


## Social media as a driver for local development: an entrepreneurial perspective from Ecuador


As mídias sociais como impulsionadoras do desenvolvimento local: uma perspectiva empreendedora do Equador

Las redes sociales como motor del desarrollo local: una perspectiva emprendedora desde Ecuador


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### ARTICLE INFORMATIONS

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This study offers a multifaceted perspective between entrepreneurs and consumers related to the use of social networks to drive the growth of small businesses. The empirical evidence presented can guide new studies but also the entrepreneurial practice of small businesses, by demonstrating the propensity of consumers towards the use of social networks and the potential benefit for growth in small businesses in local communities.

**Originality/value:**

The article is valuable because it presents original primary data, also by addressing a specific reality of a developing country. The fact that it is addressed epistemologically to research readers but also to entrepreneurs, further reinforces its practical as well as scientific value.

### ABSTRACT

This research seeks to analyze the positive effect of social networks in starting a small business. According to this paper, social networks is of great help, especially for the entrepreneur, because of their wide reach and ease of dissemination. A potential customer can be transformed by this impact, becoming a real consumer, just by the impression of social networks. This article describes social networks and their environment and defines them as a tool that helps to reduce the risk of failure in ventures. Its usefulness is especially noted at the time of the first investment, due to its low cost compared to traditional means of communication. For this purpose, two case studies were conducted on entrepreneurship in the artisanal food sector in the city of Guayaquil, showing an improvement in the profitability of these businesses thanks to the help of social networks. Additionally, consumers were consulted through a survey to determine the use and importance given to small food businesses through social networks and the impact they have. In general, the results indicate that: 1) consumers in the Ecuadorian context have a propensity to use social networks to follow small food businesses; 2) consumers have or receive some influence from posts and promotions to make their purchasing decisions; 3) social networks are a tool with potential positive impact to promote small businesses, which in turn, generate local economic development for communities. This positive impact occurs even if there is no professional use strategy.

**Keywords:** Social networks, entrepreneurship, strategy, small business, consumer, internet, media, Ecuador.

### RESUMO

Esta pesquisa busca analisar o efeito positivo das redes sociais na abertura de um pequeno negócio. Segundo este artigo, as redes sociais são de grande ajuda, principalmente para o empreendedor, devido ao seu amplo alcance e facilidade de divulgação. Um potencial cliente pode ser transformado por esse impacto, tornando-se um verdadeiro consumidor, apenas pela impressão das redes sociais. Este artigo descreve as redes sociais e seu ambiente, e as define como uma ferramenta que ajuda a reduzir o risco de fracasso em empreendimentos. A sua utilidade é especialmente notada no momento do primeiro investimento, devido ao seu baixo custo em comparação com os meios de comunicação tradicionais. Para tanto, foram realizados dois estudos de caso sobre empreendimentos no setor de alimentação artesanal na cidade de Guayaquil, mostrando uma melhoria na rentabilidade desses negócios graças à ajuda das redes sociais. Adicionalmente, os consumidores foram consultados através de um inquérito para determinar a utilização e a importância dada aos pequenos negócios alimentares através das redes sociais e o impacto que têm. Em geral, os resultados indicam que: 1) os consumidores no contexto equatoriano têm propensão a utilizar as redes sociais para acompanhar pequenas empresas alimentares; 2) os consumidores têm ou recebem alguma influência de postagens e promoções para tomar suas decisões de compra; 3) as redes sociais são uma ferramenta com potencial impacto positivo para promover pequenos negócios, que por sua vez, geram desenvolvimento econômico local para as comunidades. Esse impacto positivo ocorre mesmo que não haja uma estratégia de uso profissional.

**Palavras-chave:** Redes sociais, empreendedorismo, estratégia, pequenos negócios, consumidor, internet, mídia, Equador.

