



# Social media, new digital technologies and their potential application in sensory and consumer research

Nina Veflen Olsen<sup>1,2</sup> and Kasper Christensen<sup>1,2</sup>

New digital technologies have changed the way people communicate and opened up for new ways of interacting with consumers via social media. This article reviews findings from recent investigations and present the opportunities and challenges social media offers for sensory and consumer science. After defining social media and giving a short overview of the different medium that exists, the focus will be on two aspects of specific interest: crowdsourcing and communication of health and food safety.

## Addresses

<sup>1</sup> Aarhus University, Denmark

<sup>2</sup> Nofima, Norway

Corresponding author: Olsen, Nina Veflen ([nvol@nofima.no](mailto:nvol@nofima.no), [nvo@auhe.au.dk](mailto:nvo@auhe.au.dk))

**Current Opinion in Food Science** 2015, 3:23–26

This review comes from a themed issue on **Sensory science and consumer perception**

Edited by **Paula A Varela-Tomasco**

For a complete overview see the [Issue](#) and the [Editorial](#)

Available online 24th November 2014

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cofs.2014.11.006>

2214-7993/© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## Introduction

New digital technology has made the exchange of user generated content on internet possible and turned the web into a very popular social medium. Facebook alone has over one billion active users and many people spend today more than one third of their waking day consuming social media content [1]. People share life stories and personal opinions in blogs, write short comments on Twitter, chat with their friends on Facebook, post pictures in Instagram and Flickr, watch other peoples' videos on You Tube and send small snaps of what they are doing on Snapchat. They share information and express their emotions. They tell life stories and give advice. They brag and they complain. People are no longer only passive consumers of professional internet content; they participate actively in creating and sharing their own content. This interactivity creates a lot of opportunities and challenges, so also for sensory and consumer science. Social media makes global, one-to-one communication easier and cheaper than ever, makes the voice of the consumer

much stronger, and allows a dissatisfied customer not only to complain to her friends but to post negative comments to millions of people [2].

The aim of this paper is to review recent literature and present the opportunities and challenges social media offers for sensory and consumer science. After defining the term social media and giving a short overview of the different types, the focus will be on two specific aspects: crowdsourcing and communication of health and food safety

## Social media

Social media is defined as 'a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content [3]'. Technical functions as Adobe Flash (for animation and audio/video stream updates), Really Simple Syndication (for frequent updates of blogs and headlines) and Asynchronous Java Script (for update of web content without interfering with the interface of the whole page) made it possible for unprofessional users to make their own content publicly available over the internet (see [4] for a definition of User Generated Content).

Social media comes in many different forms: blogs, micro blogs (Twitter), collaborative projects (Wikipedia), social networking sites (Facebook), content communities (YouTube), virtual social worlds (Second Life), virtual game worlds (World of Warcraft). Different attempts have been made to classify social media according to theories like: Social Presence Theory, which states that medium differs in the degree that acoustic, visual and physical contact can be achieved [5], Media Richness Theory, which states that different media varies in the amount of information they allow to transit [6], and Social Identity Theory, which states that people establish a social identity as part of their self-concept by classifying themselves into specific social groups [7]. See Kaplan and Haenlein and Weinberg and Pehlivan [3,8] for two different social media classification frameworks.

Food blogs have become a popular platform for individuals to write about their recipes, restaurant meals, opinions, and food experiences in a public forum [9]. Everybody with a computer or a smart phone can post blogs, and for those who become popular enough to gain followers the pay may be very good. Users' present thoughts, feelings, likes and dislikes consistent with the

image they would like to give, and conveys product knowledge important for both brand and product managers. Some write very personal blogs where they invite the readers into their 'perfect' lives. Others write more dairy like blogs where they frequently post about their meals, wines and food tourism. These blogs can be interesting sources of information for food consumer research. By investigating blogs we can gain insights into how consumers shape and share their food identity [3] and how national food cuisines and local food practices can be transmitted to a global audience [10]. Microblogs like Twitter with spatiotemporal tagged information provide also an ideal source of data for investigating food exposure in real time [11]. Investigating blogs and bloggers behavior may display interesting knowledge and open up for new research questions. How does for example pre occupation with taking pictures of the food influence bloggers satisfaction with the meal?

