



12-2017

Social Media Marketing Strategies in the Organic Food Industry

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Social Media Marketing Strategies in the Organic Food Industry

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree in
Bachelors of Arts in Communications and Media Studies
School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
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Dominican University of California
San Rafael, California
May, 2017

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the undergraduate program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the Department of Communications and Media Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

Abstract

This study used content analysis to review the social media marketing strategies of the organic food industry. The results reveal which social media channels are being used and which social media marketing strategies are being used. Qualitative techniques were used to generate a pool of eight organic companies. The social media channels used were highlighted by Chanthinok, Ussahawanitichakit, and Jhundra-indra (2015) as those used by frequency and the ability of the application to achieve the desired marketing goal. The marketing strategies assessed were categorized first as transformational or informational and then further subcategorized by the way it is perceived by the consumer. This study confirmed the greater use of transformational messaging by the organic food industry.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| I. Introduction..... | 1 |
| II. The Organic Food Industry..... | 2 |
| III. Literature Review..... | 4 |
| IV. Theoretical Framework..... | 11 |
| V. Methods..... | 12 |
| VI. Results..... | 16 |
| VII. Discussion..... | 20 |
| VIII. Limitations and Future Research Suggestions..... | 21 |
| IX. References..... | 26 |

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

Introduction

The advertising and marketing of brands today incorporate a digital social media strategy into their traditional forms of marketing, which include television, newspaper, radio and magazine ads. Hanna, Rohm, and Crittenden (2011) stated, “Technology has transformed the traditional model of marketing communications. The rise in interactive digital media has catapulted company and consumer contact.” (p. 27) Since social media is a relatively new form of marketing, the strategies are being deployed by companies on varying platforms and at different degrees of implementation. “Social media is about relationships; it is about the connections between people and organizations.” (Parsons, 2013, p. 27) According to Nair (2011), “Social Media can be described as online tools where content, opinions, perspectives, insights, and media can be shared” (p. 45). Social media tools include social networking sites, microblogs, blogs, photo and video sharing sites, and business networking sites.

The importance of a cohesive and creative digital marketing strategy can be seen by the category’s dramatic growth. The number of global social media users increased 120 percent from 2010 to 2015. Over the next five years, the number of social media users is projected to increase by another 37.8 percent for a total of 2.95 billion users by 2020 (Statista, 2016, p. 7). Corporations are now viewing social media as an integral part of their marketing platform. According to the 2016 Social Media Marketing Industry Report, 90 percent of marketers stated social media is crucial to their business (Stelzner, 2016). Prioritizing which social media tactics to use has changed over time and has been prescriptive, relying on industry case studies for guidance (Furlow, 2011, p. 62).

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

The Organic Food Industry

This study focuses on the creative digital strategy employed by the organic food industry. The Organic Trade Association (2016, p. 2) studied the percentage of U.S. Households purchasing organic products which now numbers 117 million households or 82.3 percent of American families. Laura Batcha, CEO and Executive Director of OTA stated, “These new findings show how important organic has become to millions and millions of American families” (“Percentage of Households Purchasing Organic Products”, 2016, p.3).

The organic food industry is a fast growing and fragmented industry with many smaller brands. These brands may be floundering on social media because of the lack of familiarity with specific strategic marketing strategies. Wilson and his colleagues included 1100 companies in a study and found that an experimental approach to social media strategies was rarely successful. (Wilson, Guinan, Parise, & Weinberg, 2011, p. 25) Instead, companies should view their approach to social media marketing as an integrated strategy that enhances the traditional media by expanding the marketer’s ability to reach consumer engagement and loyalty. (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011) “Integrated marketing communications are the coordinated, consistent means by which firms attempt to inform, incent, persuade, and remind consumers - directly or indirectly - about the products and brands they sell”. (Batra and Keller, 2016, p. 137)

It is ironic that the organic food industry has a smaller social presence, since the demand for organic food originally derived from the consumer. This can be seen through the social media crowd culture that challenged the industrial food ideology and created small subcultures around organic food and farming practices: “These subcultures pushed

