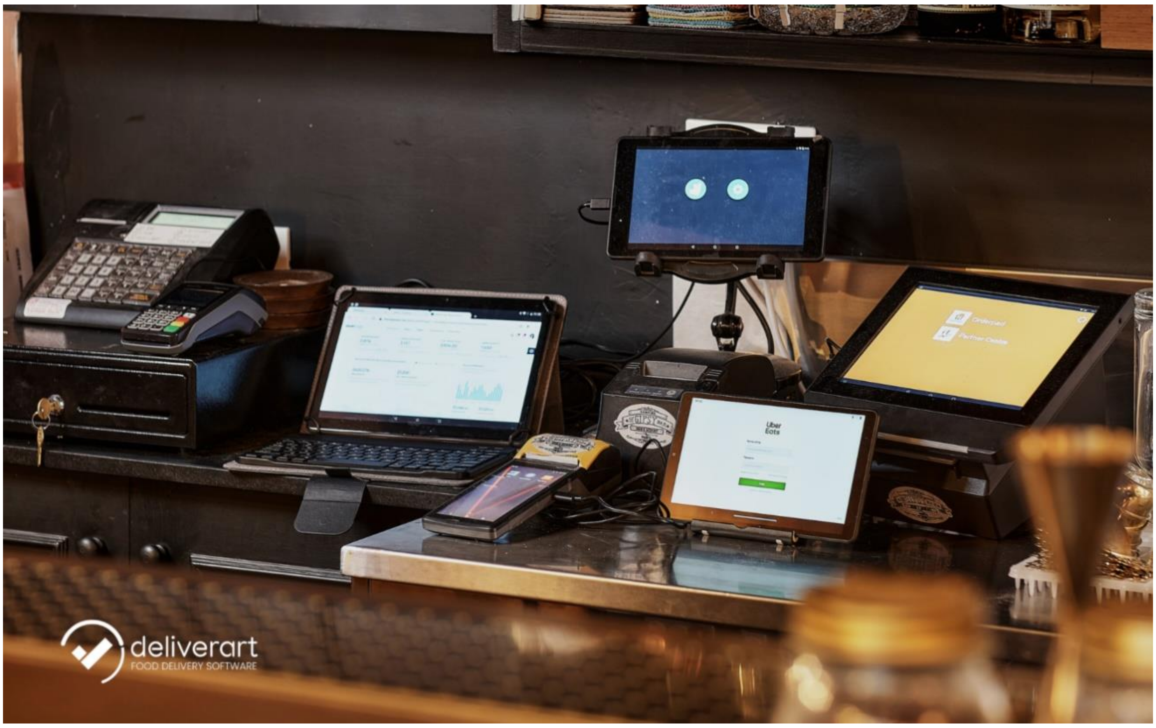
[28] Scientific Director of the B2c eCommerce Observatory Netcomm - Politecnico di Milano

[29] https://www.bresciatoday.it/benessere/alimentazione/spesa-online-covid.html

In 2020, due to the pandemic, more and more restaurants started to offer a delivery option. Due to forced closures, many businesses approached e-commerce for the first time, also thanks to the collaboration with third parties such as food delivery platforms, which took care of the delivery of the order. Food delivery platforms allowed restaurants to reach a wider audience and the customer to place an order easily. In Italy, the main food delivery apps are Just Eat, Deliveroo, Glovo and UberEATS. Restaurants upload their menus on these platforms, the customers access the app from which they can directly order and pay for their meal and then receive it comfortably at home. Food delivery also has its complications, the main one is keeping track of the various orders. The restaurant must continuously monitor the various apps to see what orders are coming in and coordinate kitchen and delivery times. Few know each device is dedicated to a single delivery platform, leading to many critical operational issues. The following image shows a typical restaurant delivery work plan, with a device/tablet for each third-party platform used[30].

Image 1.7: Typically delivery work plan

Source: Deliverart food report, 2021



[30] https://www.deliverart.it/report-food-delivery-2021/

1.5.1 The social role of food

Food is a primary good and a necessity, for human lives. It is a source of sustenance for the body and the mind, but not only, but food also has a strong social connotation it represents an element of conviviality and union, for instance, let's think about happy dinners with friends or Sundays dinners with families. Furthermore, food represents a religious and ethnic identity factor, every country has its traditions and culinary specialities, people can identify themselves through typical dishes. It is a medium through which society represents its values. Three actions are associated with food: cultivation, preparation, and consumption. These three fundamental actions have dimensions that are both individual and collective since they contain a "natural" function, that is, sustenance, and a cultural and relational aspect, identity (Francesconi and Raiteri, 2018).

Food allows us to identify the differences between various cultures and social levels, that is, to distinguish and separate "us" from "others". In addition, it also allows us to strengthen the community's identity. This food-based gender identity has very ancient origins. Since the past, food often "condemned" foreign and distant cultures as "cannibals". The citizens of the civilized West considered the peoples overseas and who lived over the Urals uncouth and repulsive, eating disgusting food, and for this reason, they called them cannibals. Even today, food turns out to be an identifying tool that allows us to approach and get to know new cultures, but at the same time, it can be used as a social, ethnic, ideological, and political barrier.

Food plays a fundamental role for the individual but also for the group and society, for this reason sharing food has a very important function, especially for Italians. The Italian people are often known as open, expansive, and sunny people, they love to relax by celebrating holidays and anniversaries with family and friends. These celebrations often take place at the table, in a restaurant or home, enjoying Italian cuisine traditions and conversing amiably. For this reason, food comprises not only its nutritional value, essential for human sustenance but also a symbolic and relational meaning, food has a function of the union. Lunches and dinners with friends or family make this feasible, experiencing moments of union and conviviality, living a relationship of full collectivity, and at the same time satisfying the individual need for nutrition. Meals, especially dinner, the time when the whole family is together, represent a predominantly relational fraction of time, a sharing of intimacy. Meals are the time when the family interacts with each other, talking about their day, their emotions, and experiencing a moment of affectivity. Italians like to eat, and mealtimes are considered sacred; the very long Christmas and New Year's dinners spent with the family are well known.

Food can be understood as shared pleasure, the point of entry into a community, a way of interacting with other people, it is a means of uniting and binding people together. It plays an important role in the social dynamics of every society. Eating together is typical, but not exclusive to the human species.

"Since gestures made together with others tend to go beyond the simply functional dimension to take on a communicative value, then the convivial vocation of humans immediately translates into attributing meaning to the gestures made while eating" (Montanari, 2007).

Montanari in his book "Food as Culture" describe food as a vehicle for self-presentation and cultural exchange, it transmits symbolic values and meanings of various kinds.

The food system contains and transports culture, traditions and group identity and is the first way to meet different cultures. Through the consumption of a product, the clients can and want to discover its origins, its history, food is not only food but also an experience. The main levers of Italian food are:

- **Culture:** food to be good to eat must also be good to think about, it must tell us a story about it and its place of origin.
- **Typicality**: it is a journey of taste that leads to fantastic places, they are unique products that can be eaten only in those specific territories, only those territories have those determined characteristics that make that product unique and distinctive from the others.
- **Emotions**: what counts is what the food manages to convey to the consumer, the product must be able to satisfy not only the sense of hunger but also other emotions.
- **Brand**: make the product recognizable and diversify from its competitors.

Italian food is presented with simplicity, it boasts simple products including pasta, oil, that carry inside all the Italian values. Products designed to be shared with the family, as already mentioned the family is very important. They are products created to please the senses, consumed more for the sense of pleasure and less for the sense of hunger. Eating a plate of pasta in the company of others or drinking a bottle of wine is much more than that, it is the sharing of a moment, of an experience all together.

1.5.2 Society is reflected in the food

Food can be defined as a charmer because people desire it even before they taste it. This desire arises not only from its taste but also from its organoleptic qualities such as colour, shape, aroma, characteristics that are put together to determine the enjoyment of the dish. As Marchesi suggests, "the art of tasting is also the art of observing". The first sense to which food is subjected is sight. The aesthetic aspect of food is fundamental, it is the first criterion with which people judge a dish, that is, people judge it based on its colours and shapes, the inviting aspect of a dish entices us to taste it (Marchesi and Vercelloni, 2001)

The poet Goethe, in one of the most tormented periods of his life, influenced by the Sturm und Drag movement, began to research the suggestiveness of colour, on the seductive power of colours and how the colour of an object influences perception. Nowadays, thanks to various research persons are perfectly aware of the power of colour, which acts at a subconscious level and can transmit certain sensations and emotions. The perception of colour is also influenced by our education and experience.

Gestalt Psychology has elaborated a thought, according to which, man tends to perceive only what he is accustomed to observing. To understand how reality is organized, he uses shapes that recall patterns. Even the perception of food is not free but determined by a reality, which people see with their eyes, through our ideologies, and previous experiences. The adjectives that are good and bad that people often attribute to food are derived from the socio-cultural environment of our experiences. In the past, society had not given much importance to the role of food, but in the 1970s something changed, and the sociology of food was born. Food is us, it talks about us, and becomes a mirror of society. It represents who humans are, what are their origins, their traditions, the different ways of preparation is a symbol of social relations (Douglas, 1972). People choose the products they want to consume because they are programmed to do so as if they already know inside themselves what the good products are; therefore, those they can eat and those that are considered harmful and whose consumption is avoided. Often this distinction between edible and harmful food depends on humans past and the country in which they live. Think of escargot, which to many is a disgusting dish while to the French it is a delicacy.

The French philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu, stated his opinion that the social class of a subject also greatly influenced his taste. The new middle classes preferred nouvelle cuisine, while the working classes remained anchored to simple and traditional dishes. Another aspect, which had demanded the attention of scholars was sexual gender. As sexual gender could influence food consumption, not everyone knows that in the past women were forbidden to eat even if they had the task of preparing it.

In the twentieth century, new beliefs emerged according to which man tends to assume the characteristics of the product he eats. This hypothesis comes from a "magical thought": the food that is eaten transfers to the human being its physical properties and its oral and symbolic ones. One becomes what one eats (Pollan, 2008). This phenomenon is described in the paper "The selection of food by rats, humans and other animals", which describes the existential condition of omnivores. On the one hand, they would like to try new foods and vary their diet, but on the other hand, they are afraid of trying new flavours. It talks about the so-called "omnivore's dilemma", characterized by neophilia as opposed to neophobia. Animals with a specialized diet have no doubts about what to eat since their food preferences are written in their genes. They do not need to employ thoughts and emotions to understand what they want to eat, as they already know it. This selection mechanism happens naturally and instinctively. Man is an omnivore and as such must dedicate time to understand among the various foods which one, he can eat. This choice gives rise to two contrasting feelings: neophilia: the desire to eat something new, trying a new taste, and neophobia: the fear of eating an unknown food. The great variety of dishes also creates a sense of stress in man. The undecided man does not know which food to eat, which is considered risk-free, which is better to avoid, and this uncertainty only generates stress. Internet, blogs, and advertising try to clarify these doubts, giving information about food to the consumer, but often this information is not clear and in contrast. The information surplus instead of helping the consumer by indicating the peculiarities of the product only generates anxiety and is responsible for unsuitable food choices. Food choices are the expression of an individual's identity, but they also depend on the information that the consumer receives (Fischer, 1988). For example, the consumer who knows that the cocoa company is Fairtrade buys from it, while if this were not indicated, the consumer might prefer another brand that perhaps instead exploits workers. Through culture persons outline the rules for what they believe to be a wise diet, indicating which foods to eat and which not to eat, trying to overcome the dilemma of the omnivore. Let's think back to the example of escargot, which to some people are repulsive while to others they are a delicacy. The scholar Rozin says that disgust is nothing more than a fear of introducing substances that people consider harmful into the body. Each culture indicates what is good to eat and what is not, so often the form of disgust towards a particular food depends only on the rules and habits of our society. However, a lack of dietary rules would make humans vulnerable and directionless, making them more susceptible to the lure of marketing. Marketing finds a huge advantage from the omnivore's dilemma because it can get the consumer's attention and convince them to buy unnecessary and always great products, for this to happen marketing uses various tactics such as the arrangement of products on the shelves. The products on the shelves are not arranged in a random order but a logical and thought-out way to attract the buyer more and make them buy. At the beginning of the supermarket are always placed confectionery products in such a way that the consumer as soon as he enters sees them and taken by hunger, buy compulsively. The music plays another important role, the high volume serves to destabilize the consumer and make him buy more.

As previously stated, the idea of gastronomy has changed considerably over the centuries. During the Renaissance, cooking was understood as a mixture of flavours, using spices and condiments. Spices from India such as nutmeg and brown sugar were highly sought after and used to enrich dishes. Typical of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance was the sweet and sour taste, which was obtained by combining European and Arab products. For the preparation of dishes and to better enhance their flavour, different cooking techniques were used, obtaining different textures and tastes. At that time eating was understood as a true art. Aristocrats, when they organized their parties, did not spare any expense for food and beverages, the greater the quantity, variety, and preciousness of food, the greater the wealth of the family. Food was used as a form of ostentation. It was during this period that etiquette was born. Later, in the modern age this tendency changes, people do not look for flavours anymore, but they prefer to keep the natural aroma of the product.

A final observation is that foods can be divided into forms. There are three types: the natural, artefactual and hybrid forms. The natural form includes vegetables, fruit, meat, and fish. These are all foods with a regular, well-defined anatomical structure, the presentation of which is not modified but is limited to cutting and combining them with other ingredients and additional decorations, such as sauces and garnishes. The second category includes sweet or savoury minced products, desserts, cheeses, all products whose destination involves a change in shape. Lastly, hybrids include food products that fall into both the natural and artificial categories. These are foods that retain their culinary structure but lose their original shape due to processing.

In Italian culture food is:

- **Sensory:** a product is eaten not only by taste but also by sight and smell. For example, when people taste a bottle of wine, they first see its colour, then smell its aroma, and finally, drink it and understand its taste.
- **Stories**: telling a story. Italy boasts long traditions linked to food to fully satisfy the consumer's need for knowledge, product curiosity, and tradition linked to recipes.
- **Origin**: concerning both the places of production and consumption. The consumption of a product can take place at home, in a restaurant, in a bar, on the street (street food).
- **Tradition:** of products, recipes, and countries
- **Place of preparation and consumption**

1.5.3 New consumption's style

In paragraph 2.1 is observed how the food supply chain has a social impact, and how the action to eat a dish of pasta is a socialisation action. Globalisation is the process that unifies the worldwide markets in one single market, in consumption models which are homogenised and convergent, this could happen because there was a development in innovation and technologies and an international trade. Of course, globalisation created some collateral effects such as the risk of excessive cultural homogeneity and the probability to lose single social identity, their traditions, their use. Increasing globalisation is decreasing the differentiation between the population, and this can affect also the food. Globalisation is not the only factor on which depends the new consumption style, but there are also other factors, which can be sum up in some points:

- Is increasing the number of families composed by two members or single parents, in the last years birth rate is decreasing.
- Consumers are more concerned about waste and environmental issues and pay more attention to environmental sustainability.

- Development and progressive growth of social inequalities and the consequent shrinking of what is termed the 'middle class.
- In the past the companies offered their products to the mass today they study their products to the needs of the single customer. Is not more a mass orientation but is customer orientation.
- Weakening of traditional ties and increasing the hectic pace of life and work.

The combination of these factors, some more recent others more established over time, are the reason why the relationship between food consumption and social relations changed, and they are part of this research. It is clear how the changes of consumer's behaviour don't depend only on one but more factors, from the economic to the social demographic factors. Food consumption is impacted by external and internal components and varies according to the historical period. Elena Angela Peta, in her research, observed how in the last years Italy from an emigration country passed to an immigration country. In the '00s, in Italy there was a boom of immigration, these people come from all over the world, especially from East Europe and North Africa and countries like China, Peru, Philippines. The new citizens bring with them their habits, their tradition and of course their recipes, introducing in our culture new dishes. Nowadays is normal to listen people say, "I go out to eat sushi, I go out to eat Indian food, or I go out to eat a kebab", their traditional food become part of our normal life, while thirty years ago this would be unusual. In the following image, it can be observed some data about this phenomenon. In Italy, more popular ethnic restaurants are Chinese (58%), Egyptian (21%), Peruvian (15%) and Latin American (6%). In Lombardia ethnic restaurants are 3,6%, in Piemonte, Veneto and Emilia Romagna from 2,6% to 2,4%. These data show us that 19% of Italians go to ethnic restaurants once a month and 30% two-three times a year.

Image 1.8: Ethnic restaurants in Italy

Source: Coop – Fipe Confcommercio, Camera di commercio 2021

Another important change is consumer's change, he pays more attention to food's quality and become aware and careful. Today is important for a company to create a strong relationship with their customers. In other to build with their clients a powerful relationship and increase their fidelity, the businesses try to give them an experience.

Le Bussole, a Confcommercio's[31] guide, reports that for 78% of customers quality is one of the most important characteristics in a good, and for 62% is the freshness. Italian consumers pay more attention to the food they buy, its ingredients, the features of products, its origins, and who is the producer. They are willing to spend added time and extra money to know what they eat. Transparency, wellness, and sustainability are the key points of the customers. Is

[31] Nuovi stili di vita ed impatti sui consumi alimentari", "Le Bussole", Confcommercio https://lebussole.confcommercio.it/approfondimenti/nuovi-stili-di-vita-ed-impatti-sui-consumi-alimentari/

fundamental for the businesses to give us all the possible details about the company's history, brand, purposes, and goals. The millennial generation is the target that pays added attention to know what is buying, to buy Fairtrade goods, certificate goods as bioproducts and vegan products.

For Italians, a healthy lifestyle and a healthy diet are particularly important, so much that in recent years it has become almost an obsession. There has been an increase in people following diets, starting from a vegan diet. This one is based on the consumption of vegetable products to the Dukan diet famous for its high protein and low-fat intake. Then we have the slimming diets such as Weight Watchers, the cabbage diet, and the very famous detox diets such as the Master Cleanse also called lemon detox diet; in fact, it is based only on the intake of this lemonade prepared with lemon and cayenne pepper. There has also been a marked increase in the consumption of lactose-free products, low-fat and low-salt products, and gluten-free products designed for coeliacs, as they are considered more digestible. The data shows that sales of products considered by consumers to be healthy have increased, one example being goji berries. Recent studies have shown the beneficial effect of this product on the body, which has greatly increased its sales. In Europe, Italy is in first place for the consumption of goji berries. Another food considered healthy for its enormous benefits is the almond. These examples show how the food industry is also trying to understand consumer trends to maximise sales. Consumers are adopting health-based eating behaviour, increasing consumption of products rich in fibre and proteins, and reducing fat, salt, and sugar. Companies have catered to consumer demands by selling products with the required characteristics on the market. To have more impact, they try to emphasise these products. Often, consumers find labels with -30% fat, high fibre product etc. Eating healthier has also increased the consumption of fruit and vegetables. Coldiretti attests that a quarter of the total expenditure of Italians is dedicated to the purchase of fruit and vegetables. Another food considered healthy is fish, and in recent years its consumption has also increased at the expense of a reduction in the purchase of meat. Another important quality for consumers is craftsmanship, with artisanal products often being preferred to industrial products because they are considered better.

Another important phenomenon, which started as a fashion and is now a category, is biological food. In Italy, there is a strong growth trend in biological products. More and more areas are dedicated to this type of cultivation; it is estimated that more than 10% of the total area is dedicated to organic farming. In the southern regions, this practice is much more developed, because the soil is facilitated by climatic conditions that prevent the emergence of diseases, which can affect production. Therefore, most organic production takes place in southern Italy. To be used for organic farming, the land must be set aside for two years, and no chemicals may be used; this period is called the conversion period. The growth of this sector depends on several factors:

- consumers are driven to look for safe products (concerns ingredients), products that have not received pesticides, herbicides etc.

- preservation of the environment and biodiversity

- favouring local products

However, there are contradictions, it is observed that the southern regions have the highest prevalence of obese and overweight adults. This is due to the fact that health products have a higher price, think of the organic product, organic farming costs 30% less than the traditional method, and this leads to an increase in the final price of the good. The other reason is culture. In Central and Southern regions people tend to eat richer food, often fried and in larger quantities. In addition, the canons of beauty are different from those in the North: tall women are preferred in the North, while in the because of in South the idea of beauty is the curvy woman. The major percentage of overweight people are part of over 65, but this problem also affects an increasing percentage of youngers. 9% of the under 14 are affected by obesity disease and 21% are overweight. The data are not so alarming that because of their weight, they are overweight. The figures are not as alarming as in the USA; however, this phenomenon is three times higher than forty years ago.

In the end, another component that is becoming very important, among the others mentioned above, is sustainability. In particular, in the food and beverage sector, people are trying to have low environmental impact production as it is one of the ways to protect the future of the planet. This is the reason why there is increasing consumer attraction to local production, as the food industry tends to waste resources. In addition, plastic-free packaging is also on the rise as a solution to plastic consumption.

1.5.4 The modern consumer

As previously stated over time consumer behaviour and styles have changed. These changes have occurred because of cues from social and cultural changes, outlining a new consumer. A study by the Eurispes Observatory, Uci, Universitas Mercatorum, in 2019 brings out the portrait of a consumer 4.0. From the data collected, the characteristics of the new consumer were understood, more informed and aware, he pays more attention to the food he buys, trying to consume healthier and certified products. He tries to get innovation and pleasure from the food he eats.

"Consumers 4.0 no longer have hunger, but appetite, and this is satiated in their minds rather than in their bellies." [32]

Knowing what consumers buy and their preferences allow us to understand their values, desires and needs. As previously said, consumption is the mirror of society, it is the identity of the consumer, I buy vegan products because I want to convey a certain message. In recent years the food and beverage sector has been alternating between tradition and innovation, and therefore today's consumer is a post-modern consumer, a mix between ancient and contemporary consumers, redefining the relationship with consumption. In the post-war period the consumer was a person-consumer and today they are moving to a person-consumer with new attitudes and eating habits.

In the previous chapter, it was said how important the quality of the product is today for the consumer. Quality is defined by five elements, which are: food safety, food quality of the original land, the naturalness of the production processes, declared health content and the lay substance of quality. These components were identified by the CPT[33] Observatory through a survey on the meaning of quality as perceived by consumers, specifically by the target of millennials[34]. From the survey it emerged that food safety is an important element in the consumer's choice, labels are fundamental because they give the consumer the necessary information to reassure him about the ingredients and their origin. On the other hand, the

[32] Osservatorio Eurispes, “Identikit del consumatore 4.0”, https://eurispes.eu/news/identikit-del-consumatore-4-0-osservatorio-eurispes-uci-universitas-mercatorum/

[33] Osservatorio CPT: Osservatorio Cibo, Produzioni, Territorio Eurispes, Uci e Universitas Mercatorum

[34] Sociologists and demographers define the millennial generation as those who were born after 1980 and entered adult life in the first fifteen years (approximately) of the new millennium. People born in the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century, therefore, belong to this generation (definition taken from Accademia della Crusca).

food quality of the original land leads to the rediscovery of the territory and territoriality, together with the protection of the environment. Moving on to production processes, certifications, with particular attention to organic ones, have become a reference for many consumers, together with the declared health information of the product, as healthy food is seen as positive and in step with scientific food research.

A final aspect observed by the Eurispes Observatory is that there is a sort of intellectual transformation of food, there has been a shift from seeing food as a simple food to an instrument of pleasure, from an individual fact to a relational act. This change is also due to the action of the media, with the rise of television programs or formats related to food (MasterChef, Hell's Kitchen), which today are increasingly popular and numerous. There are channels dedicated entirely to food and its preparation, an example is the food network. The chefs become like real stars, loved, and followed by thousands of followers, Antonino Cannavacciuolo 2.8 million followers, Bruno Barbieri 1.1 million, Iginio Massari almost 1 million etc. There is a presentation of dishes on social networks, first of all, Instagram. This intellectual evolution of food is also full of contradictions, in a continuous oscillation of sophisticated and health-conscious behaviours, to opposite attitudes.

From these divergent observations, the new culture that accompanies the food sector today is mainly "incoherent", between a continuous and obsessive search for health and the excessive desire to take pleasure from food, between a return to the origins, to the past, to tradition and parallel growth of food styles oriented to the market and the global metropolis.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL MEDIA

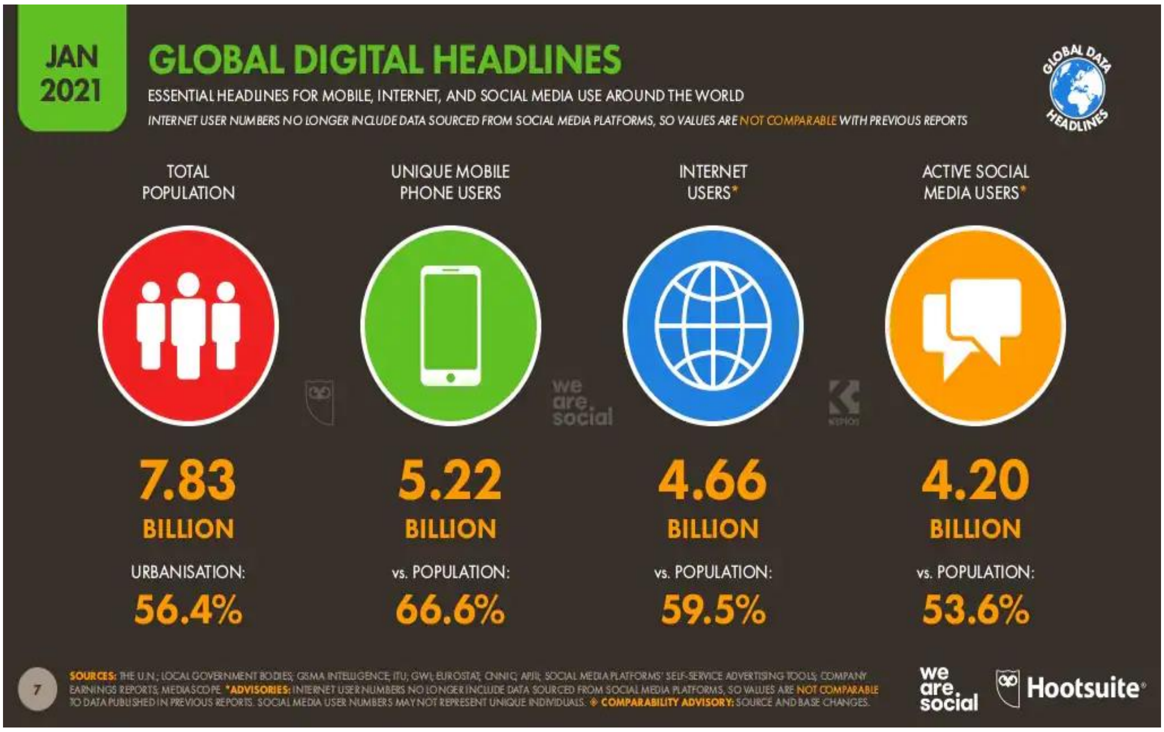
INTRODUCTION

Over the years, technology continued to improve and modify the way how people communicate with each other. Nowadays technology has a key role in people's lives, it switched daily life into a digital sphere through which users interact. People create, get and exchange information via laptop, smartphone, and any other technological device. With the internet's evolution, social media platforms development take place quickly. Today, in the world there are more than 206 social media platforms (Magliocco, 2018). Social media users, from all over the world, exchanges any kind of information instantaneously and at any moment of the day, transforming social media and Internet application into the first source of information. The information's exchange could give to company data about user's behaviour and be useful insights of product/service developments. Social media is, in the business perspective, a powerful marketing tool, companies interact directly with their customers and increase the active participation of different users. Over the years, the importance of traditional marketing tools as TV, billboards and radio decreased and digital marketing activities grew in relevance. Through social media companies can collect data about customers and understand how to promote their brand and have advantages from the social environment. For the companies is hard to measure in monetary terms brand engagement, brand awareness and WOM (word of mouth) generated by social media but is easy to understand how social media assume relevant roles in the users' feelings evaluations. These elements don't have a real economic outcome but are relevant in the user's perceptions and emotions, and their final decision. There are already a huge variety of social media, but constantly someone makes up new ones, an example is Tik Tok that was created in 2018 and became very famous during the pandemic period. The 2021 Global digital report[35] shows that in the world there are around 4.2 billion active social media users, this number represents 53,6% worldwide population. This data demonstrates that social media now are part of human's life, users spend more time on socials compared to the previous year. The number of users has grown in so short time, and the general trend will continue to rise. In 2020 the

[35] Digital 2020 Reports: Simon Kemp – Hootsuite

active social media users have grown more than 13% (490 million users), in relationship with the previous year. Nowadays 4,66 billion people have access to an internet connection, this number represents 59,5% of the worldwide population. In this year the new internet users were around +316 million people, which represent +7.3% worldwide population. The favourite social media platforms are, first of all, Facebook, in the second position there is YouTube and in the third place, there is WhatsApp[36]. The following image shows the data described above.

Image 2.1: Global digital users Source: Hootsuite 2021



Analysing the Italian situation, it is clear that the situation is not so different from the rest of the world. In 2020 there was a slight demographic decline in Italy, but this did not affect connections there are over 1 million people connected to the internet for the first time. This data represents a 2.2% increase that takes us over 50 million users. In the social media sector, there was an increase of 2 million new users (6%), bringing the total number of registered users to 41 million, around 68% of the Italian population[37]. The Italian population is connected for more than 5 hours a day to the internet and spend almost two hours on social media (98% from a mobile device). The time people spend listening audio is also significant, one of 4 people regularly listening podcasts, and gaming are also relevant, 4 of 5 people regularly play

[36] Hootsuite 2021: https://wearesocial.com/it/blog/2021/02/digital-2021-i-dati-italiani/
[37] Hootsuite report 2021

video games. The time spent watching television (broadcast and streaming) is more than 3 hours a day, and in the end, there is the time spent reading press media (online or physical print) around 1 hour and a half. The platforms most used by Italians are YouTube, in the first position, which is used by 85% of the population between 16 and 64 years old. Then there are WhatsApp and Facebook, which also exceed 80% of users, followed by Instagram (67%) and Messenger (55%). "However, the growth of TikTok (which has doubled) and the entry into the "ranking" of Telegram, a messaging platform that makes privacy one of its main USPs, are interesting[38]." Are also popular the live-streaming platforms Twitch and Reddit. After this brief introduction and explanation of some important data about social media, it is fundamental to understand what is meant by social media, these massively used tools that have become an integral part of everyday life and how relevant digital marketing channels are for businesses and organisations.

2.1 Social media definition

Defining social media is not that simple, it is more complex than one might think. The most comprehensive definition and the one most often quoted in scientific articles (Business Horizons 2011) is:

"Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan, 2010).

By analysing this definition, one can understand the main characteristics of this new era. Internet-based applications are fundamental, which means that social media arise from collaboration and cooperation in the field of the Internet. User-Generated Content (UGC) is another fundamental element, it is nothing else, but the content created by users, it is widely discussed as there are two currents of thought, those who consider it to be part of social media and those who say it is independent of social media. In 2005 for the first-time people heard about user-generated content, was the period when the first Internet applications were born, and this term was used to indicate the different types of media created by the end-user and accessible to all. Users are no longer just passive recipients of information, but they also

[38] https://wearesocial.com/it/blog/2021/02/digital-2021-i-dati-italiani/

become active participants, generating content. This change happens thanks to the internet and the possibility to create and exchange information continuously between different social platforms. User-generated content must have three characteristics (Vickery, 2007):

- The content has to be created outside routine and professional practices.
- The content must be published on a website accessible to all or on a social network where users are registered.
- The content must be determined by an amount of creative effort.

As mentioned above, this is the most complete and comprehensive definition, but other definitions are also taken into account and are listed in the following table.

Table 2.1: Social Media definition

Source: Personal elaboration from different books definition

Definition	Author
"Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking"	Oxford Dictionaries, 2012
"Social media platforms have emerged as a dominant digital communication channel via which consumers learn about, share information on, and interact with brands they consider, purchase, and evaluate"	Simon Hudson, Li Huang, Martin S. Roth, Thomas J.Madden, 2016
"Social media refers to the mobile or network-based application, which supports the creation, exchange and access of user-generated content among members"	Tsan-Ming Choia, Shu Guob, Suyuan Luo, 2020

Considering the various definitions, one common point can be observed, namely the active participation of the user which is a fundamental element of social media. Through participation, users can create, transmit and disseminate their information, both positive and negative experiences about companies and brands. Social media is nothing more than a general term used to refer to an infinite number of apps, each platform has the elements that make it recognisable and specific from the others, moreover, each social platform has its functions and objectives.

Kietzmann examined the main elements of social media to understand their functionality and created a model known as the Honeycomb of Social (Business Horizons, 2011). This model consists of seven main blocks that allow us to understand the most important forces behind social media, where marketers, users and platform operators interact with each other. Using social media platforms an exchange of experiences occurs, and people study how these experiences influence and impact the communication channels in the companies. Companies need to understand the usefulness and importance of this new communication channel.

Image 2.2: The Honeycomb of social media Source: Jan H. Kietzmann, 2011

The honeycomb of Social consists of seven blocks and can be explained as follows: the block representing identity plays a role of fundamental importance for those social media that require their users to disclose more personal information. Identity represents the extent to which users have to reveal themselves, recording their name, age, gender, place of birth, city of residence, sentimental status, profession, interests and hobbies. Identity disclosure is one of the core elements of most social media platforms. An example of a social platform that does this is exactly Facebook. The social network in 2021 has 2.9 billion monthly active[39] users, about 36% of the world's population, while daily active users are 1.9 billion. If Facebook were a country, it would be more populous than China. Such an influx of data, including personal data, raises questions about how it is used or managed. The treatment of privacy even today is a critical topic for both platforms and users. However, it is knowledge of hobbies, interests and tastes that enable companies to create appropriate strategic communication to engage with the largest number of users.

The second block is conversations, which is the extent to which users communicate with each other. Many social media have been developed in such a way as to encourage and promote discussions between individuals or groups. One example is Twitter, which encourages real-time conversation; other applications are private blogs, where conversations can be longer and therefore more time-consuming. One aspect that has to be taken into account is the speed at which one has to adapt. The timing of

today's conversations are different from the past. One example is the creation of WhatsApp, the instant messaging application that has significantly shortened the time of conversations. Users demand speed and promptness from companies when asked. For companies to provide sufficient performance, they need to ensure constant monitoring of social platforms and deploy more human resources in these areas. In addition, the ability to communicate with potential customers or loyal customers indirectly increases the dissemination of information about a product, company or brand and promotes brand awareness.

Sharing is the third block, indicating how users are facilitated in receiving, distributing, and exchanging content, in an environment where sharing is one of the most important aspects of social relations. Sharing objects are a means of interaction and a tool to connect with other users. Companies can analyse which content generates the most shares and try to exploit it to draw attention to the brand.

The next one is presence, this block represents the accessibility of users by others, i.e., a user who actively participates on the platform can be seen by other users, also participants. Active participants know where other users are. There is like a bridge connecting real life to virtual life, this connection can be more or less strong, depending on the type of social media and the

[39] https://it.shopify.com/blog/statistiche-facebook

users it wants to attract. League of Legends is a popular online strategy game, for example, does not make available any personal information about its players, who identify themselves with a username and an avatar. Online games generally make references to virtual worlds and develop less of a presence block. One example that has bucked the trend in recent years is PokemonGo, an application that connects to the GPS and allows the player to enter an augmented reality, which enriches the gaming experience by adding electronically manipulated information to human sensory perception. In this game, presence is very high, as the *mobile* screen acts as a continuation of reality and the movements of the avatar are the same as those of the player. Companies should evaluate each consumer behaviour and investigate their actions to deal with them most appropriately and profitably, and this was done with PokemonGo. Companies have started to exploit the success of the game to their advantage and use lures to push players to move to their chosen points of interest, such as clubs or shops.