Today food companies use social networking sites as Facebook to support the creation of brand communities, for conducting marketing research and even for distribution of food products. They use content communities as You Tube for involving customers in product related competitions. They ask customers to upload videos where they use the product, sing about the product or in other way interact with the product. Sometimes these competitions are too successfully, as in the 'Whopper Sacrifice' campaign where the fast food giant developed a Facebook application that gave users free Whopper sandwich for every 10 friends they deleted from their Facebook network. The campaign was adopted by over 20 000 uses, resulting in the sacrificing of 233 906 friends in exchange for free burgers before it was shut down by Facebook after one month [3].

### Crowdsourcing

Social media made crowdsourcing, coined by Howe [12] as 'the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call', possible. Firms apply crowdsourcing for monitoring customers' interest, for gathering new ideas, and for creation of new products [13••]. PepsiCo monitored for example thousands of conversations with customers on social media and assessed customers' preferences via Facebook when formulating the new product Gatorade [8]. Danone encouraged consumers to participate in the creation of new cream desserts flavors, and when Lay's invited consumers to come up with a new potato chip flavor they got 245 825 proposals. After screening all the ideas a jury picked two winning flavors that were launched in the market. The two creator finalist were then endeavored to convince consumers to vote for their respective flavor. In addition to seeing her name on the product, the winner received €25 000 and 1% of the product's sales for a year [14•].

Studies investigating if users really can compete with professionals in generating new product ideas have found that on average user ideas score higher in novelty and customer benefit, but lower on feasibility [15,16••]. Experts seem to generate ideas that are easy to implement, while users generate ideas with a larger market potential. These findings support the importance of crowdsourcing for new ideas. When investigating social media-enabled customer co-creation projects in Barilla, Martini, Massa and Testa [17•] found that customers had a tendency to propose nostalgic products. The leading Italian pasta company created Facebook pages for each of its main products and organized an online community for all their brand lovers. They wanted to create a communication and relationship platform to give all people a voice; a platform where customers could submit ideas that others could vote for. The first year of activity, 4120 ideas were recorded. Based on votes two ideas were implemented. The community seemed to be driven by people who strived to re-create the past by proposing re-editions of old products, old packaging and old gadgets. Most of the ideas were also exploitative by nature, meaning not very radical.

While crowdsourcing seem to generate a win-win situation by creating value for both the firm and the customers, some obstacles have been found. Investigations of five FMCG case studies revealed two negative consumer reactions to crowdsourcing practices; the feeling of not being rewarded for their effort and the feeling of being cheated [14•]. The feeling of being cheated was essentially linked to the complexity of the crowdsourcing operation rules and customers misunderstanding of these rules. These concerns need to be taken into consideration in future crowdsourcing projects. Another worry that makes some firms reluctant to crowdsource is the necessary speed of the development project. To create, pack and brand a product in almost no time, which is necessary to keep the crowd's interest, means to rush the normal development process. Not all firms are willing to do so [14•]. Crowdsourcing may also influence the employees, who might worry about job security [13••].

### Communication

Social media opens up for new ways of communicating with food consumers about health and food safety issues. Research indicate that between 55% and 67% of US adults go online for health and wellness information, and that social media is used by 20–34% of those searching for health related topics. Social media can facilitate social support groups, deliver education programs, recruit for services, train students, and help with communication between other health care professionals [18]. The web offers numerous advantages for those seeking health information, including anonymity, privacy, tailored health information, and the potential for interactivity and social support. Many researchers investigate how to influence healthy behavior via social media right

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/2079750>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/2079750>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)