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

hard for food innovation” (Holt, 2016, p. 7). The organic food industry benefits the environment as well as the consumer. The word “organic” refers to the way farmers grow their agricultural products, encouraging soil and water conservation, reducing pollution, and is known to be a healthier way to live when compared to non-organic food. (Minj & Banerjee, 2014, p. 1) According to the USDA,

“Organic is a labeling term that indicates that the food or other agricultural product has been produced through approved methods. The organic standards describe the specific requirements that must be verified by the USDA-accredited certifying agent before products can be labeled USDA organic. Overall, organic operations must demonstrate that they are protecting natural resources, conserving biodiversity, and using only approved substances.” (“Organic Standards”, 2017, para. 1)

There are both environmental and personal health reasons for the consumer to purchase organic food. These issues can be used to attract the attention of the consumer if used in their marketing campaigns. Holt (2016) points out that brands can stay relevant by marketing particularly dominant or contentious social issues related to ideology.

This report distinguishes foods labeled as organic versus natural. There is much controversy surrounding food labeling. On May 10, 2016, the FDA closed docket FDA-2014-N-1207 that allowed for comments by interested parties on food labeling qualities.

“Although the FDA has not engaged in rulemaking to establish a formal definition for the term “natural,” we do have a longstanding policy concerning the use of “natural” in human food labeling. The FDA has considered the term “natural” to mean that nothing artificial or synthetic (including all color additives regardless

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

of source) has been included in, or has been added to, a food that would not normally be expected to be in that food. However, this policy was not intended to address food production methods, such as the use of pesticides, nor did it explicitly address food processing or manufacturing methods, such as thermal technologies, pasteurization, or irradiation. (“Natural on Food Labeling”, 2016, para. 3)

Because of the inability to define natural food, there is no way to correlate the health, economic, or social benefits as similar to organic.

Literature Review

Batra & Keller (2016) studied the integration of new media with more traditional methods and point out the optimal integration of marketing communications is extremely important but faces challenges due to the technological advances of new media, shifting media patterns, and a consumer with divided attentions. Further, the authors conclude that, “Digital media, in particular, offers tremendous potential through their greater versatility and precision, but they also create greater integration challenges.” (p. 1)

According to the 2016 Social Media Marketing Report, the top five benefits of digital social media marketing are increased exposure, increased traffic, development of loyal fans, marketplace insight, and generated leads (Stelzner, 2016, p. 17). Companies use a variety of different marketing strategies to achieve those results. It is no longer enough to incorporate social media as a stand-alone platform. Traditional and social marketing platforms need to be part of a marketing ecosystem transforming social media into a platform of influence (Hanna et al., 2011).

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

Social Media Channels

Internet technology has allowed for connectivity between businesses and consumers. Social media is a group of online communities that has developed out of the strong desire to interact. The expansion of internet users, high-speed internet connections, and ease of use created the environment for speedy distribution of content by both businesses and consumers (Chanthinok, Ussahawanitichakit, & Jhundra-indra, 2015). In deploying their online social media strategies, brands have followed the lead of the consumer; therefore, brands are gravitating towards social networks, microblogs, microsites and video sharing because the consumer reach is solidly on those channels (Ashley, 2015, p. 23). In Table 1, Chanthinok et al. (2015) highlights the various social media types, their key purposes, and the advantage of that particular type.

Table 1. Summary of Social Media Types

| Social Media Type | Key Purpose | Advantage of social media type |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Facebook | Social networking sites | The company's Facebook fan page permits the testing of attitudes and opinions of online consumers or even promotes and sells their products and services. |
| Twitter | Microblogging service | The company always not only promotes the product and service but also provides sufficient information as interaction and conversation. |
| Blogs | Share and exchange contents | The company can share product and service features, open discussions, and review. |
| Google+ | Social networking sites | The business can share exclusive offers and discounts to its special customer group. |

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

| | | |
|-----------|-------------------------------|---|
| YouTube | Video-sharing sites | The firm can share content, make product and service presentation, bookmarking, rating, follower, and commenting in all collaboration of social network. |
| Flickr | Store and photo-sharing sites | The business can store and share photos online to a strong loyal social network. |
| LinkedIn | Business networking sites | The organization can create a profile in order to present that their work to the audience. In the same vein, it enables a company to seek new employees or many experts to join work together |
| Instagram | Photo and video sharing | The firms can share activity photos or videos of what's happening to promote the brand and company. |

Note: Reprinted from Social Media Marketing Strategy and Marketing Outcomes: A Conceptual Framework by Chanthinok, K., Ussahawanitichakit, P., & Jhundra-indra, P. (2015). *Allied Academies International Conference: Proceedings of The Academy of Marketing Studies (AMS)*, 20(2), 35-52.