### RESUMEN

Esta investigación busca analizar el efecto positivo de las redes sociales en el inicio de una pequeña empresa. Según este trabajo, las redes sociales son de gran ayuda, especialmente para el emprendedor, por su amplio alcance y facilidad de difusión. Un cliente potencial puede transformarse por este impacto, convirtiéndose en un consumidor real, sólo por la impresión de las redes sociales. Este artículo describe las redes sociales y su entorno, y las define como una herramienta que ayuda a reducir el riesgo de fracaso en los emprendimientos. Su utilidad se nota especialmente en el momento de la primera inversión, debido a su bajo coste respecto a los medios de comunicación tradicionales. Para ello se realizaron dos estudios de caso sobre emprendimientos del sector de alimentos artesanales en la ciudad de Guayaquil, mostrando una mejora en la rentabilidad de estos negocios gracias a la ayuda de las redes sociales. Además, se consultó a los consumidores a través de una encuesta para determinar el uso e importancia que se le da a los pequeños negocios de alimentos a través de las redes sociales y el impacto que tienen. En general, los resultados indican que: 1) los consumidores en el contexto ecuatoriano tienen propensión a utilizar las redes sociales para seguir a los pequeños negocios de alimentos; 2) los consumidores tienen o reciben alguna influencia de publicaciones y promociones para tomar sus decisiones de compra; 3) las redes sociales son una herramienta con potencial impacto positivo para promover pequeños negocios, que a su vez, generan desarrollo económico local para las comunidades. Este impacto positivo se produce incluso si no existe una estrategia de uso profesional.

**Palabras clave:** Redes sociales, emprendimiento, estrategia, pequeña empresa, consumidor, internet, medios, Ecuador.

## INTRODUCTION

Currently in Ecuador, there is an increase in the commercialization of products that are represented by small businesses or also known as ventures. A large number of projects have achieved success with the good management of identifying opportunities and developing them with creativity. In addition, to work them together with the many tools that exist today as social networks, open fairs and stands in markets, which are used to make a brand known to consumers.

Entrepreneurship was one of the few options that people could have, for fear of failure or for not having the necessary resources to achieve success. The initial investments in advertising could be very expensive, so the ideas remained in a simple desire. Today, we have free tools such as social networks, by which we can save large amounts of money and take the products to a massive diffusion. As Susana Villalobos says in her book *Social Networks for Entrepreneurs* "Don't be afraid to make mistakes. After all, when you move in the direction of your dreams, you will always make mistakes" (2014).

On the other side, the empirical evidence shows that in Latin American countries the use of social networks positively impacts the growth and reach of new small businesses (Quezada-Fadanelli et al., 2022; Zumba-Zúñiga et al., 2016; Moreno et al., 2022). This same trend is generally observed in Ecuador, and in remote locations in the country it is observed that the use or non-use of social networks significantly affects the entrepreneurial process, even when this use is done in an amateurish or unprofessional manner without well-defined strategies (Ordoñez-Valencia, 2023).

There are several doubts as to whether these mechanisms really help entrepreneurs to make their products known in such a competitive market. Can a social network have such a high impact that a product without advertising investment can be recognized locally? The guidelines to answer this question are the main objective of this research. For this reason, we will document cases of entrepreneurs in the food sector in Guayaquil who use social networks as a means of dissemination of their products, to know a before and after the use of a social network as a means of promotion.

In addition, the aim is to identify whether the use of a social network as a means of dissemination is sufficient to promote the purchase of a product at the level of local commerce. Finally, we want to provide valid references of successful ventures so that people are not afraid of failure and are able to launch their projects.

The structure of this document will be based on two real case studies of entrepreneurs in the city of Guayaquil, where they will be interviewed to collect as much information as possible about their businesses and verify whether social networks were a positive tool for their success. This interview will be accompanied by surveys to people who will serve to obtain data from the consumer sector. Finally, all the information collected will be posted and recommendations and conclusions on the topic will be issued.

### Contextual Framework

#### Internet

Undoubtedly, one of the main means of communication today is the Internet. Millions of people around the world use it daily for the variety of information that can be found. In Ecuador, 40.4% of the population has access to the Internet, with the provinces of Pichincha (53.1%), Azuay (52.1%) and Tungurahua (45.5%) being the most representative. The province of Guayas is in 8th place with 40.0% having internet access (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2013).