The fifth block is relations, i.e., how users can be connected, interact with other users. Linking two users create a form of association that leads them to converse, share information, meet, or simply consider themselves as contacts. An example LinkedIn, a social network for developing professional contacts, suggests new contacts to us based on our common factors. Companies can decide to analyse what kind of relationships are developed on social media and access them to create their own. A company that can form as many relationships as possible on the web is likely to expand its customer base. Reputation is the sixth block and represents the way a user identifies others and him/herself, whether online or in the real world. A good reputation often translates into trust. Inspiring trust is essential for the brand because it is the basis for establishing a relationship with its customer, without trust, it is difficult for the consumer to buy. The number of likes of a video on YouTube, or followers on Instagram can be a yardstick for assessing a company's reputation and level of trust. For a first-time visitor to a brand's Instagram page, seeing so many followers automatically generate a sense of trust, and it's easier to feel confident if you know that other people already are. Finally, the last block is groups, i.e., the possibility for users to create communities. The object of these groups is their common points. Analysing these building blocks, one understands the importance of interconnection and interrelation between presence, relationship, and conversation because each of them indirectly implies the maintenance and updating of other elements. The constant evolution of the internet is the factor that triggers the continuous development and updating of social platforms; in fact, the internet is the basis for the evolution of social media itself.

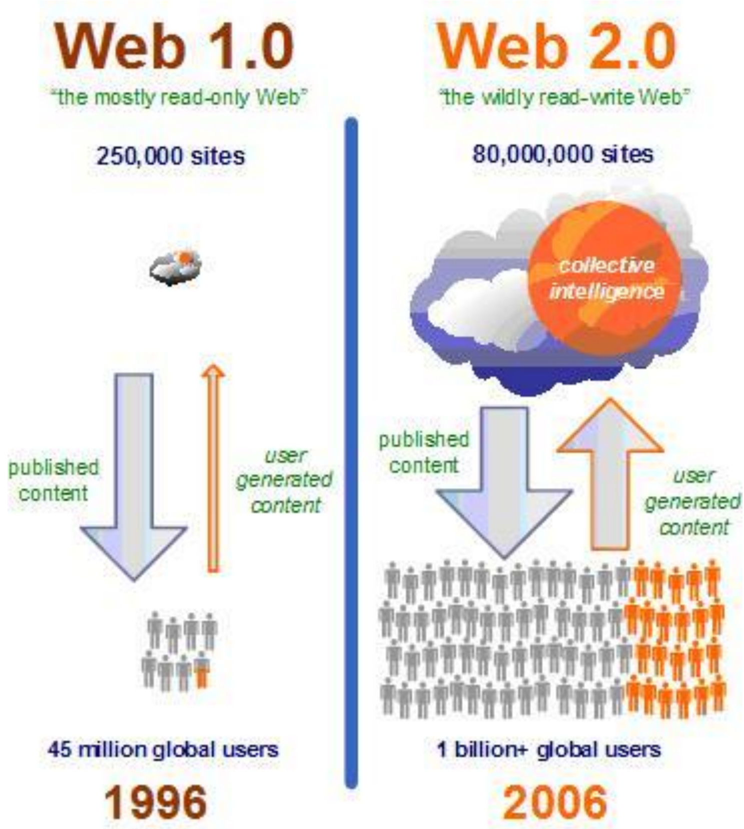
2.2 Web 2.0

As stated in the previous paragraph, the term Web 2.0 appeared for the first time in 2004 and, according to the Treccani encyclopaedia, it indicates the second phase of development and diffusion of the Internet. This phase is characterised by an increase in interaction between user and site. There is big participation by users who also become authors of new content and easy dissemination of information that can be exchanged quickly and easily with peer-to-peer tools, or with tools such as social networks[40] (Facebook, YouTube etc). Sites are constantly and rapidly evolving through the creation of new programming languages, even for those who do not have a specific technical background. When someone talks about Web 2.0, social media and User Content Generation (UCG), is important to distinguish each of them in order to understand how social media has evolved. The term Web 2.0 was coined by Tim O'Reilly at a business conference in San Francisco in 2004, during an exchange of thoughts on editorial marketing strategies. With this term, O'Reilly meant the dynamism and interconnectedness of the Internet's web pages, created, and modified by its users, it has already been said that users have become the creators of Internet content. Web 2.0 was the direct successor of web 1.0 where users were passive to web pages. In web 1.0 the pages were static, users simply received the information without the possibility to modify it, they had no active part in the creation of the contents, while in web 2.0 users can create, exchange, comment on the contents. Users exchange information between different web platforms, providing and acquiring personal knowledge among peers. Creating and exchanging content is so easy that numerous social platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube etc. have been created. Interactions between users have reduced the time it takes to disseminate information and increased their traffic. At the same time, companies were able to improve because they were able to find information from users easily and for free. In the following picture, it can be seen how web 1.0 and web 2.0 work.

[40] https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/web-2-0/

Image 2.3: Web 1.0 and Web 2.0

Source: https://alfa2.wordpress.com/web-20/web-10-vs-web-20/



The distinction between web 1.0 (passive user who simply receives information) and web 2.0 (active user, who creates, edits, exchanges content) is quite clear; however, according to the scientific article (Shari and Shang, 2011) some key elements that characterise web 2.0 can be identified, in particular, there are three:

1. Knowledge-creating (KC) cycle enabled: Web 2.0 applications use the standardised SECI[41] model through which users interact with each other, creating and exchanging tacit and explicit knowledge.
2. Control mechanism: Web 2.0 platforms ensure effective exchange, transformation, sharing and application of the knowledge acquisition process among users. Some

[41] SECI model of knowledge dimension, Wikipedia

examples of control processes are recording, framing, standardising, authorising, reviewing.

3. Value for the customer: social applications give users the possibility to share the knowledge acquired within the platform, in the way they prefer with images, videos, messages, memes etc.

Considering the key points listed above, the scientific article proposed four models for Web 2.0.

The first model is exchanger: the model authorises the acquisition of messages and data instantaneously through socialisation and externalisation activities between users. A low control mechanism is present. An example of this model is MSN and Skype.

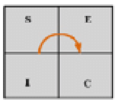
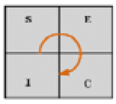
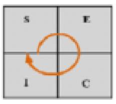
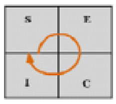
The aggregator model is also characterised by a low level of control activity, it enables the knowledge of information through socialisation and externalisation activities. Users can share and save content. These web pages have various contents to attract more users to the platform. Examples are Twitter, YouTube, Facebook.

The third model is the collaborator: the model includes all activities in the acquisition process, such as internalisation, socialisation, and outsourcing. The model is characterised by a high control mechanism. Users can update, share specific and quality content. A few examples are Wikipedia, Ansenwers.com etc.

Lastly, there is the liberator, this model is based on a low control of the mechanism and on the knowledge cycle process, which goes through different stages such as socialisation, internalisation, and externalisation. The model undergoes continuous revisions that bring significant improvements in data quality. Linux and Office are the perfect examples of this model.

Image 2.4: Classification of Web 2.0

Source: Understanding Web 2.0 service models, Shari et al., 2011

Model category	Experience-socialization platform		Intelligence-proliferation platform	
	Exchanger	Aggregator	Collaborator	Liberator
Web 2.0 applications (number of sites listed on AjaxProjects.com)	Calls & VOIP, chat, e-mails, networks (268 sites)	Blogs, bookmarking, music, photo, video, RSS, networks (613 sites)	Wikis, travel, bookmarking, business, office, programming, games (118 sites)	Business, office, programming, Web 2.0 tools, games (43 sites)
Dimension type Community knowledge-creating cycle enabled by Web 2.0 platform	Type II 	Type IV 	Type V 	Type VI 
Control mechanism	• Log	• Log • Framing • Standardization	• Log • Standardization • Systematization • Authorization • Review	• Log • Standardization
Customer value	• Exchange of instant message or data	• Share and retain information	• Share, retain, assimilate, and regenerate knowledge under specific standards	• Share, retain, assimilate and regenerate knowledge under free format
	• Extended social network	• Information sufficiency • Extended social network	• Knowledge quality • Information sufficiency • Upgraded user knowledge and skill	• Knowledge reliability • Application flexibility • Upgraded user knowledge and skill
Exemplary cases	MSN, Skype	Twitter, Plurk, YouTube, Facebook	Wikipedia, Answers.com, Salesforce.com	OpenOffice, Linux

In short, web 2.0 can be defined as a mass platform, where all the actors (users, enterprises, public authorities) can communicate with each other, creating and exchanging information and content. It is through these interactions that contents are created, modified, and exchanged. Web 2.0 is nothing more than the foundation on which social media is built; indeed, they cannot be understood as synonyms. The term social media refers to the creation of content by users. Web 2.0, on the other hand, is the application that enables content creation.

2.3 Classification of social media

To gain a better understanding of social media classifications, there are some enlightening academic researches that are worthy of mention, such as Andreas M. Kaplan's and Michael Haenlein's paper, and Rumen Varbanov's paper. The two of them present common features and distinctive elements. Both classifications will be analysed in this paragraph.

When people are asked to explain what social media are, most refer directly to apps such as Facebook, Wikipedia, YouTube and so on. This answer is not wrong, as these apps are part of the social media world. However, as noted in section 2.1, it is complex to give a single comprehensive definition of social media. It has been said that social media consists of a huge number of platforms, and these platforms can be very different from each other. Before proceeding to describe the different types of social applications may be, it is worth analysing the two key elements that characterise social media.

The article "Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media", written by Haenlein (Business Horizons 2010), allows us to better classify social media applications. The two criteria on which it is worth basing the classification of social media are:

- Media Side: i.e., social presence: the important aspect that characterises social media is the time spent on the platform and the media richness. According to the Short, Williams & Christie theory, social presence is understood as the audible, observable, and personal contact that can be achieved between two involved users. Social presence is influenced by the proximity and instantaneousness of the medium. Because of these two characteristics, different social media differ in social presence.
- Social side: here, the way one presents oneself or self-disclosure is relevant. Goffman states that in all social relationships, people are very concerned about the impressions they can make on others, which is why appearance is crucial. A good presentation allows people to make a good impression, and this is also the case in social media. On the other hand, self-revelation means the conscious or disclosure revelation of the individual information.

The more widespread social media are, and the more important people attach to the opinion of others, the greater the dissemination of information. Considering the criteria of social presence and self-presentation, several categories of social media can be identified.

Table 2.2: Classification of social media, Source: Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Looking at the table above, six categories of social media are identified:

BLOGS: this is the first classification of social media. It is characterised by a low social presence and high self-presentation. Blogs are usually websites run by a single person who publishes different contents, presented in reverse chronological order. Blog topics are different: the blog can talk about the blogger's life, as a kind of personal diary, narrating their events, it can discuss about topics important to the blogger, such as politics, sustainability, environment etc. The blogger talks about blogger's impressions, ideas and can also give advice and suggestions to their readers. Within the blog, the only action that readers can do besides reading the content is to write their comments. In the case of a corporate blog, readers commenting on it indirectly promote the features of the brand, if the comment is positive. In the case of a negative comment, the blog may face having a disadvantageous and unprofitable effect.

COLLABORATIVE PROJECT: it allows simultaneously the connection between users and the possibility for them to work on the same content. It is characterised by a low social presence and low self-presentation. Collaborative projects are nothing more than the contents obtained from the different actions undertaken by various users, as saying users collaborate simultaneously to ensure the best result. This type of social media represents the most appropriate outcome of UGC. Collaborative projects can be distinguished between wikis and social bookmarking applications. Wiki is nothing else but a website that allows users to perform certain activities such as editing, adding, removing text content. Wikipedia is the case in point of a wiki site. Social bookmarking, on the other hand, refers to sites that collect and evaluate web content (links) and multimedia content. An example of social bookmarking is Pinterest. Collaborative projects are not only applied on the web but can also be used within the company. Employees can share information, ideas, suggestions on the various stages of a project.

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES: As previously mentioned, when people are asked to explain what social media are, they respond directly by nominating applications such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. Applications that have a very high number of users, (Facebook in 2021 has users of 2.9 billion). These applications are part of this social media category, characterised by an average social presence and high self-presentation. Social networking sites are platforms that allow users to connect through e-mail and instant messages. In order to access these sites, users have to register, providing their data. Then after registering, they can share various content with other members on the platform, including content such as photos and videos of their personal lives. Over the years, the number of users who have joined these platforms has always tremendously grown. The users come from all over the world and belong to all age groups but especially the younger ones.

CONTENT COMMUNITY: characterised by social media presence and low self-presentation. The main objective of this type of social media is to allow users to share various types of content, in different forms, like videos, text, photos and PowerPoint presentations. Applications such as YouTube, Flickr, SlideShare are part of the content community. Users access the platform easily without having to create a profile, either by entering only their email, or also without it. The main risk of these platforms is that they are used as a space for the distribution of copyrighted products, and once content is uploaded, it is very difficult to prevent its dissemination. At the same time, content communities are a very profitable communication channel for companies because users can positively promote different features of a company, or a specific brand, all over the world.

VIRTUAL GAME WORLDS: This is the penultimate category of social media; the characteristics are high social presence and low self-presentation. Virtual game worlds are platforms that allow participants to live through their avatar another life in a three-dimensional environment. Users can interact with each other as they would in real life. Virtual game sites develop in two forms: the first is the virtual game world where users interact according to particular and strict rules in the context of a largely multiplayer online role-playing game. In this arena, due to strong restrictions imposed, people are not able to present themselves freely, which is why the degree of self-revelation is limited. The second form is the world of virtual games designed for the single-player: here the user does not interact with other users but it plays individually.

VIRTUAL SOCIAL WORLDS: this is the last category of social media where users are also part of a virtual world, but unlike virtual game worlds, users can behave freely and are not subject to strict rules. Users experience a three-dimensional environment as if they were in real life.

After the presentation of Kaplan and Haenlein social media classification, there is the examination of another social media classification (Varbanov, 2015).

Image 2.5: The Main Categories of social media

Source: The Business potential of Social Media platforms, Varbanov (2015).

Varbanov's classification is more precise and detailed than the previous one, although there are some categories in common. The shared categories that are in common between the two classifications will not be considered further, only the non-described categories will be analysed. The other categories of social media classification are:

MICROBLOGGING: this category is very similar to the category blogs, described in the previous classification; the difference between the two categories lies in the length of the content:

microblogs are characterised by a maximum of 200 characters. Microblogging started to be famous in 2007 when the Twitter platform was created. The content of microblogs is the same as that of blogs, i.e., photos, sentences and comments can be posted. Microblogging is also used to create real-time content. The most popular microblogging is Twitter, which allows its users to comment up to a maximum of 140 characters. Microblogging can be used to increase a company's website or product visibility.

SOCIAL NEWS SITE: In this classification of social media, the user can simultaneously be both a reader and an author of the content. This means that the user can read, comment on the content posted by other users and at the same time publish them material. As there is a great deal of interaction between users, people can consider this information as valid because it comes from reliable sources, therefore the information is considered as real news. Google News is an example of a social news site.

GEOSERVICE: Geoservice platforms enable users to use geolocation to find various places on Earth. When people are in a new city and they don't know how to move around it, where the places are, which are the places to visit, or which are the services that the city can offer, geoservice helps the user to locate places like bars, restaurants, cinemas, churches, anything that can serve the user. Google maps is an example of a geoservice platform, through their login users can check all the places they want to visit.

LIVE STREAMING: this is a platform that allows participants to stream free of charge from different technological devices such as smartphones, computers, tablets through an internet connection. Users communicate live with other users connected to the Internet; therefore, for live streaming, it is essential to have an Internet connection. Live streaming can take the form of a broadcast where one user is the presenter, and the other users are the guests. One live streaming platform that is increasingly becoming very popular is Twitch.

The Photo-sharing category in the Kaplan and Haenlein article is placed within the Content Communities category. As well as the Community Forums, which is placed in the Content Communities category.

As previously mentioned, there isn’t a truly universal model to take into account when classifying social media; therefore, there are some examinations of the main classifications based on two scientific types of research, but further classifications of social media can be found on the Internet. Another noteworthy classification is the one devised by Maurice (see figure below), but there are also others.

Image 2.6: Maurice's social media classification Source: Maurice 2017

The key point in this classification is the position of the user about the other six categories. The user has a central role within the scheme, thus, being able to interact and relate with all six categories. The six categories established by Maurice are Networking (Facebook, LinkedIn), Collaboration (Prezi, Wikipedia), Video sharing (YouTube), Image sharing (Instagram), Blogging (Wikipedia) and finally Microblogging (Twitter).

2.4 Strengths and weaknesses of social media

As described in the first paragraph, a key element of social media is participation, the interaction between users and the exchange of information. Active user participation brings both benefits and risks. Free access to these platforms has generated a complex social media ecosystem, with many users subscribing to one or more sites. Social media differ from one another, and users sign up according to their needs and motivations (John, 2012), but the key point remains sharing. The possibility of creating a profile, interacting with people with similar taste, interests, hobbies, creating relationships, drives people to participate and maintains these relationships. The last important aspect is the social presence factor. In order to be able to evaluate participation in social platforms the thesis focus on two theories, the first is the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the second is the Uses and Gratification Approach (U&G). These two theories state that people tend to behave in the way they have planned. The intention to do something or adopt a certain behaviour is crucial for the behaviour itself (Conner and Armitrage, 1998). For example, every time a user decides to share content on a platform, this behaviour is preceded by the intention to share. There is a direct relationship between the intention to share and the actual sharing behaviour.

Professor Anita Whiting in her article "Why people use social media: use and gratification approach" tries to clarify which elements of social media generate a sense of gratification. This sense of gratification comes from social interaction, information seeking, leisure, entertainment on these platforms, relaxation, expressing opinions and so on.

Another important effect that the use of social media generates in users is related to the ego[42], or rather the defensive ego, which is closely linked to self-esteem (O'Brien, 2011). The content posted has an expressive function, explaining the opinions and ideas of users, which is why a user agrees with the content posted by another user if it reflects their moral criteria and social functions. It is through these functions that friendships, bonds, relationships, and communities are created on the platforms. The defensive ego has an important function, warning us of external dangers and trying to eliminate uncertainties. As already mentioned, today social media are considered a valid source of information, users create, edit and share content freely without any restrictions.

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[42] Irish Marketing Review, 2011, The emergence of the social media empowered consumer

Participation in social media is crucial, but which aspects can influence it? According to Professor I-ping Chiang[43], participation in social media can be influenced by five categories:

- Social relationship: users interact on platforms to get to know like-minded individuals who have the same interests to create a virtual friendship. Like-minded individuals tend to interact, exchanging information with each other to grow a relationship. If within the platform the user finds it difficult to find like-minded people, he will not create relationships and thus also decrease participation.
- Social identification: human beings need to be part of something, to be part of a group, a community. Platforms contain different communities where the user can enter. Users will enter communities that share their ideas, feelings, and thoughts.
- Social influence: being part of a group or community can influence one member opinion and feelings. The ideas and opinions of users can be influenced through the content they see and read on social media, the greater the degree of cohesion between social media and user, the greater the possibility of influencing the user. The more cohesive a community is, the more power it will have over the user's decision-making power.
- Social satisfaction: this is done by assessing the opinions and experiences of users. Social satisfaction assesses overall past, present and future actions taken on social media by the user and the community.
- Social commitment: refers to the users' willingness to maintain a relationship with the community in the long term.

Participation in social media is influenced by several factors, there is no single way that drives users to participate in the activity of platforms.

"Consumers' ethical perceptions of social media analytics practices: Risks, benefits and

[43] International Journal of Electronic Commerce Studies, 2019, Exploring the benefits of social media marketing for brands and communities

potential outcomes" (Michaelidou, 2019) and "Social media opportunity or risk" (Everett, 2010) are the articles that go on to explain the weaknesses/negative aspects of social media users are.

The first negative aspect is:

- Loss of data: information that is posted, created, shared, commented on etc. on social media can lead to misunderstandings, and a consequent loss of reputation for the company, influencer, or user.

- Anonymity: Applications do not always ask for verification of the user's identity, and because of this, fake accounts can be created. The fake account presents itself as a normal person, who just wants to make friends, with good intentions, but this is not the case. Often, these attackers send friendship requests, which appear to be normal links, but are not, they are malware that infect the computer and can steal real user data.

- Criminal action: Users access platforms through different devices (smartphone, tablet, laptop) and this increases the possibility of criminal action by hackers. The synchronisation of different devices allows hackers to access all the data stored on them.

- Risk implications: users and companies often exchange data, including personal data on platforms without considering privacy risks. There have been numerous scandals about the collection and dissemination of users' data by social media.

Social media are a channel of communication, where one can meet new people and make friends, they are a source of up-to-date information, they offer many opportunities to their users but at the same time, they involve risks. When deciding to become part of this world one has to be both risk and opportunity conscious (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Benefits and risks of SM uses by users

Source: Personal evaluation from the article

Benefits	Risks
Ego defensive	Anonymity
Social identification	Criminal actions
Strengthening of moral beliefs	Data leakage
Social relationship	Privacy
Social commitment	

2.5 Social media in Italian businesses

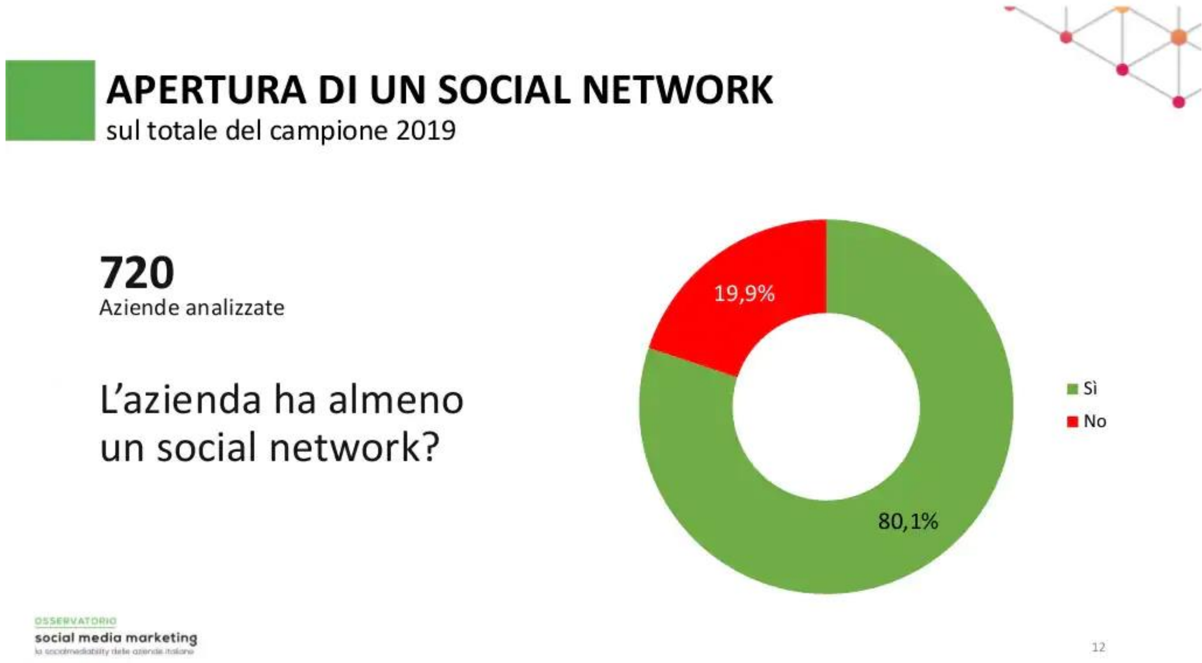
In a global context, 27% of consumers find new brands through social media ads, 75% have bought a product after seeing it on social media, while in Italy 30% of online users search for product information directly on social networks (compared to 43% worldwide), companies present on these platforms are increasingly investing in new e-commerce solutions[44]. The aim of this paragraph is to analyse some research data to better understand the situation of social media in Italian businesses. "La SocialmediAbility delle aziende Italiane" (Fraia, 2019) is the first report that will be taken into consideration. The analysis was conducted by the Executive Master SDC IULM dedicated for "Centromarca". Through the report, people can understand how companies have had to adapt to the evolution of the Internet and the new needs of consumers. The research monitors 720 Italian companies belonging to six different sectors, 120 for each sector[45]. The sectors considered are banking, furniture, food, clothing, hospitality, and in the last observation, a sample of companies operating in the personal care sector was added. The sample of 120 companies consists of 40 large, 40 medium and 40 small companies in each sector. The objectives of the research are to find out the penetration rates of the use of social platforms, which social media companies use the most, which communication strategies are implemented through social media, the concept of storytelling

[44] https://www.osservatoriomondoretail.com/2020/08/03/social-network-la-crescita-in-italia-e-gli-utilizzi-nellambito-business/
[45] http://www.osservatoriosocialmedia.com/ricerca-social-media/ricerche.php

and finally the efficiency levels achieved. Image 2.7 represents the opening of a social network in percentage based on the sample.

Image 2.7: Companies with at least one social media profile

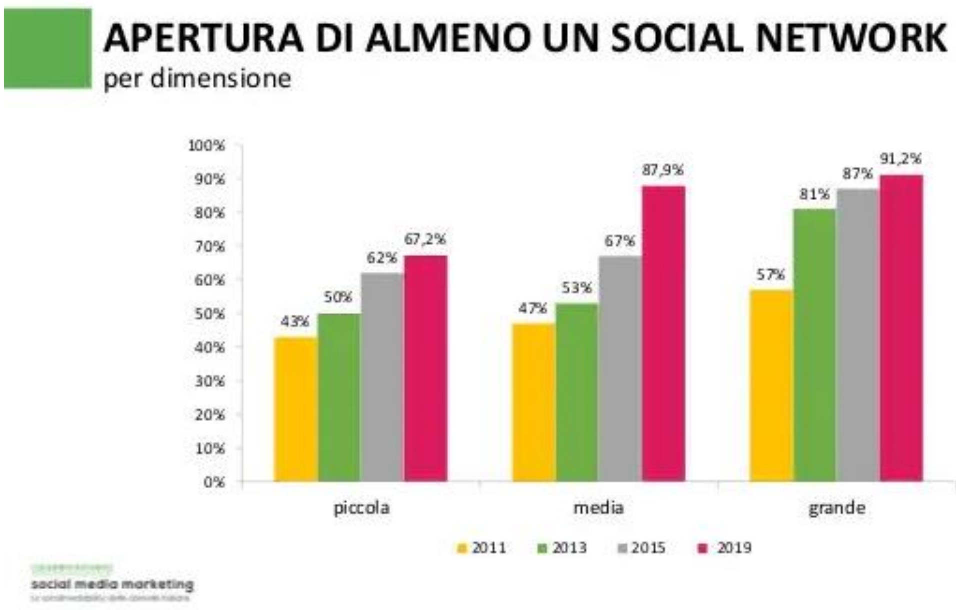
Source: Social Media Marketing & Digital Communication - Executive Master SDC IULM, 2019



The data shows that in a sample composed by 720 companies about 80,1% of them have already one or more social media profile. A small part of the sample, that represent the 19,9% of companies haven't any social media profile. In this image can be understood how much importance have social media platforms for the company today.

Image 2.8: Companies with at least one social media for size

Source: Social Media Marketing & Digital Communication - Executive Master SDC IULM, 2019



As can be seen from image 2.8 above, of the sample of 720 companies, about 576 companies (80.2%) use at least one social network. This is best understood by looking at the graph regarding the opening of a social media network by company size. Large companies are the most present on social platforms, accounting for 91% in 2019, while smaller companies are the least present, accounting for 67.8% in 2019. The image also shows that over the years the opening of a social profile has increased for all companies but not in the same way, while large and small companies have had a steady increase, medium-sized companies between 2018 and 2019 had an increase of 20 points. Over the years companies' social media profile has become a powerful communication tool, using it to directly promote their brands.

Image 2.9 represent which social media platforms are the most used by companies. It's not so difficult to imagine which one is in the first position, Facebook (2,4 billion users), followed by Instagram (photo sharing) in the second place, and YouTube (video sharing) third.

Image 2.9: The most used social media platforms

Source: Social Media Marketing & Digital Communication - Executive Master SDC IULM, 2019

Each social media platform has its characteristics and functions, and companies choose the best one to use according to their objectives. Facebook is the favourite one because its online sales tools (Showcases, Product Catalogue and Marketplace) are accessible and used not only by Italian entrepreneurs but by in more than 50 countries worldwide[46]. Facebook allows companies to communicate with customers quickly and easily and increases brand awareness and brand reputation. Instagram allows companies to make themselves known through images and videos. Customers are free to interact with the company by liking or commenting on the post. In addition, the Instagram platform gives the possibility to conduct small surveys, through stories companies can ask simple questions to their customers to get to know them better, understand what they prefer, what they want. 61% of companies that use Instagram consider it very efficient, creating a divide between companies that have shifted investments because they were previously dissatisfied and those who use the channel with satisfaction[47]. YouTube allows companies to share their videos, which can be shared again by any users in

[46] Social Network: la crescita in Italia e gli utilizzi nell'ambito business
[47] Ibidem

the platform, improving brand awareness, company brand identity; 66% of companies consider YouTube a very efficient platform.

Instagram is the third most popular platform for companies. Which companies are the most followed on Instagram? The latest data put Juventus in the first place, its success is due in part to the footballer Cristiano Ronaldo, who in a few months has significantly increased the number of followers of the company reaching 40.5 million. Right behind with 40.3 million followers, the fashion company Gucci and in third place, the car manufacturer Lamborghini with around 26.9 million followers.

Image 2.10: Top 5 Italian brands on Instagram

Source: Digitalic, 2021

Brand più seguiti su Instagram, la top 5 italiana

#	Marchio	Follower
1	Juventus	40.5 milioni
2	Gucci	40.3 milioni
3	Lamborghini	26.9 milioni
4	Dolce&Gabbana	23.9 milioni
5	Prada	23.6 milioni

The second study to be taken into consideration is the one conducted by Hootsuite. The research analyses the situation of social media within Italian companies. 86% of the companies surveyed stated that a presence on social platforms is essential to remain competitive, 70% of them planning to increase their use of social media. Nowadays it is no longer important to ask companies if they have social profiles but rather to ask how many social profiles they have, the research showed that 47% of the companies surveyed have at least four active social profiles and 43% have between 1 and 3 profiles (Hootsuite, 2021). At an operational level, most companies decide to manage social media themselves, with only a small proportion (11%) outsourcing some of their management to external companies. Moreover, in 34% of companies, social profiles are managed by one person, in 31% of companies by two people, 18% employ three people and only 6% of companies have a team of four people to manage the platforms. The main objectives that Italian companies seek to pursue using platforms are brand reputation (83%) and brand awareness (74%), quite in line with European objectives, although, unlike Italian companies, European companies put brand awareness first. Italian companies instead focus on the qualitative aspect of brand presence on social networks. About the third objective, there is a difference: European companies focus heavily on engagement and the creation of active communities (71%), while Italian companies focus on increasing conversions and sales. This is because companies use social media to increase revenue, with 46% seeking to identify and cultivate leads. However, social commerce and social selling, compared to the global average, are underdeveloped, at 16% respectively. Further data shows that social media is also expanding outside of marketing: customer service (37%) and recruitment (23%). [48]Companies also rely heavily on advertising, 53% of companies invest in social ads, influencer marketing (20%) and customer support (20%) are still underdeveloped. The challenges that Italian companies will have to face are mainly three:

- ROI of social: being able to understand and interpret the data that companies have, evaluate whether the work they are doing is giving the desired results, connect the objectives of social with the company objectives. Unfortunately, this is a big obstacle for Italian companies, only 31% of them calculate the ROI of social media (in line with the European average).
- Strategy: developing a global social strategy, being able to involve and coordinate several departments at the same time.
- Resources: relate to lack of budget, time, and skills. Concerning the lack of skills, data on the training of employees should be reported. About 43% of the companies do not provide any training to their employees. The remaining companies provide training through online courses (39%), participation in events (25%), classroom training (15%) and finally 11% regarding peer-to-peer (Hootsuite report, 2020).

In order to increase sales through social media, companies implement some tricks: 32% highlight the characteristics of the product and its quality, 28% try to involve customers in

[48] Ibidem

issues of importance to the company through the tool of real-time marketing, 18% try to reach their customers through influencers and finally some companies offer different offers every month (13%[49]). Every year more and more companies are increasing their capital investment (53%), a third are keeping their capital constant (32%) and only 5% are reducing their social media investment.

2.5.1 Social media in Italian food businesses

After the examination of social media Italian companies, this paragraph aims are to illustrate the social media in Italian companies but concerning to food sector. Communicating food efficiently is a very complex, demanding, and difficult task. Unlike other sectors, in the food sector, it is even more important to be able to excite the consumer and to do this it is necessary for companies to be able to involve the five senses and trigger emotions. To better appreciate a product, consumer have to feel its taste, understand its smell, its tactile sensations and convey its quality. Companies, through their creativity, must use evocative images, right words, and right graphics to make an impression and impress consumers. The perfect mix of strategy and creativity is needed. The latest data, from the report of the Social Media Marketing observatory of the IULM University of Milan[50], indicate that 83% of companies operating in the food sector have at least one social media profile. Previous research has shown that the number of companies with at least one social profile has increased over the years. In 2010 companies with at least one social profile were 31% while in 2018 they are 83%[51].