Payne and Frow (2005) take this a step further by emphasizing a multichannel integrative approach. The creation of relevant media and deploying that media across multiple channels represents the point of co-creation of customer value. The multichannel concept is impacting the future plans of content activity for 2016. According to the Social Media Marketing Report (Stelzner, 2016), all social media channels show expected expansion with four areas achieving the highest concentration: 73 percent of brands stated they planned on increasing their video content; 71 percent plan on increasing their use of visuals; 71 percent plan on increasing business to business (B2B) blogs; and 63 percent plan on increasing their business to consumer (B2C) blogging. Future plans for

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

strategic social media deployment are more closely tied to the outcomes of industry journals and their findings.

The focus of creative marketing strategies following industry case studies is related to the difficulty in measuring marketing performance. Return on investment, a traditional metric for judging the allocation of future expenditures and time, is not readily available on these newly developing marketing channels. According to the Social Media Marketing Industry Report (Stelzner, 2016), only 41 percent of the brands stated they have the ability to measure their social media return on investment (ROI). The main reasoning for this shortcoming is there is no widely accepted standard of measurement because of the inherent difficulty in tracking all consumer behavior after viewing a media marketing piece. "The ROI issue has plagued marketers for years." (Stelzner, 2016, p. 9). Chanthinok, et al. (2015) defines marketing performance as, "The outcome of social media marketing strategy that can be both a financial and a nonfinancial measurement." (p. 47) The authors outlined a method for measuring marketing performance. In order to capture the nonfinancial measurement of consumer behavior within the technology industry, they evaluated the correlation of the subjective satisfaction from an executive, manager, or stakeholder to the objective financial metrics of profitability and stock price return. Although this method showed statistical significance in measuring marketing performance, the method is time intensive and unlikely to be widely adopted.

Predominant Strategies in Social Media Content Deployment

Creative marketing strategies are defined as processes that customize a marketer's message to what appeals most to the consumer. Creative content is designed with the

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

consumer audience preferences in mind and encompasses both the message and the delivery method. (Laskey, Day, & Crask, 1989) There has been an enormous amount of prior research done on the typologies of these creative methods in marketing, some of which are very simple and some of which are complex and are deployed across multiple platforms. This study will give an overview of the basic typologies on a category and subcategory basis.

According to Laskey et al. (1989), the typology process that proved to be most reliable involved a two-stage process. First, a categorization of the message on the basis of informational versus transformational is formed by reviewing the approach used to present the brand. "Rather than residing wholly within the advertisement, this definition resides in the consumer's perceptions of the ad's content." (Puto and Wells, 1984, p. 638) Therefore, when defining informational and transformational, it is not just the presentation of the marketing material but how the consumer perceives it as well. Informational strategies use factual brand data to educate the consumer in a logical manner. Puto and Wells (1984) note that to be considered an informational strategy, the material must contain three elements. It must present factual information, information that is immediately important to the consumer, and data that the consumer accepts as being verifiable. Transformational strategies give an emotional motivation to the consumer using a unique set of psychological characteristics that would not be typical when evaluating the brand. To be considered transformational, the strategy must contain the following two characteristics. First, the experience the consumer receives from the strategy is portrayed to be warm and exciting compared to a factual description. Second, the experience must interconnect with the brand, allowing the consumer to think of the

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

brand when remembering the experience (Puto and Wells, 1984).