#### Origins of the Internet

Created with military origins in 1969, known as Arpanet, it had four servers helping communication in American wars. Years later, Arpanet disassociated itself from the military and expanded to other countries to offer academic information. The *National Science Foundation* ended up absorbing it, and together with other networks, created a cell called the Internet. In 1990, the European Center for Nuclear Research sought a way to store data using links, which led to the discovery of a system called the *World Wide Web* or www (World Wide Web). For the year 1993, Marc Andreessen, was the one who facilitated navigation on www. Some time later, he created the Netscape program which provided greater speed and extension, today it is known as Internet (Briggs, 2002). Currently, we can access the Internet through different devices and in a matter of seconds access all kinds of information, whether academic, work and communication in general, being of great help for the development of people.

#### Social Networking

Communicating has never been easier. Sending a comment, a photo or a simple text message was unimaginable years ago. Distances between people and letters are a thing of the past. Today, thanks to the Internet and social networks, we can find out in real time about an event, communicate with a loved one and share special moments. Belonging to a social network allows the user to create a group of friends without having to be physically present.

The term social network could be defined as a structure where people enter to create or strengthen friendly, love, work, etc. relationships, sharing content in order to interact with each other. "Social networks are formed by people who are grouped by common interests that allow communication between the parties involved" (Martínez, 2013).

According to a study, 1.61 billion people use social networks worldwide, meaning that one in five people have used this medium at least once a year (eMarketer, 2013). The first social network was created in the 1990s, specifically in 1995 by Randy Conrads, who named it classmates.com" (Morduchowicz, 2010). The purpose of this network was to keep in touch with former school and university classmates, share photos, experiences, moments lived in that stage of their lives. From then on, countless social networks have been created for different *targets* (target audience), where the main thing is to involve interaction between people.

### Classification of Social Networks

There are several types of classification, either by target group, by the content to be shared or by several variables. This does not mean that, exclusively, a social network belongs to a certain category, but it can be mixed by the characteristics it may have.

#### For its target audience:

**-Horizontal social networks:** These are the most commonly used, with free access for any user and without a defined theme. For example: Facebook

**-Vertical social networks:** Unlike the previous one, they have a defined theme and are classified into three types.

1. **Professional vertical social networks:** Aimed at a group of people seeking to maintain professional relationships among users. For example: Linked In.
2. **Vertical social networks for leisure:** Aimed at communities that develop leisure, culture, sports, travel or video games activities. One of these is Wipley (Social Shared Corporate, 2015).
3. **Mixed vertical social networks:** They are a combination of the professional ones with the addition of leisure topics. For example: Yuglo.

#### Geographical location:

**-Sedentary social networks:** They change according to events, relationships and content created by users. It is a microblogging social network that allows sending updates in the form of short messages with a character limit. For example: Plurk.

**Nomadic social networks:** The content of these social networks will be based on the place where the person is located and the check-ins he/she makes. An example is: Foursquare (Zara, 2013).

#### Depending on the subject:

**-Human social networks:** Seeks interaction between users based on their interests and tastes. An example is: Tuenti

**Content-based social networks:** Everything that happens depends exclusively on the content that is published on the network. Relationships are developed by linking profiles through the content published, for example: Flickr (Burgueño, 2009).

### Main Social Networks in Ecuador

In Ecuador, middle and upper class levels represent the largest number of users. Of the total population, which is 15,872,55, 6.81% use social networks, which represents, that 1,081,620 people have access to these communication tools, either from a computer or *Smartphone* (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos, 2013).

The most common social networks are:

**Facebook:** Created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, it functioned as a means of communication between students at Harvard University. Two years later, it became fully public, allowing free access, people could post photos, statuses and all kinds of information they wanted others to see, these functions can be performed until today. By 2007 the number of users was surprising, which led companies to create a new line of business by promoting their products through this medium. Today, Facebook has 1.59 billion active users (Moreno, 2016).

**Twitter:** Provides a free service in which messages called *Tweets* are published with a maximum of 140 characters and the way to interact is to get followers and follow people of interest. Created in 2006 by Jack Dorsey and named after the "tweet" of a bird (which in English is called *twitt*) (Castrejón, 2012). It currently has 305 million active users.