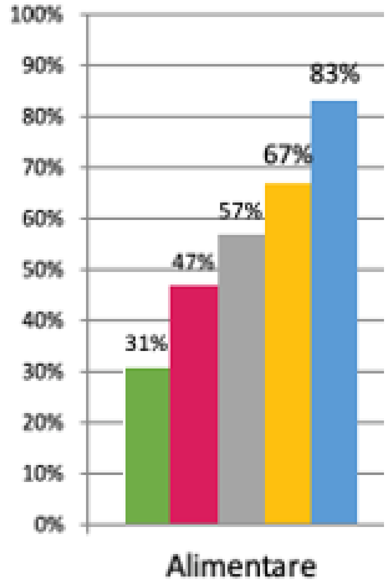
[49] https://www.osservatoriomondoretail.com/2021/04/29/come-si-comportano-le-aziende-italiane-sui-social-network/

[50] Social Media Marketing & Digital Communication - Executive Master SDC IULM

[51] https://www.mastersocialmediamarketing.it/come-il-settore-alimentare-si-affaccia-al-mondo-del-digitale-presenza-web-e-social/

Image 2.11: the growth of social media in the food sector

Source: Social Media Marketing & Digital Communication - Executive Master SDC IULM, 2019



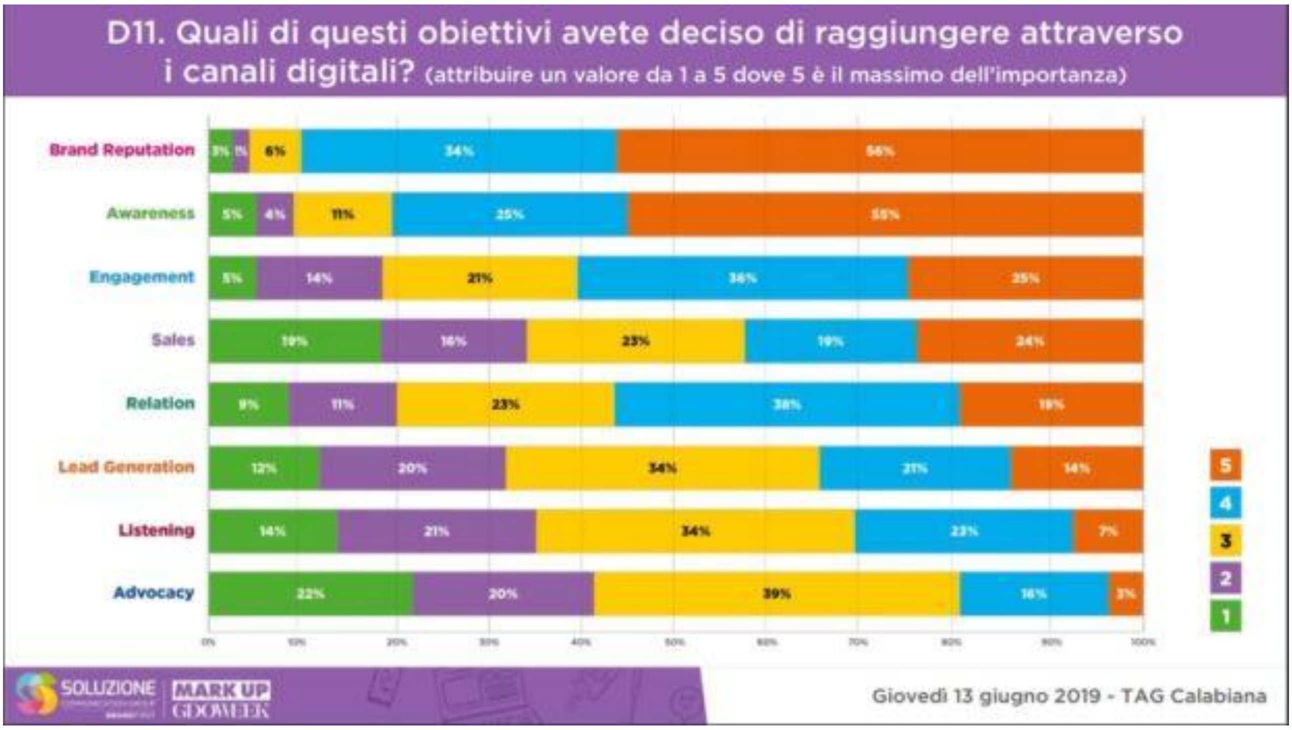
The use of social media has become an integral part of a company's communication strategy, as social platforms are essential for interacting with consumers. Using images, videos and articles, these pages aim to attract new potential customers and consequently increase sales. Social media planning activities, through the development of an editorial calendar, is fundamental for the company. The calendar plan is the tool that allows the company to plan the publication of posts, stories, and reels. Content is created according to the target audience and the objectives that the company wants to achieve. One of the main objectives is to encourage users to share the material posted, to be able to expand the reach or the number of users who have viewed the company content. The second objective is to create a community, to encourage customers to talk about companies' products, commenting on posts and stories. The contents of the editorial calendar are decided after analysing the feedback, which is based on likes, positive or negative comments. One 'problem' found is that 22% of corporate websites have no direct link to social media, thus worsening the user experience. The We Are Social report (Hootsuite, 2020) shows Facebook as the most widely used platform in the food sector, with YouTube in second place, used by only 50% of companies, despite the video format being the most engaging for consumers. There is also a strong increase in instant messaging services. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and Snapchat offer tools to buy products shown on their pages on their respective applications. Aimia's survey shows that 56% of consumers follow their favourite brands on social networks to find items for sale. In contrast, 31% of consumers browse social media to find new products to buy. The survey "*The digital eras of food communication*" confirms that 67% of online usage is the result of strategic work[52]. Soluzione Group was involved in the survey of more than 150 Italian companies[53] in the food sector with 10 billion euros of aggregate turnover. The analysis shows that 58% of the food companies surveyed rely on agencies specialising in web & social marketing. As far as communication investments are concerned, they tend to be targeted but not too substantial. Food companies are divided into two streams: those who spend even more than 10% of their budget on digital communication and those who use the resources in dedicated projects. Some companies spend no more than 3% of their available budget on digital communications, while 26% spend less than 1%. The most advanced category is meat and sausages, while the "laziest" category is snacks, which spend only 1-3% on digital communications. The survey analysed the most active platforms in the food industry and found that social listening is used very little, even though this activity allows companies to track online conversations around the brand. Listening to what consumers are saying is an excellent opportunity to decipher trends and patterns of behaviour and to build and manage a positive brand reputation. 56% of the companies surveyed indicated brand reputation as their main objective. However, only 6% of companies use social listening as part of their digital strategy. The bigger the budget that a company sets aside for digital communication, the more approachable it is, through multi-channel and multi-tool. Food sector has been booming in recent years, which also increases competition between businesses. The publication of real, attractive, beautiful photos serves to attract the attention and curiosity of users. Often, companies turn to professionals to create photo sets of impact and quality. The images can be used as backgrounds for your website and will feed the gallery of social channels, visual content has more interactions than textual content. "Recipes, curiosities, food-related stories, surveys, news from the culinary world, detailed or funny insights, new menu proposals, appointments and events allow expressing the soul of the company and the brand[54]". Food

[52] https://www.impresedelsud.it/limportanza-di-una-strategia-di-comunicazione-e-social-per-il-settore-food/
[53] Soluzione Group FOOD E COMUNICAZIONE DIGITALE, I BRAND ITALIANI SONO NELL'"ERA NEANDERTAL"
[54] https://www.mastersocialmediamarketing.it/come-il-settore-alimentare-si-affaccia-al-mondo-del-digitale-presenza-web-e-social/

storytelling used to tell the authentic culture of food and its preparation, the ability to enhance quality of raw materials, coming from a controlled and certified supply chain, is an essential tool to achieve marketing objectives. To be able to talk about food products effectively, it is necessary to build a strategy capable of enriching the buying experience, providing consumer with the necessary information, and enhancing qualities of the product. The consumer is increasingly oriented towards a healthy and balanced diet. The following image shows the main corporate objectives that food companies want to achieve using digital channels. In first place is brand reputation (56%), awareness (54%), in third place engagement (25%).

Image 2.9: Corporate objectives to be achieved with social media

Source: Soluzione Group Food e comunicazione digitale.



The food sector is evolving rapidly, but it is also influenced by other social and commercial sectors. The relationship that has been created between food, fashion, design, and art. Nowadays, food is a way to discover the history and culture of the territory. Social media are essential for transferring and sharing know-how, and it is on social platforms that dialogue takes place between companies and their current or potential customers.

2.6 The impact of social media on the brain and consumption habits

The time users spend on social platforms is constantly increasing. This happens every year without users even realising it, but let's see what effects social media has on our brains:

DEPENDENCE: Around 5-10% of online users claim to be unable to control the time they spend on social platforms. A study on the effects of social media on user revealed that the use of social media has the same effects on brains as drug use. In the areas that control emotions, attention and decision-making processes, there is a degradation of brain matter due to the excessive use of these devices. The reason for this is the immediate and effortless gratification offered by social media, which causes the brain to develop an addiction to the stimuli they offer[55].

MULTITASKING: People often think that using social media while doing other tasks increases the ability to multitask, but this is incorrect. The ability to perform a task while simultaneously chatting on Facebook and looking at Instagram stories does not increase the ability to multitask, quite the contrary. It has been shown that people who spend a lot of time on social media decrease their ability to switch between tasks, are less efficient, have more difficulty learning and memorising training and are more prone to distractions.

PHANTOME VIBRATION SYNDROME: this refers to the impression of having received a message and feeling your smartphone vibrate in the absence of a real stimulus (Goyal and Saini, 2019). A study has shown that around 89% of respondents experience this stimulus at least once every 15 days. The increase in this phenomenon is due, in part to social media, to the use of smartphones, tablets, which are equipped with notification alerts. At the moment, there are no real remedies to reduce this phenomenon, users have to rely on common sense. "The only actions they can take are to limit the frequency of use, change the notification mode frequently, carry the mobile phone in different positions, and avoid vibrate mode.[56]
Every time a user receives alike, a positive comment or any notification, they feel a state of pleasure, which on a physical level occurs with a rush of dopamine. Dopamine is the basis of our addiction to social media. The mechanism that takes place inside the human being is like

[55]https://www.focus.it/comportamento/psicologia/come-i-social-media-ti-cambiano-il-cervello
[56] https://www.stateofmind.it/2021/01/sindrome-da-vibrazione-fantasma/

what happens when playing slot machines. Tristan Harris, a former software designer at Google and now founder of the Center for Human Technology, was the first to describe this concept, which was also taken up in the Netflix documentary 'The social dilemma'. The operation of slot machines clearly explains this phenomenon: the player pulls the lever on the machine, then waits a few seconds until the wheels stop turning, showing the final result, and finally the player finds out whether they have won or lost. Every time the player wins there is a positive effect, and the brain produces dopamine, while when the player loses, they find it hard to hold back the impulse to play again, trying again to win and feel pleasure. The same mechanism happens with social networks. When an Instagram user publishes a new post, he or she expects to receive likes and comments, which generate the feeling of pleasure and therefore dopamine, and it is this feeling of pleasure that keeps the user hooked on the smartphone. It is of little importance whether notifications are active or muted. If active, the user has the feeling of pleasure when the smartphone lights up, vibrates or beeps indicating that someone has liked or commented on the post. If mute, the user will always be tempted to open the application to check how many people have interacted with the post. Social networks exploit the brain's ability to generate sudden bursts of pleasure to keep users attached to their phones and spend as much time as possible on social platforms. Therefore, the smartphone continues to attract people, and it is very difficult not to look at the screen for more than ten minutes, and to use the phone in moments of boredom. For some time, Instagram decided to hide the like counter on its platform. The reaction of users to this decision was positive, thinking that the platform was trying to do something to reduce the addiction levels, but this was not the case. Instagram's decision to hide the likes, leaving them visible only to the user who posted the post, was not about freeing users from addiction, but the opposite. The aim was to encourage users to post more. Without the fear of being judged for a few likes, not meeting expectations, and appearing lame, users felt free to post more. Through this tactic, Instagram was able to achieve two goals at once: on the one hand, it removed one of the main obstacles to the carefree posting of content (being judged negatively for a few likes); on the other, it ensured that dopamine, the most powerful tool available to social networks, continued to do its job[57].

[57]h ttps://www.wired.it/attualita/tech/2020/09/24/social-dilemma-dopamina-effetto-smartphone-cervello/

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: According to research by the University of Chicago, relationships formed online tend to be solid, even more so than relationships formed in real life. The reason is thought to be that before meeting in person, people have the opportunity to understand each other's tastes, ideas, opinions and passions and discover any common interests[58].

After the analysis of the effects of social media on the human brain, this paragraph aims to understand consumption is influenced by social platforms. Five phenomena can be observed, which often also overlap.

The first phenomenon is discovery: through social platforms, consumers discover their friends' consumption tastes and preferences. Users are curious about their friends' preferences because they are often similar to their own. Through their friends' posts, users can learn about products and services they did not know about before and be encouraged to buy[59].

Evaluation is the second phenomenon. In addition to discovering new products, consumers are looking for personalised suggestions. Social media store users' tastes to propose in the future products that may be in their interest, providing ratings and rankings of the product concerned[60]. One example is Facebook, which features instant personalisation. This service allows users of the social network to go to some popular review sites in various fields (music, cinema, travel, gastronomy, entertainment) and find ratings of their Facebook friends at the top of the list. Companies have also realised the great power of social media and how they can increase their sales through these platforms. One example is Levi's, which already in 2010 integrated its online site with Facebook. Customers could see which products their friends had given their preference to.

Feedback: through social media, consumers receive opinions and advice from their friends on what to buy, with feedback from friends being the most popular. According to Edison Research, 31% of Twitter users ask their followers for their opinions on products and services daily. Another site that is popular with users is Yahoo! Answers, where consumer questions are becoming increasingly frequent.

[58] Ibidem
[59] https://www.webandfood.it/come-i-social-network-influenzano-le-nostre-abitudini-di-consumo/
[60] Ibidem

Sharing the purchase: JWT Intelligence's survey[61] states that 83% of consumers who got a good deal on a product through sites such as Groupon, subsequently tend to refer it to their friends. In recent years, group buying sites such as Groupon have seen strong growth, and this is also due to word of mouth. Once satisfied with their purchase, users would tell their friends about it, and they in turn would buy and recommend the site to other friends. Buying has increasingly become a collective experience even if consumers do not know each other and buy from different places. Users exploit the potential of the web to benefit from advantageous offers, understanding and comparing products, these are the phenomena that determine social networks as tools capable of revolutionising consumer habits.

Customisation: Consumer feedback is a valuable resource for companies. By collecting the information and feedback that consumers provide on products, companies have the opportunity to adapt or create new products and services that are personalised to the needs of the consumer. The dissemination of these new personalised products and services takes place directly on social platforms or via email. The benefits for companies are a strong increase in sales while for the user the frequency and volume of proposals received become unsustainable, risking the opposite effect for companies.

[61] Ibidem

CHAPTER III

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE FOOD CONSUMPTION

3.1 Social media influence food consumption

In the previous paragraph, the data showed that more and more companies in the food sector are using social media for communication and marketing. In this context, users also play an important role. Many users are influenced by the fashion of photographing their meals and posting them on social profiles. They capture it from above, from a particular angle, they focus on a colour or an ingredient, or they study the context of the dish and the type, whether it is a sandwich, a dessert, or a course. Users do everything they can to make the food stand out and look inviting. No user has not shared at least once a photo of food or product, sweet or savoury, and the use of one of the most famous hashtags: #foodporn. This hashtag is a favourite among users to best convey the idea of how good the product is; in fact, it has been used in photos over 114 million times[62]. Nowadays, users photograph and post all kinds of dishes, from traditional to innovative, from fast food to starred restaurants. Every photo that is considered 'Instagrammable' is posted and shared with friends on social media. However, some foods are more Instagrammable than others such as mango, avocado, blueberries, matcha recipes. Their reputation as health foods plays an important role in explaining the boom in consumption of these products. Many personal trainers and fitness specialists encourage the consumption of these foods as they are rich in vitamins and minerals, such as blueberries and matcha powder which contain a lot of antioxidants or avocado rich in monounsaturates. But the boom in consumption of these foods is mainly due to the fact that they are Instagram friendly, a photo containing products such as blueberries or matcha powder can get more likes than a photo of a plate of pasta. Photos of food trigger feelings, sensations or emotions in users that encourage them to post and share content on the web. Images are an integral part of the advertising story, not only reinforcing the message but also reminding of communication post, which is expressed through social platforms.

[62] Bocconi food blog: L'influenza dei social media nel settore food https://bocconifoodblog.wordpress.com/2018/08/12/linfluenza-dei-social-media-nel-settore-food/

The question of social media influencing consumption can be answered with a yes, social media can influence food choices. In her new book "New models of food consumption" Anna Zinola explains that consumer choices depend on many factors and the weight the consumer gives to each variable. Zinola says that social media have a strong impact in the kitchen at different levels. They can influence consumers' purchasing choices, for example before trying a new product people consult forums/blogs to get reviews from those who have bought it previously. Social platforms influence the way a dish is prepared. To find out information about recipes, ingredients, measurement, cooking methods, etc., consumers no longer consult recipe books but look up the specifications on social pages, so the platforms influence the way food is presented, they follow the directions of photos on Instagram or Facebook. Once upon a time, when consumers were looking for a new restaurant to try out, they would ask their friends for advice; today they look at TripAdvisor to try out a new restaurant (Zinola, 2019). Nowadays the vision and perception of food is different, it is experienced and interpreted in a new way. Social media have almost radically revolutionised the way consumers look at and consider food, and their way of approaching both food and cooking has changed. A new food trend has emerged, dictated in particular by social networks.

3.2 How social media influence food consumption

Food production and consumption account for one-third of the world's total household environmental impact. Consumers have a key role to play, they are the key players that enable the transition from the current diet to a sustainable diet with a lower environmental impact. What are the factors that influence what consumers eat? One of the factors is the social environment. There is evidence that the use of social media can change the way consumers search for and select food products to buy. Social media, in particular social networks, are becoming important sources of information and media, including on food (Zhang et al., 2019). Social platforms are also used to obtain recipes, increase food choices, and in some cases mash up the consumer in confusion. The consumer has doubts about what the correct food choices are. Nowadays it is difficult, if not impossible, to get on a social platform, scroll through feeds or stories and not see photos or videos of food, recipes, or friends or family sharing what they have cooked, eaten, or are going to eat. Sharing their meals is what Italians like to do most on social networks. A Doxa survey states that 70% of Italians usually post photos of the food they eat. The tendency to post what you eat is most widespread among young people (13-32 years old), it is not important if the dishes shared are desserts, pizzas, sushi, or pasta dishes, the important thing is to share them and that it is appetizing. The pleasure of portraying a dish you are about to eat outweighs the pleasure of eating it. Sharing dishes is a key part of corporate marketing. Restaurants, pizzerias, food companies, and food bloggers are among the most active in the industry. This is because images are a powerful tool for attracting consumer attention. A simple image requires a low degree of concentration but can influence the user's food choice. Nowadays, food educators must consider this element. The unbridled desire to share the food the consumer eats can also have a positive utility. The study conducted by researchers from the psychology department at Aston University (Birmingham), shows how seeing what our friends or followers eat also influences our food choices. Circulating messages about healthy food on social platforms can increase adherence to a more varied and balanced diet and improve people's food choices.

The research published in the scientific journal Appetite analysed a sample of 369 university students and how their eating habits were somehow influenced by the food consumption posted by their friends (Hawkins, et al., 2020). The analysis focused mainly on the consumption of fruit, vegetables, and energy-dense snacks. The students were asked to observe how many of their Facebook contacts posted pictures or videos of them eating these products (fruit, vegetables, and snacks) and then to record their food consumption as well. The researchers then cross-referenced the data collected to see how the impact of information received via social networks influences the food choices of university students. Analysis of the data showed that there was a correlation between the perception of the food choices of Facebook friends and the eating habits of the study participants. Those who thought their friends had a healthier diet followed this trend by increasing their consumption of fruit and vegetables and reducing sugary foods, while those who thought their friends had a diet based more on junk food increased (but to a lesser extent) their consumption of snacks and high-calorie products.

Hawkins, co-author of the research says that these findings should not only make users pay more attention to what they consume, but they should also consider what they post and how their posts may influence the consumption of others. Social media influence (even implicitly) the eating habits of members of online social networks more than people think. Therefore, users should think more about the photos of the food they post online and how these photos can influence food choices, especially of younger people. Prefer posting healthy and balanced dishes rather than posting the slice of cake or other unhealthy products. Posting the nice dish of udon with vegetables could be a good way to stay in line and positively influence the consumption of one's online friends.

Teenagers are the most likely to be influenced by content on social media, and there is a biological reason for this. The brain development of the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for holding back impulsive choices, is fully developed by the age of 20. Before that time, teenagers tend to follow and imitate others in their food choices, which makes them more likely to be influenced. Dogliotti states that adolescents and young adults are also easily influenced by diet. Through social platforms, sportsmen or successful actors can become spokespeople for certain dietary behaviours or healthy lifestyles. By following their profiles, young people are encouraged to adopt their lifestyles and eating habits[63]. As far as adults are concerned, the situation is slightly different, their habits are more difficult to change as they are consolidated over time. However, the authoritativeness of the person spreading the message and the information is a key point for changing their consumption or adopting new eating patterns. Information has a different value depending on the source.

The huge amount of information available can be confusing or cause consumers to lose confidence in social media. Thus, they turn online discussions, online community, and consumer associations for food advice (Sturiale and Scuderi, 2013). It is interesting to understand how exposure to food online affects eating habits. Another factor, which through social media is becoming increasingly important is the environment. Consumers care more about sustainability and prefer to adopt responsible and sustainable consumption behaviour. Moreover, the Internet has changed the definition of word of mouth, which is no longer limited to face-to-face contact, but nowadays users obtain information and share experiences through the Internet. (Ho and Chien, 2010), argue that there is a dependency relationship between information received through online word of mouth and consumer behaviour. It turns out that the level of trust consumers have in food blogs can influence their food consumption behaviour. As such, companies promote their products using the Internet and

[63] Fondazione Umberto Veronesi Il ruolo dei social network nei percorsi di educazione alimentare

connect with customers through brand communities, social media, forums, websites, blogs, and online gaming sites (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

3.2.1 Sustainable consumption: How does social media affect food choices? Benevento case

The scientific article "Sustainable consumption: How does social media affect food choices?" by Simeone and Scarpato aims to understand the characteristics of consumers who wish to stay informed on social media. The study considers a sample of 162 people, who live in the municipality of Benevento in Campania (Italy). The city of Benevento is taken into consideration because it is among the first ones for social media use and diffusion, it is a city that pays attention to culture, and it is populated by a lot of young university students. The collected data were processed using a probit model, thus managing to identify what are the variables within social media that influence consumers' food choices. Social networks tend to homogenise consumption, do not promote sustainable consumer knowledge, and thus lead consumers to engage in unsustainable eating behaviour. In addition, social media tend to contribute to behaviour consumption that impoverishes the environment. Consumers receive a lot of information about the quality and characteristics of the food product, but little information about its environmental impact and sustainability. Adopting sustainable food consumption involves complex choices but is a crucial aspect of sustainable development. Vermeir and Verbeke, suggest that sustainable food consumption can be stimulated through consumer involvement, improving the perceived effectiveness of sustainable products, and increasing social pressure (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006). Social networks have become important sources of information and a means of communication about food for consumers (Arnold, 2019; Fleming-Milici and Harris, 2020). The possibility of having more information about the sustainability of products incentivizes consumers to consume more of them. An example is what happened in Belgium, a TV programme shared via Twitter and Facebook profiles messages about health and analysed the interest of the users. The results showed that information on health and production is characterised by low acceptance, generated numerous reactions, and even provoked contradiction. The increasing environmental concerns require a shift of the consumer’s culture towards a better understanding of sustainability in food production and sustainable consumption. The introduction of a sustainability label or guideline can help consumers make more environmentally friendly food choices (Lazzarini, 2018). Furthermore, it is important to know that consumers are more likely to trust individuals who belong to their social groups. Food companies also play an important role in informing consumers about social issues such as health and sustainability. Online communication between the company and the consumer is an excellent strategy to build trust with the consumer and at the same time provide all the necessary information. Companies can use online word of mouth to promote their products create awareness about them and at the same time stimulate discussions with and among consumers. If a company does not meet certain criteria, consumers can use social media and word of mouth to organise protests, raise awareness among other consumers and encourage the company to adopt fair and responsible behaviour.

The survey conducted in Benevento (Italy) focuses on consumers responsible for food purchases and how their food consumption is influenced by social media. There are five main reasons why Benevento was considered: the city is very touristic, it has a rural tradition, it is an important city from the point of view of art, it has a strong cultural identity, there is a large flow of university students, which help to develop human and social capital. A further factor to consider is that in the Campania region there is the highest number of Facebook subscribers and in the province of Benevento the use of social networks is widespread, as demonstrated in times of emergency. Solidarity campaigns were promoted through social media to restore the problems caused by the 2015 floods. Social networks have become a platform where users can respond to the communication and relational needs of others in moment of crisis. The sample consisted of 162 respondents, with a questionnaire of 41 multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire is composed of four blocks, each with one point to be analysed:

1) Spending and consumption habits, consumer preferences for local and fresh products, and focus on the consumption of organic products.

(2) Dietary habits, in particular consumer preferences for animal proteins derived from meat, legumes, and dairy products, as well as specific knowledge of certain foods and the type of fish consumed.

(3) Knowledge and concern about sustainable consumption, investigating whether consumers were aware of the environmental effects of meat production, focusing also on food waste and the purchase of 0 km and seasonal products.

(4) The way consumers found the information.

Respondents were also asked about general data regarding age, gender, level of education and area of residence. Consumers were asked how they obtain information about the products they consume, their characteristics and whether they use social networks to find information about new products or products already consumed.

Russo and Simeone in their final thesis state that social consumers are exposed to more information due to the huge volume of sources on the internet. However, such information is often less reliable than information from traditional mass media because anyone can post on social networks without careful control. The user posting the content may not be a reliable source, so it is important to check the reliability of the source to see if the news is true or fake. Consumers feel more informed about the quality of food and its characteristics but lack accurate information.

The results of the study revealed the presence of some variables that are positively influenced by information on social media and other variables that are negatively influenced:

- The consumption variable of local fish is negatively influenced by social media. Consumers with information from social platforms prefer the consumption of better-known fish species over local fish. Thus, there is a reduction in the consumption of local fish species and an increase in the consumption of known fish, generating an impoverishment from the point of view of the sustainability of the latter (Simeone and Scarpato, 2014). This is an example of how social media influence the consumer to adopt mass consumption, losing local culinary customs and traditions. The problem of sustainability exists in the fact that the more a species is consumed the more it is depleted while local species being unknown are not consumed and therefore remain unsold.
- The variable of food reviews is positively influenced by social media. Consumers read reviews and gather information about food products via social platforms. In this way they get to know other consumers who have the same food interests, a relationship is

established based on the exchange of ideas and information with people who are geographically far apart. The relationships created enable the acquisition of new knowledge but at the same time, there is a gradual loss of local culinary traditions.

- The variable reading online magazines is positively influenced by social media. Consumers keep themselves informed by reading online magazines on social platforms, thus also determining the quality of information.
- Social media negatively influence the consumption variable of organic products. Nowadays, consumers pay more attention to the way products are produced, to the effects on the environment and human life of traditional farming practices, and they do not turn to social networks but to niche, channels to find the necessary information. The organic consumer is critical, aware, and attentive to consumer choices, and seeks information on specialised channels.
- The purchase of local products is positively influenced by social media. Companies selling zero-mile products turn to social media to publicise their products and platforms disseminate information about local products and try to attract new consumers.

As can be deduced from the research data, social media tend to homogenise consumption, leading consumers further away from sustainability awareness. The only variable to this process of mass homogenisation concerns the variable of 0 km consumption. Through social media, consumers have at their disposal a huge volume of information, but this may be of low quality and untrue. The scarcity of information on sustainability issues limits companies' opportunities to identify strategies to increase and support eco-innovation and consumer motivation. Social networks allow companies to establish a conversation with their consumers and show the company's vision on different topics such as sustainability, equity etc. The consumer knowing the company's vision and deciding to buy their product sends the message that they endorse those same values, the simple act of buying the product can be transformed into a social statement. The research also found that consumers who do not have any social profiles tend to have less open communication behaviour, compared to consumers who have at least one social profile (Stephen, 2016).

3.3 Online community

Community is a term of Latin origin, derived from communis "performing his task (minus) together with (cum) others" and in the Italian language been used since the 13th century. The word refers to a community, a group of people who are linked by the same interests and discuss these interests, exchange experiences and opinions. An early example of a community in history might be our great-grandmothers who met daily in their courtyards to chat among themselves while sewing or arranging the vegetables they had gathered in the garden. Now, to be part of the community, you no longer look out of the window but open any social platform, the community develops in a virtual context. Consumers increasingly tend to form communities to seek suggestions, advice and opinions on the preparation and consumption of products. Veganizzami Questo is an example of an online community (Facebook), the page has over 18,000 members. Participants exchange and ask for information on aspects of being vegan, exchange recipes, advice, generating a set of conversations. During the conversations, consumers mention different brands, expressing their experiences and opinions on certain products. Within the group, each member is free to post photos of the recipes they have prepared, showing the result and which products were used in the preparation, with the respective brand. When it comes to photos and food, the first social network that comes to mind is Instagram. The behaviour of consumers to post pictures with their plate generates a flow of likes and comments which is, for consumers, a form of expression of their opinion. The communities that are created on Instagram, Facebook arise from the need of consumers to create a group where they can find support and advice to their needs, where members are united by the passion and interest for certain products (example vegan products), which drives them to create a bond. The information shared in the group, where brands of products or services that have nothing to do with the group can be named, is spread through the links created by the members. The opinions and advice of some members are so important that they have the power to influence the opinions and ideas of other group members.

To better express the concept of an online community, its characteristics are indicated:

- Community is based on the presence of ties between people who are members of the same social network (Kane et al., 2013). The ties established within social media are digital and are evaluated in terms of degree, i.e., the number of ties a member has, which, in turn, determines the degree of intimacy of the tie; symmetry, i.e., the reciprocity of the tie, how users interact with each other; strength, i.e. the depth with which network members interact; and, finally, affection, the fact that two members like each other or not. The bonds created through social networks can be of four types:

1. Flow refers to the tangible and intangible material that passes from one user to another as they interact within the community.
2. Relationship is the bond that reflects the social connections created between the various members.
3. Interaction is a relational event, its probability increases due to relationships and vice versa, relationships increase due to interactions.
4. Proximity refers to shared physical and social space, where ties can be created or strengthened.

- The community gives its members a sense of belonging and a feeling of closeness because the various members share the same passions and interests. The people in the community reflect the principles of the community and try to carry these values outside the community.

- The existence of communities is based on conversations; without conversations, communities would have no sense of existence. When the community is no longer able to generate a flow of conversations, members lose interest and gradually become less and less active until they decide to leave. Participation in the group is essential, as communication is fuelled by participation. However, the 80/20 rule applies, i.e. it is believed that within the community only a small group of individuals (about 20%) generate and participate in conversations while the remaining 80% of members are passive subjects, reading conversations but not participating in them.

- The more users are participating, i.e. active in the group, the better the online community works. This happens because members create links, feel part of something and this encourages them to participate and contribute their experiences to the group discussions.

- Online communities adopt a democratic political model. Each community also has leaders, who emerge through their authority in the field and through the reputation they earn. The members of the group, therefore, elect/appoint those who are the leaders based on their demonstrated ability to add value to the community.

- Online communities are generally governed by rules, which may be implicit or explicit, to keep the group calm. When a social profile is created, the platforms require users to sign the terms and conditions for the use of the application; this contract serves to inform the user of the rules to be observed to become part of the community. Often there are also moderators within online communities, users whose purpose is to control the contents of posts in advance or afterwards. The aim is to limit misbehaviour and to ensure that the content published is in line with the values of the group. There are also free-access platforms, where controlling the behaviour of various users is more difficult and where there is more transgression.

3.3.1 Formal analysis of the online community

The online community is one of the six classes that make up social media and can therefore be analysed through social network theory. The network is the constitutive meaning of social network theory (Kane et al., 2013). The social network is made up of a set of nodes that go to represent users which can be organisations or individuals. Within the network, reciprocal behavioural ties are formed between the various nodes, these ties can be ties of friendship, kinship or simple acquaintance, and the pivotal point in conversations or meetings. The participation of the subjects is fundamental. Each node assumes a role in the social relationship and gives rise to interactions with other members of the network. As previously mentioned, conversations give rise to exchanges of resources, in the form of flows of information that pass from the network of one node to another. In the exchange of information, a reciprocal influence can occur between the entities that make up the network. Another factor to be taken into account is that the information flows exchanged within communities are multidirectional, cross-platform, and take place immediately and at any time. The relationship created between the various nodes can be represented using lines and forms a complex structure where each node plays a specific role. This role goes to determine what are the opportunities and limitations that the node encounters in the network (Kane et al., 2013). To outline the particular characteristics of the social networks that form on social media Kane et al. (2013) proposes the use of Borgatti and Foster's framework (2003), here the value of the social network is defined about the mechanisms that govern it or in terms of the goals it pursues. There are two interpretations, in the first interpretation, the value of the network is explained in terms of user or platform, while in the second interpretation the value of the network depends on its content or structure. The value of the social network may depend on the content that is transmitted within it or on the structure of the network itself and also on the ability to be able to control or reach a certain volume of resources or content. The term 'content' refers to the resources available within the network and when these are exchanged, an infinite number of relationships called 'social capital' are created. Within social platforms, the content available is digital and can be directly created by users, who make their knowledge and information available to other members. Since it is digital content, it can be present at the same time in different places, and more than one user can simultaneously use, copy and distribute it at will. On the other hand, determining the value of the social network based on the structure it takes on means considering the architecture of the network paths, made up of the nodes and the network structures, by the links between them. The objectives of the social network are to ensure homogeneity and performance of the network members. Social homogeneity concerns how the network can influence the nodes within it or in a particular position. On the other hand, the performance of network members means describing why and how certain nodes in the network behave differently according to the position they occupy. The personal characteristics of the node, in this case, influence its motivation to assume a certain position in the network or to shape the network to achieve its goals.

3.3.2 How online community works

In online social networks, information is disseminated through the messages posted by the user. This information can become a topic of conversation, i.e., a coherent set of terms semantically linked and express a precise idea (Guille et al., 2013). The content produced by users is made up of a set of messages, which flow within the network because individuals decide to share it. One user's choice to share that information also drives other users to share it, continuing the dissemination of the information. This phenomenon is called 'social influence', i.e., adopting a certain behaviour only because other users have previously adopted it and influencing subsequent connections. In the concept of social influence, the individual tends to imitate other users, posting the same information, which then spreads throughout the network, a mechanism similar to that of contagious. In a social network, information is contained within a message, which spreads along the lines of the network according to particular mechanisms. The way of dissemination depends on the specific properties of the nodes and lines of the social network. The dissemination of information occurs due to the mechanisms of social influence, which drive the masses to disseminate information according to a waterfall model (Guille et al., 2013). The term mass behaviour indicates a behaviour that is adopted by a large number of people, all individuals performing the same action, i.e., dissemination of the same information, also driven by their beliefs. On the other hand, the waterfall model consists of the dissemination of information by individuals who, despite being unaware of their ideas about that information, decide to post it anyway because it has already been posted by many other network users. The activation sequence represents an ordered set of network nodes that adopt information. Therefore, the information dissemination process is described by considering whether the node activates when it receives the information. The node activates if it decides to disseminate it, based on its ideas, beliefs, or social influence, otherwise, it remains switched off. In this way, the dissemination process is seen as an activation of nodes populating the network (Guille et al., 2013).

To better understand how information is disseminated within social networks, different models are adopted. Most models are based on the assumption of a closed world, assuming that information is only transferred between nodes belonging to the same social network, moving through the lines connecting the nodes and without any external interference. However, recent studies have shown that this theory cannot be considered valid; nodes are subject to undergo both internal influences within the social network and external influences as well. There are also networks where contagion is cooperative, i.e., one social network helps another social network to disseminate information (Guille et al., 2013). The information dissemination process in the online community also depends on the type of ties created between nodes. Strong ties represent relationships where the two nodes have a very close relationship such as between two best friends or family members, while weak ties are fewer close ties such as an acquaintance between the nodes. Observing the world of work, Granovetter developed the theory of weak ties. It has been observed that individuals are more likely to find a job because they are helped by people with whom they have a weak social link than because they are helped by their family members or close friends. The same is true for the diffusion of information and ideas in the online community, weak ties are the main actors that allow the diffusion of information between nodes. Link strength is measured in terms of frequency of contact, duration of interaction, amount of effort invested in the relationship and existing level of intimacy of the relationship. It is quite intuitive that weak ties are social relationships that require little investment in terms of time, effort, and intimacy; they are ties that are established between acquaintances or other individuals with whom one has weak connections, characterised by little contact and brief interactions (Liu et al., 2017). The flow of information in weak links is done through bridging links. These are social links that connect two nodes or a group of nodes to the network, without which this link would have no way of making contact.

Weak ties are more likely than strong ties to acting as bridges between groups of nodes, because they are located at the periphery of the network, thus having the ability to reach groups of nodes that would otherwise not be connected at all. The ability of weak links to act as a bridge between groups of nodes is referred to as 'weak link strength' and refers to the ability of weak links to reach wider-ranging and potentially more heterogeneous sources of information (Liu et al., 2017). Analysing the information diffusion process, it has been noted that there are three mechanisms through which platform users can share information on social networking sites:

- Link sharing, the user shares the link on the social platform and then a link user seeing the link decides to share it in turn.
- Users who are connected visit the same web page and both decide to share the link on the social platform, but in this case, the two operations are independent of each other.
- User shares the same link on several social platforms, making the information reach more people and prompting some links to share the link on the platform.

Bakshy et al.'s (2012) various studies on weak ties have led to the following realisation: when two subjects have a weak tie, they have few social contacts in common and this allows both to have access to a greater variety of information. In the case of strong ties, both have a large number of common contacts and thus have access to most of mainly the same information, reducing the variety of it. Strong ties are characterised by homophily, i.e., they would have more similar and aligned interests, and, therefore, would tend to interact more with each other. The interaction between the two nodes would be greater and on one hand, it would increase the probability that the two subjects could influence each other, but on the other hand, the amount of information would be less because many contacts in common mean similar sources of information. For this reason, the presence of a weak link increases the possibility of encountering new information from different networks, unlike the strong link.