The second stage of the typological process is classifying the messages into subcategories. Subcategory creative marketing strategies appeal to the consumer in a variety of ways. Frazer (1983) listed the following seven marketing strategies in order for which they were developed. These included: Generic, Preemptive, Unique Selling Proposition, Brand Image, Positioning, Resonance, and Affective. The Generic strategy presents product features with no superiority claims. When a Generic claim adds the dimension of a superior product in some way, the subcategory is called Preemptive. If there is a unique physical feature or benefit in the message, the subcategory is termed Unique Selling Proposition. The Brand Image subcategory uses symbolic association. A marketing strategy that identifies competitors and attempts to build a mental niche is termed Positioning. Resonance uses positive experiences. Lastly, an Affective strategy avoids a selling style and uses humor or ambiguity. By categorizing into these positioning strategies, Frazer introduced classification by intentional consumer effect (Frazer, 1983, p. 41).

Laskey et al. (1989) used Frazer's positioning strategies, but felt they were not effective without the delineation of informational and transformational engagement. The two-stage process combines the simplicity of the dichotomy but also uses the complex positioning strategies to display intentional consumer effect. Laskey preferred the use of the terms "informational and transformational," rather than "rational and emotional" because they represent richer concepts, which are easier to subdivide into Frazer's categories. Although Laskey's typology was designed for analyzing television advertisement messages, he believed that typology could be applied to other media as

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

well.

Ashley and Tuten (2015) applied Laskey's typology subcategorization as well as the typologies of other researchers when evaluating the creative strategies in social media marketing used by top brands. Ashley and Tuten not only looked at positioning strategies but also incorporated the ability of the content to engage the consumer. Engaged consumers are more likely to show attachment and brand loyalty. People can form an emotional attachment to a brand, and consumers who are emotionally attached are more likely to view a brand more favorably. (Thomson, Macinnis, & Park, 2005) Brand attachment better predicts consumer behavior versus brand attitudes and may be viewed as an antecedent of true loyalty. (Schmitt, 2012)

Industry executives are incorporating a metric for consumer engagement. Therefore, Ashley and Tuten added the subcategories of social cause, exclusivity, animation, spokesperson, sales promotions and user-generated content to capture forms of engagement within their content analysis. Consumer engagement, within the marketing industry, is defined through the three actions of Consumption, Contribution, and Creation (Guosong, 2009, p. 5). The definition of these categories were further developed. Consumption refers to consumers who simply view brand-related media without participating. Contribution represents consumers who participate with brand-related media, such as "liking" or following a brand on social media channels. Creation refers to consumers who create and publish online brand-related content. (Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski, 2016, p. 66)

Prior studies, such as Ashley and Tuten's (2015), have used a variety of typologies to analyze what social media channels and strategies have been used by top

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

brands across a variety of industry groups. There is a lack of scholarly research done on the social media marketing strategies and channels within the organic food industry. The organic food industry is the fastest growing sector of the United States food industry (“OTA Talking Points”, 2016, para. 3). The organic food industry is also surrounded by small subcultures that are eager to support the community. (Holt, 2016) It is important to fill this gap in the research to get a glimpse at the strategies these organic food companies are using through their social media channels to reach out to their targeted audience.

Theoretical Framework

The study will employ a content analysis of the social media marketing strategies used by the organic food brands across various social media channels. Creative social media marketing strategies can increase the receiver’s motivation and improve the practitioner’s ability to identify options. (MacInnis, Moorman, & Jaworski, 1991) Two primary questions are being studied in the organic food industry.

The research questions for the study are:

1. Which social media channels are being used by the organic food industry?
2. Which social media marketing strategies are being used by the organic food industry?

This is important to the organic food companies, as the effectiveness of social media marketing strategies is difficult to quantify by a return on investment measurement (Stelzner, 2016, p. 9). The Ashely and Tuten study (2015) ranked the message strategy of informational functional appeal to have the highest percentage of use out of all the messaging strategies. My argument is that the marketing strategies that the organic food companies utilize will have a higher percentage in the transformational rather than the

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

informational category. Holt (2016) noted that after social media took off, “In short order, a massive cultural movement had organized around the revival of pre-industrial foods.”

(p. 7) I expect the emotional nature of the organic food topic to have been harnessed and deployed through transformational creative marketing strategies.