**Instagram:** Its history began in San Francisco in 2010, by two photo lovers Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger (Pareja,

2013). Its main function is to share photos by adding filters so that followers can view and comment on them. It has more than 400 million users, which is considered a success for the short life of this social network.

### **The 4Cs of Social Networks**

As mentioned above, people use social networks to interact with others through publications in order to have a closer contact. As this process is so striking and effective, companies and even small businesses have been attracted by these mechanisms and have chosen to promote their products through these media.

This decision leads businesses to develop strategies to publish attractive content to users, whether it is a photo, a video, a comment or describe the features of a product and thus achieve a high impact that benefits the brand.

"Users create a lot of content and place it in a context, which leads to establish good connections between people in common and in turn create a community" (Meridio, 2010). This is when the 4C's are born: Content, Context, Connections and Community that Social Media Marketing generates as a result. People use social networks on a daily basis, generating content or simply seeing what's new. Small businesses take advantage of this to reach this large number of potential consumers through publications. The characteristics of the 4C's are:

1. Content: The key piece of the strategy, you must know your audience to generate valuable information and attract their attention. 45% of users use social networks to learn about brands (Social Media Marketing, 2013).
2. Context: More conversation and less promotion, it is "face to face", where a closer contact with customers is maintained. Users enter social networks to contact brands and want them to respond as soon as possible.
3. Community: Providing quality content will generate interaction among users, which will create a social conversation focused on the same tastes, which will be reflected in a target group.
4. Connections: Not all social networks are the same, each one is a different world with its own specific functions. Therefore, a strategy must be developed based on the interests of the business in order to choose the right medium and adapt it to the target group.

### **Undertakings**

Most of the great companies were created by groups of entrepreneurs who wanted to excel professionally, who discovered an opportunity and dared to see what could happen. Many of them were successful and today, they are great brands recognized worldwide.

"The typical entrepreneur is young, middle class and with an accepted level of education, who had some close example to influence his or her entrepreneurship" (Kantis, 2004).

Additionally, the entrepreneur is characterized by being dynamic, creative and passionate about what he/she does. The entrepreneur is defined as a producer of market values, who is alert to discover new opportunities and acts accordingly to take advantage of them (Aguelo, 2013).

When undertaking an entrepreneurial venture, doubts may arise as to whether the project you have in mind can really work. The fear of failure plays a crucial aspect in the decision and is capable of causing an entrepreneurial business to die before it is born. This fear is caused by the fear of taking the risk.

The fear of not knowing what might happen is one of the main factors to stop the realization of a venture. It is seen as a normal reaction because the whole situation is working against it. The whole environment is new, some aspects of the business may be unfamiliar, sales at start-up are not relatively good and the probability of losing the investment money is very high. "The effective entrepreneur must see risk as something positive that instead of limiting actions, allows with greater acuity the opportunities that arise" (Amaya, 2012).

But how do these small businesses work today? Many of them are born without having a physical space where to carry out their operations, they manufacture their products in their own homes, production volumes are on demand, they do not have fixed costs and their investment capacity is not so high.

For this reason, a large number of companies resort to social networks. As it is a free medium where they can promote their brand, they have the power of diffusion and allow them to be known to a large number of people. In this way, through the advertised content, new customers can be attracted in order to generate sales and make the business more profitable for its growth.

Ecuador is currently one of the most entrepreneurial country in Latin America according to a study conducted by *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor* in 2013, the rate of entrepreneurial activity stood at 36%, this means that one in three Ecuadorian adults had begun the process to establish a business or owned one, with no more than three and a half years. Of

these, 22.7% undertook an entrepreneurial activity to take advantage of a market opportunity and 12.1% did so out of necessity to earn income (Líderes, 2013). This last percentage is reflected in the unemployment rate, which currently stands at 5.7%, and underemployment, which is 17.1%; the underemployed are employed people who receive incomes below the unified basic salary (Orozco, 2016). The aforementioned literature indicate that companies and the society in Ecuador are increasingly committed to the digital environment (Tejada-Castro et al., 2018; Luque et al., 2024).

## METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted in the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador. A sample population of 150 people was taken as a sample and a survey was conducted with six questions regarding the use of social networks for the development of local entrepreneurship in the food sector. Below are the questions and answers expressed in graphs. For the analysis of results we use descriptive statistics (Posada Hernandez, 2016), as well as content analysis (Castilla-Polo & Ruiz-Rodriguez, 2017) to interpret the performative and constative nature of the elements used by entrepreneurs and involved with small businesses.

## RESULTS

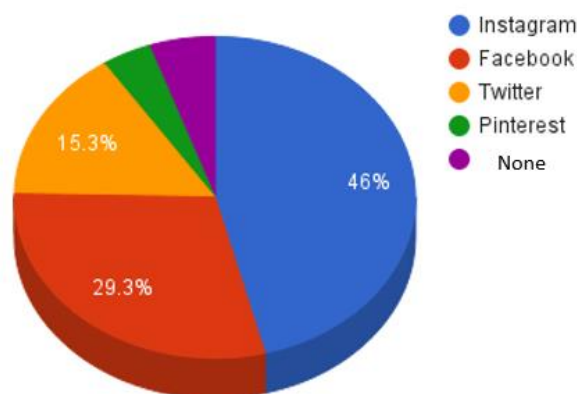
After conducting the research, both on the consumer side, through the surveys, and on the entrepreneurial side through the interviews, it is clear that every venture may run some risk in its beginnings. Making a brand known and making representative sales from the beginning of a business is a great challenge.

An entrepreneur can carry out various activities to publicize his business or improve an adverse business situation, looking for alternatives of all kinds, the main one being the use of social networks. According to the interviewees, they choose this medium because it is totally free and has a resounding reach in a population. According to the sample taken in the surveys, 91% of the participants use these means of communication, 56% of them indicated that Facebook is their favorite social network.

On the other hand, analyzing sales improvements in entrepreneurships, it was found that 22% of users make their purchase actions because of some eye-catching content, either a photo or a video seen on a social network, while 64% are willing to do so at some point in their lives. For this reason, entrepreneurs must publish interesting information to capture people's attention and generate a positive effect on their business. The effectiveness of a social network as a means to promote a product is reflected in increased sales.

Finally, social networks are an effective alternative for the diffusion of a brand, since, in addition to being totally free, they attract new customers, cover more market segments and generate higher revenues. All this, without the need to invest big amounts of resources in advertising.

**Figure 1.** Preferences regarding the social network use

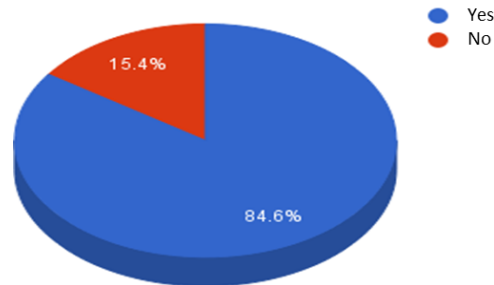


Note. Own elaboration with the research data (2023)

The first question asked was fundamental to know if the participants uses social networks and which one was the most attractive. The answer option "None" was selected since a very small sample of the population does not use these media, according to this study, 5.3%.

In order to generate a focus on the research topic, a very specific question was asked about entrepreneurship in the food sector. We were able to verify that the people surveyed are very involved to this type of business. The question was: do you follow accounts of small businesses or artisanal food brands that promote their products through this social network? A significant majority leaned towards a positive answer.

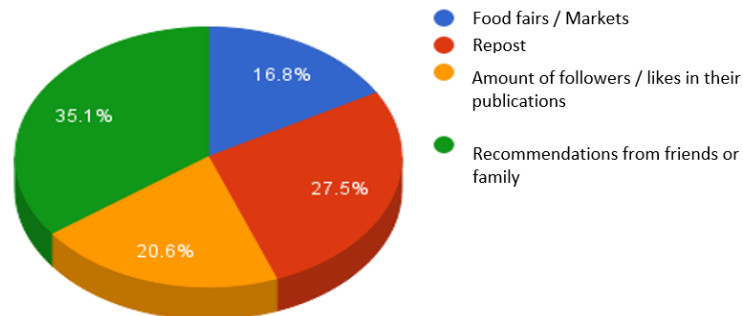
**Figure 2.** Act as a follower on social networks



Note. Own elaboration with the research data (2023)

Many mechanisms are used to publicize a new business. The most common nowadays are the recommendations made by those closest to the company. In other words, people's comments are influential for the development of an enterprise. The Figure 3 shows how interactions are important so that those involved in small businesses (customers or future customers) can consume the content.