3.3.3 The influence of opinion leaders in online communities

In communities, some nodes have the power to influence the behaviour, habits and opinions of other users, and these nodes are commonly called opinion leaders. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) are the first scholars to propose a definition of opinion leaders. They believe that opinion leaders are individuals who transmit and disseminate a message to a large group of people, the message is transmitted by the mass media to their network. However, the definitions attributed to opinion leaders are numerous, according to Weimann (1994) opinion leader is the person who can spread information and give advice, establishing a conversation with other users to allow the exchange of ideas. Rogers (1995) considers opinion leaders as individuals capable of informally influencing users, with a certain frequency and in the direction, they want, prompting users to adopt certain behaviour and attitude. In the online community, the opinion leader is the individual who most successfully influences other users, encouraging communication and social interaction. Users influenced by the opinion leader's ideas and behaviour are called followers, and their opinion around a topic depends on the opinion of the opinion leader. One last definition of opinion leader is proposed by Burt (1999), according to whom opinion leaders are the guardians of information, and community members actively seek opinions and advice and therefore rely on opinion leaders. Having all this power within the online community, the opinion leader can be used as an agent for change. The concept of opinion leadership has the potential to be applied in all fields, from the field of public health to consumer behaviour, the opinion leader plays a key role in the dissemination of information (Lam and Schaubroeck, 2001).

In order to fully understand how an opinion leader manages to influence the opinions and behaviour of consumers in general, but particularly about the context of the online community, it is necessary to first understand what the defining characteristics of an opinion leader are. Their ability to influence other users depends on several attributes, linked to the context of the communication and the characteristics of the individual. The main characteristics are:

- The opinion leaders are experts on the subject matter. They have the knowledge, technical skills and professionalism that enables them to express their judgement, opinion or give their assessment on the subject, on which them classify themself as experts.
- The opinion leaders have a significantly greater knowledge of the subject matter than other individuals. This wealth of knowledge does not only depend on direct experience with the subject matter but also a careful process of evaluation, selection and synthesis of information.
- The degree of social activity of the opinion leaders is high, allowing them to get to know and exchange views with other experts in their field.
- The opinion leader may hold a recognised position of social leadership even outside them community. Their status and level of education are slightly higher than in the group of people they influence, although this difference does not make them belong to a higher social class.
- Opinion leaders are also characterised by a certain level of homophily. There is a certain similarity due to beliefs, social status or education that brings the opinion leader closer to the people he or she influences. it is this state of closeness that allows the opinion leader to have a position of influence.

Its ability to influence other users depends on the relationship that is established with them, the degree of trust that is created depends on the characteristics of the relationship. The relationship of trust is directly proportional to the ability of influencing the node. The closer and stronger the relationship, the more the opinion leader will have the power to influence users, this correlation is valid both at the social network and community level. It is necessary to consider the fact that users tend to be more active in their community than in others, causing more influential nodes to existing at the circumscribed community level than the social network as a whole (Asim et al., 2019). As previously mentioned, the relationship of trust that is created between the opinion leaders and the users influences them ability of influencing the nodes, which is why trust can be direct or indirect. Direct trust is based on the opinion leader's characteristics, his reputation, the relationship he has established with users and the frequency with which he communicates with them. Indirect trust, on the other hand, is assessed based on the opinion leader's communication activity and the users' response to this activity. To better understand the concept, taking Facebook as an example, direct trust is based on the content that the user shows on their profile, while indirect trust is assessed on the activity of participation in conversations, for instance, the conversations conducted in Facebook groups. Just as opinion leaders possess certain characteristics to be defined as such, so does trust. The

Trust is relational because it depends on collaboration and communication over time between two people. As two users interact, mutual exchanges take place and the relationship tends to strengthen, leading to an increase in trust. Trust is an emotional feeling; when a person trusts another person, he or she feels comfortable in relying on him or her. The feeling of trust experienced motivates them to continue the relationship. Trust is participative, this characteristic is based on the volume of conversations in which the user participates in the group. One last characteristic of credibility is that can be conversational, thus determining the frequency of communication between the two users. Trust can be of two types: bonding or reputation. The former is when a person relies totally on another person with whom they have a close relationship, the latter is due to all the positive interactions they have had with the person. Trust is a very subjective feeling it is created on the evaluations, thoughts, and opinions that an individual has towards another, it is not the same with everyone but chance depending on who people consider. A further characteristic is that the feeling is asymmetrical, subject A has full trust in subject B but it is not certain that subject B also has full trust in subject A. The same reasoning can be applied to the transitivity factor, if A trusts B and B trusts C it is not certain that A automatically trusts C. In addition, a sense of trust may also exist concerning a subject with whom one does not have a direct relationship (compositional factor). The factors that influence the sense of trust are the strength of the bond between the two subjects, their degree of closeness, the similarity of characteristics and interests (Asim et al., 2019). These aspects allow the opinion leader to establish such a deep relationship with other users.

In addition to trust, another important factor for opinion leaders is credibility. The credibility of a subject is defined as the trustworthiness gained over time regarding the issues contained in the information they are currently conveying (Lam and Shaubroeck, 2001). If the information comes from a credible source, its degree of influence is high, whereas if the information comes from an unreliable source, its degree of influence is also almost non-existent. The credibility of the source derives from its experience with the topic of information, and how relevant the topic is in general and on the lives of users. The credibility of a person alone is not enough to qualify him as an opinion leader. The opinion leader is not only defined based on personal characteristics, background, charisma, and competence, but also concerning the position he or she assumes within the community. The opinion leader must assume a strategic position that allows him/her to exert influence on other users and have a role that allows him/her an adequate level of centrality. There are three measures of centrality, to be able to identify the position of advantage that opinion leaders occupy (Liu et al., 2017):

1. Rank: measures the number of connections the opinion leader has in the network, the more connections has the greater the chance of receiving information to disseminate.
2. Proximity: indicates the average distance between a node and other nodes in the network. An increase in proximity makes it easier for the opinion leader to reach other nodes with information.
3. Capacity to be in the middle relates to the frequency with which a node is on the shortest arc connecting two nodes and is important because if an individual is in the middle of two other individuals it is more likely to represent a bridging link in the network, i.e. a node connecting otherwise disconnected groups;

Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet theorise the model to explain the functioning of the opinion leader's influence mechanism. The model is called a two-stage model, in the first stage the mass media influence opinion leaders who then in turn exert an influence on the social contacts they have created. The two-stage communication model highlights how a small

group of influencers manages to spread the information in the social network with the ability to influence the opinions of the reached subjects. It is precisely the influential subjects who drive the process, continuing to transmit and disseminate the information, thus exerting a strong effect on an ever-larger group of nodes. The transmission of information plays an important role in the ability to influence the known through the concept of structural equivalence. Structural equivalence indicates a situation in which two or more positions in the network share a similar set of connections and characteristics such as social status, education, etc. Since the known equivalents are connected to similar nodes, the probability that they will receive similar information is high, so they are influenced by the strengthening of the argumentation contained in the information.

3.3.4 How opinion leaders influence consumer

The influence of opinion leaders is used in many areas, from politics to public health, we are seeing this especially now with the pandemic we are facing. However, in this thesis, it is important to understand how opinion leadership acts on the consumer, particularly the food consumer. Scholar Meng proposes an analysis of the opinion leader's influence on the consumer's purchase intention. In order to understand the role of the opinion leader in the purchasing process, a research model based on functional and emotional value is considered. These are the values perceived by the consumer in the purchasing process, that determine trust in the information received. Product information in turn has a consequence on the intention to buy. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the trust a consumer has in the opinion leader depends on professional knowledge, involvement in the product, level of interaction and reputation, but also on the credibility and quality of the information, which must be conveyed promptly and coherently. The information that the opinion leader provides, and its characteristics are directly linked to the purchase intention, but these factors, in turn, depend on the degree of homogeneity that the consumer perceives towards the opinion leader. Meng (2016) through the administration of questionnaires, found that the opinion leader's fame does not have a significant impact on the trust of their recommendations, while professional knowledge, involvement in the product and level of interaction does. The opinion leader's reputation does not play an important role in the trust relationship, whereas involvement in the product appears to be a key factor, exerting a significant influence on both the purchase intention and the advice given by the opinion leader. The correlation between trust in the opinion leader's information and involvement with the purchase intention is weak but significant. This occurs because the consumer does not interact directly with the opinion leader but prefers to observe their conversations with other consumers. Consumers tend to think that the advice the opinion leader gives to others can also be used for their decision-making process, even though it is addressed to third parties, thus also increasing trust in the opinion leader. The reputation of the opinion leader is not important, but why? Nowadays, users have access to information disseminated by opinion leaders through social platforms, which are accessible to everyone, whereas once upon a time opinion leaders disseminated knowledge through the mass media. The use of mass media was not allowed to everyone and therefore opinion leaders were seen as celebrities and used this celebrity status to influence consumers. Nowadays, opinion leaders are seen as ordinary people who can influence others by disseminating high-quality information (Meng, 2016).

A study for the analysis of opinion leadership was conducted on the Instagram platform, in particular, the research focuses on the factors for which a subject is perceived as a leader and the influence that these subjects exert on consumer behaviour Casaló et al. (2018). The data of the study highlight how the perception of originality and uniqueness of content, posted on one's profile, contribute to considering a user as an opinion leader. Opinion leaders manage to influence some consumer behaviours, for example, they induce the user to interact with their profile, follow the advice given by the opinion leader during the purchasing process, promote the opinion leader's profile with other consumers. If the personality and interests of the opinion leader coincide with the consumer, their influence will be greater. Another important aspect is originality, which is defined as the ability to act in a new way and to differentiate oneself from other links of a user. Original actions are perceived as innovative and surprising, arousing interest and attention from the observer. Opinion leaders stand out within the group because they pay attention to everything new and unconventional, stimulating users to follow new trends. For this reason, if the content posted by a user qualifies as original, it will attract the attention of his followers, allowing him to be considered an opinion leader. The concept of uniqueness tends to be like the originality, i.e., higher is the perception that the opinion leader's content is special, different and specifically related to the user, higher will be the interest it will generate. The concept of uniqueness is used to distinguish those who can be considered opinion leaders and those who cannot. As repeatedly stated, the opinion leader exerts an influence on the behavioural intentions of the consumer. Users show an intention to interact with individuals, who will be opinion leaders, who understand a certain topic well and about whom they have a lot of information. Furthermore, the fact that opinion leaders display high levels of knowledge and expertise on a specific topic allows them to be recommended by the consumer to other users who have the same interests and needs. The followers of opinion leaders are always updated with credible, and relevant information to their disposal, and these characteristics lead them to follow the advice of the opinion leader in the buying process. In opinion leadership, the similarity aspect between users is of considerable importance. The study by Casaló et al. (2018), highlights precisely how the perception of equality between the opinion leader's behaviour, actions and thoughts and the interests and needs of his or her followers reinforces the influence that opinion leaders can exert on the intention to follow the opinion leader's advice. The consumer follows the advice of someone who has similar interests, characteristics and needs to his own because he represents the ideal to aspire to and in this way, the psychological distance between him and the owner of the profile is also reduced.

3.3.5 Food influencer

Before explaining what, the term food influencer refers to, a distinction must be made between the concept of influencers and opinion leaders. The term influencer refers to famous people who are in vogue at the time and who get likes and approval on social media. The figure of the influencer has always existed, albeit under different names and forms. The meaning, as the word itself reminds us, is a person able to influence the opinion of the opinion of other person, thanks to his/her large following. The influencer's large following is made up of all the users (followers) who follow them on social media. They are hired by companies to publicise and sponsor their products and services. Sponsorship is done by spreading promotional messages on behalf of the companies that have hired them, in exchange for a generous fee. One of the fundamental characteristics that influencers must have been the ability to communicate, to be able to interact with their audience. Influencers are divided into micro-and macro-influencers. Micro-influencers are individuals with less than 10k followers and therefore refer to a small group of people. Micro-influencers are less expensive, but their messages can have a greater impact because they target a niche. Macro-influencers target a wider audience and therefore receive higher fees. In more practical terms, the job of the influencer is to produce written content, videos, photos or any kind of content, which is the result of their creativity. In most cases their fan base is formed and grows also because they choose to interact via chat, posts, and tweets with their followers, opening debates on the topics in which they are most knowledgeable and in the areas in which they have specialised and become famous on the web[64]. Nowadays the activity of the influencer can be considered as a real job.

On the other hand, the opinion leader, through his authority and credibility, guide the opinions and influences the thoughts of his followers on a specific topic. One of the main differences between the two categories is that the advice and information provided by the opinion leader are spontaneous and less interested than that of the influencer. The opinion leader expresses him/herself on current issues that are of particular interest to him/her and his/her community. A further difference is that, unlike the influencer, the opinion leader does not receive payment for talking about a product or service and for this reason is considered more credible than the influencer.

In recent years, the food sector has evolved significantly, becoming increasingly influential, launching new trends, celebrities and increasing the number of followers. In the last year, over 1.59 million pieces of food-themed content were posted, an increase of +57.4% in posts. The growth in the food sector is probably due to the lockdown that has pushed users to devote more time to cooking. 54% of Italians follow food influencers because they give culinary advice. Food influencers, as the name suggests, are ambassadors for companies and/or food products, who influence consumers in their choice. Research carried out by Buzzoole, a martech company, shows that 60.57% of food influencers are women and that 56.53% of their audience are women[65] aged between 18 and 34. 86% of food influencers fall into the micro and medium category (10,000 to 100,000 followers). The rest of the market is made up of social stars and celebrities. The social platform preferred by users to post food-themed content is Instagram (75.64%), followed by Facebook and Twitter. Step by step recipes has become a must-have, easy to replicate at home. Sustainability is another factor that matters to consumers, with many tips being given to avoid or at least reduce food waste. Content dedicated to food allergies and intolerances is also becoming more popular, with many tips being given by food professionals.

[64] Journalism: Who are influencers, what do they do and how do they earn money? https://www.giornalettismo.com/chi-sono-influencer/
[65] https://www.foodaffairs.it/2021/10/22/social-sempre-piu-food-oriented/

Sonia Peronaci founded GialloZafferano in 2006, making it the largest online recipe community. Since then, numerous cooking pages and websites, blogs and account profiles dedicated entirely to the world of food have spread across the internet. Light, traditional or vegan recipes, each profile has its orientation and content is offered in two formats: photography and video. The approach is direct, the recipes simple to replicate and the tempting presentation invites the reader to cook the dish. The following tables, a ranking of the Top8 macro and micro-influencers.

Table 3.1: Top8 Macro food influencer

Source: personal elaboration about the data from Forbes article Quando il cibo fa tendenza: chi sono i 20 migliori food influencer in Italia

Influencer	Instagram name	Followers	Features
Benedetta Rossi	@fattoincasadabenedetta	3.8 million	Benedetta is one of the most loved characters on the food scene. She has built the largest community on Instagram, where she shares a simple cooking style linked to her memories.
Benedetta Parodi	@ziabene	976 thousand	Journalist, food influencer and TV presenter: Benedetta Parodi has conquered thousands of kitchens.
Sonia Peronaci	@soniaperonaci	802 thousand	Sonia Peronaci is for the web the mother we all turn to for recipes and cooking advice. After leaving GialloZafferano, she launched her website and the official social channels that bear her name.
Chiara Maci	@chiarainpentola	689 thousand	Every day Chiara Maci talks about traditional Italian dishes and experiments in the kitchen. Blogger, cook and TV presenter, she has conquered the small screen and now boasts three cooking programmes and

			several publications with her recipes.
Carlotta Perego	@cucinabotany	537 thousand	Carlotta Perego, aka Cucina Botanica, (Forbes Under 30 2021) has a single, important mission: to make as many people as possible aware of a sustainable lifestyle through her vegetable recipes. Good, loved and approved by everyone, even the most sceptical.
Daniele Rossi	@danielerossichef	437 thousand	Daniele Rossi is the chef from whom we would like to learn cooking secrets and techniques. He started by winning over the Tik Tok audience (1.2 million) with his simple, funny, and elegant video recipes.
Marco Bianchi	@marcobianchioff	411 thousand	Marco is both a lover of healthy cooking and a populariser of science, who has always been linked to the Umberto Veronesi Foundation. He shares simple, colourful, and healthy recipes with his community. Especially suitable for children.
Federico Fusca	@federicofusca	271 thousand	His cuisine is local, often linked to the Roman gastronomic tradition. In a very short time, Federico Fusca has become a point of reference in the world of Italian food influencers for his fresh, dynamic and extrovert way of cooking.

Here is the list of the Top8 micro-food influencers.

Table 3.2: Top8 Micro food influencer

Source: Personal elaboration about the data from Forbes article Quando il cibo fa tendenza: chi sono i 20 migliori food influencer in Italia

Influencer	Instagram	Followers
Stella Menna	@unastellaincucina	88.1 thousand
Maurizio Rosazza Prin	@maurizio_chissenefood	86.7 thousand
Cecilia Mansani of Delicious Breakfast	@ceciliamansani	85.2 thousand
Marika Milan	@breakfast_and_coffee_	75.5 thousand
Francesca Gambacorta	@frafoodlove	63.7 thousand
Ada Parisi	@sicilianicreative	62.3 thousand
Claudia Sirchia	@thatclaudia	54.1 thousand
Valentina Tozza	@the_kitchen_that_values	48.9 thousand

3.4 The online word of mouth

Some of the conversations that arise within online communities are about the brand. product or service produced by the company, thus creating the phenomenon of the online World of Mouth. The online World of Mouth refers to any positive or negative statement expressed by potential consumers, present or past, about the company's product or service. Such statements are expressed by a multitude of individuals or institutions through social platforms (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Online word-of-mouth is nothing more than the evolution of traditional, offline word-of-mouth. The evolution of the internet has allowed companies to collect unbiased information about consumers and what they think of the company's products. In addition to this data through wom allows companies to collect data on the opinions, advice and suggestions that consumers share on various platforms. The opinions expressed by consumers are considered as reviews or recommendations that invite or not to buy or use the company's products. As word of mouth is a form of communication, it must contain within it a message that is being communicated, such as mentions of brands, products or services and the consumer expresses an opinion about them. As in every message, there is also a sender, defined as the source of the message, he is the one who creates the message and then there is also the receiver, i.e., the one who receives the message, processes it and obtains a series of information from it. Initially, word-of-mouth was developed on opinion-sharing platforms such as online discussion forums and review sites. Today, however, word of mouth is also very much present within social media, specifically on social networks such as Instagram and Facebook, making platforms a new channel for generating and spreading word of mouth online (Aghakhani et al., 2018).

Hu and Ha considering the various online contexts in which word-of-mouth occurs, classified it into four types:

- Wom affiliate, refers to the reviews that consumers leave on the platforms where they also bought the product, a well-known example being Amazon.
- Specialised wom concerned about the reviews that consumers give on sites for comparing and evaluating purchases, these sites only serve to review products, no sales take place.
- Wom social refers to all information about brands, products or services that are exchanged between users on social networking platforms.
- Mixed wom refers instead to the information that consumers exchange about brands and products but on other social platforms such as discussion forums or blogs.

So, in social word-of-mouth, the conversation, which allows the exchange of information and recommendations about the product or brand, takes place via social networks. Conversations between users can take place directly on official company profiles or users' profiles. Studies show that positive online word of mouth has effects on consumer purchase intention (Kudeshia and Kumar, 2017; Tien et al., 2018). During the decision-making process, consumers voluntarily seek product reviews in order to be facilitated in their choice, which is why online reviews play a key role because they reduce the risk the consumer perceives of purchasing a product and contribute to the formation of a positive attitude towards the brand. Companies need to be able to use this form of communication to their advantage, increasing the likelihood of acquiring new customers and boosting sales. It should always be kept in mind that the statements and reviews that individual posts on a social platform are highly visible to a large group of possible consumers who are also present on the platform. Moreover, consumers can also share these reviews and statements with other users, thus expanding the resonance of the message. Today, social media are used by a very high percentage of the population and can be an important point of contact for companies to connect, converse and exchange information with potential or current customers. To be able to make the most of and benefit from the online word-of-mouth method of communication, companies need to fully understand how this tool works, its features and its components. Online word-of-mouth exerts a strong influence on the consumer's decision-making process, especially when seeking information about products, services or brands. The traditional tool in advertising today is less influential for consumers than word of mouth, which is considered a more reliable source of information (Cheong and Morrison, 2008). Reviews and messages conveyed by other users are considered more credible than what is communicated by companies, as consumers have no interest in expressing positive or negative opinions about a product. Since online reviews are considered more truthful and credible than corporate advertising, they also have more influence on the consumer's purchasing decision process. A study by Cheong and Morrison shows that people tend to trust other consumers more. This is because the consumer who has bought the product is believed to have learned about the product's characteristics, strengths and weaknesses and talks about the experience in an unbiased manner. This also happens with opinion leaders, they can influence consumers with their recommendations and opinions even when the consumers reading the review disagree, precisely because of the degree of trustworthiness and credibility they have (Cheong and Morrison, 2008).

3.4.1 Characteristics of word of mouth in the social media

Online word-of-mouth in the context of social media takes on different connotations depending on the characteristics and objectives of the platform. Although there is a similarity between offline word of mouth, the more traditional ones, and online word of mouth, the one that takes place on review sites or discussion forums. Therefore, it is considered possible to analyse online word-of-mouth in social media using the theoretical literature of offline word-of-mouth, but carefully highlighting the differences that can occur in the context of social media. In order to better understand the role that online word-of-mouth can play in the context of food; it is necessary to know the main characteristics of this tool.

1. Online word of mouth is a form of communication between users that takes place on the web, they interact and exchange messages regarding the purchase or intention to purchase a product, service, or opinion of a brand. The flow of communication is spontaneous, the two consumers have no commercial purpose or brand promotion; companies are extraneous to this conversation. In this respect, online word-of-mouth is the same as offline word-of-mouth. Arndt defines word of mouth as an oral communication between people, with a recipient and a communicator that the recipient perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, product, or service. The information that is the subject of the communication, being created and transmitted entirely by consumers, is called User-Generated Content (UGC). UGC is contrasted with Producer-Generated Content (PGC), i.e., content created and transmitted by companies. Word of mouth has a strong influence on the consumer's opinion of the brand and their decision to buy. This makes companies consider it an important tool for persuasion and is used to stimulate the dissemination of positive information about the brand. In order to positively influence consumers and their purchases, companies use the tool of eWOM marketing, i.e., marketing campaigns on social media implemented by word of mouth among consumers. When companies use word-of-mouth as a marketing tool, they must ensure that it is not perceived as being motivated solely by the financial gain of the reviewers, which could negate the positive effects that word-of-mouth can have on consumers.

2. Word of mouth in social media, especially social networks, is not only in written form, which is the case on online review platforms. In social media the consumer can express his or her opinion on the product, service, or brand explicitly, by publishing a post or status, writing a comment or sending a direct message in chat. At the same time, they can also express an opinion implicitly by using signals which can be liking the posts published by the brand, tagging the brand of its content, or registering their location at the brand's shops (Aghakhan et al., 2018). Thus, one characteristic of online word of mouth is that it can be implicit or explicit. At the same time, word of mouth can be video format or image format, video content is preferred by users because it is more enjoyable and engaging; therefore, it attracts the consumer's attention better (Erkal and Evans, 2016). Another characteristic of online word of mouth is that it can be defined as intentional or unintentional. Word-of-mouth is intentional when the consumer posts comments, opinions about the brand or product voluntarily because they want to express their opinion and make it public to other possible or current

customers. Word of mouth is unintentional when the objective of the consumer is to show his preference to the social network, not to express an opinion on the purchased product or service.

3. Social media are so popular because they allow their users to create new relationships, maintain old ones both at a distance and closely. Interacting with other members of the platform and creating bonds is a key point of social media. The relational dynamics created on social platforms influence the sharing of information and the effect it has on consumers. In analysing and understanding the influence of online word of mouth, it is essential to consider the effects generated by the relationships between users. It is on relationships that the development of conversation and the dissemination of information depends. Online word-of-mouth found on social platforms differs from that of review sites or online discussion forums because in social sites users have a bond. In discussion forums or online review sites, the user who shares their opinion or experience about the product, service or brand does so anonymously. The relational aspect of the user is not at all important for understanding word-of-mouth on the site. In this sense, online social word-of-mouth is more akin to offline word-of-mouth between people who already know each other and between whom there is an emotional connection.

3.4.2 Online word of mouth in the food context

Before proceeding to talk about the online word of mouth in the context of food, some general data on online word of mouth will be given. Research conducted by Nielsen reports that 92% of consumers ask friends and family for advice or opinions before making a purchase. This figure explains why word-of-mouth marketing generates six trillion dollars in annual spending. Word-of-mouth marketing generates five times more sales than mass media advertising. In addition to consulting family and friends, consumers rely on online reviews, 88% of whom trust online reviews as much as they trust the advice of their close connections. Online word of mouth is seen as a key factor in the purchasing process by 74% of consumers. A further figure reported is the effect of online and offline word of mouth, i.e., this tool leads to an increase in sales of 0.2% to 1.5%. [66]

[66] Word of mouth that's good for brand reputation

It is important to highlight the main factors for implementing a good online word-of-mouth strategy. The first important factor is brand loyalty. Keeping an old customer is easier and less expensive than buying a new one. The second important factor in word of mouth is trust in the brand. HubSpot data shows that 75% of people do not believe advertisements, but trust suggestions from family, friends, and online reviews from other consumers. The third factor is being able to maintain continuous and personalised interaction with the customer. Consumers want to be wowed with an impressive customer experience, which is why 54% of consumers believe that companies need to adapt their communication methods. To create valuable communication, customers need to be allowed to choose how they want to interact, and in particular with which tool: with messaging channels, such as WhatsApp and Messenger, via chat or through other social channels.

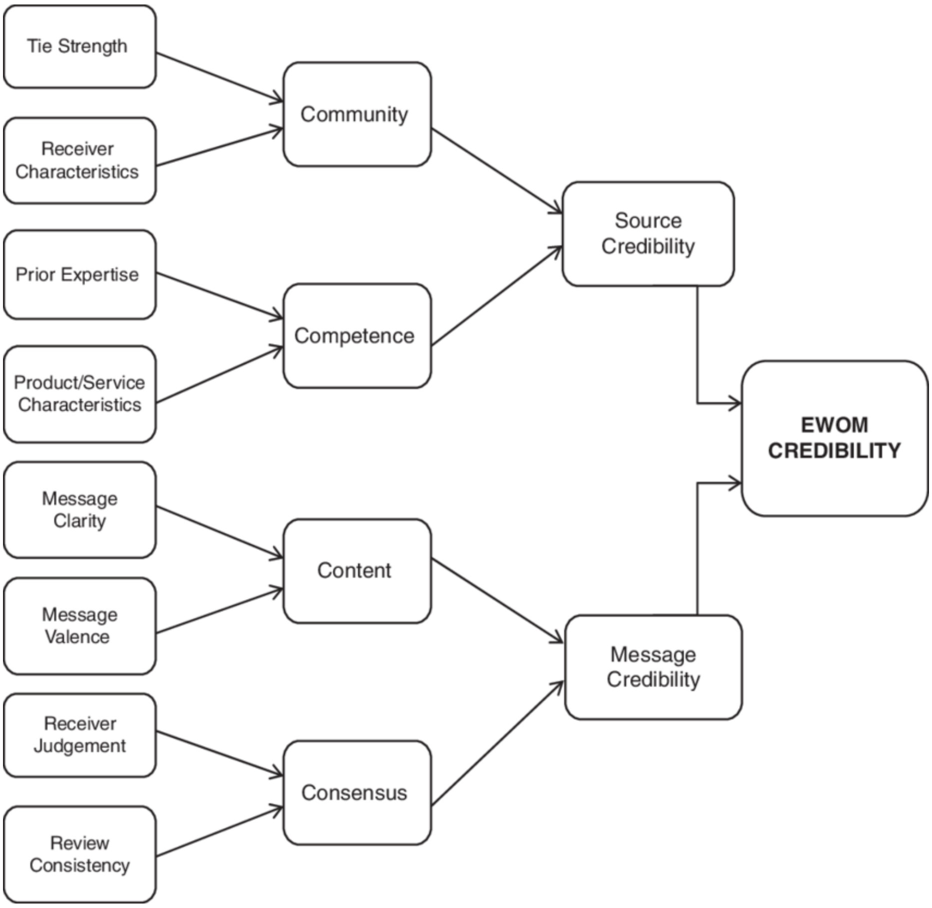
Researcher Hussain attempted to understand the functioning and role of online word-of-mouth in the purchasing of food products and services. The results of the study show that 81.7% of the participants consult online reviews and comments on products and services. An additional factor highlighted by the data analysis is how the perception of risk associated with the purchase influences word-of-mouth. The higher the risk perceived by the consumer during the purchasing process, the more likely they are to adopt online word-of-mouth when evaluating the product. The level of risk perceived during the purchasing process also depends on the competence, reliability, credibility and objectivity of the online word-of-mouth source. The level of homophily that the consumer perceives with the source does not have significant relevance in determining the perceived risk (Hussain et al., 2017). In the decision-making process, the perception of risk associated with the purchase is a critical factor for the consumer. The perception of risk arises from the probability that certain actions will lead to an unpleasant consequence. To protect themselves from the perceived risk and to reduce insecurity regarding the purchase, consumers seek information about the brand or the relevant product from different sources, thus being able to make the best decision. Online word of mouth serves to support the consumer's decision-making process through its characteristics of competence, reliability, credibility, and objectivity of information. The characteristics and qualities of word-of-mouth then go on to determine the credibility of the source, a fundamental quality for establishing a relationship of trust between the sender and the recipient of the message. The degree of homophily determines the similarity that consumers perceive between themselves and the originator of the message. In the context of online word-of-mouth, the factor of homophily is important in determining the credibility of word-of-mouth, because it strengthens the relationship between the recipient and the sender of the message, but it does not play a crucial role in reducing the perceived risk. Despite a high degree of homophily, consumers still perceive a risk during the food purchasing process.

3.4.3 Word-of-mouth credibility in social media: the 4C model

The credibility of word of mouth is one of the determinants influencing the adoption of this tool during the buying process, it has an indirect effect on purchase intention. The fact that consumers tend to trust the statements, advice, and opinions of other users more than the company itself suggests that credibility is an implicit aspect of word of mouth. Companies need to understand the factors that influence word-of-mouth credibility to understand how to spread positive information about the company, its products, or its services. When analysing the credibility of online word-of-mouth in social media, it is more appropriate to consider the credibility of offline contexts rather than the word-of-mouth of discussion forums and review sites. Although online word-of-mouth in social media has several points in common with word-of-mouth in review sites and discussion forums. Offline word-of-mouth is preferred because it takes place between individuals who have a strong connection, the sender being part of the recipient's social network. The message is deemed credible precisely because it comes from the direct experience of a trusted individual with the product, brand or service. This is also the case in social media, where the purpose of platforms is to facilitate the creation and maintenance of existing links. The credibility of the message depends on the existing link between the sender and the recipient (Moran and Muzellec, 2017). The recipient knows exactly who the author of the message is, which is not the case on review sites and discussion forums. Often the social network is the place where real-life friends meet virtually, initiating conversations very similar to those that take place offline. In Figure 3.1 can be observed how Moran and Muzellec model the 4Cs regarding the credibility of word of mouth.

Image 3.1: Moran and Muzellec 4C model

Source: Moran and Muzellec (2017), "eWOM credibility on social networking sites"



Moran and Muzellec's model aims to analyse the factors that influence the credibility of online word of mouth in the context of social networks. The credibility of eWOM is affected by two factors: on the one hand, the characteristics of the message and the recipient's evaluation of it are considered. On the other hand, there are aspects concerning the receiver and the sender of the message. The relationship created between these two subjects and the levels of knowledge they have about the subject of the message is analysed. The 4C model is since the credibility of word of mouth is given by both the credibility of the message and the source. The credibility of the source depends on the relationship between the sender and the recipient of the communication, the strength of their link and the characteristics of the recipient. A final variable that determines the credibility of the source is competence, i.e., previous experience with the subject of the message and the characteristics of the product/service. The credibility of the message depends on its content, the value of the information and its clarity. It also depends on the effect that the message elicits on the recipient, important is the consistency of the message with the overall opinion (Moran and Muzellec, 2017).

Source credibility consists of community and competence. The community dimension refers to the set of relationships that are created between the sender and the receiver of the message during online word-of-mouth. The presence of community is a new aspect arising from the presence of message exchange on social platforms. In social networks, the credibility of word-of-mouth comes from the link that exists between the recipient and the source of the message. The closer the link, the greater the credibility and trustworthiness that the recipient will place in the statements of the source. Another relevant characteristic is the recipient's characteristics. The weight the recipient of the message gives to the recommendations of others and how willing the consumer is to rely on others. The more the consumer trusts and listens to the recommendations of others, the more likely he or she is to consider the online word of mouth a useful source. The information obtained about products and services will be used in the purchasing decision process.

Another component of source credibility is the competence dimension. The competence dimension refers to the levels of knowledge of the sender and the recipient about the brand, product, or service under discussion (Moran and Muzellec, 2017). The expertise of the source is crucial, the more knowledgeable the source is about the brand and product, the greater its credibility on the topic. The source's knowledge grows with experience, given by prolonged use of the product and always being upgraded with market news. In addition to the competence of the sender, the competence of the recipient must also be considered. The greater the involvement the recipient has with the product, the more attention they will pay to the qualities and characteristics of the product or service. Whereas in the case where the involvement of the recipient is low, more accessible, and intuitive factors such as the characteristics of the source will be taken into account as a proxy for assessing credibility. In this case, the information processing process will be fast and unscrupulous (Aghakhani et al., 2018). In the analysis of competence, the object of the message, whether it is a product or a service, is also relevant. It is more difficult to evaluate a service because it is intangible, which is why more information processing is required. Higher levels of risk are associated with the service purchasing process. In the case of a product, the involvement of the recipient is again considered: the lower the degree of involvement of the product, the greater the consumer's reliance on the credibility of the source.

The credibility of the message is composed of content and consensus. In online word-of-mouth, the content of the message is about clarity and the value (positive or negative) of the communication. Message clarity is about the reasons why the source expresses favourable or unfavourable opinions towards the product or in the experience with the service or brand (Moran and Muzellec, 2017). If the message author's favourable or unfavourable reasons are supported by another user in their review, it only increases the veracity and credibility of the message. Message clarity refers to the language used by the user to describe the experience with the brand, which can be concrete or abstract. Concrete language is used to describe a recent experience and abstract language for a long-term experience. The language of the message must be clear so that the recipient can understand the concept exactly as the sender intended. The value of the message can be positive, negative, balanced, as the sender lists both pros and cons of the product/service, or neutral, the sender does not expound either positively or negatively but only gives general information. Negative word-of-mouth is the most concrete one; in the case of positive word-of-mouth, readers tend to doubt the veracity of the content when there are too many positive evaluations in the message. The credibility of word-of-mouth is diminished when the message contains information about incentives or aspects of personal satisfaction linked to the spreading of the message. In this case, the recipient doubts the sincerity of the communication.

The other aspect of message credibility is consensus. Offline word-of-mouth messages are more credible if they reflect the recipient's judgments and if they are consistent with other available messages about the brand (Moran and Muzellec, 2017). Recipients pay more attention to the message if it contains information that is relevant to them, i.e., information that can have consequences for their actions, and the information is in line with their purchasing objectives. If the message is interesting for the recipient, the number of interactions and conversations is likely to be higher than otherwise. Consistency of the message with other messages about the brand, product/service is relevant. Consensus also from other users reduces purchase uncertainty and the risk that the consumer makes a bad decision. Consistency of reviews is an important proxy for credibility. If most of the information describes the brand in a certain way, this word of mouth will be more credible than if the only message describes the brand in the opposite direction.

