



# ITALIAN STARTUPS GOING GLOBAL

The proliferation of digital platforms has revolutionized the way startups can access global markets and communicate with international customers and stakeholders, opening up new opportunities to compete on a global scale.

A study of a sample of Italian startups in the food tech sector sheds light on the supporting role of social media in the international growth of companies.



The research by Ginevra Testa (Research Fellow at the University of Genoa, CIELI - Italian Center of Excellence on Logistics and Infrastructure, Genoa, Italy) and Mirko Olivieri (Lecturer and Research Fellow in Economics and Business Management at the Faculty of Economics, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy), published in the journal *International Marketing Review*, aims to enrich the theoretical and practical understanding of the strategic use of social media to achieve international marketing goals in startups. Data were collected on a sample of 7 Italian food tech startups between April 2023 and January 2024 through semi-structured interviews, company observations, and analysis of company documentation and content posted on social media.

Social media communication by Italian food tech startups - a fast-growing sector that has attracted a large amount of investment in recent years - focuses mainly on three areas: spreading brand awareness and improving brand image in international markets (52.53 percent of the total), communication related to the positioning of their offerings (31.73 percent) and penetration of local business networks (15.73 percent). Social media, and LinkedIn in particular, are an indispensable tool for Italian food tech start-ups,

not only to improve brand visibility and optimise offer positioning, but also to build valuable international networks and synergies that can create value. On the one hand, this integrated approach allows startups to better adapt to the needs of foreign markets, responding more precisely to specific local needs, and on the other hand, to develop strategic relationships with market players, ensuring easier access to foreign markets and overcoming knowledge gaps due to a lack of knowledge of the institutions and regulations in force in each country.

## HOW FOOD TECH STARTUPS ARE USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO ACHIEVE INTERNATIONAL MARKETING GOALS



Positioning start-ups in international markets

31.73%

Communicate the features and benefits of the high-tech product and its usefulness in the consumer's life.

Expanding brand awareness and improving brand image in international markets

52.53%

Communicate the ethical behaviour of founders and CEOs, sustainable practices and the high-tech and innovative orientation of the company; promote the Italian food tradition and Italian food.

Penetrating the local commercial network

15.73%

Encourage partnerships with local suppliers, brokers and consultants; identify investors, institutions, online communities and local initiatives.

## RECURRING THEMES IN THE COMMUNICATION OF FOOD TECH START-UPS AND THEIR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

|                                                                                     |                                     | STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | TRADITION AND AUTHENTICITY          | Promoting the Italian culinary tradition                                                        |
|  | LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS                  | Working in partnership with local suppliers                                                     |
|  | PRODUCT BENEFITS                    | Product/service benefits, with an emphasis on technological innovation                          |
|  | SUSTAINABILITY AND ETHICAL BEHAVIOR | Communicating business practices and ethical behavior                                           |
|  | HIGH-TECH FEATURES                  | Communicating the high-tech features of the product/service                                     |
|                                                                                     |                                     | Build relationships with local online communities to gather information about foreign consumers |
|                                                                                     |                                     | Stay on top of local market needs to adapt their offerings                                      |
|                                                                                     |                                     | Make consumers aware of the added value of the solutions offered                                |
|                                                                                     |                                     | Engage consumers, who are more likely to provide feedback and ideas                             |
|                                                                                     |                                     | Identify investors and local institutions to gain visibility and support for initiatives        |