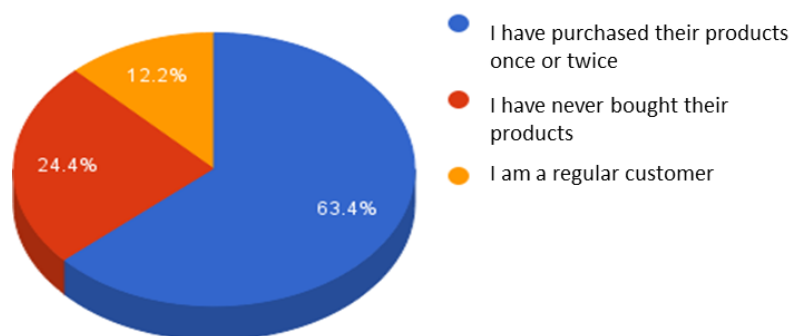
**Figure 3.** Connection search mechanisms



Note. Own elaboration with the research data (2023)

The evidence collected regarding the consumer behavior, or in other words, the possible impact of account recommendations on consumers, shows us that there is no creation of loyalty. This may suggest that a percentage of people can behave as explorers to learn about the quality of products. In this sense, the social network, specifically in the context of gastronomy businesses, could be used more strongly to generate first interactions and/or leads to potentials customers.

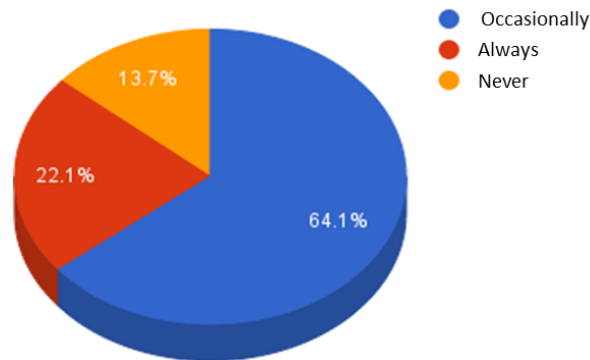
**Figure 4.** Behavior towards the social networks content recommendations



Note. Own elaboration with the research data (2023)

When we analyze the frequency with which the consumer declares that they consume or purchase products recommended by the posts, we can determine that there is an influence, although it is not always so frequent, but it does exist. Something fundamental that a small entrepreneur must know is to manage their publications with an eye-catching content for the consumer, since the surveyed population makes their purchase actions motivated by an effective publication.

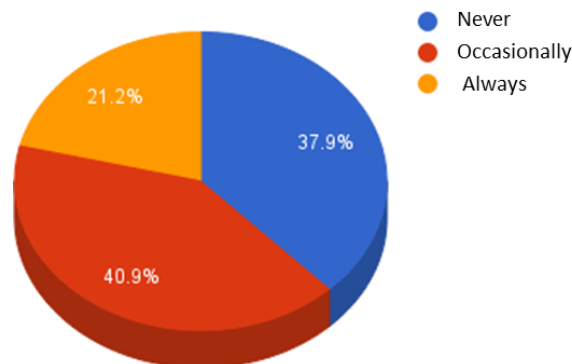
**Figure 5.** Frequency of the consumption impulse motivated by following the posts or published content



Note. Own elaboration with the research data (2023)

Promotions are an anchor for consumers to fix their eyes on new brands. Attracting a new audience is easier if a product comes to them for free or as a hook for a promotion. Entrepreneurs use this way to publicize their products and get people to try their quality, resulting in one more customer in a short period of time. The evidence collected effectively demonstrates that, at least eventually, promotions are an important determinant for consumers to be reached in their purchasing intention and acquisition of products. Figure 6 shows the result in detail.