3.4.4 The importance of negative word-of-mouth management

An important aspect of online communication by word of mouth is valence, i.e., whether the message conveyed about the product, service or brand is positive or negative. There is no single thought in the literature on how valence affects online word-of-mouth and the effects it generates. However, some studies have shown that negative valence, i.e., negative word-of-mouth attracts more attention from the consumer and has more influence than positive valence. Thus, negative word of mouth has a greater impact on the purchase decision process than positive word of mouth (Cheung and Lee, 2008; Lee et al., 2009; Schijns and van Bruggen, 2018). In addition to the fact that negative word-of-mouth is more likely to attract consumer attention and have a greater effect than positive word-of-mouth, one must also consider the effect generated on the brand. Negative word-of-mouth generates a negative evaluation of the brand and reduces the consumer's intention to buy; the opposite is true in the case of positive word-of-mouth. Negative word-of-mouth is also seen by the consumer as a wake-up call because it increases the risk that the product or service will produce unwanted effects. It also allows the consumer to classify the item as being of high or low quality and to avoid buying if it is not deemed suitable. Negative valence can reduce consumer trust in the brand and the service and product being marketed (Bhandari and Rodgers, 2018). Companies need to engage and find ways to manage negative word-of-mouth. Interacting directly with the consumer allows them to understand their complaints, dissatisfactions and needs. The company's response to the customer is called feedback, which indicates the entire process the company goes through to minimise the effects of negative online word-of-mouth and the retaliation it can have on the brand, particularly on trust. Feedback is nothing but the written response provided by the company to a consumer's negative review or comment in the context of online word of mouth (Bhandari and Rodgers, 2018). The company is born to satisfy the consumer's needs, desires and transmit value to the consumer, and through feedback, it renews this goal. The company's response to problems and negative comments from customers is an attempt to re-establish a relationship of trust between the two parties, while at the same time trying to limit the spread of negative values about the brand. In social media, this need to respond appropriately and promptly to negative comments is even more present. This happens because social media are large networks connecting millions of users in real-time. Information travels fast and reaches many users this can amplify the effect of negative word of mouth and further damage the company. One can think of a negative comment written on the company's official profile, the news spreads virally and reaches many consumers. A negative word-of-mouth approach allows the company to contain, and in some cases even avoid, the unwanted effects of negative value and ensure that the consumer continues to trust the brand.

CHAPTER IV

EMPHYRICAL ANALYSIS

4.1 Methodology

As Churchill (2001) states, in all commercial investigations, it is necessary to establish a plan to serve as a guide for data collection and analysis. In order to be able to fully understand what has been written in the previous chapters and to see if it corresponds to reality, it was decided to carry out a questionnaire. To implement a good questionnaire, which enables reliable data to be collected, certain guidelines must be followed. The methods and procedures used to gather information must be specified and easy to understand. The collection of information is necessary for understanding and solving the problem. The problem is identified as the aim of the research, what is to be gained from the analysis of the data. The business investigation brings to the information system the methods and techniques useful for obtaining data so that it can be analysed in a rigorous form. It is important to be able to structure an appropriate methodology to obtain the necessary data so that the actual conclusions can be developed. The aim of the investigation is to understand whether consumers believe that social media influence their food consumption and through which methods this can happen. The sample taken covers the entire population aged between 18 and 75 years. The present study is carried out to assess how consumers act and react in the current context, through their food consumption, also considering the latest changes due to the Covid-19 emergency. In order to implement the process in the best possible way, a series of sequential phases were studied which can be grouped into the following groups:

1. design of the investigation,

2. obtaining information,

3. data processing and analysis,

4. interpretation of the results, resulting in the presentation of conclusions (Santesmases Mestre, 2012).

In order to be able to carry out the analysis in the best possible way, it is important to define the problem; a well-defined problem is a half-solved problem. A clear and precise definition of the problem to be investigated is therefore necessary. Identifying the problem involves specifying the objectives of the investigation. In this case, the questions which have been formulated for the study are as follows:

- What do you want to investigate: behaviour, knowledge, opinions, attitudes, perceptions preferences, intentions, etc.?
- What aspects of a partially known problem do you want to investigate?
- What cause-and-effect relationships are intended to be discovered?
- What variables influence behaviour, intentions, attitudes, etc.?
- Which market segment should be identified?

Once the problem was identified, the investigation design was created, which is the structure as well as the study plan, useful as a guide for data collection and analysis. (Churchill Jr and Gilbert, 1987). In this case, the type of design is descriptive since its purpose is to describe the characteristics of a given group of people, target 18-75 years old, protagonists of the survey and to estimate the relationship between several hypothesized variables, then make conclusions. The questionnaire was created on the Qualtrics platform and then disseminated by sharing the link on various social platforms, such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook, in order to gain more visibility. The survey was composed of three blocks:

1. The first block consisted of ten questions, from question 1 to question 10. The questions were generally around consumer habits, for instance which shop the consumer usually goes to for food shopping, what are the main criteria for choosing one shop over another etc.
2. The second block consisted of 18 questions, from question 10 to 28 the main focus of the research. The questions referred to the world of social media, whether consumers follow food influencers, food brands, important players in the food world and how following these people can influence their consumption.
3. The third block consisted of 7 questions, from questions 28 to 35. These were general questions about consumers, such as how old they are, what their occupation is, with whom they live, their income amount etc.

There was a total of 473 participant in the questionnaire, however, not all of them completed questions until the end. The survey was fully completed by 442 respondents. The first block of questions was completed by the entire sample, the second block by 444 and the third block by 442 people. For the data analysis, only people who have fully completed the questionnaire will be considered. The questions in the survey were implemented in various ways, containing both closed questions with a simple yes or no answer, multiple-choice questions, and open questions, where the respondent was asked to write down the information concerning him or her. For the data analysis, a technique such as frequency distribution and statistical technique is used. The distribution period of the survey was from 22 January 2022 to 06 February 2022. After defining the survey design, it is necessary to specify the hypotheses. These are nothing more than statements or negotiations about the behaviour of a variable or a relationship existing between two or more variables (Santesmases Mestre, 2012). The result of the study is drafted to confirm or reject them.

4.2 Research objectives and hypotheses

The research aims to understand if social media influence food consumption and how they affect consumers. Economic development, digitalisation have changed the way consumers approach food, food today is not just food, it is much more, it is an experience. Consumers are becoming more attentive and aware; they are seeking information about products before buying them. Familiarisation with social media is changing the approach to many of the activities that characterise consumers' lives and changing their social and cultural aspects, making it natural to use the internet to search for information, share and buy online, even in the food sphere. The new generations are characterised by a high cognitive and adaptive power, given also by the fact that consumers, particularly young consumers, can interface immediately with innovative technologies, experimenting with them and getting involved, sometimes even underestimating the risks. Social media has transformed the way people communicate. Users are connected at any time and in any place, breaking down the lines between space and time. We try to understand how these tools are used by consumers in the food sector. Another aim is to understand the effect of seeing posts about food on the human brain, whether it makes the consumer feel hungry, happy, or sad. It is important to understand if there is a correlation between the food that consumer sees on the various social platforms and the food they consume. Does seeing vegan products make consumers eat them? The issue of sustainability understood as the ability to maintain quality and respect for the environment is increasingly important to consumers today. The phenomena of climate change are only aggravating the agri-food scenario and are pushing consumers in their small way to look for possible solutions that can stop this phenomenon. The consumer is asking companies in the sector to take increasing responsibility for environmental protection and product quality. The questions the survey aims to answer: Do social media influence food consumption? From a population that is changing, evolving rapidly, one expects a correspondence of new habits. In the generation of flash information and smartphone addiction, has food culture gained a not insignificant position in the universality of trendy interests? Below are the theorised hypotheses that will be investigated in the survey. Social media have a strong impact on food consumption, and consumers' food choices often depend on the content they see on social platforms. How do these platforms influence consumer choice? First of all, it depends a lot on the food influencers or opinion leaders that the consumer follows. These two people are considered experts in their field and therefore their advice influences the consumer. If the food influencer promotes the consumption of certain foods or a certain lifestyle, the consumer tends to follow them. For example, if the food influencer promotes the consumption of healthy food, then the consumer will be tempted to eat healthily. As well as being influenced by the advice of the food influencer and opinion leader, food consumption is also influenced by the consumer's close relationships. If friends tend to consume junk food the consumer will be more likely to follow that pattern and consume junk food. Furthermore, it is crucial to know that junk food has a higher degree of attractiveness than healthy food. The images themselves have strong attractive power and can push the consumer to eat more. A further characteristic of social media is that it tends to homogenise consumption by impoverishing the ecosystem. If consumers see the food influencer or their friends consuming a certain kind of product, they can decide to do the same and this creates a detrimental effect on the ecosystem. E.g., the food influencer eats only salmon, and the consumer decides to do the same, without considering local fish. The demand for salmon increases generating more production while the demand for local fish decreases as its resources decrease. Social media tends to be unsustainable because the consumer does not know the impact of what they eat. A further hypothesis is how online word-of-mouth created on social media influences the consumption of food. Social media have a predominant role in the choice to buy one or another food, for example, let's take what happens when you try a new restaurant. The first thing the consumer does is look at the reviews on TripAdvisor or ask friends if they have been there before. Reviews are salient tools, if they are great, you will gladly go and eat at that restaurant if the reviews are not so positive you will have doubts about whether to try your luck, the same goes for buying a new food product.

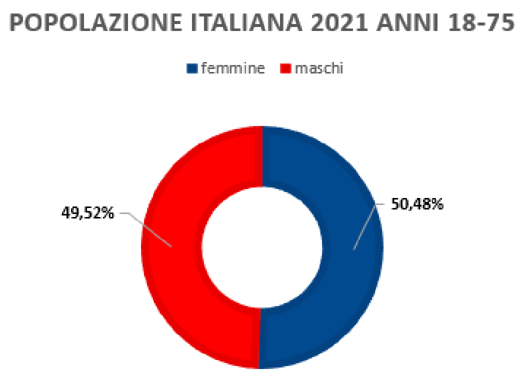
4.3 Sample demographics

The share of the population taken into account for this questionnaire are all people aged between 18 and 75. The level of education, like the main occupation, encompasses different categories and is not homogeneous. Respondents are randomly selected from different social backgrounds, not culturally isolated, with different socio-economic backgrounds. The survey is aimed at both genders. In statistical analysis, a distinction must be made between finite and infinite populations. The distinction is very simple: when it is possible to count precisely how many units are part of the population we speak of a finite population, in all other cases of an infinite population. In this case, the population is finite. Defining the population serves to understand the percentage of error that the data can contain. For an investigation of four hundred people, the demonstrated error is plus or minus 5%. A demonstrated error as close to zero as possible is needed for the study to be representative of the total population universe.

The method used is non-probabilistic and consists of the selection of the elements of the sampling, which is carried out totally or partially, according to criteria fixed for the investigator. The sample taken is a sample of 442 respondents who have completely completed the questionnaire. The demographic data concerning the sample will now be analysed to better understand its composition.

The first variable taken into consideration concerns the gender of the interviewees. To understand whether the sample is representative of reality, the Italian national statistics will be compared with the percentages obtained from the data collected.

Image 4.1: Italian population 1 January 2021, Source: Istat 2021

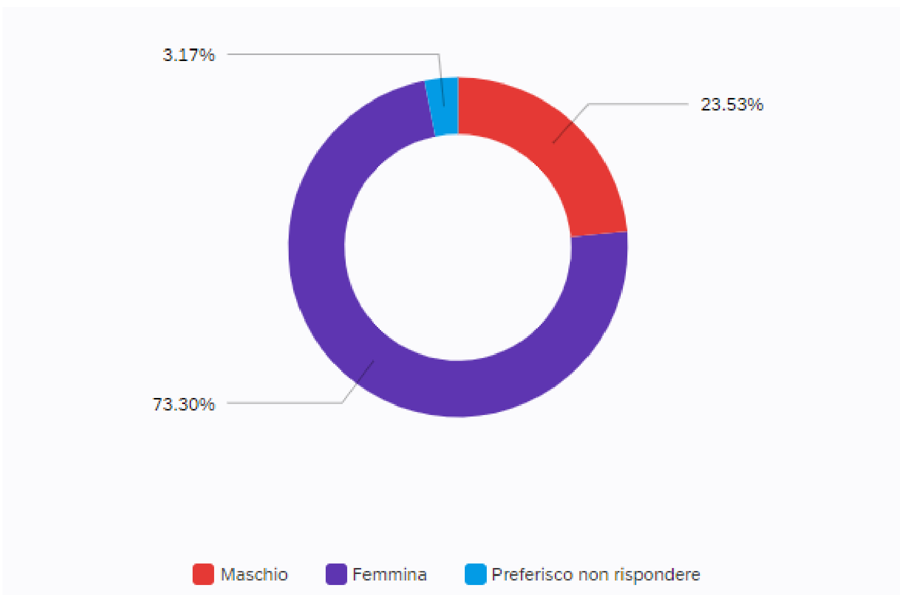


Età	Maschi	Femmine	Totale	%
18-24	2.155.401 52,30%	1.965.938 47,70%	**4.121.339**	7,00%
25-29	1.566.265 51,40%	1.479.314 48,60%	**3.045.579**	5,10%
30-34	1.633.887 50,60%	1.592.259 49,40%	**3.226.146**	5,40%
35-39	1.747.529 50,20%	1.735.723 49,80%	**3.483.252**	5,90%
40-44	2.001.502 49,90%	2.007.068 50,10%	**4.008.570**	6,80%
45-49	2.329.457 49,60%	2.363.044 50,40%	**4.692.501**	7,90%
50-54	2.377.041 49,30%	2.440.634 50,70%	**4.817.675**	8,10%
55-59	2.261.108 48,90%	2.362.857 51,10%	**4.623.965**	7,80%
60-64	1.901.209 48,20%	2.044.887 51,80%	**3.946.096**	6,70%
65-69	1.652.948 47,60%	1.821.385 52,40%	**3.474.333**	5,90%
70-75	1.609.510 46,80%	1.831.661 53,20%	**3.441.171**	5,80%

Image 4.2 represents the data that was collected through the questionnaire.

Image 4.2: Gender of the sampling frame

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

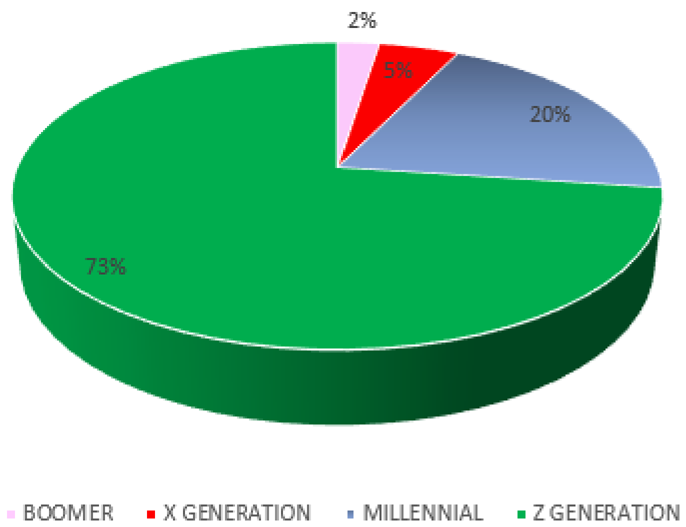


As it is possible to observe in image 4.2 the respondents are 73,30% women, that is 324 answers, 23,53% are men (104 respondents) and 3,17% preferred not to answer (14 respondents). This sampling is not representative since it is seen that it does not correspond to the percentages verified by Istat, which were 50.48% for women and 49.52% for men respectively.

The second variable is the age of the respondent.

Image 4.3: Age of the sample

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



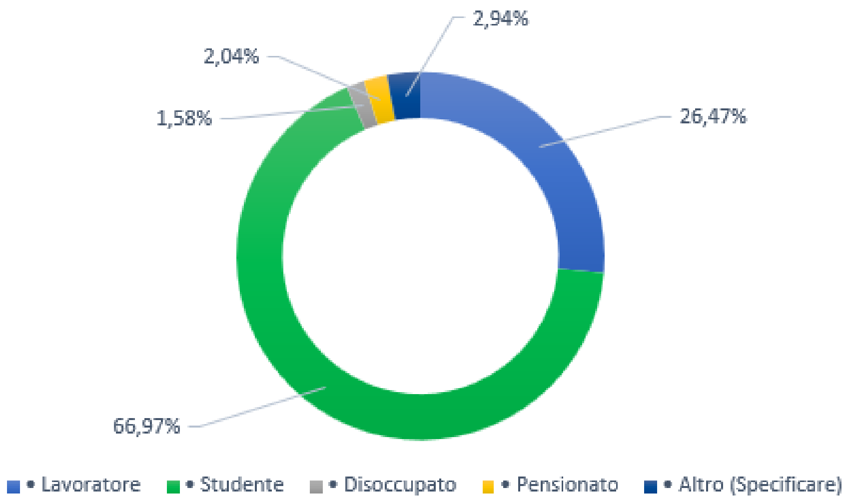
GENERATION	TOTAL	%
BOOMER	11	2%
X GENERATION	21	5%
MILLENNIAL	88	20%
Z GENERATION	322	73%

To make the data easier to understand, the sample was divided into generational eras. Baby boomers, the generation of respondents born between 1946 and 1964, represented 2% of the sample. Generation X, i.e., those born between 1965 and 1979 are 5% of the sample. Millennials, years 1980-1994 are 20% of the sample. Finally, there is generation Z, comprising those born between 1995 and 2010, and they make up the largest percentage, 73%. Obviously, such a high number of respondents belonging to the Z generation are mainly students and make the sample not reflect reality.

Variable number three concerns the occupation of the sample.

Image 4.4: Employment of the sample

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



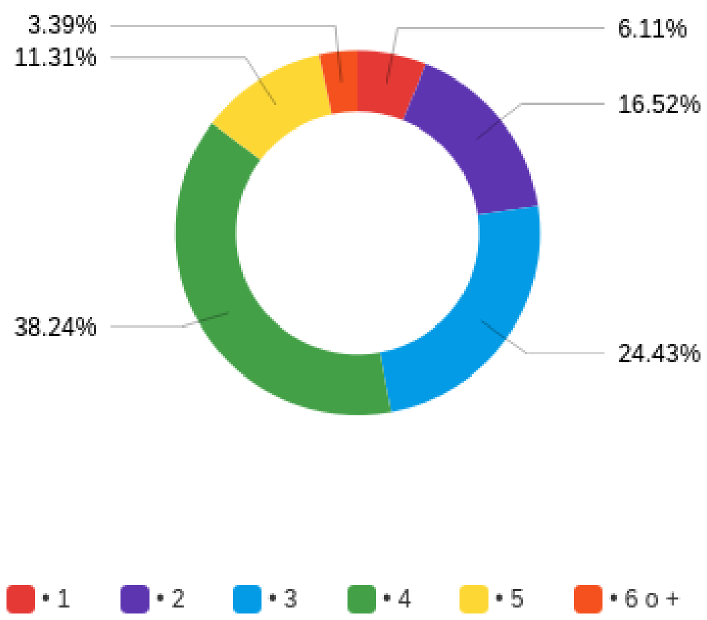
Out of a total of 442 respondents, 66.97% were students (296), 26.47% were workers (117), 2.94% belonged to the category other than housewives, student workers (13), 2.04% were pensioners (9) and finally, 1.58% represented the unemployed (7). The data collected are not representative of reality. Observing the ISTAT statistics on more than 60 million residents in Italy, the employed are about 23.4 million, or 39.1%. Of this percentage of workers, about 18.1 million are employees, while 5.3 million are self-employed. However, it must be taken into account that the general population is also made up of minors and pensioners who cannot work. According to ISTAT data, the unemployment rate in Italy in 2021 will be about 9%. [67]

[67] Istat: https://www.truenumbers.it/italiani-allavoro/#:~:text=In%20substance%2C%20only%20a%20percentage,of%20204%20on%2010%20this.

The fourth question in block three concerns the household composition of the respondents.

Image 4.5: Household composition

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

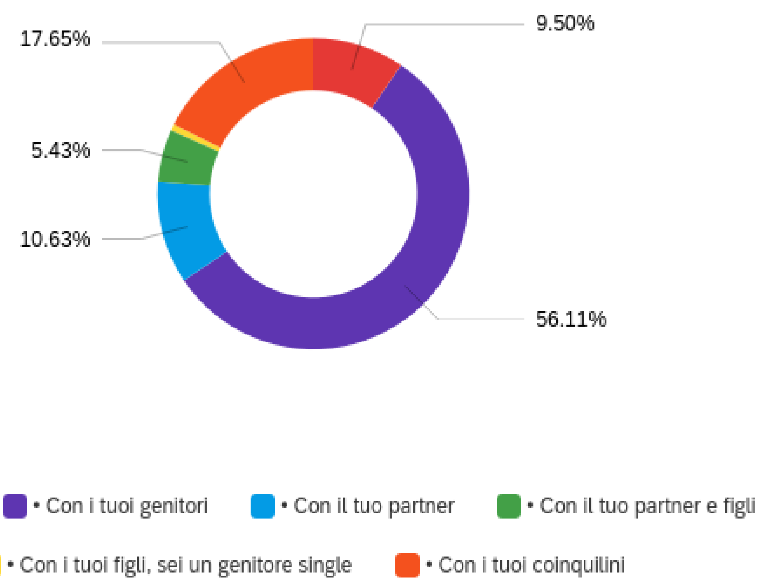


The collected data show that 38.24% of the respondents (169) stated that their household consists of 4 people, 24.43% of 3 people (108), 16.52% of 2 people (73) etc.

To gain a better understanding of the data on household composition, data are provided with that question the respondent about where they live. A further important variable on the sample is to understand where the members of the household life and who they are.

Image 4.6: Who the sample lives with

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

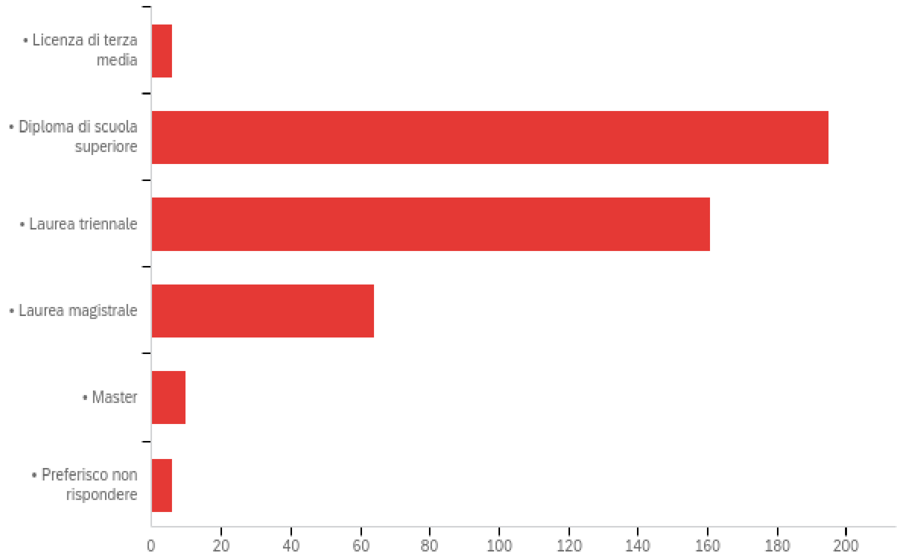


#	Campo		Conteggio scelte
1	• Da solo	9.50%	42
2	• Con i tuoi genitori	56.11%	248
3	• Con il tuo partner	10.63%	47
4	• Con il tuo partner e figli	5.43%	24
5	• Con i tuoi figli, sei un genitore single	0.68%	3
6	• Con i tuoi coinquilini	17.65%	78
			442

The data shown in the image indicates that 248 of the respondents (56.11%) still live with their parents, this is because many of them are students and do not have the necessary resources to be able to live on their own. Of the respondents 78 live with roommates (17.65%), again many of them are students, probably off-site students who share the house with friends and companions. 42 people (9.50%) live alone, probably part of the working class. 47 of the respondents (10,63%) live with their partner, 5,43% with their partner and children. Only a small percentage, 0.68% are single parents, so they live only with their children.

Image 4.7: Sample education

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



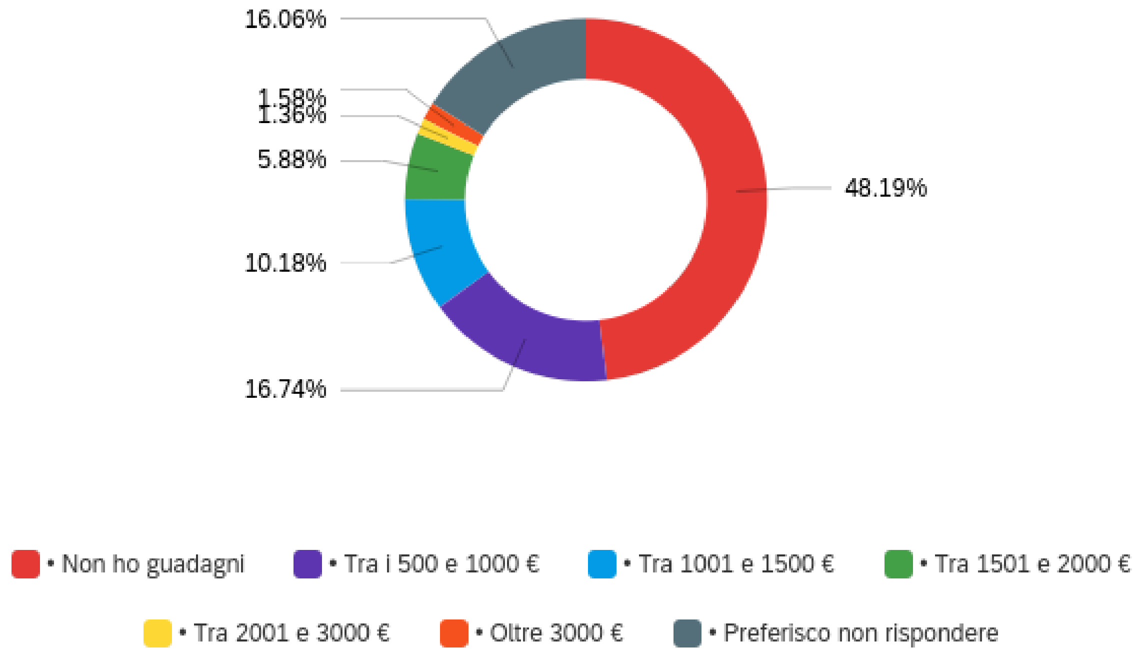
#	Campo	Conteggio scelte	
1	• Licenza di terza media	1.36%	6
2	• Diploma di scuola superiore	44.12%	195
3	• Laurea triennale	36.43%	161
4	• Laurea magistrale	14.48%	64
5	• Master	2.26%	10
6	• Preferisco non rispondere	1.36%	6
			442

Most of the respondents (44.12%) have at least a high school diploma, 36.44% or 161 of the respondents have a bachelor's degree, 14.48% have a master's degree and 2.26% also have a master's degree. Only a small percentage, 1.36%, had only a secondary school diploma or chose not to answer.

The last general variable taken into account to understand the characteristics of the sample analysed concerns income.

Image 4.8: Income amount

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



Almost half of the respondents (48,19%) stated that they have no earnings, probably due to the fact that they are students and do not have a job. 16,06% preferred not to answer this question (71), while 16,74% stated that they have a salary between €500 and €1000 (74). 10.18% stated that they get between €1001 and €1500. 5.88%, that is 26 people, declared to earn between €1500 and €2000. The resting state is that they have an income above 2000 euros a small percentage of 2,8%.

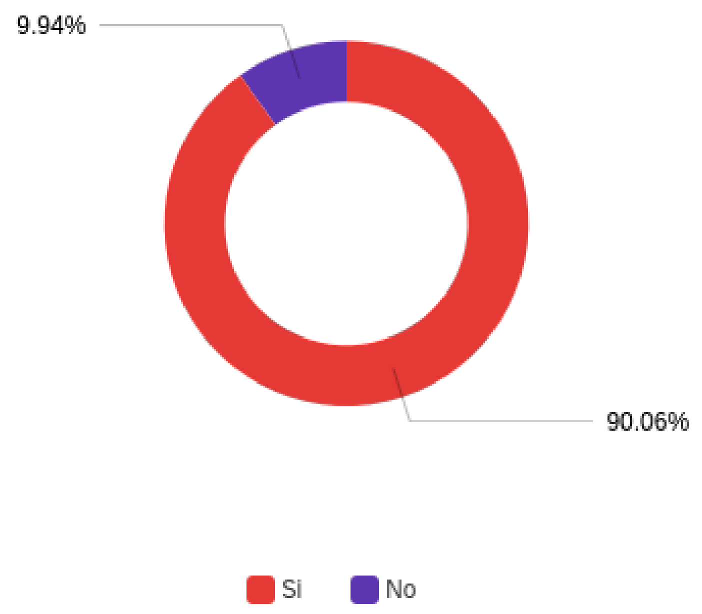
4.4 Analysis of collected data

In this paragraph, we will analyse the data on the first and second blocks of questions. The first block is general questions about how the consumer makes purchases, to better understand the consumer and their habits. The second block focuses on the context of social media and how this content can influence the consumer.

Q1 - Do you normally (for yourself or those living with you) buy food products?

Image 4.9: People making food purchases

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

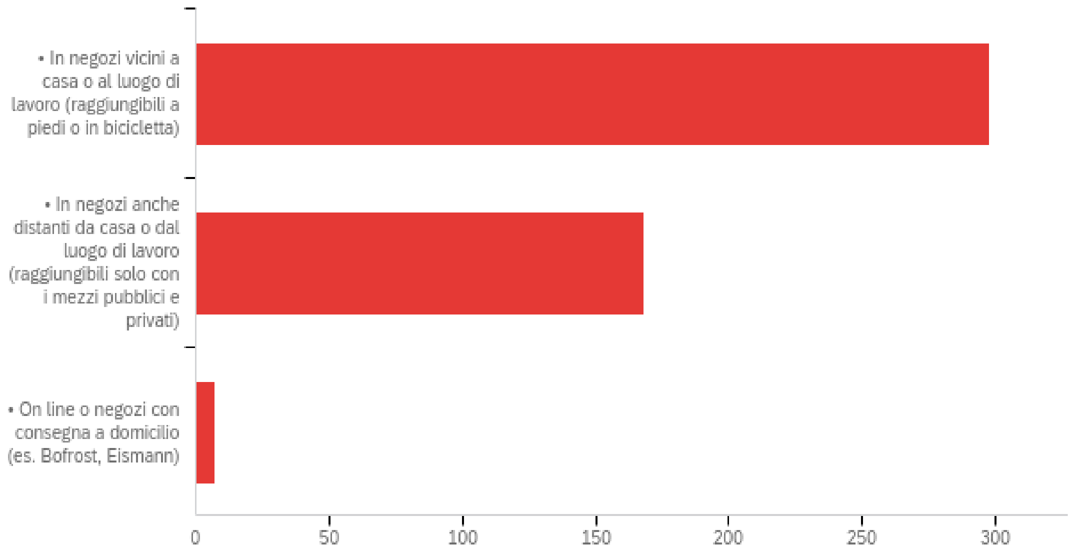


Out of the interviewed sample of 442 people, 90.06% (398 people) stated that they make food purchases for themselves or their families, only the remaining 9.94% (44 respondents) stated that they do not make food purchases.

Q2 - Where do you prefer to shop for food?

Image 4.10: Where consumers make their food purchases

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

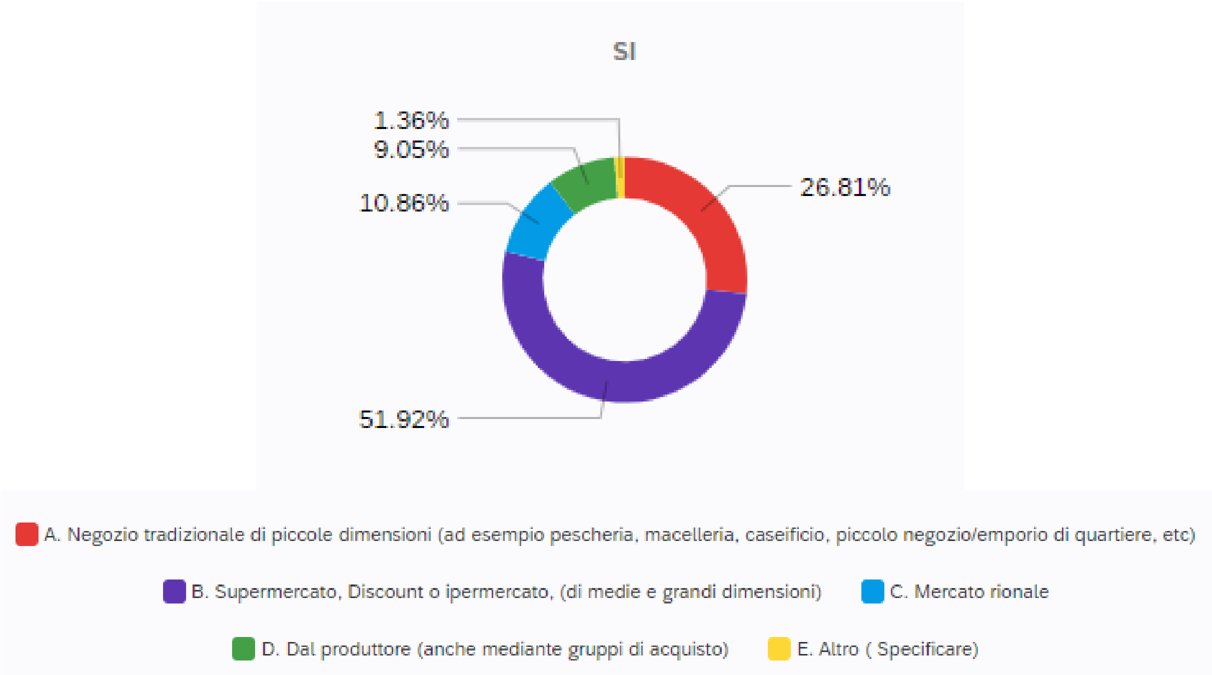


To the question of where you prefer to buy groceries, the respondents answered in the following way: 281 of the respondents (63,57%) prefer to buy groceries in shops close to their home or place of work. This consumer choice may depend on the time factor, the consumer works or is a commuting student and does not have much time to travel, or the choice depends on the simple convenience factor, buying at the shop near home because it is convenient. 151 of the respondents (34,64%) also prefer to buy in shops far from home or work, in this case, the time factor is not considered so important for the consumer. Only 7 respondents (1.58%) expressed the preference to buy online or in shops with home delivery.

Q3 - In which types of shops do you usually go to buy food products?

Image 4.11: Types of shops

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



Consumers were asked to indicate whether or not they usually go to these types of shops. About the traditional small shop (such as fishmonger, butcher, greengrocer etc.) the consumers are divided almost in half, 50.67% of the consumers (224) say they usually buy products from these shops while the other half 49.32% do not. This is because, with the presence of supermarkets and hypermarkets, consumers can find everything they need without having to go to many different shops. Supermarkets, discounters, and hypermarkets were chosen by 96.83% of the respondents, while only 3.16% said they do not usually buy in these types of shops. The opposite situation is true for the local market and purchases made directly from the producer or through purchasing groups. A 79,18% state that they do not habitually buy at the local market, as opposed to 20,81% who do. For purchasing groups or buying directly from the producer the situation is similar, 83.25% of respondents (368) say they do not usually buy through this method, perhaps because of inconvenience, because direct producers are far away even in other regions, perhaps because of lack of information, how purchasing groups work or where producers are located. A 16.74% of the respondents (74) buy directly from the producer or through purchasing groups.

Q4 - How often do you go to the following types of shops to buy food products?