Yadav (2016) performed a study in India that reviewed the motivation of young organic food consumers. The motivations were either egoistic or altruistic, which both align with a transformational marketing strategy. Egoistic is described as the personal health benefits of consuming organic foods. Altruistic is described as the consumer’s motivation from the desire to benefit the environment. Yadav found that egoistic played the largest role in the purchase of organic food with altruistic also being important. This has direct implications for marketers. “Marketers need to put more emphasis on the egoistic value of the organic food products such as health benefits, taste etc. along with the altruistic values of their products” (Yadav, 2016, p. 95). The independent variable in this hypothesis is the marketing strategy categories deployed and the dependent variable is the percentage of use from the organic food brand sample. The level of measurement technique being used will be the ratio scale because the measurement value can equal zero and the rankings assigned to the items are according to their size.

Methods

This study will be using the quantitative approach to content analysis to address the research questions and garner information regarding the content of social media posts by organic food companies. This method has been proven to be effective in the past for identifying the social media channels and strategies used by brands (Ashley, 2015, p. 20).

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

It should be noted that content analysis does not display the effectiveness of the social media strategies or channels; it identifies which strategies and channels are most prevalent among the sampled organic food brands.

Sample

The objective of this study is to identify the social media channels and marketing strategies of organic food companies. The organic food industry is highly segmented with many small producers. Therefore, the sample of organic food brands used was determined by two metrics. First, they had to identify as producing only 100 percent organic food products. Companies offering a product line of natural and organic foods were not considered due to the contentiousness around the word natural in advertising. The only companies included were those with products that are stamped with the USDA Organic symbol. Second, they had to be large enough to have a minimum of 100,000 social media followers across all channels. This produced a list of eight brands. The eight brands include Cascadian Farms, Stonyfield Farms, Horizon Organic, Organic Valley, Earthbound Farm, Simply Organic, Nature's Path, and Earth's Best.

The social media content for all brands will be gathered during the same week occurring March 13, 2017 to March 20th, 2017. The content captured will include one week of screen shots over the channels listed by Chanthinok et al. (2015) in Table 1. The sample size of the study is a Large-N Design. The social media channels will be allocated one point if they are used over the sample period.

Code Sheet Development

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

Beginning with the extent of usage of social media by the organic companies, all brands will be surveyed for their available social media content. Each company will be reviewed and will be given 1 point for having a presence on the social media site and a score of zero if there is no presence. The social media types include Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Google+, YouTube, Flickr, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

A second code sheet is needed to record the creative message strategies used across all social media platforms. The posts will be qualified for their appropriate transformational and informational subcategories. The subcategories of the transformational and informational creative strategies that will be used were outlined by Ashley and Tuten (2015); Frazer (1984); Puto and Wells, (1984); and Laskey et al. (1989). The subcategories are outlined in Table 2 below. The social media channels that will be used were identified by Chanthinok (2015, p. 38). The channels include Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Google+, YouTube, Flickr, LinkedIn and Instagram.

Table 2. Message Strategy Categories & Subcategories

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Transformational - Emotional | |
| Emotional | Psychologically moving - makes the consumer "feel" |
| Experiential | How they experience the five senses |
| Unique Selling Proposition | Differentiates the products from others |
| Comparative | Comparison to competitors |
| Resonance | Displays the core values of the brand |
| User Image | Improvement of self image of consumer |
| Social Cause | Involves brand in social cause |

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Exclusivity | For a limited time, quantity or by invitation only |
| Animation | Animation |
| Spokesperson | Celebrity or individual who represents the brand or product |
| Sales Promotions | Discounts, Contests, Sweepstakes |
| Requests for User-Generated Content | Content submission, contests |
| Informational - Factual | |
| Functional | Product or Brand Function - no emotional appeal |

The dependent variable is the percentage of use from the sample of organic food companies. The code sheet will contain a score of 1 for each subcategory when the social media marketing subcategory is observed. Zero points are given if a subcategory is not used on the media channel.