**Figure 6.** Frequency of the consumption impulse motivated by promotions



Note. Own elaboration with the research data (2023)

### Insights gathered from interviews

As a fundamental part of the research, two women entrepreneurs from the city of Guayaquil were interviewed to learn about their experience in their ventures and their views on the use of social networks. Both represent businesses in the food sector, Isabela Carmigniani, creator of *Munamii Cupcakes* and Ximena Montenegro, owner of *Nutriterapia* a company dedicated to offering nutritious and healthy alternatives to its consumers.

They define an entrepreneur as someone who is passionate about what they do, creative, dynamic and not afraid of risk. This is how they respectively started their business, as a dream for which they fought until they achieved it. But both coincide that it was not easy, it takes time to get on the road to success, looking for strategies and making good decisions are part of growing as a professional.

In Isabela's case, her brand *Munamii Cupcakes* was born 3 years ago. She comes from a family that loves to cook, which led her to choose a business in this category. She started preparing *cupcakes* for people close to her for free. After a while, she realized that people liked her product a lot, so she started selling them to her friends. She is not specialized in

gastronomy, rather she has a degree in marketing, but her love for cooking and her knowledge acquired in her studies, led her to start her small business.

*Munamii Cupcakes* focuses on the marketing of cupcakes, which are cupcakes the size of a hand of different flavors and designs, offers home delivery in the city of Guayaquil. Its first means of dissemination was through "word of mouth", based on the experiences of people, these, they told others and so on they were recommending it. "The comment that a person can make represents much more than what can be published on a social network" (Isabela Carmigniani).

Carmigniani began by purchasing his utensils and ingredients in supermarkets. Being a small business, he had no suppliers. This meant that his profits were not lucrative enough because his costs were high and he did not have much production, since it was difficult to get clients. According to her information, she sold between 60 to 75 cupcakes a month, which left a profit of 35%.

After three months of existence of *Munamii Cupcakes*, and convinced that her product was of good quality, she decided to create accounts on the social networks Facebook and Instagram, in order to publish information about her business and the products she offers. This was a great help to expand in the market, make herself known to new segments and attract more customers. As an experience, he comments that the business could not afford to advertise on a billboard or television as a brand usually does and resorted to this totally free means of communication that led him to have a surprising reach.

Isabela Carmigniani understood that the content she had to share on social networks had to be eye-catching, so she started by creating an identity for her business, created her logo and developed material to attract followers. Today, she has more than 14 thousand followers between the two social networks she manages, she shares humorous posts, information about her products, photos of her customers eating her cupcakes, prices and promotions: "You should not always post the same information about the product because in the end the consumer already knows it" (Isabela Carmigniani). Facebook and Instagram helped her to have a closer contact with her customers, which generated that she can capture a new market segment by understanding the needs and tastes of the consumer, getting to create customized *cupcakes*. Customers began to ask her for this idea and now people arrive with a story that *Munamii Cupcakes* turns into a sweet.

Currently, *Munamii Cupcakes* relies on high-end suppliers such as Universal and other companies that supply boxes and labels. It sells between 1,500 and 1,800 cupcakes a month, generating profits of more than 100%, all as a result of the good management of social networks over time and the investments they have made by participating in open fairs and street markets. These opportunities have generated new clients and even contracts with recognized brands such as Samsung, De Prati and recognized foundations, which have helped the business to grow considerably. Currently, *Munamii Cupcakes* is working on a web page project where the *cupcake* can be personalised according to the client's taste and the company will make it a reality.

Figure 7. Munamii logo and Cupcake presentation



Source: accessed from the company's social networks

On the other hand, Ximena Montenegro, representative of *Nutriterapia*, comments that the idea was born by her husband. He has always been a lover of *gourmet* products (gastronomist) derived from goat, which led them to investigate this industry and encourage them to produce it.

*Nutriterapia*, for a year and a half, has been dedicated to the production and commercialization of organic products based on goat dairy products. In their facilities located in the city of Guayaquil, on the coast road, they produce products



such as yogurt, cheese, butter, manjar and their new *whey protein* line (high quality whey-based protein). Their logistical structure is very organized, so they deliver only twice a week.