Table 4.1: How often the consumer goes to the shops

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

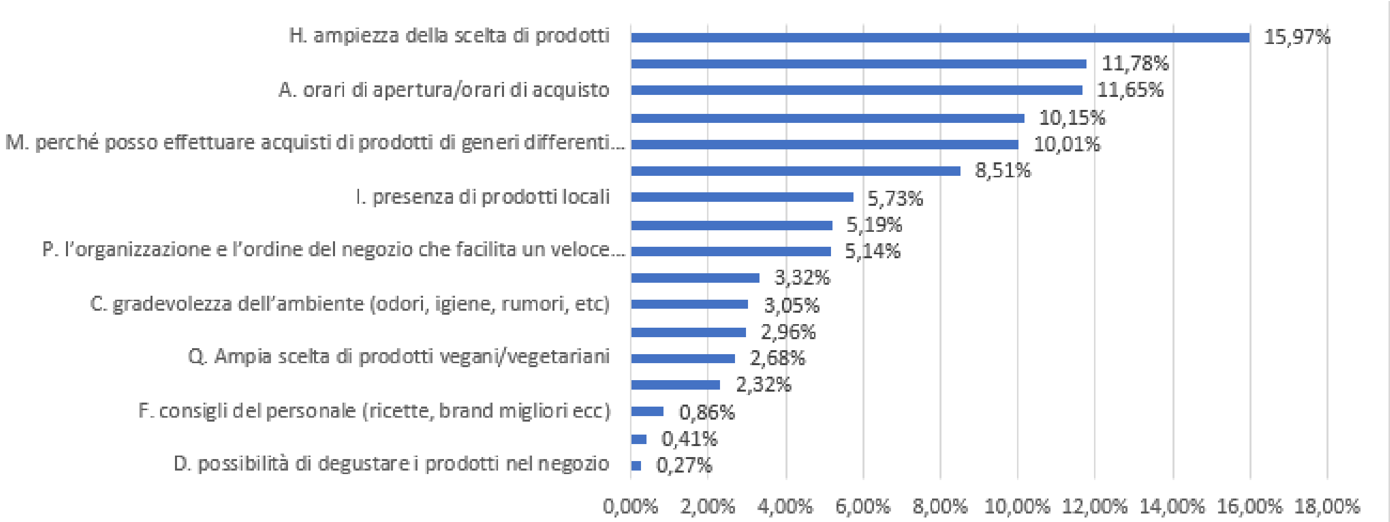
	Daily	2/3 times per week	1 time per week	2/3 times per month	1 time at month	Rarely - Never
A. Small shops	3,17%	13,11%	22,41%	14,38%	16,70%	30,23%
B. Discount, Supermarket	5,29%	37,21%	38,05%	14,80%	3,81%	0,85%
C. Local market	0,00%	0,63%	9,73%	4,86%	9,94%	74,84%
D. From producer	0,21%	0,85%	4,02%	3,38%	10,57%	80,97%
E. Other	0,63%	0,00%	1,06%	0,63%	0,85%	96,83%

Consumers were asked how often they frequent different types of shops. Traditional or small shops (baker, butcher shop etc.) are frequented daily for 3.17% of the respondents, 13.11% two or three times a week, 22.41% once a week, 14.38% two or three times a month, 16.70% once a month and the remaining 30.23% rarely if ever. The supermarket is the main choice of dead consumers, which is why 37.21% of people go there two or three times a week, 38.05% at least once a week and 5.29% every day. The local market, on the other hand, is mainly frequented by the consumer (74.84%) rarely or never, only 9.73% and 9.94% attend it once a week and once a month respectively. A similar situation occurs with the producer's shops, 80,97% of the consumers state that they do not go or go very rarely to this type of shop, about 10% go at least once a month while 4,02% once a week and 3,38% two or three times a month.

Q5 - What are your reasons for choosing the point of sale you use? (Max 3 options)

Image 4.12: Reasons consumers choose that shop

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



Consumers were asked about the reasons that lead them to buy in a particular shop rather than another, with consumers being able to choose several alternatives up to a maximum of three. The main reason for choosing a shop is the range of products, chosen by 15,97% of respondents, followed by promotional offers and discounts, chosen by 11,78% people, and in third place is opening hours, chosen by 11,65% people. Just below with 10,15% and 10.01% preferences is the quality of the products and the possibility to buy products of different kinds (meat, fish, vegetables, bread). The least chosen reasons are the possibility to taste the products, with 0,27% of preferences, and the possibility to spend time outside the home and socialise, 0,41% of preferences. The wide choice of vegan/vegetarian products reaches a total of 2,68% preferences, an example of how food culture is changing.

Q6 - How do you rate the presence of the following additional services in your grocery shop? (1= Not important, 2= Not very important, 3= Don't know 4= important 5= Very important, Absent)

Table 4.2: Evaluation of additional services

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

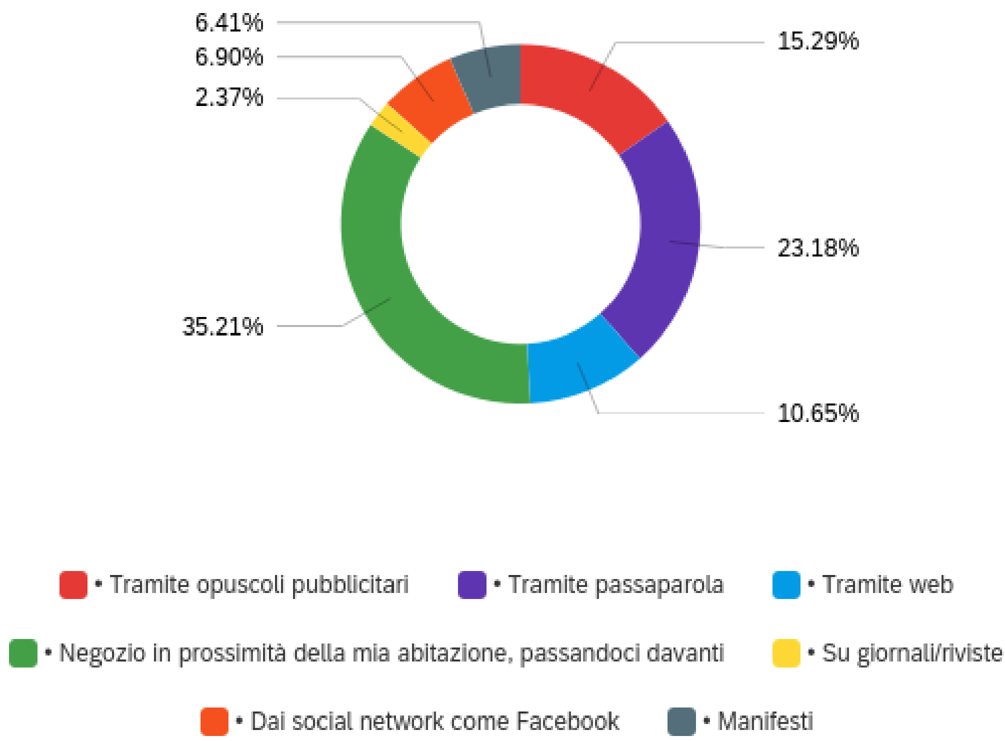
	Avarege
A. servizi integrati (pagamento utenze, Lottomatica)	3.40
B. consegna a domicilio	3.68
C. servizio di custodia (bambini e/o animali domestici)	3.79
D. possibilità di pagare a fine mese	3.78
E. programma di carta fedeltà	3.52
F. presenza di parcheggio	4.31
G. possibilità di pagare con diverse modalità	4.39

The consumer rated on a scale of one to five, where 1 mean not very important and 5 mean very important some services that can be found in the shop, there was also the option of absence, i.e., the service was not available. Among the various services, the most important for the consumer, average 4.30, is the possibility to pay in various ways with ATM, credit cards, cash (63,85% of preferences). The presence of parking is another important service for the consumer, the average of this service is 4.31. In third place, with an average of 3.79 is the child or pet care service. Right behind with an average of 3.78 was the possibility of paying at the end of the month. The services with the lowest average are integrated services, average 3.40 and the loyalty card programme, average 3.52.

Q7 - How do you generally find out about a food shop? (Max 3 answers)

Image 4.13: How the food shop is discovered

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

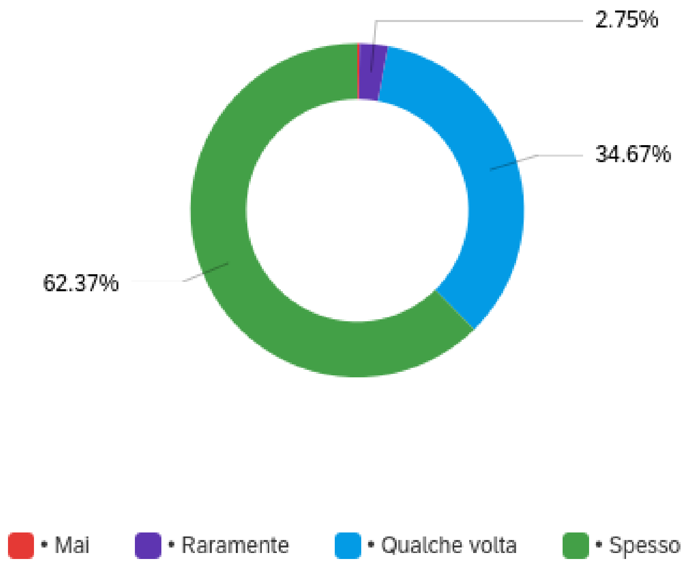


Consumers were asked to indicate how they find out about the shops, with up to three options to choose from. The main way to find out about a shop is to walk past it, perhaps because it is right in front of the home, this choice was indicated by 35,21% consumers. The second way is to find out by word of mouth, a friend or family member recommends the shop 23,18%. The least common way to find out about a new shop is through magazines or newspapers (2,37%). Social networks are mentioned as the place of source by only 6,90% consumers, close to this number also posters (6,41%). Advertising brochures have an important impact on the consumer, 15.29% of the sample discover new shops through this tool.

Q8 - How often do you return to a shop you have already visited to buy food?

Image 4.14: Back to the point of sale

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

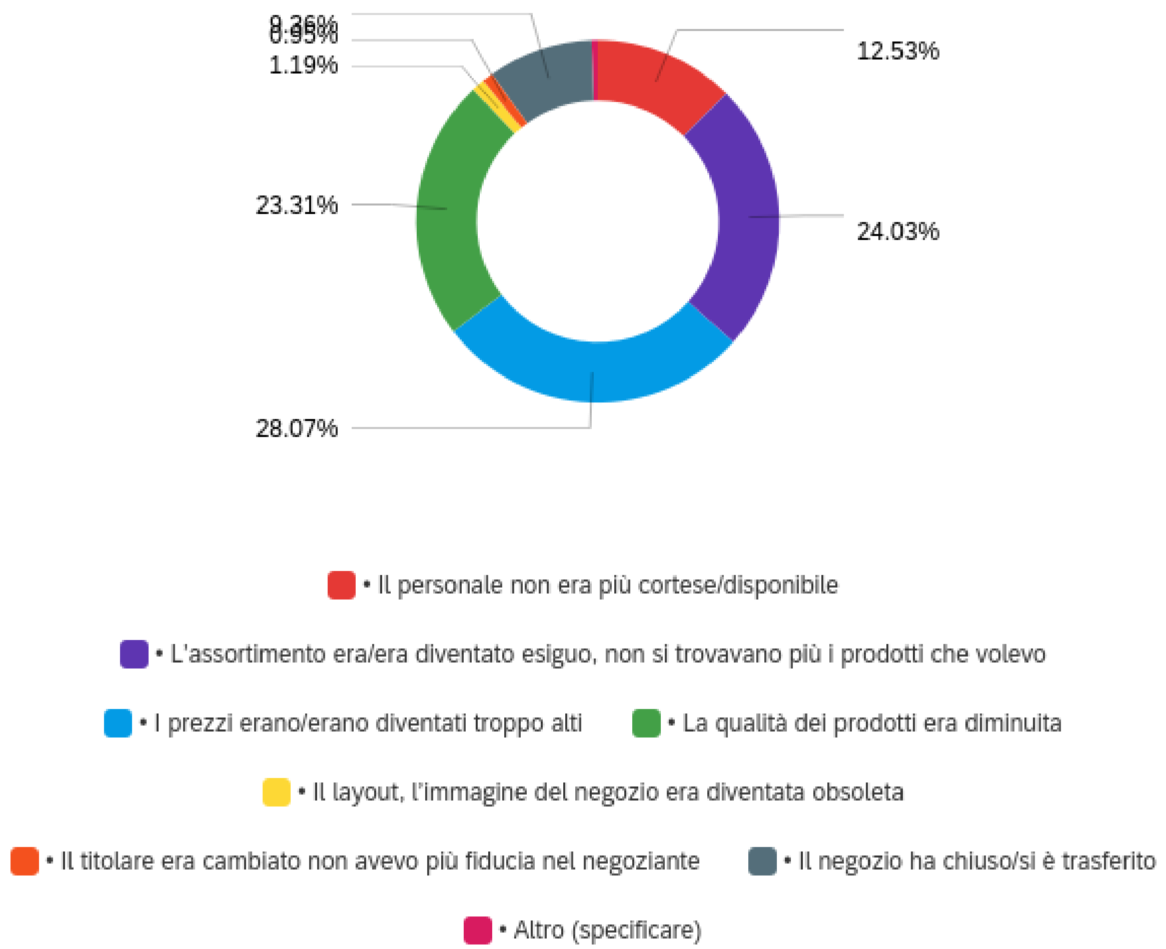


The data show that when asked how often you return to a shop you have already visited to buy food, consumers answered as follows: 62.37% said they return often to a shop they have already visited, 34.67% said they return a few times and 2.75% said they return rarely. Consumers answered as follows: 62.37% said they return often to a shop they have tried, 34.67% return a few times and 2.75% return rarely.

Q9 - What factors influence your decision not to return to a shop? (Max 3 answers)

Image 4.15: Factors influencing non-return in a point of sale

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

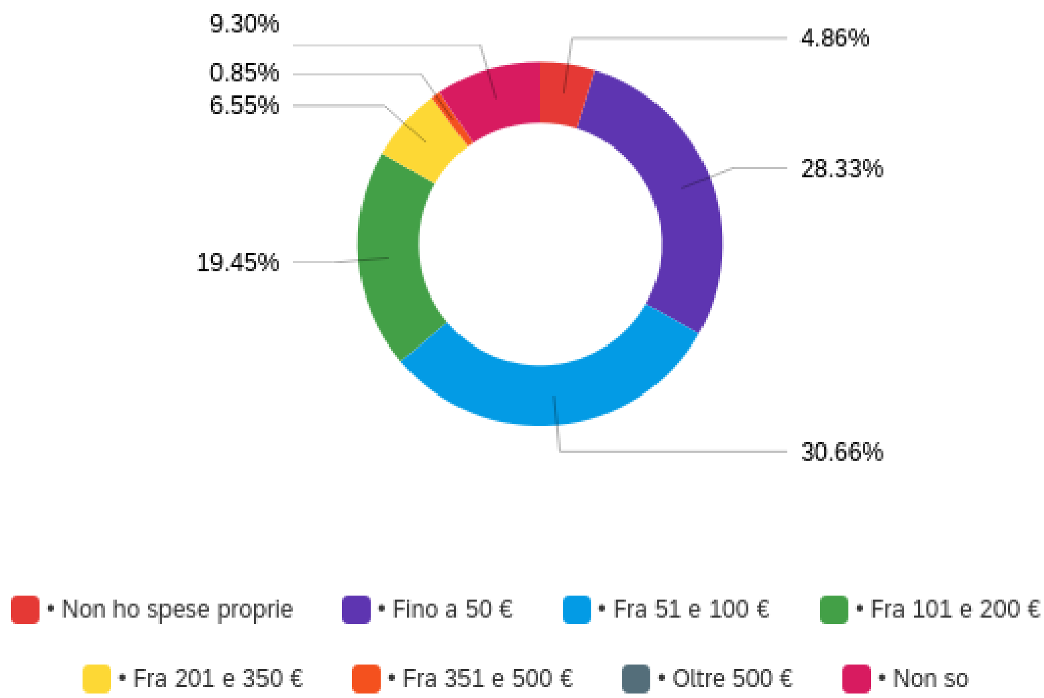


The main factors that influence consumers not to return to a shop are in the first place with 28.07% are prices that are too high, in the second place 24.03% the assortment of products was not very wide, and the needs of the consumer were no longer satisfied, in the third-place, 23.32% the quality of the products was no longer the same, it had decreased. The next level of importance was that the staff was not courteous (12.53%) or the shop had closed or moved (9.26%).

Q10 - How much do you spend per week on food shopping? (Including lunches and dinners out, aperitifs)

Image 4.16: Weekly food expenditure value in euros

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



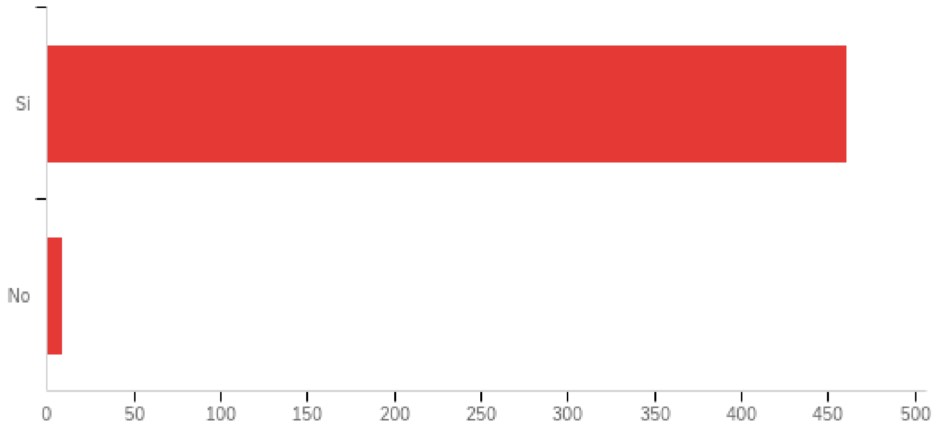
For the weekly food shopping, 30,66% of the interviewees declared to spend between 51 and 100 euros, 28,33% are slightly more frugal and manage to spend no more than fifty euros. On the other hand, 6,55% of consumers declared to spend between 201 and 350 euros, it can be assumed that this percentage of respondents are workers and for this reason, they often eat out for lunch, also because they may not have time to go home. A group of 9.30% of interviewees stated that they do not keep track of their weekly food expenses. While a small group of 4.86% stated that they have no expenses of their own.

The analysis of block one concerning general aspects of consumer habits and needs is concluded. Now we proceed with the analysis of the questions on block two, the one referring to the context of social media and its effects on the consumer.

Q11 - Do you subscribe to any social media?

Image 4.17: Social media subscription

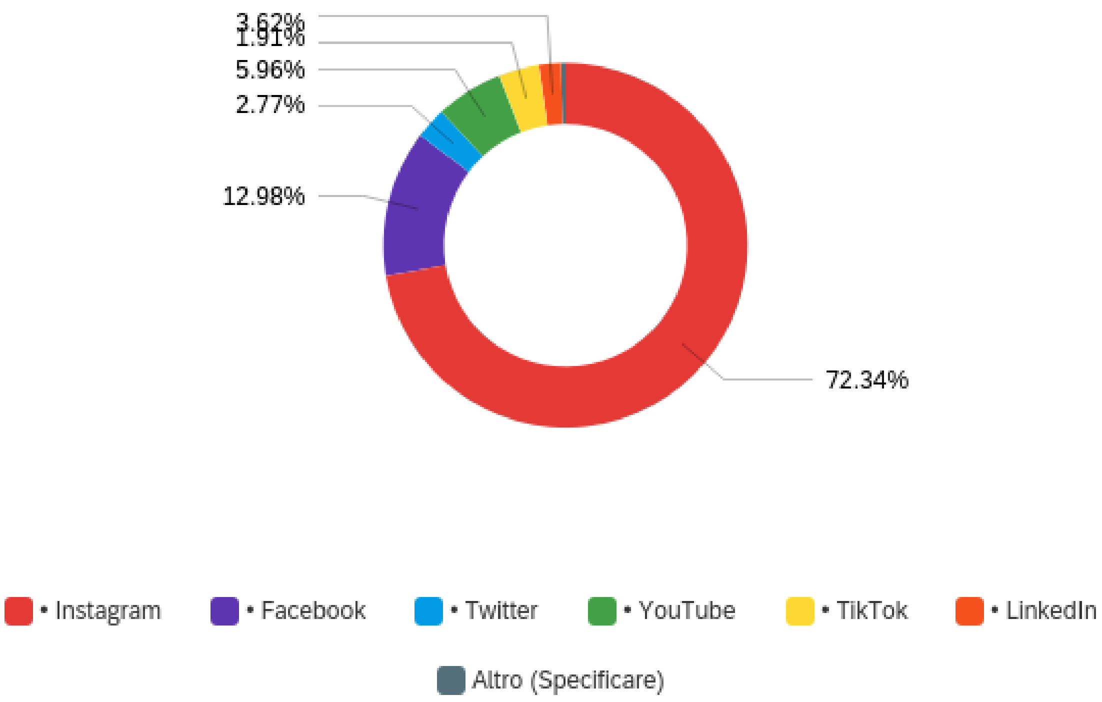
Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



Of the sample of 442 people, 98,09% said they were subscribed to at least one social media outlet, while the remaining 1.91% said they had none. Such a high percentage of social media subscribers is no longer surprising but only goes to show how embedded social networks are in people's lives. People tend to be online as soon as they wake up, especially young people who check their Instagram and Facebook apps as soon as they wake up to see if they have any messages or notifications. Social media has become so important that for some users it is their job, they get paid to post content (influencers). Today, imagining a life without social media is almost impossible, so addictive are these applications.

Image 4.18: Sample subscription to social media

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

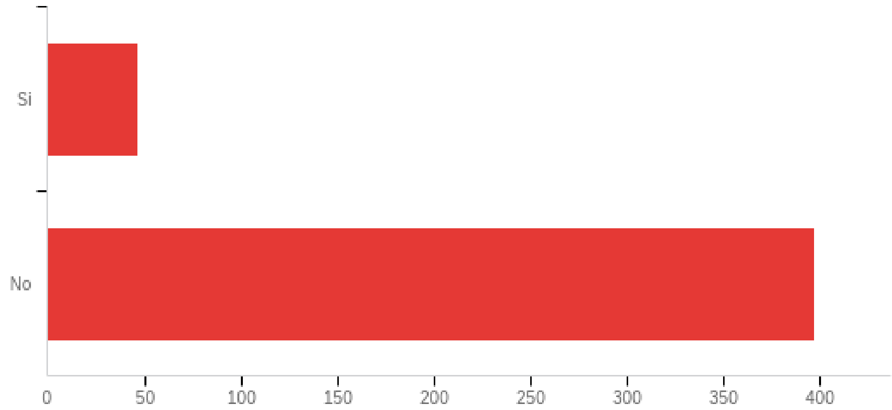


When asked which social media they use the most, the sample answered as follows: in the first place was Instagram, preferred by 72.34% of respondents. This choice is probably due to the fact that the sample is quite young, having grown up during the boom period of Instagram, and therefore prefers it to other social media. In second place is Facebook with 12.98% of the preferences, in third place YouTube 5.96%. 3.62% of the users confirm LinkedIn as their main social media, a percentage so low can be explained by the fact that most of the respondents are young students; therefore, still out of the context of work while the app is mainly addressed to that target. Tiktok, the latest social media trend, reached only 1.91%, perhaps because the app is still new and not well known to users.

Q13 - Do you follow the social profiles of food brands (e.g., Mulino Bianco, Barilla, Ferrero)?

Image 4.19: Do you follow the social profiles of food brands?

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

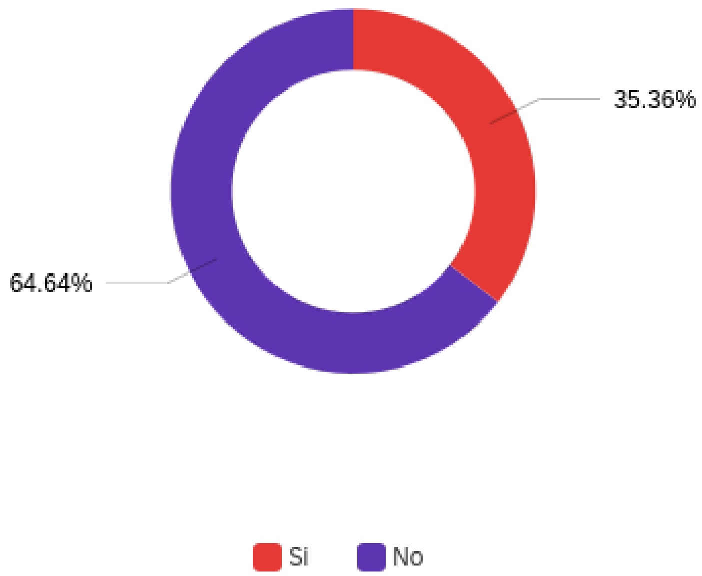


The sample was asked whether or not they follow the social pages of any food brand, 89.41% said no (395) while the remaining 10.59% said yes. Consumers who confirmed that they follow some pages were allowed to indicate them to better understand which brand they are talking about. Among the brands followed by consumers, the most mentioned are Barilla, Ferrero, Mulino Bianco, Nutella, Kinder, Lavazza, all well-known brands both in Italy and abroad. Among the less known brands there are Mulino Bertollo, Sgambaro, Wami water, Justegg, Pastafelicia etc. Two supermarket chains are also included in the list of brands followed: Esselunga and Conad.

Q14 - Do you follow the social profiles of food influencers?

Image 4.20: Sample follows food influencer

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

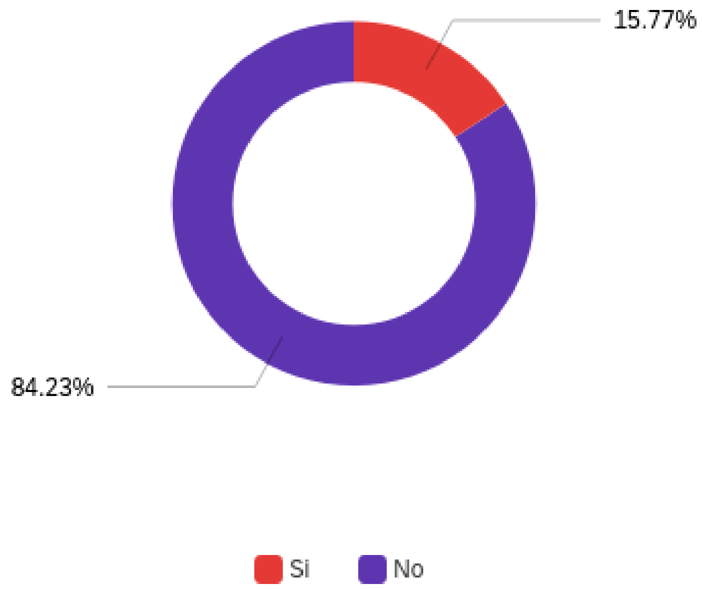


The sample was asked the same question as before, but this time about food influencers. Here the situation has changed: while in the previous question only 10.59% claimed to follow the social pages of food brands, food influencers account for 35.36%. 157 consumers follow at least one food influencer, while the remaining 64.64% do not follow them (285). The analysis shows that the most followed food influencer is Carlotta Perego of Cucina Botanica, a page dedicated to many tasty and inviting vegan recipes. Carlotta Perego is a young food influencer and since the sample is also very young, she may be preferred to other food influencers. Other very popular food influencers are Benedetta Rossi with Fatto in casa per voi, Chiara Maci, Diletta Secco, Lucake this young food influencer is mainly dedicated to the preparation of sweet recipes such as cakes, mono portions etc. Adriana Kulchytska is another young food influencer who has been making a name for herself on social media, particularly on TikTok. Cooker girl, Mrs Veggy, Chef in camicia, Giovanni Fois, Antonella Clerici, Little vegan witch, are other popular food influencers. From the data collected, it can be observed that the sample tends to follow food influencers who offer many vegan or vegetarian recipes. It can be assumed that this is a sample that gives weight to what they eat and the impact their consumption has on the environment, which is why they prefer a plant-based diet.

Q15 - Do you follow the social profiles of nutritionists?

Image 4.21: The sample follows nutritionists

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

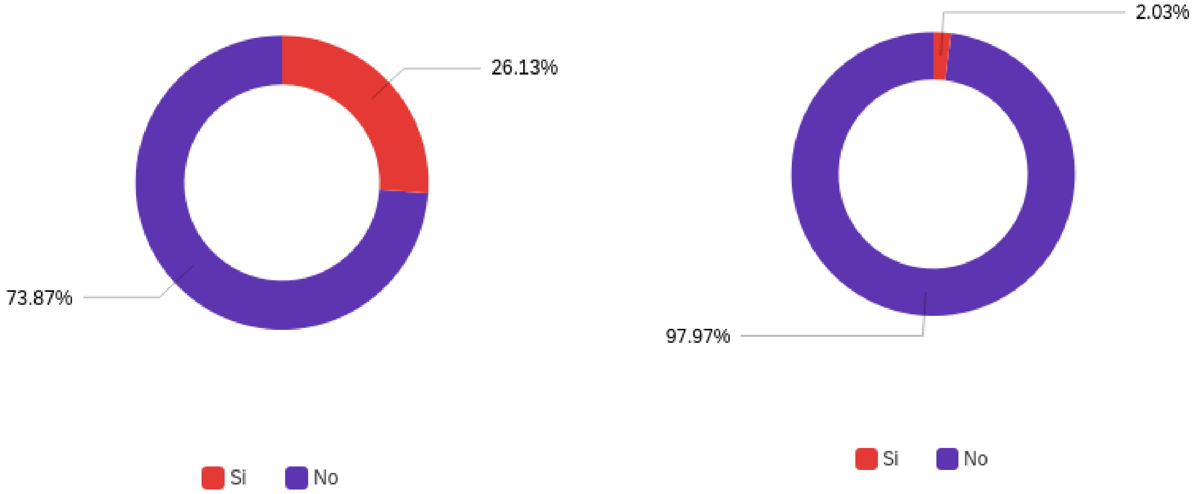


As far as nutritionists are concerned, 15.77% of the sample (70) claimed to follow them, while the remaining 84.23% did not (372 people). Among the most followed nutritionists are Dr. Anna Marchetti, Dr. Silvia Goggi, Dr. Edoardo Mocini. In addition to the famous nutritionists, some respondents indicated their nutritionist as the one to follow, the one who treats them and knows their habits. In this particular case, the two have a link and it is easier for the consumer to follow the advice of their nutritionist and also more credible and reliable, thanks to the link between them. In addition, the sample stated that they necessarily follow the social profiles of nutritionists but also pages dedicated to healthy eating and staying healthy, profiles such as atavolacolnutrizionista, ilgolosomangiarsano, aspirante_nutrizionista.

In the following two questions, the sample was asked whether they followed the social profiles of chefs and food critics; their answers are shown in Image 4.22.

Image 4.22: The sample follow social profiles of chefs and food critics

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

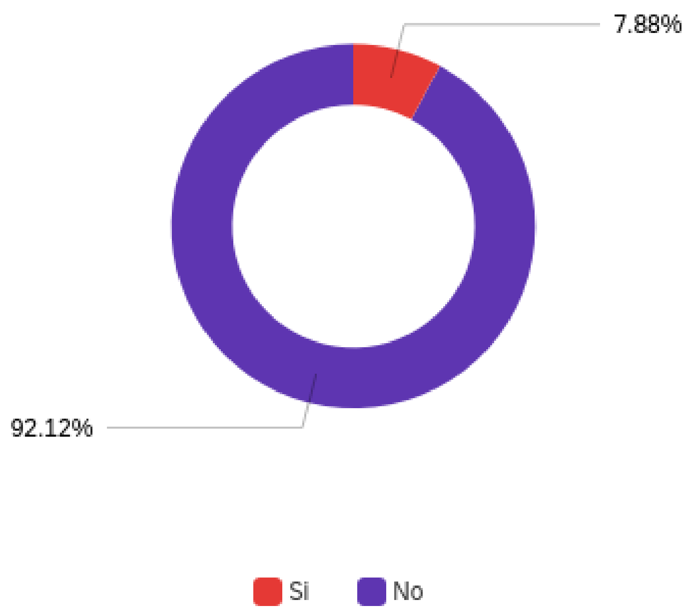


The image on the left refers to chefs. 26.13% of respondents (116) say they follow chefs' social profiles, while 73.87% of respondents (346) do not. The main Italian chefs followed are the four judges of Masterchef, a popular TV cooking programme, and they are Bruno Barbieri, Carlo Cracco, Antonino Cannavacciuolo and Giorgio Locatelli. All four are high-profile star chefs, well known to the Italian public. Another very popular chef is Alessandro Borghese, who also hosts several television programmes such as Quattro ristoranti, Junior Masterchef etc. The list also includes names of well-known pastry chefs such as Iginio Massari, Daniele Rossi, Ernest Knam, and Damiano Carrara, the last two of whom are also judges on the popular TV programme BakeOff Italia. Other popular chefs include Massimo Bottura, Hirohiko Shoda (known simply as Chef Hiro), Max Mariola etc. The most followed foreign chef is Gordon Ramsey, Florin Dumitrescu is also mentioned. The image on the right concerns the food critics followed. Only 2.03% of the respondents say they follow food critics, the remaining 97.97% do not. The pages followed are the Michelin guide and Food Club.

Q16 - Are you a member of any food community?

Image 4.23: The sample follow food community

Source: *Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up*

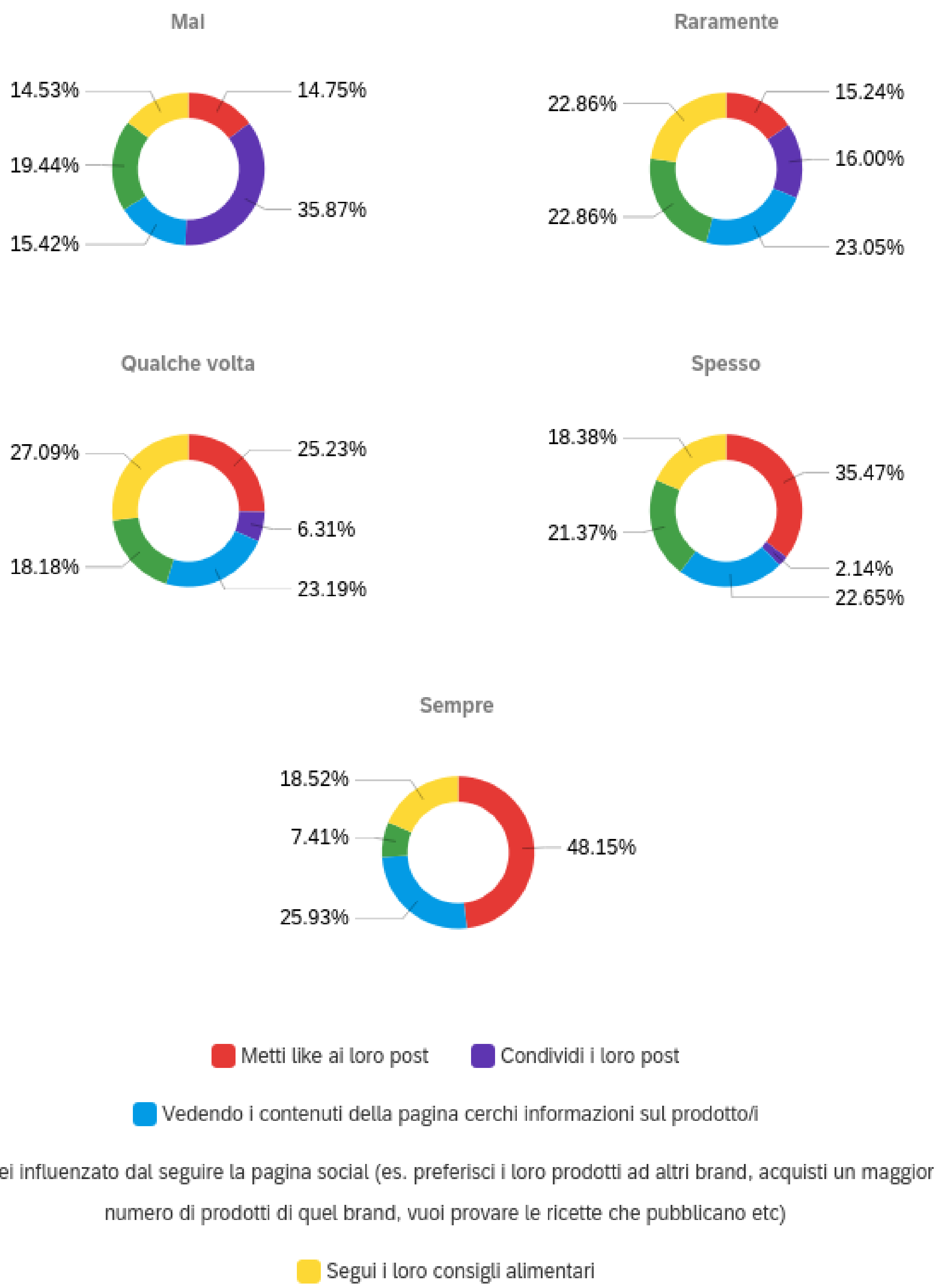


7.88% of respondents said they follow or are members of a food community, the first two most frequently mentioned being Alta.Cucina, GialloZafferano and Ifoodsteps. Food communities such as the vegan food community, gluten-free community, Korean cooking community, Asian cooking community, BuzzFeed, Asfood, and vegan communities or communities offering recipes without the use of milk and eggs are also named. The other 92.12% of the sample stated that they do not follow or subscribe to any of these pages.