Coder Training and Reliability

There will be one coder trained to analyze the content collected from the eight brands. The coder was given a worksheet as well as examples of each subcategory. One coder was used in order to insure inter-coder agreement and measurement consistency. The social media marketing strategy observations will be collected during the same one-week time frame for all brands. The findings will be reported in three tables. The first table will display the social media channels. The second table will display the social

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

media channels by usage. The third table will rank message strategy usage by each brand.

Results

Organic Food Company Social Media Channel Usage

In the first stage of the analysis, the coder evaluated the existence of social media channel use by brand. Coders marked a 1 for brands that have a social media account and a zero when there was no account. The social media channels included Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Google+, YouTube, Flickr, LinkedIn, and Instagram. As shown in Table 3, the most commonly used channels were Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram with all brands participating. This was followed by Google+ with a 75 percent participation rate. The least used channels were Blogs at 63 percent and Flickr at only 25 percent.

Table 3. Social Media Channel Usage by Brand

| Company | Face book | Twitte r | Blogs | Googl e+ | YouT ube | Flickr | Linke dIn | Instag ram | TOTA L |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------|-------|-------------|-------------|--------|--------------|---------------|-----------|
| Cascadian Farms | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 6 |
| Earthbound Farm | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 8 |
| Earth's Best | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| Horizon Organic | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| Nature's Path | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 7 |

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|------|------|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|------|----|
| Organic Valley | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Simply Organic | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 5 |
| Stoneyfield | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| | 8 | 8 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 49 |
| % of Brands Used | 100% | 100% | 63% | 75% | 100% | 25% | 50% | 100% | |

Table 4 displays the social media channel by available usage type according to account availability. All brands established microblogs, social networking, photo sharing, and video sharing accounts. Five used discussion forums and four used business networking. The companies have the tools in place to engage in a cohesive media marketing strategy.

Table 4. Social Media Channel Usage

| Channel | Number of Brands (Out of 8) | Percentage of 8 Brands |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Microblog | 8 | 100% |
| Social Networking | 8 | 100% |
| Photo Sharing | 8 | 100% |
| Video Sharing | 8 | 100% |

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

| | | |
|-------------------------|---|-----|
| Blogs/Discussion Forums | 5 | 63% |
| Business Networking | 4 | 50% |

Organic Food Companies Social Creative Strategies Implemented

In the second stage of the analysis, the coder categorized the creative strategy as transformational (emotional) or informational (rational). Following, the coder gave one point for the predominant strategy used to connect with the consumer. Thirteen separate subcategories were used. As can be seen in Table 5, 88.6 percent of the social media messaging was transformational and 11.4 percent was informational. This supports the argument that the marketing strategies the organic food companies utilized would be a higher percentage for transformational messaging versus informational. Within the transformational category, the subcategories of experiential (15 percent), user image (14 percent), and Social Cause (12 percent) were the most common strategies used to connect with the consumer. Comparative, exclusivity, and animation were not used by any company. Informational messaging was 11.4 percent of the total, the fourth most deployed category, even though that messaging strategy leads to the least amount of interaction with consumers.

Table 5. Message Strategy Usage

| Category/Subcategory | Message Strategy | Percentage Transformational or Informational | Percentage of All Messages |
|----------------------|------------------|--|----------------------------|
|----------------------|------------------|--|----------------------------|

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|--------|---------|
| Transformational | | | |
| Experiential | 16 | 17.20% | 15.24% |
| User Image | 15 | 16.13% | 14.29% |
| Social Cause | 13 | 13.98% | 12.38% |
| Emotional | 11 | 11.83% | 10.48% |
| Unique Selling Proposition | 9 | 9.68% | 8.57% |
| Requests for User-Generated Content | 9 | 9.68% | 8.57% |
| Sales Promotions | 9 | 9.68% | 8.57% |
| Resonance | 7 | 7.53% | 6.67% |
| Spokesperson | 4 | 4.30% | 3.81% |
| Comparative | 0 | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| Exclusivity | 0 | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| Animation | 0 | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| Transformational Total | 93 | | 88.57% |
| | | | |
| Informational | | | |
| Functional | 12 | 100% | |
| Informational Total | 12 | | 11.43% |
| Total | 105 | | 100.00% |