Ximena Montenegro found her opportunity in a market that is increasingly looking for healthy products. People are concerned about what they consume to avoid diseases. Thus was born *Nutriterapia*, a business where it was difficult to organize as a structure, it was difficult to get suppliers and extremely complicated to find a facility that meets the requirements for the care of the environment. In addition to all this, their sales at the beginning were not representative, they only marketed their products to family and friends which generated a movement of approximately twenty products among all their lines. But this situation did not cause the business to faint, in fact, they used creativity to move forward.

One of their actions was to opt to use social networks as a free medium. They created accounts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to share content and have a greater advertising reach. Ximena Montenegro says that when she tried these media, it was not difficult to find new customers, the product is so innovative that people began to arrive, she currently has regular customers and approximately five new customers contact her every week because they learn about her brand through these media, where she has 1,800 followers. From there, she values this media for its unimaginable reach and considers it a powerful tool to achieve her objectives.

*Nutriterapia* publishes images of its products, posts photos of customers consuming them and shares information for a healthy lifestyle. This activity leads to create a stronger and closer connection with customers, keeps the brand always present in their mind, since it is not only presenting a product but also helps them with health tips, becoming another friend.

Currently, *Nutriterapia* is growing, the information is confidential, but the interviewee was able to comment that her sales have taken a considerable upturn due to the quality of its products, generating 45% profit compared to the monthly investment, and this, in part, is thanks to the good use she makes of social networks, since she receives weekly orders from this medium. *"It is always nice to find more people concerned about their food, which helps my brand to be recognized more"* (Ximena Montenegro).

**Figure 8.** *Nutriterapia* variety of products



Source: accessed from the company's social networks

In summary, the evidence presented here shows us that 1) consumers in the Ecuadorian context have a propensity to use social networks to follow small food businesses; 2) consumers have or receive some influence from posts and promotions to make their purchasing decisions; 3) social networks are a tool with potential positive impact to promote small businesses, which in turn, generate local economic development for communities. This positive impact occurs even if there is no professional use strategy, so we deduce that with a robust strategy the results could be even better (Ordoñez-Valencia, 2023). All these findings are aligned with the respective international literature, reinforcing existing hypotheses and reaffirming the evidence in favor of the better use of social networks by small entrepreneurs (Quezada-Fadanelli et al., 2022; Zumba-Zúñiga et al., 2016; Moreno et al., 2022; Tejada-Castro et al., 2018; Luque et al., 2024).

## CONCLUSIONS

Creating a solid foundation for communication and commercial promotion in the business is possible with the correct use of social networks. Today, 84.6% of a sample of 150 people are interested in following accounts of small food businesses, so managing quality content generates great positive impacts for a brand that has just been born.

Throughout this research, it was possible to demonstrate the power of this media and the reactions it has on consumers. Additionally, it was verified how two businesses in the city of Guayaquil have grown thanks to this tool, since according to the survey, 63.4% of people have purchased food products from entrepreneurs who promote their brands on social networks once or twice, and 12.2% are already regular customers.

Finally, we seek to motivate all those future entrepreneurs who have the objective of creating their own business and do not make it a reality for fear of failure. Running the risk is part of every entrepreneurship, so you should not give up trying. Using the right means, such as social networks, makes it possible to achieve the objectives set and achieve a profitable business. It must be understood that the conditions for entrepreneurship will not always be favorable and that the passion for achievement must be the engine to move forward.

### Main limitations of the study and future research

The main limitations of this study include its focus on the artisanal food sector in the city of Guayaquil, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other industries or regions. Despite the highlighted positive impact of social networks in reducing the risk of failure in ventures and improving profitability, it may neglect the possible challenges or negative consequences associated with the use of social networks in entrepreneurship. Future research could address these limitations by conducting a broader analysis across diverse industries and geographic locations, exploring both the benefits and drawbacks of using social media in business creation and maintenance. Additionally, investigating the long-term effects of social media participation on business success and examining strategies to mitigate the potential risks associated with online presence would improve understanding of the role of social media in entrepreneurship. business..

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