Q17 - Rate the following statements (Remember they refer to the social pages of food brands, food bloggers, nutritionists, online food communities, food critics)

Image 4.24 Assessing claims

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



The sample was asked to rate, on a scale of never to always, statements referring to the context of social profiles of food influencers, food brands, nutritionists etc. A table is also included to the left of the graph for a better understanding of the graph. The order of the table follows the legend of the graph, so in the first line, there are the data that refer to the likes on the posts. Observing the data, it can be seen that 29.73% of the respondents' state that they never like posts, 18.02% rarely do so, the majority 30.63 do so sometimes, 18.69% often and only 2.93% always like. Another important fact to analyse is how many of the respondents see the contents of the page and then look for information about the products. 31.08% admitted they never do it, 27.25% rarely do it, 28.15% follow the advice only sometimes, 11.94% often do it and only a low percentage of 1.58% always do it. The sample was asked to self-assess and indicate whether they were influenced by following the social profiles of various food influencers, chefs, nutritionists etc., the sample answered 39.19% never; therefore, almost half of them do not feel influenced by the profiles they follow, 27.03% believe they are influenced rarely, 22.07% only sometimes, 11.26% often and only a small percentage of 0.45% often. The situation is slightly different when asked if they follow the advice of the various influencers, with the majority (32.88%) stating that they follow their advice, 29.28% never, another 27.03% rarely and less than 10% often.

Q18 - Rate the following statements, bearing in mind that they relate to the social media context

Table 4.3: The effects of content on food on the sample

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

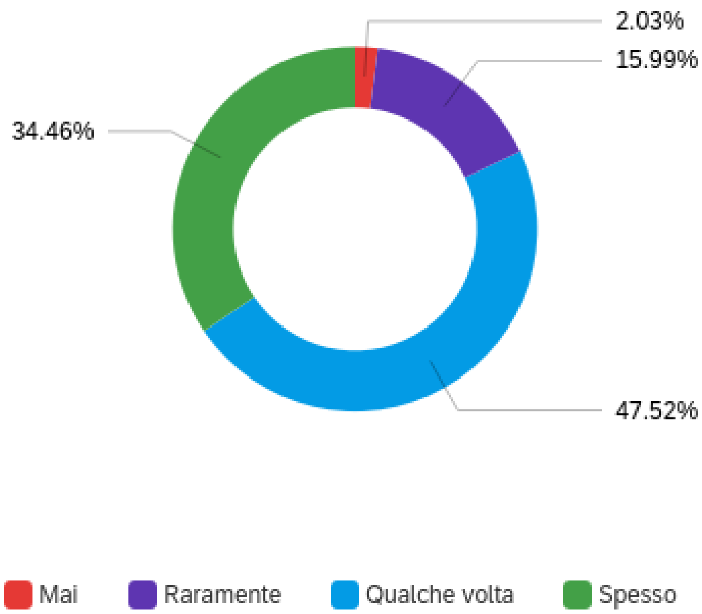
Campo	Media
Vedere contenuti sui prodotti alimentari salutari mi fa mangiare meglio	3.17
Vedere contenuti sul cibo mi fa venire fame	3.66
Vedere contenuti sul cibo mi fa sentire felice	3.35
Vedere contenuti sui prodotti alimentari mi fa mangiare di più	2.49
Vedere contenuti sul cibo "spazzatura" mi fa mangiare peggio	2.34
Vedere i contenuti sui prodotti vegani fa nascere il desiderio di provare i prodotti vegani	2.82
Vedere i contenuti sui prodotti alimentari mi fa sentire affamato	3.11
I contenuti alimentari dei tuoi amici influenzano i tuoi acquisti	2.43
Prima di provare un nuovo ristorante guardi le recensioni su TripAdvisor	3.58

The table had to evaluate on a scale from completely disagree (1) to agree (5) with a series of statements on the content of food. To simplify the understanding of the data a table was inserted. The table contains the average of each sentence that consumers evaluated. The first statement to be evaluated was: Seeing content about healthy food products makes me eat better, with an average of 3.17. The majority of the respondents (41.22%) fairly agree, 24.55% have never paid attention to it so they do not know what, 18.47% completely disagree with this statement, while 9.23% disagree. In opposition there is the statement number five: Seeing content about "junk food" makes me eat worse. The average of this sentence is 2.34, sample did not respond in the same way as in the previous question. 28.83% stated that watching junk food does not influence them at all, 33.33% also disagreed with this statement, 17.34% did not know, 16.44% stated that they are influenced by junk food. Comparing the first and the fifth statement it can be observed that the sample believes to be influenced more by healthy contents than by junk food contents. The second statement, have the higher average (3.66) and is about whether content about food makes the respondent hungry. Exactly half of the consumers said they agreed with this statement, even 20.27% agreed. 11.04% never paid attention to it and the remaining 6.31% and 12.39% totally disagreed with the former and somewhat disagreed with the latter. From the analysis, we note the emotion that posts about food cause to the consumer. 43.92% of the consumers say that they quite agree with the statement that content about food makes them feel happy, 9.91% completely agree with this statement, 25.58% did not care and the remaining about 19% disagreed or completely disagreed. Another important finding from the analysis is that consumers believe that they are not influenced by the food consumption of their friends, average 2.43 one of the lower. More than 56% disagreed or completely disagreed with this statement, while 22.52% fairly agreed. The situation regarding the influence of review sites such as TripAdvisor is different. Average 3.58, the second one most influential. 42.57% of the sample agreed with the statement that they consult TripAdvisor before trying a new restaurant, 25.90% completely agreed. These data confirm what was stated in chapter three where the influence of online word of mouth of review sites was discussed. Respectively 11.49% and 13.51% state that they completely disagree and disagree with this sentence.

Q19 - Does seeing new recipes make you want to try them?

Image 4.25: The desire to try recipes seen on social media

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

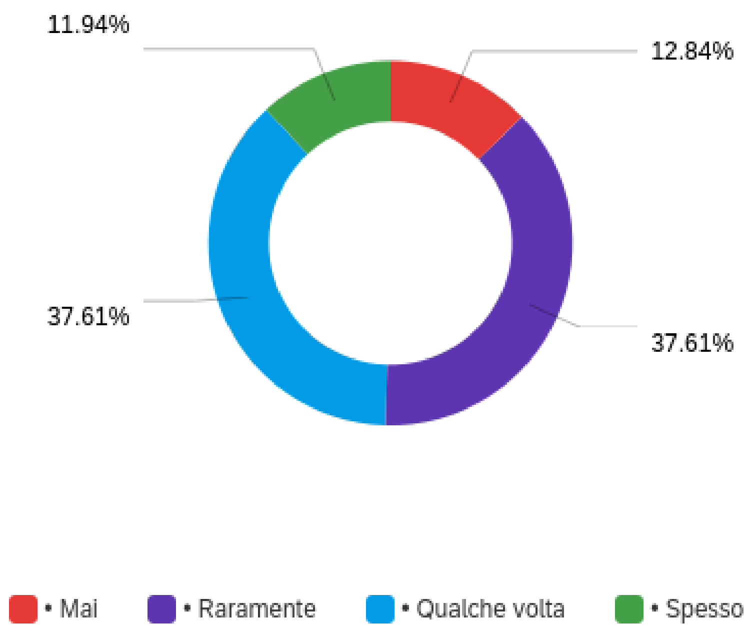


Recipes on the social profiles of food influencers, chefs and nutritionists are an important part of the content they publish. These recipes are tempting, tasty and often easy to make, you don't need to be a chef to replicate them. The sample was asked to rate how big their desire to replicate these recipes is. 47.52% of the respondents (210) sometimes wanted to try these recipes, 34.36% always wanted to try them (152), 15.99% rarely wanted to try them (71). As mentioned above, these recipes are very appetizing and inviting. The percentage of respondents who never want to try them is a very small percentage, only 2.03% (9).

Q20 - How often do you actually cook the recipes you have seen on social media?

Image 4.26: How often the sample tries online recipes

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



After asking the sample how much they wanted to try the new recipes, they were actually asked how often they tried these recipes. Here the percentages change slightly compared to the previous question. 12.84% of the respondents said they never try them, 37.61% said they rarely or sometimes cook them (166) and 11.94% cook them often (53).

4.5 Bivariate analysis

In the previous paragraphs, all the data collected by the survey were analysed using a mono-variate analysis, but in this paragraph, a bivariate analysis will be carried out. The bivariate analysis consists of analysing the data resulting from the consideration of two variables at the same time. Two variables will be combined: a social media question and a demographic variable to better understand how consumers responded to the survey.

A first bivariate analysis that can be studied is the combination of the most used social media and the age of the consumers, to understand if in some way the age of the consumer influences the choice of the platform, they use most.

Table 4.4: Most used social media compared to the age of the sample

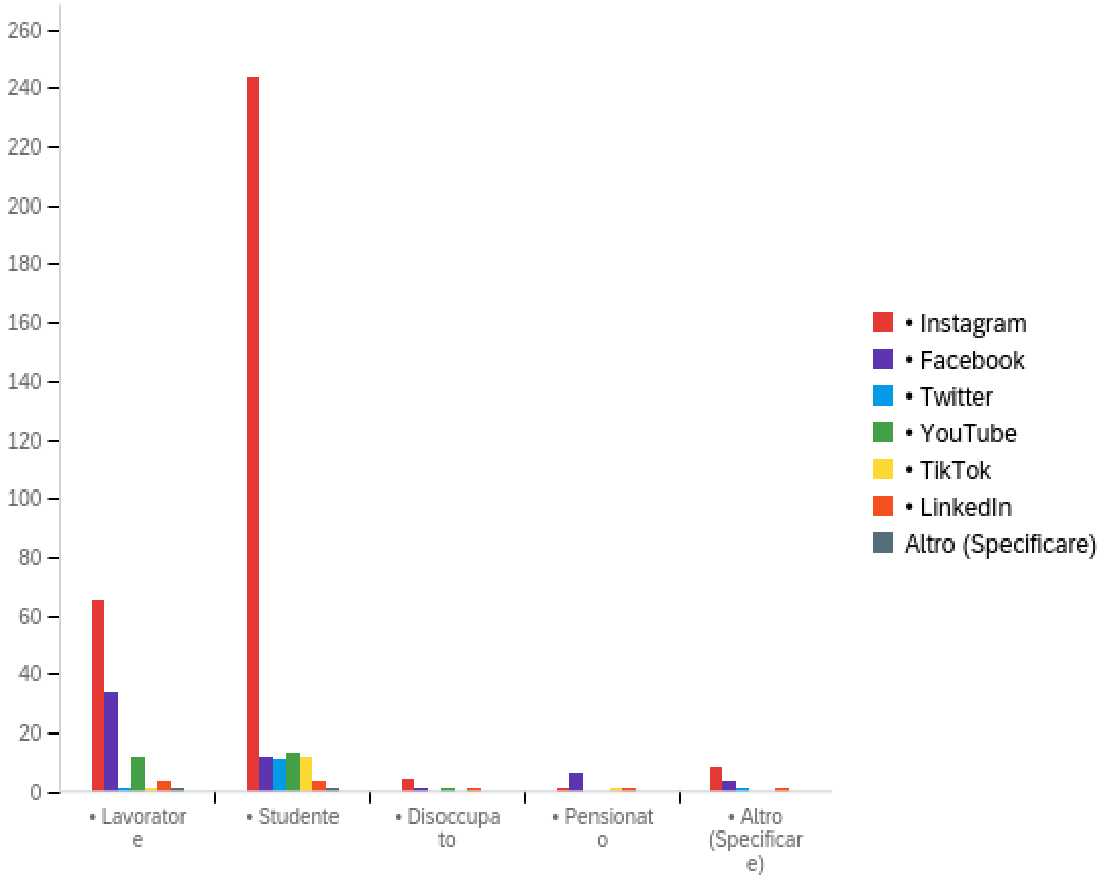
Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

GENERATION	INSTAGRAM	FACEBOOK	TWITTER	YOUTUBE	TIKTOK	LINKEDIN
BOOMER	0%	90%	0%	0%	10%	0%
X GEN.	37%	53%	0%	11%	0%	0%
MILLENIALS	43%	38%	0%	13%	4%	2%
Z GEN.	83%	5%	4%	5%	3%	0%

The table shows in percentage terms which are the main platforms that each generation uses the most. It is not difficult to imagine that the older generations will use Facebook more, because the content is more appropriate for their age and because it was the first social network to become popular. The data confirms this theory, the Baby Bommer and X Generation use mainly Facebook, the former with a percentage of 90% and the latter with 53%. The other platforms used by Generation X are Instagram 37% and YouTube 11%. The last two generations, millennials, and generation Z, use almost all the social networks present. The category of millennials breaks down as follows: 43% use more Instagram, 38% more Facebook, 13% YouTube, 4% TikTok and 2% LinkedIn. The main account of generation Z is Instagram, with 83%, but other platforms such as Facebook are also used by 5% of respondents, Twitter 4%, YouTube 5% and TikTok 3%. LinkedIn is hardly used by anyone, but this is probably due to the fact that, being a young generation, they are not yet working.

Image 4.26: Social media most used about respondent's occupation

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



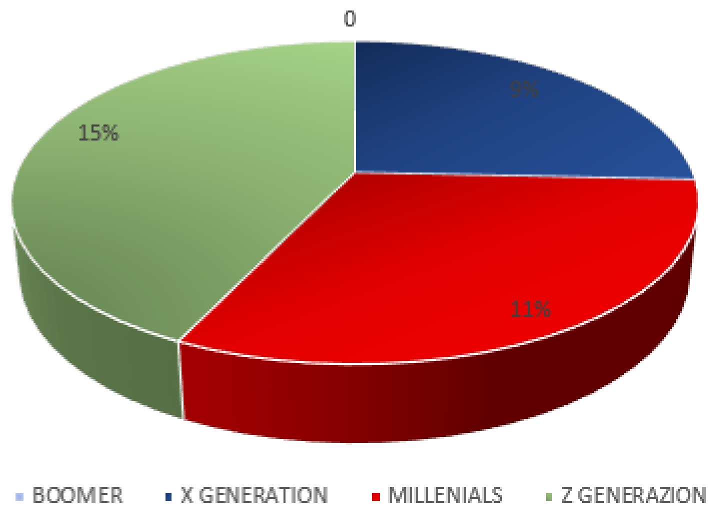
In this graph it is even more evident between the use of social media is the age of the respondent, while young students mainly used Instagram but also all other social media platforms respondents from the working category mainly use Instagram and Facebook. As they get older, the sample uses less and less of the various platforms and prefers only some of them, among the older target group Facebook is the most used platform.

The second question taken into account is whether or not the respondent follows social profiles of food brands, this variable is compared with the respondent's age and gender.

Table 4.5: Proportion of food brands followed concerning age

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

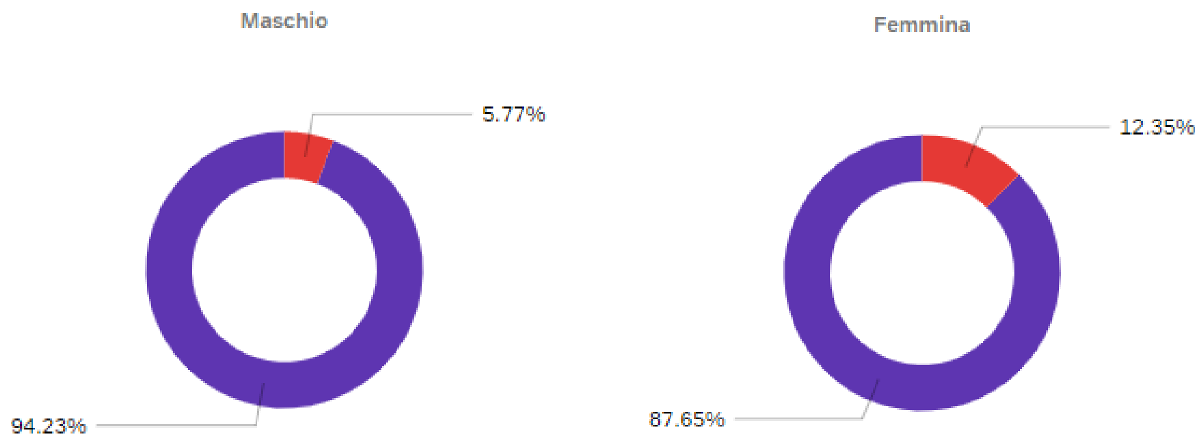
GENERATION	BOOMER	X GENERATION	MILLENIALS	Z GENERAZION
YES	0	6%	9%	12,5%
NO	100%	91%	91%	87,5%



When the sample was asked whether they followed the social pages of food brands, the vast majority answered no, only a small part (about 11%) answered yes. It was therefore decided to analyse by generation how the brands' social profiles are followed. None of the Boomer generation stated that they follow at least one social profile, this is perhaps due to their 'lack of experience' with social media. Already a small part (6%) of the Z generation claim to follow some brands. 9% of millennials follow food brand profiles. The generation that follows these companies the most are Generation Z (12,5%), who are starting to pay a lot of attention to the food they eat and its impact on the environment. Young consumers are interested in following companies to understand how they operate, what their values are, their plans for the future. Young consumers pay a lot of attention to the impact that companies have on the environment and look favourably on companies that fight against climate change.

Image 4.27: Percentage of food brands followed by gender

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

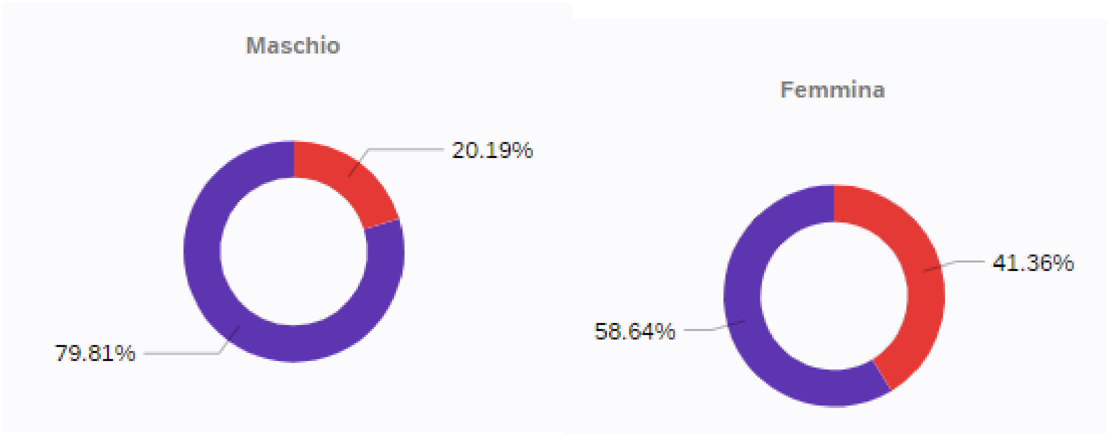


Taking into account the gender variable and the variable of following or not following food brands on social media, it can be seen that the percentage of women (12.35%) who follow profiles is more than double that of men (5.77%). However, there is the unknown of those who have not expressed a choice (7.14%).

In the following graph, the gender of the sample is also taken into account, but this time concerning following the social profiles of food influencers.

Image 4.28: Percentage of food influencers followed about gender

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

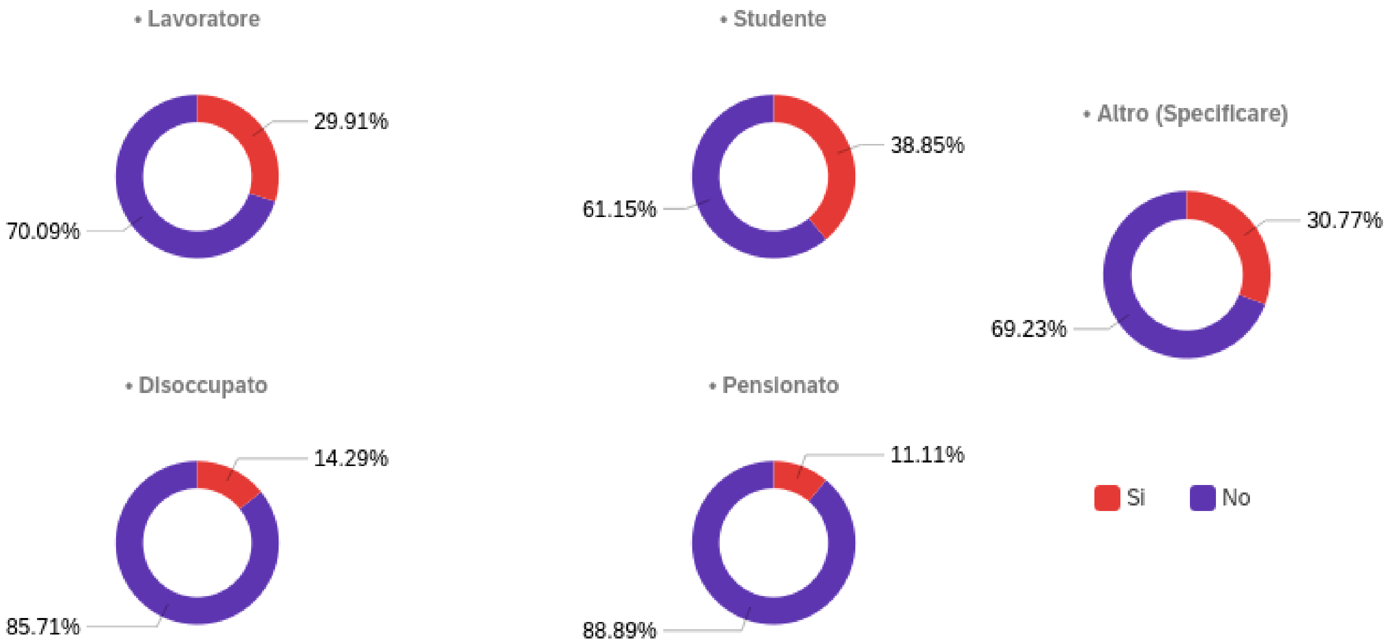


In the case of food influencers, the situation has not changed, in the sense that the percentages have increased, more people follow food influencers but the ratio of male to female gender has remained the same.

The male gender following food influencer profiles is 20.19%, while the female gender following food influencer profiles is more than double the male gender (41.36%). The female gender is more likely to follow other profiles than the male gender. Those who follow food influencers and preferred not to declare their gender remain at the same percentage of 7.14%.

Image 4.29: Percentage of food influencers followed concerning employment

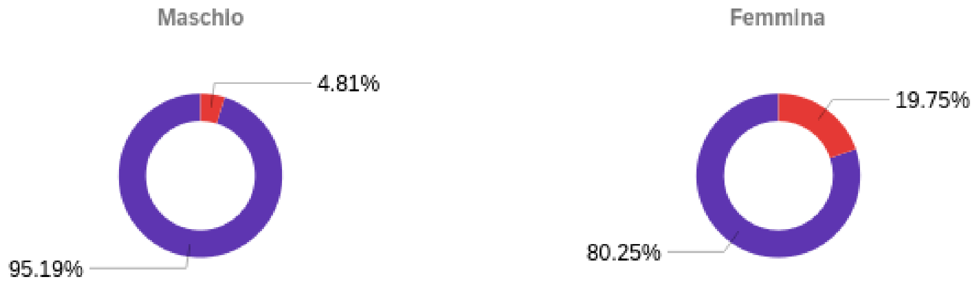
Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



Food influencers are followed mainly by students (38.85%), followed by the other category (30.77%), which is largely represented by housewives and working students. 29.91% of working people follow food influencers, and 14.29% of unemployed people. Among older people the percentage decreases, only 11.11% of retired people follow food influencers, the same phenomenon occurs for food brands, the older the sample the less they follow social profiles.

Image 4.30: Percentage of nutritionists followed with gender

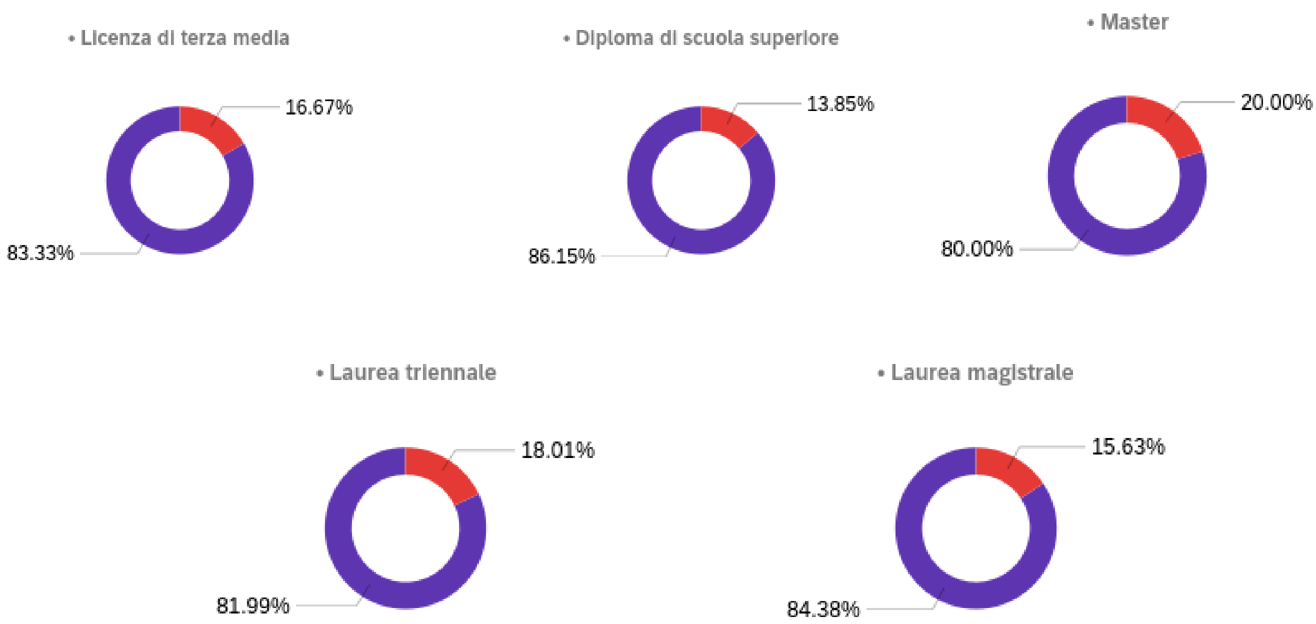
Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



In graph 4.33 the gender of the sample is related to those who mainly follow nutritionist profiles. It can be observed that the female gender is more willing to follow these users (19.75%) while the male gender is a clear minority (4.81%). One hypothesis for which these data can be explained is that the female gender tends to be more attentive to the food they consume and better informed about the effects of various dishes.

Image 4.31: Percentage of nutritionists followed about gender

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

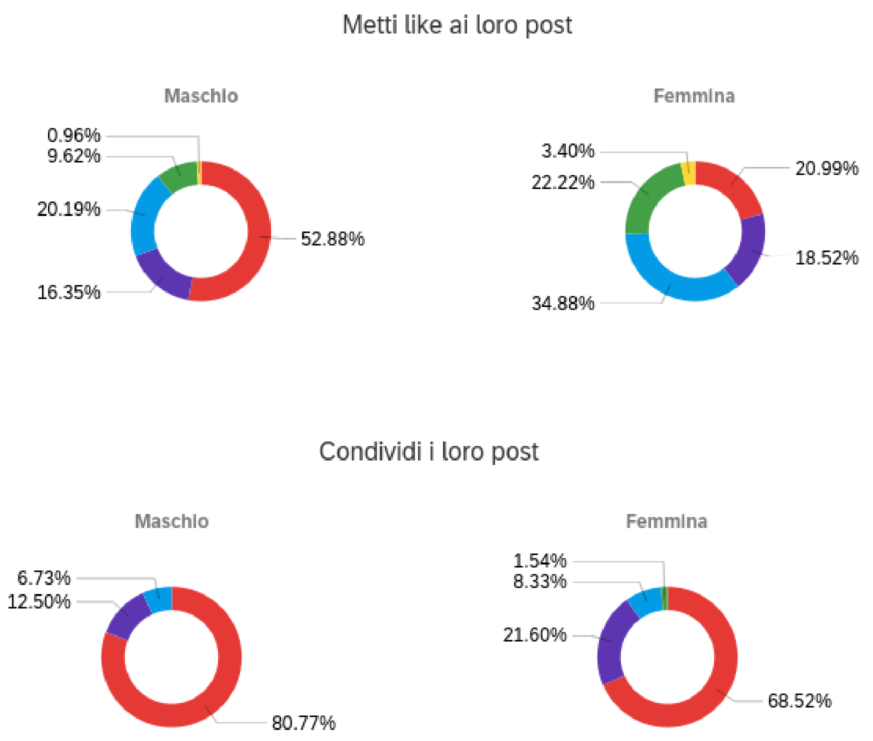


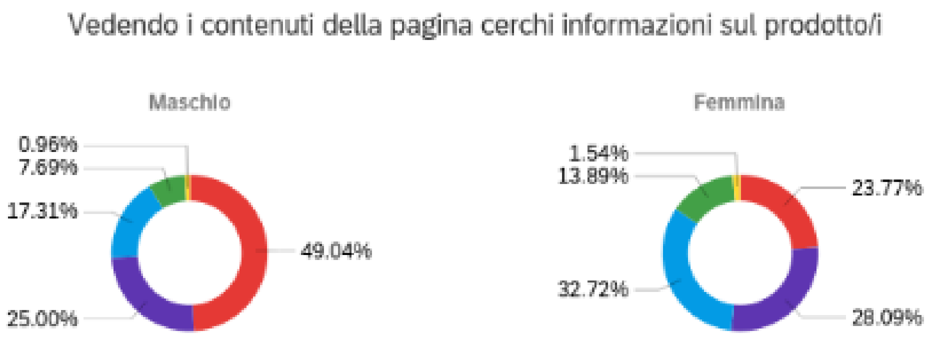
On the other hand, considering the percentage of nutritionists followed concerning the education of the sample, it is observed that there is not much distinction between the various classes. A different level of education does not influence the consumer to follow or not the nutritionists. The percentages are all similar enough that no particular behaviour is observed. Consumers with a master's degree are the largest percentage (20%) while consumers with a diploma are 13.85%. However, it must always be considered that each level of education corresponds to a different number of subjects, interviewed with a master's degree are 64 while those with a high school diploma 195 out of a sample of 442.

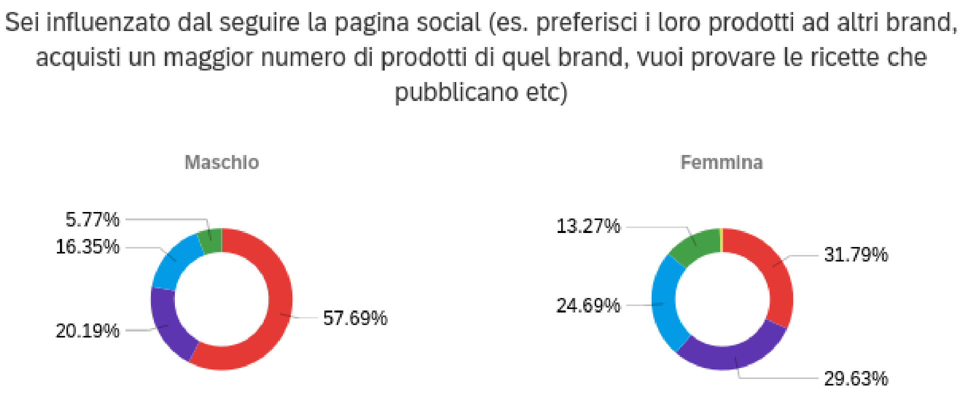
As far as food influencers are concerned, the data show that there is a certain harmony. Different levels of education, occupation group or income do not significantly influence the percentage of the sample following food influencers. Food influencers are followed by a similar percentage of users in each category. Taking into account the gender of the respondent, the percentages remain similar, with female respondents having a higher percentage of 29.32% and male respondents having a slightly lower percentage of 19.23%, but still higher than other categories, for example, nutritionists (4.81%).

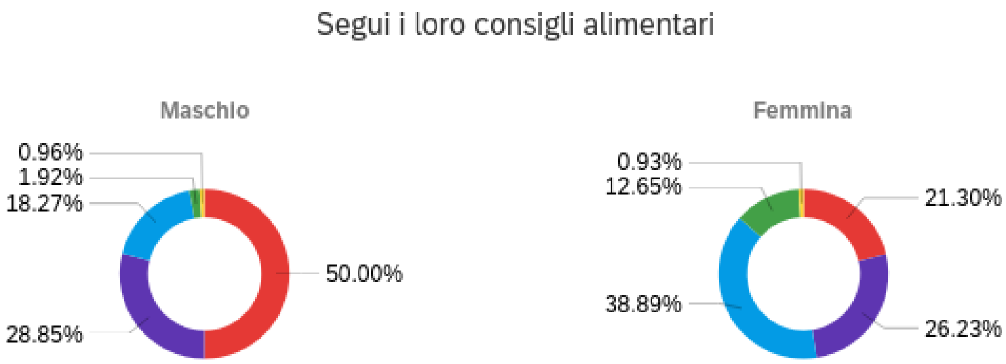
Image 4.32: Assessment of statements about gender

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up









Looking at the numerous data, the first thing you notice is that the female gender tends to be more active in all categories. The male gender tends to be more inactive, simply viewing the content without performing any action. The category where consumers tend to be more inactive is on sharing posts. As many as 80.77% of the male gender never share posts, 12.50% do so only rarely and 6.73% sometimes. On the other hand, 68.52% of the female gender never share, 21.60% rarely, 8.33% sometimes and the remaining 1.54% often. The category where the male gender is most active is when looking for information on products posted by food influencers, nutritionists etc. Half of the male consumers do not look for anything

(49.04%), 25% look for information rarely, 17.31% sometimes, 7.69% often and the remaining 0.96% always. The figures for the female gender are broken down as follows: 23.77% never look for product information, 28.08% rarely do so, 32.72% sometimes do so, 13.89% often and 1.54% always. The category in which the female gender is most active is liking posts: only 20.99% of the members do not take any action, 18.52% do it rarely, 34.88% sometimes, 22.22% often and 3.40% always. More than half of the

male gender is inactive (52.88%), 16.35% likes rarely, 20.19% rarely, 9.62% often and 0.96% always.