As can be seen in table 6, seven of the eight brands developed content for their social media channels. One company, Earthbound Farm, had accounts on all eight social media platforms but had zero utilization within the timeframe of the analysis. Another

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

company, Earth's Best, had five social media accounts but only posted once during the test period. Nature's Path accounted for almost half of all social media posts from the group selected. The most prominent platforms used to interact with the consumer were Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

Table 6. Message Strategy Usage by Company

| Company | Facebook | Twitter | Blogs | Google+ | YouTube | Flickr | LinkedIn | Instagram | TOTAL | % |
|------------------|----------|---------|-------|---------|---------|--------|----------|-----------|-------|---------|
| Cascadian Farms | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 4.76% |
| Earthbound Farm | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.00% |
| Earth's Best | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0.95% |
| Horizon Organic | 1 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 19 | 18.10% |
| Nature's Path | 15 | 26 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 7 | 52 | 49.52% |
| Organic Valley | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 7.62% |
| Simply Organic | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 8 | 7.62% |
| Stoneyfield | 3 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 12 | 11.43% |
| Total | 27 | 44 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 25 | 105 | 100.00% |
| Social Network % | 25.71% | 41.90% | 2.86% | 1.90% | 0.95% | 0.00% | 2.86% | 23.81% | | |

Discussion

This study was implemented to address two key questions. First, which of the social media channels are being used by the organic food industry? Second, which social media marketing strategies are being used by the organic food industry? The brands featured in the study focused on some media channels more than others. Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounted for 91.4 percent of all posts over the time period

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

making social networking and microblogs the preferred means to reach the consumer. Stelzner's (2016) research covering all industries identified, "60% of all marketer's use video in their marketing and 73% plan on increasing their use of video." (p. 5) Video has become an essential part of marketing among all industry groups. However, in the organic food industry, only 2.9 percent of the posts were video. This is an obvious area where the organic food industry could engage with their customers by enhancing their use of video.

Yadav found both egoistic and altruistic as being the largest motivations for organic food purchasers, with egoistic playing the largest role. The experiential and user image subcategories were the top two marketing strategies used, which are both egoistic. The third most used strategy is social cause, which is altruistic. Therefore, the brands are utilizing the subcategories shown to be most effective in the organic food industry.

Overall, the results show that emotional nature of the development of the industry is ideal for engaging the consumer. However, only half of the sample companies showed a consistent online marketing strategy and only one showed consistent engagement. With the dynamic growth of the organic food industry, greater emphasis needs to be placed on creative and engaging strategies to enhance the conventional marketing.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions

There are several limitations to this study. First, the organic food industry is highly fragmented with many small brands using social media in a limited way or not at all. The methodology used to identify the companies yielded a relatively small number of eight brands. Secondly, the observation time of one week is limited. The brands being

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

studied could behave differently outside the observation window. Different time periods were reviewed. For companies that were not as active on their social media accounts, adding a week or two would be unlikely to impact results because they post so infrequently. However, the volume of screenshots expected in a week for companies that do actively use their social media accounts limits the expansion of the time period. There is no specific metric for which social media channels to include in the study. The channels chosen were considered most relevant by Chanthinok et al. (2015) There are hundreds of social media channels not included in this study because of volume limitations (Hanna et al., 2011).

The organic food industry is the fastest growing food sector within the food industry and grew 10.8 percent in 2015 (“State of the Industry”, 2016, para. 3). As social media has developed, subcultures have taken off with food innovation a primary beneficiary. These include organics, sustainable ranchers, urban gardeners, farm-to-table restaurants and others. This cultural movement has organized to demand healthier food choices (Holt, 2016). However, not all consumer digital media responses are positive. Digital interaction allows for consumer positive or negative opinions to be posted publicly. An additional criteria including this type of response could be added.

Deciphering which social marketing strategies are most efficient for the industry to use is still based on utilizing case studies. Marketing managers for all industries are under pressure to show how their marketing campaigns contribute to firm performance. Further research into a measurement system for quantifying return on investment by campaign and category would help simplify where managers should focus their time and expenditures.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES - ORGANIC FOOD INDUSTRY

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