Image 4.33: Assessment of statements concerning employment

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

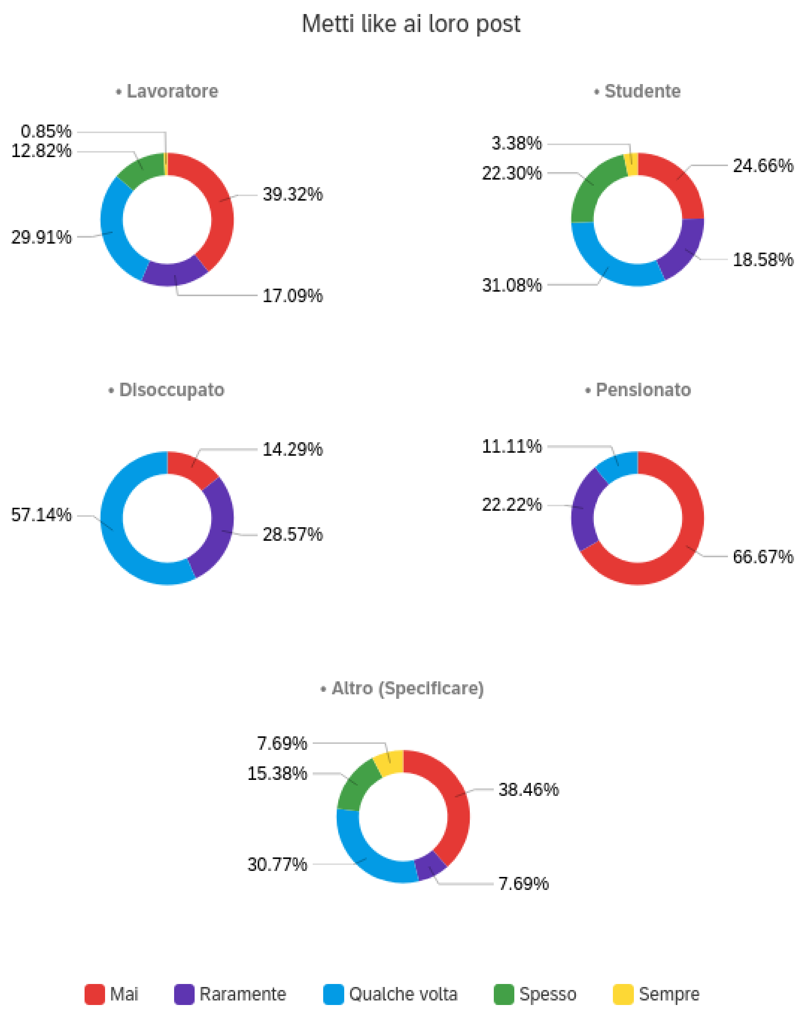
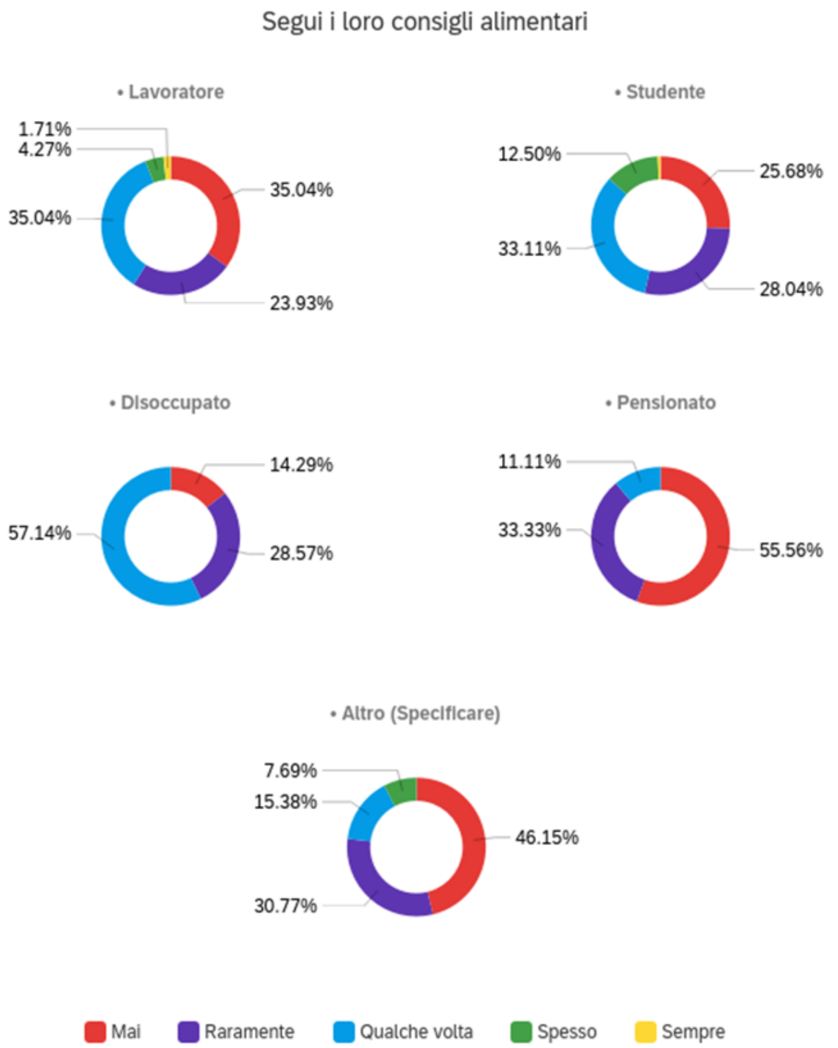


Image 4.34: Assessment of statements concerning employment

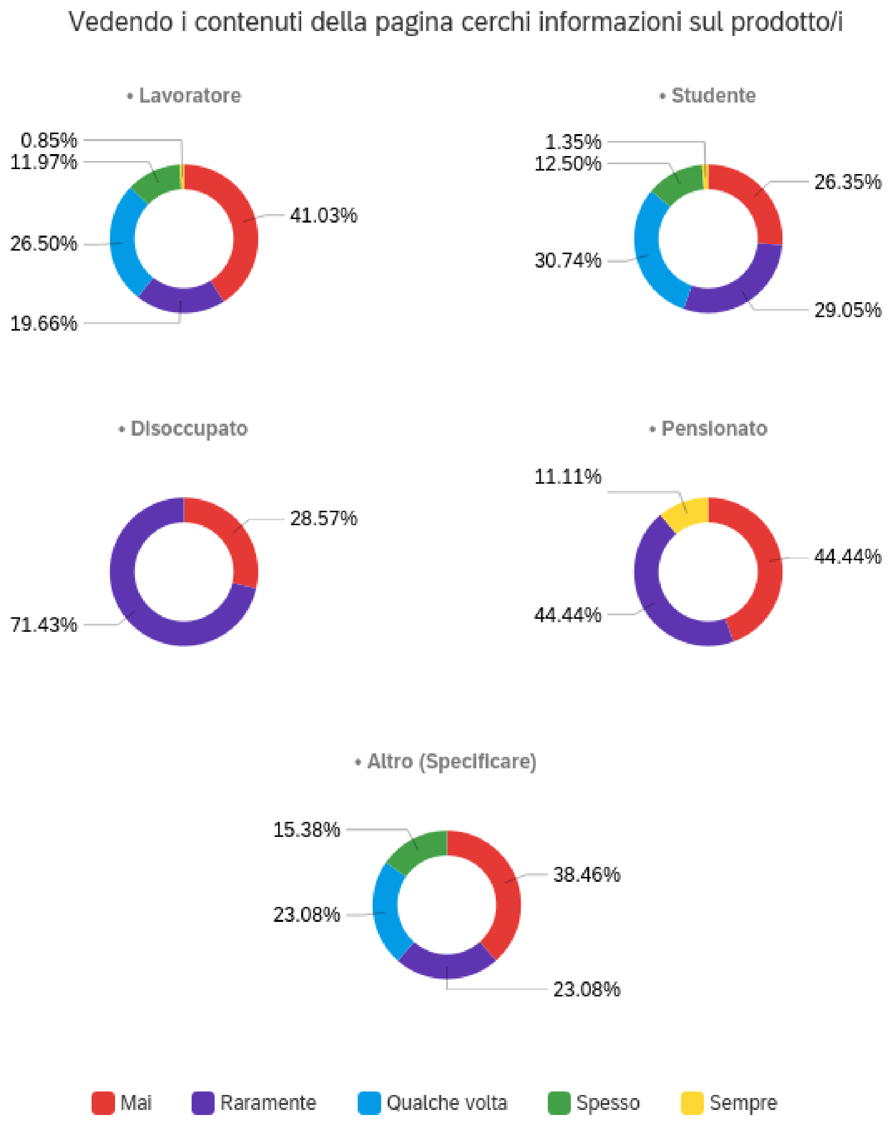
Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



Consumers assessed how often they follow food advice, for this analysis the sample was divided according to occupation. The retired category is the one that never follows food advice (55.56%), in second place with 46.15% the other category represented by housewives and working students and in third place workers (35.04%). The category of unemployed people is the category that follow the advice sometimes (57,14%) but the class that follow often the advice is represented by the students (12.50%).

Image 4.35: Assessment of statements concerning employment

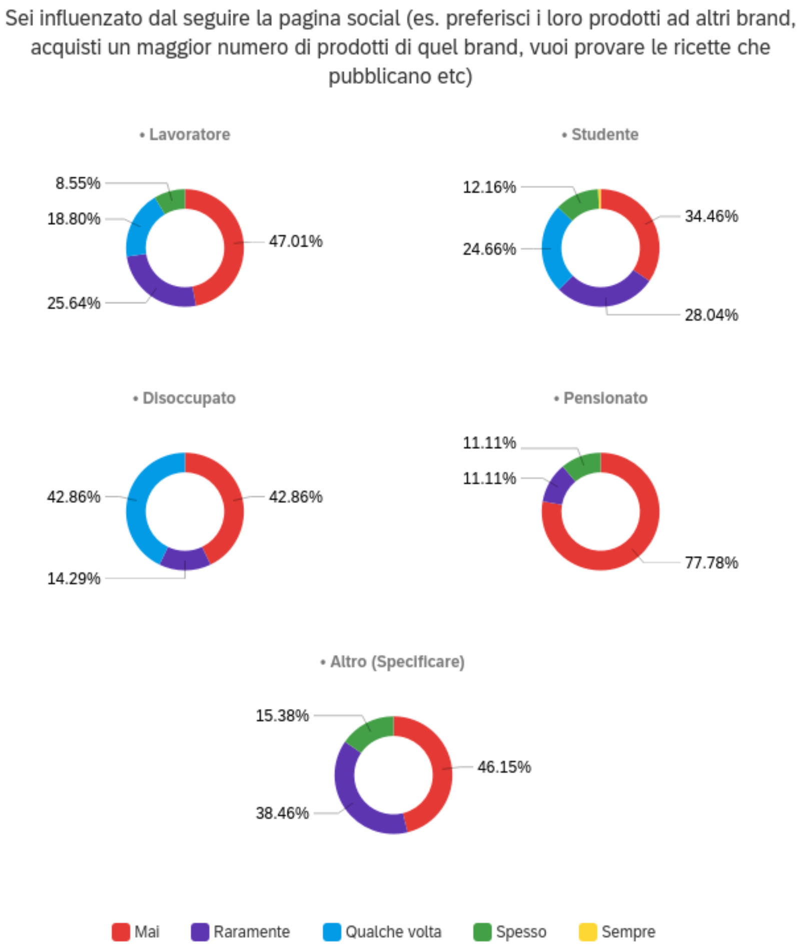
Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



The sample, considering the other statements, is more interested in looking for information on sponsored products. The categories that seek information the most are workers (11.97%) and students (12.50%). On the other hand, pensioners are the class that almost never looks for information (44,44%), maybe because they have well defined consumptions and hardly change the products they consume.

Image 4.36: Assessment of statements concerning employment

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



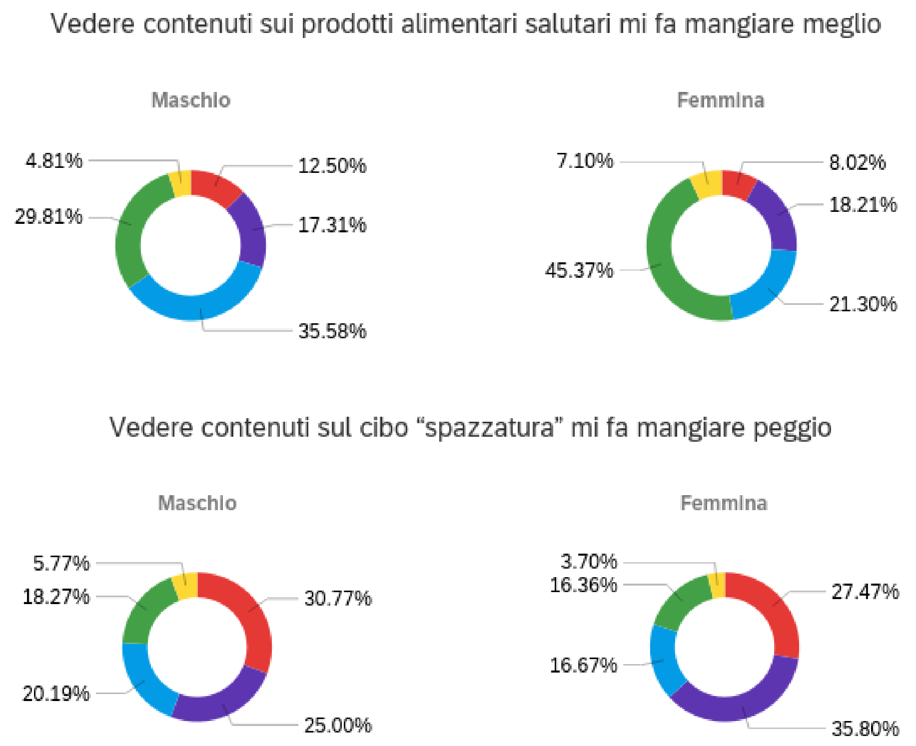
In general, the sample does not think that the use of social media can influence their food consumption in any way. This is because many people are not aware of it or have never paid attention to it. Only a small percentage in all categories (more or less 11%) think that social media influence their food consumption. The class more aware about this factor is represented by the housewives (15,38%), follow student class 12,16%.

The general trend that can be observed in these images is that the target group with lower age, represented by students, has a higher level of activity. Students are more active in the content of food influencers, opinion leaders etc. A higher percentage of users interact by liking, sharing the post, looking for information on sponsored products and following the advice they receive. This trend among students may be because social media are now an integral part of their lives and therefore, they almost automatically react to the stimuli received. For older respondents, social media is still 'new' and being technological is not really in their nature; therefore, it is more difficult for them to respond to the stimuli of the users they follow.

In the following graphs, further statements will be analysed according to the gender of the sample.

Image 4.37: Healthy and junk food content concerning gender

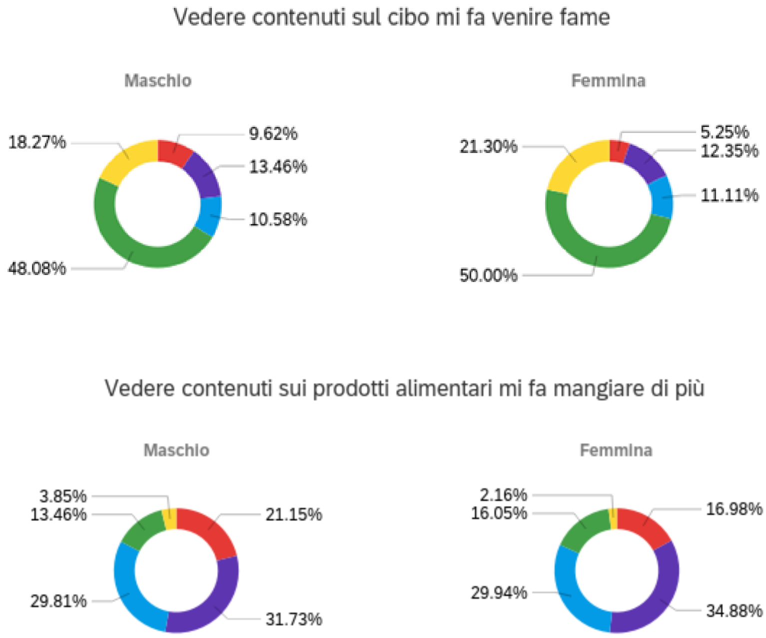
Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



To the sentence seeing healthy content makes me eat better a large majority (45,37%) of women answered that they quite agree. In their opinion there is a correlation between the food they see and the food they eat, healthy food has a positive influence making them eat better. This opinion is shared by 29.81% of the male gender. At the same time, men are more reluctant to think that healthy food makes them eat better, with 12.50% of the male gender as opposed to 8.02% of the female gender. 35.58% of men and 21.30% of women never paid attention to whether healthy food makes them eat better. If the sample believed that there is a relationship between healthy food content and better eating this is no longer so true when it comes to junk food. The sample feels that they are less influenced when it comes to junk food, 30.77% of men and 27.47% of women feel that they are not influenced at all by what they see. The percentage of men who think they are not influenced by junk food is higher than women but at the same time, the percentage of men who think they are influenced by junk food content is higher in comparison to women. Let's explain this better in numbers, 30.77% of men feel they don't eat worse if they see junk food content but 18.27% feel they eat worse if they see junk food content. In contrast, 27.47% of women believe they are not affected, while 16.36% believe they are. In the male gender, there is a greater difference in opinion.

Image 4.38: Food content makes people hungry and eat more about gender

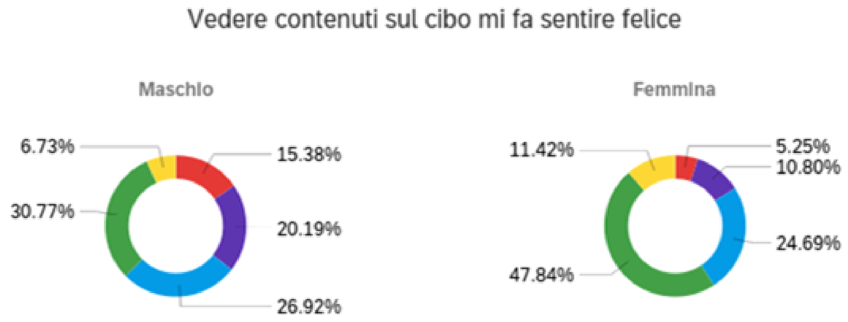
Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



The sample considers the sentence "the contents about food make me hungry" quite true. It was evaluated as follows: 18.27% of men and 21.30% of women completely agreed, 48.08% of men and 50% of women fairly agreed, 10.58% of men and 11.11% of women did not care and the rest did not agree. The majority of consumers believe that content about food makes them hungry, but that does not mean they eat more. In the sentence food content makes me eat more, more than half of the consumers disagreed. 21.15% of men and 16.96% of women completely disagree, 32.73% of men and 34.88% of women disagree, about 29% in both categories have never considered this and only about 17% of men and 18% of women think that social media content makes them eat more. So even though food content on social media makes people hungry, consumers feel that they have self-control and can avoid eating more.

Image 4.39: Content about food makes you feel happy concerning gender

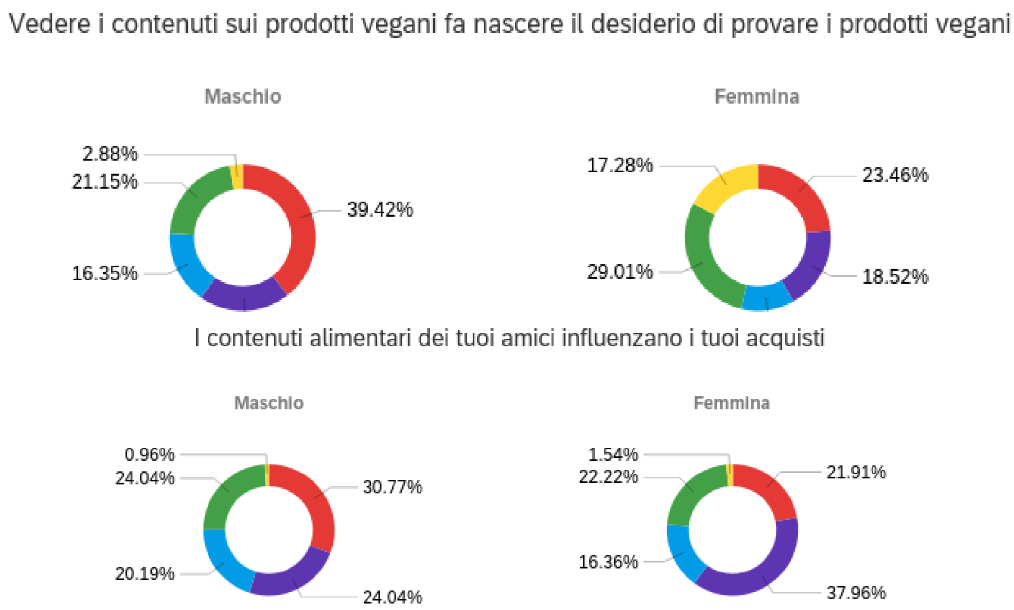
Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



Seeing content about food kind of positive emotions, such as happiness more than half of the women agree with this statement 47.84% agree while 11.42% completely agree. On the other hand, men have a different opinion: food does not make them happier. Only 6.73% and 30.77% are completely happy or quite happy when they see content about food. The remaining 26.92% have never considered this, and the rest about 35% do not feel happy. For women, only about 15% feel that they do not feel happy when seeing content with food.

Graphic 4.40: Vegan food about gender

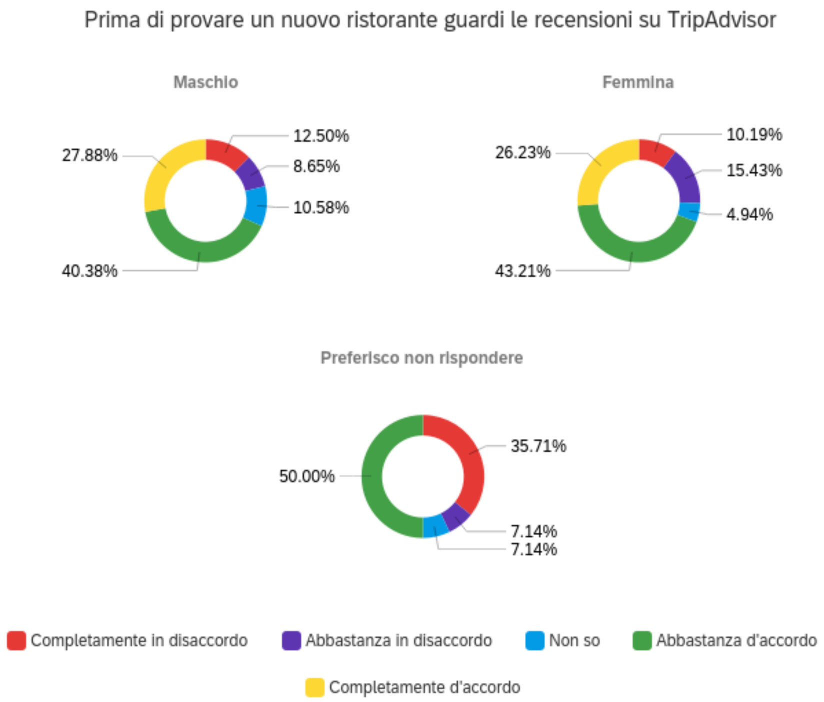
Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



Overall, less than half of women are influenced to try vegan products, however, the percentage of women who want to try these products where they have seen content about them is higher than men. When seeing content about vegan products 29.01% of women want to try them and 17.28% want to try them. For the male gender, the percentages are different, 21.15% want to try them and a small percentage of 2.88% absolutely want to try them. The male gender is not very keen on consuming vegan products, but a higher percentage of men than women think that their purchases are very much influenced by the purchases of their friends. 24.04% of men completely agree that their friends' purchases also influence their own, whereas the percentage of women is 22.22%. Although consumers, in general, expressed that they are not influenced by their friends' purchases more than half believe this is not true, about 54% of men and about 56% of women.

Image 4.41: Influence of TripAdvisor concerning gender

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up

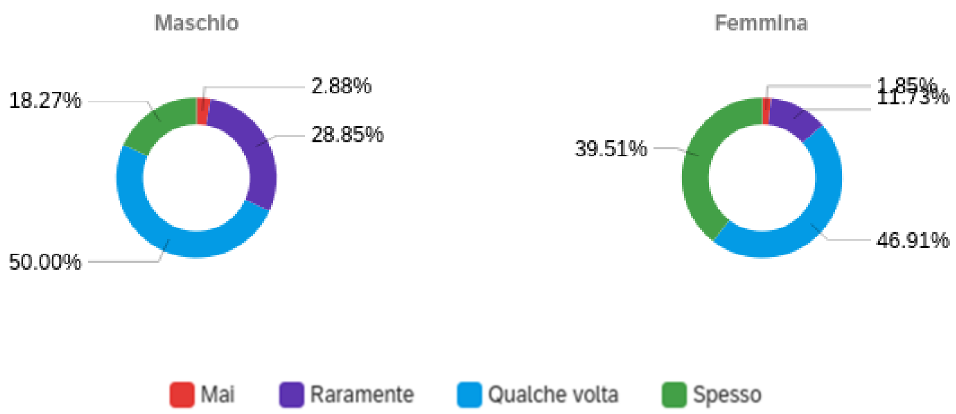


In general, more than half of the consumers consult TripAdvisor before trying a new restaurant. The percentages between the male and female gender in their opinions are very similar. About 67% of men agree that they consult TripAdvisor before trying a new restaurant, about 69% of women. Approximately 21% of men and 25% of women do not agree, the remaining 10.58% of men and 4.94% of women do not know.

On the whole, women are more attentive, in fact, they always express an opinion in most cases, whereas men more often admit that they have never paid attention to that factor.

Image 4.42: How often the sample wants to try new recipes concerning gender

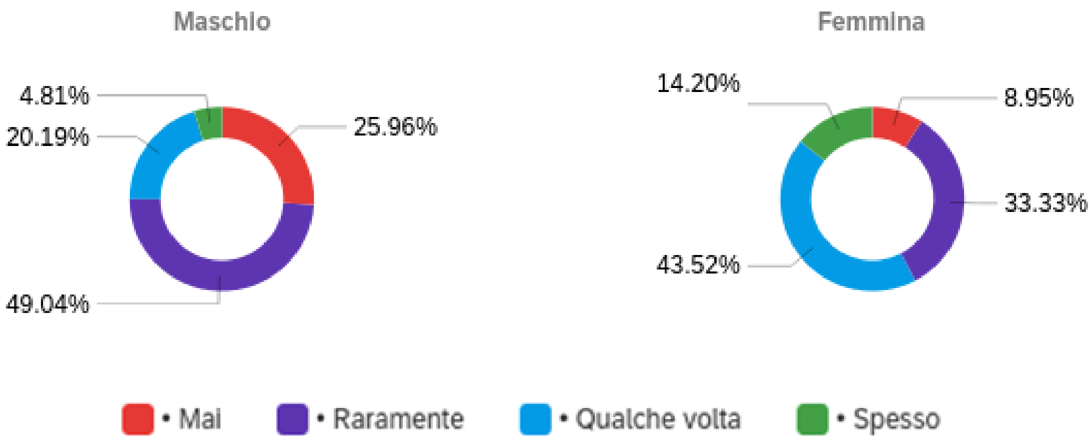
Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



Overall, the sample turns out to be willing to try new recipes they find on social media, only a small percentage, 2.88% in men and 1.85% in women, never want to try them. The female gender is more willing to try them than the male gender 39,51% of women always want to try recipes, in men 18,27%. About half of the sample of both genders only want to try them sometimes.

Image 4.43: How often the sample tries new recipes concerning gender

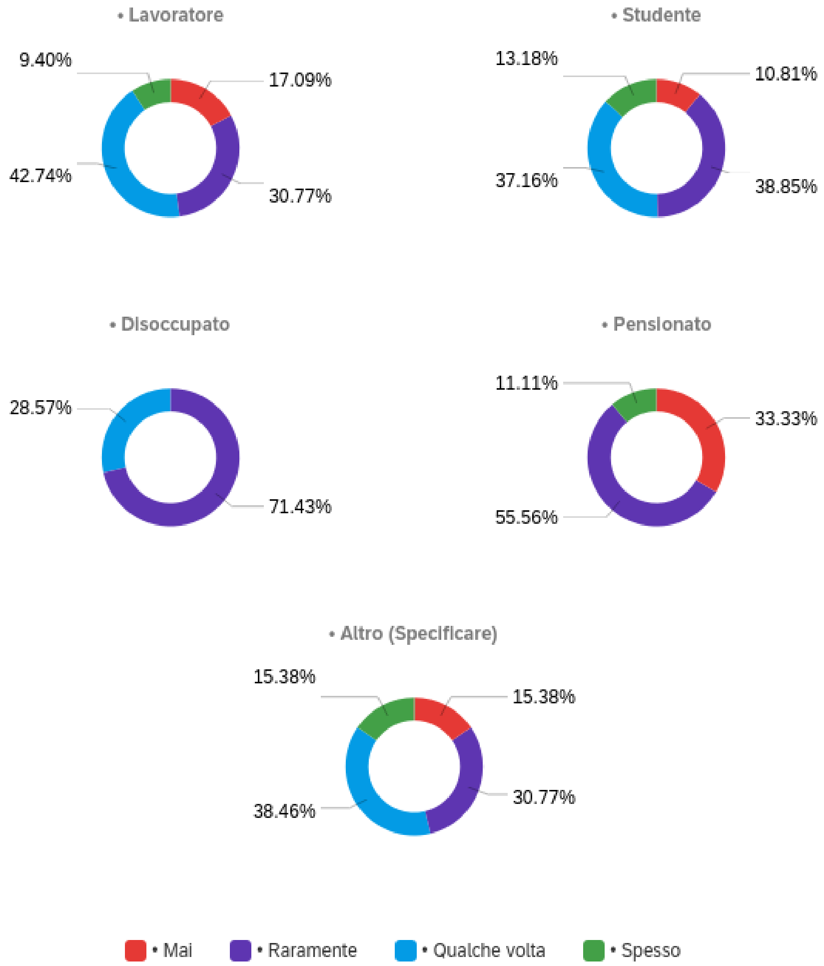
Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



Comparing the number of times, the sample actually cooks the recipes seen on social media with the willingness to cook them shows that recipes are cooked less often than they would like. The fact that the recipes are prepared less than one would like may depend on a time factor. The sample comes home tired from work or university and does not have as much time to prepare the dish. The male gender is less active in the preparation of new dishes, 25.96% admit that they never cook the dishes they see, while the percentage of women is 8.95%, which is much lower. On the other hand, 4.81% of men say they always cook the new recipes, again a higher percentage of women, 14.20% always cook the recipes they see on social media. 49.04% of men do it only rarely, in women 33.33%. Finally, recipes are cooked sometimes by women in 43.52% of cases and by men in 20.19%.

Image 4.44: How often the sample tries new recipes concerning employment

Source: Personal elaboration of data from the survey drawn up



The category that most often tries recipes found online is mainly represented by housewives, with a percentage of 15.38%, followed by students with 13.18% and in third place pensioners with 11.11%. The category of pensioners, with 33.33%, is also the one with the highest percentage of consumers who never cook the recipes seen on social media, followed by workers with 17.09% and in third place with 15.38% the category of working students and housewives.

CONCLUTIONS

In this process, it was highlighted how the consumer's food habits and understanding of food have changed. These changes result from the economic and social situation of the period. Initially, consumers considered food as a nutritional factor, necessary for their sustenance and survival, particularly in times of war when there was a lack of food. Then, with the economic boom, the number of foods increased, and consumers changed their habits. Whereas before they consumed mainly flour-based foods, with economic development and its positive effects, consumers increased their meat consumption. Meat becomes a main food in consumer's diet, also a symbol of a better lifestyle. Through food, the consumer demonstrated his standard of living. Certain foods, such as caviar and champagne, represented a status symbol. However, in the following years, some scandals alerted consumers. The ethanol wine scandal and the mad cow scandal made consumers evolve. If until then they had consumed the product without asking questions about its origin, after these events they became more careful. He pays more attention to the products he consumes and their provenience. In particular, they want to know more about the products' raw materials, the ingredients, and the production process. The first food safety and quality standards were created, which the producer was obliged to meet to be able to sell his product on the market. Despite social welfare, consumers reduce their meat consumption as they learn that too much consumption is not good for their diet. This is the beginning of the period in which people prefer to buy healthy products that do not harm their health or the environment. Consumers are increasingly attentive to social problems such as guaranteeing ethical pay for workers, or problems related to changes in the ecosystem and animal exploitation. Therefore, in his small way he makes certain food choices, such as buying fair trade products, organic products, products that do not involve the exploitation of animals. Food is the mirror of the consumer; it represents his way of being. The concept of food has evolved, it is no longer something that humans need for sustenance but something much more important. It is a means of communicating to society the ideas and opinions of the consumer, depending on the consumption of these or those products. Moreover, food also became an experience. Through the consumption of a product, the consumer has the opportunity to learn about the history, origins and traditions of the territory. The product has a lot to tell, and it is up to the producer to provide all this information also to make people understand the value and quality of the product itself.

The increased use of social media has played a key role in this process of information dissemination. In recent years, social media has become a fundamental part of consumers' lives. Very few people today do not even have a social account and it is slowly becoming a fundamental part of business life. Through social profiles, companies can more easily make themselves known, disseminate information and initiate conversations directly with their customers. A company needs to establish and maintain a relationship with its customers, and this is easier through this tool. Social media also have persuasive power, they can influence consumer consumption. First of all, social media tend to homogenise consumption. People are influenced by the images and videos they see on these platforms, especially videos that have a strong power of attraction for consumers. If the consumer sees content on healthy food, he/she will tend to consume that kind of product. Food influencers and opinion leaders is another key point in this filed. Opinion leaders and food influencers are considered experts in the food sector, so their views, advice and opinions matter a lot to consumers. People tend to be influenced by the advice of experts when choosing products. Online communities also play an important role, they are a meeting point for different consumers and have a particular theme that unites them. Here, consumers exchange information, opinions and ideas, whether about products, brands or services. Review sites like TripAdvisor have a lot of consideration for the consumer. When consumers have to try a restaurant for the first time, they always look for information on these platforms.

To better understand consumers' opinions on social media and whether they feel of being influenced, a survey was conducted. The survey showed that only a small part of the sample, especially women, believe they are influenced by the content on their feed. The female gender is more active on social media. Women are more willing to follow food influencers, food brands, chefs etc. and implement their advice, while men say they are more independent. However, the survey shows that men value the opinions of their friends, with 25% of the sample stating that they are influenced by their friends' consumption. Mainly following the food influencers, the chefs who are enrolled in food communities are young people, also because social media is an important part of their lives. Older categories use social media but attach less importance to it. The main platform used by the older categories is Facebook while the one used by the younger ones is Instagram. According to the theory, content about food has strong power on the consumer, triggering different emotions and feelings. Images about food make the consumer feel happy and hungry, according to 36% of men and 58% of women. However, the feeling of hunger does not make them eat more, the sample can manage this impulse. Furthermore, the data collected shows that consumers believe that content about healthy food has a greater influence on their consumption than junk food, i.e., they are more influenced by healthy food.

In general, the data collected by the survey deviates significantly from the theory, mainly because consumers believe that social media have little influence and do not change their food consumption. This difference from reality may be due to two factors. The first factor is that the sample taken into consideration is not representative of reality. The Italian population in the 18-75 target is composed of about 49% men and 51% women while in the sample 73% of the users are women. This is a considerable difference from reality, and this means that the data collected cannot be considered reliable. Another difference from reality is that the questionnaire was attended mainly by young consumers with a target age between 20 and 27 years, far from the real composition of the Italian population. The other factor that makes the data collected not coincide with the theory may be that the consumer is not fully aware of the power that social media have over him. Often their power and their influence are underestimated, and people think they are making their own choices independently when in fact that particular stimulus has remained in their subconscious. Another thing to consider is that almost a third of consumers, both male and female, answered to almost every question that they did not know what to answer. They had never considered that factor and whether it could affect their food choices. Not considering or noticing a factor does not exclude the possibility that it has a direct or indirect influence on food choices. There is a need to make consumers more aware and to consider all the variables that can influence their choices both positively and negatively, thus enabling them to make less impulsive food purchases.

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