

Enhancing Brand Positioning through Social Media Strategies during Crises: A Case Study of a Peruvian Micro-Bakery amidst COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the adaptive strategies of a Peruvian micro-bakery, "Alfonsina Hecho en Casa," in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research analyzes the effectiveness of brand positioning through social media platforms, specifically Facebook and Instagram. Data collection included a digital content analysis, customer surveys, and an in-depth interview with the business owner. Findings highlight how targeted digital engagement, visual content, and adaptive communication strategies facilitated customer retention and brand visibility. Key insights suggest that emotionally-driven and personalized content can strengthen brand positioning, particularly during crises. The study underscores the importance of agile digital marketing practices and quality-driven communication for sustaining small businesses in a dynamic market environment. Limitations involve the focus on a single business context without longitudinal analysis. Further research is recommended to explore the long-term effects of social media strategies on brand loyalty and to compare digital adaptation approaches across different sectors.

KEYWORDS: Brand positioning, social media strategies, digital engagement, COVID-19, small businesses, adaptive communication, quality management, Peruvian market.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary business landscape, digital platforms have become vital for micro businesses facing unexpected challenges like the recent pandemic. This study focuses on how Facebook was strategically employed by the online micro pastry shop "Alfonsina Hecho en Casa" in Peru during the pandemic. By delving into this case, we aim to reveal the specific tactics and strategies micro businesses use to navigate crises.

Figure 1. Post from Alfonsina Hecho en Casa



Source: Alfonsina Hecho en Casa [on september 13, 2020](#)

This case exemplifies the experiences of many small businesses dealing with pandemic-related impacts. By analyzing how this micro pastry shop employed Facebook to reach their customers during covid related restrictions in Peru, we hope to uncover innovative methods they adopted to sustain their business, engage customers, and maintain competitiveness.

It is vital to mention that Peru was one of the swiftest countries to react at the beginning of the pandemic, and in spite of their efforts, suffered from one the highest mortality rates during it (Schwalb & Seas, 2021). In this context, businesses we're forced to innovate to navigate the heavy restrictions enforced by the government in order to stay afloat (Durst, Palacios Acuache & Bruns, 2021). That is why this study not only aims to contribute to understanding micro business dynamics during crises but also enriches discussions on using social media for business survival and growth.

2. Literature Review

The following review highlights small businesses practices, digital branding, social media and marketing, while taking into account the implications the pandemic had on maintaining revenue in all sectors.

Small digital Businesses

Alkhowaiter (2016) highlights the power of Instagram and Facebook in building small businesses, while Ahmad et al. (2018) reflect on entrepreneurs' experiences with social media adoption and its impact on performance outcomes. Olsson and Bernhard (2021) focus on women entrepreneurs' knowledge and use of social media to keep up with digitalization in small businesses. Angelyn and Kodrat (2021) examine the effect of social media marketing on purchase decision-making, and Nayana et al. (2019) emphasize the effectiveness of social media as a branding tool from the perspective of women entrepreneurs in Kerala. Saleh (2021) investigates the use of ICT and social media during the COVID-19 pandemic by the informal home-based business community in Kuwait City.

Espinoza (2018) examines social networks and inequality among the urban poor in a Latin American city, while Villares-Varela (2018) discusses Latin American migrant women entrepreneurs in Spain and their negotiation of class, femininity, and career. Drummond et al. (2018) explore the impact of social media on resource mobilization in entrepreneurial firms, and Jayasingh (2019) investigates the effect of consumer brand engagement on social networking sites on brand loyalty. Wu and Li (2018) conduct a cross-cultural discourse analysis of emotional branding on social media by global brands on Twitter and Weibo.

Durst et al. (2021) examine the experience of Peruvian small and medium-sized enterprises during times of crisis, while Kübler et al. (2020) investigate social media's impact on the consumer mindset and the appropriate use of sentiment extraction tools. Kutila (2020) examines the effect of COVID-19 on small businesses in Forssa and social media marketing. Iseli (2021) offers marketing strategies for small business owners using social media, and Ashbeck (2020) discusses coffee shop communication through social media and engagement. Ouvrein et al. (2021) propose a marketing-audience classification of social media influencers, and Stopfer and Gosling (2018) explore online social networks in the work context. Finally, Al-Weshah (2019) discusses customer relationship management in the Jordanian food industry.

Digital Branding on social media

Harrigan, Ramsey, and Ibbotson (2012) investigated the use of e-CRM by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) using a mixed-methods approach. They found that SMEs use e-CRM to improve customer relationships and that firms with better e-CRM capabilities are more effective in marketing their products. On the other hand, Arora and Stoner (2009) used a mixed-methods approach to understand the brand personality. They found that customers' perceptions of brand personality are important in determining brand loyalty and purchase intention. They also found that using a mixed-methods approach allowed them to gain a more comprehensive understanding of brand personality.

In the case of Cesaroni and Consoli (2015), they investigated whether small businesses are able to take advantage of social media. They found that while social media can be an effective tool for small businesses, they face challenges in implementing and using social media effectively. Subsequently, Gholston, Kuofie,

and Hakim (2016) explored the use of social media for marketing by small businesses. They found that social media can be an effective marketing tool for small businesses but that firms need to use social media strategically to achieve their marketing goals. These findings are in line with the work of Ingrassia et al. (2022), which examined the use of digital influencers by businesses in the hospitality, restaurant, and catering (Ho. Re. Ca.) sector. They found that working with digital influencers can be an effective way for businesses in the Ho. Re. Ca. sector to promote their products and services.

Russmann and Svensson (2016) reached similar conclusions after studying organizations on Instagram. They found that businesses can use Instagram to build brand awareness and customer engagement. However, the pre-requisite is a strategic use of the site in order to achieve their marketing goals. This complements Morris's findings (2015). They provided a practical introduction to in-depth interviewing, harnessing the method's capability to gather rich qualitative data, which allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of complex phenomena. Similarly, Coelho, Oliveira, and Almeida (2016) investigated the impact of post content on Facebook and Instagram metrics. They found that the type of content posted on these platforms can have a significant impact on user engagement and other metrics.

When adopting Instagram as a platform for e-commerce, the most prominent factors include the interface usability, audience reach, demographic considerations, the ease of setting up a store, integration with payment systems, Instagram's policies, and more. The researchers might use various statistical analysis techniques to identify and quantify the impacts of these factors (Herzallah, Muñoz-Leiva, Liébana-Cabanillas, 2022). Devereux, Grimmer & Grimmer (2020) reach a similar understanding in their work, which explored consumer engagement on social media specifically for small retailers. They provide evidence and insights into how small retailers can effectively engage with their customers through social media platforms. This relates to Ajismanto and Widyanto's (2020) work by further highlighting the importance of social media for SMEs' marketing. The latter explores the effect of social media effectiveness on SMEs' marketing efforts. Their research emphasizes the impact of social media on the success of marketing strategies for micro, small, and medium enterprises. On the other hand, Saputri and Kurniasih (2020) investigate the usage of digital marketing channels in SMEs in Bandung District, Indonesia. This study delves into the various digital marketing channels employed by SMEs to promote their products or services. The findings can be relevant to understanding the specific digital marketing approaches adopted by SMEs in the region, which can be valuable for other SMEs seeking to improve their marketing efforts. Suryono et al. (2020) focus on successful social media advertising activities for micro, small, and medium enterprises. Their research offers insights into effective strategies and practices that lead to success in social media advertising for SMEs. This study's findings can contribute to the broader understanding of social media advertising and its impact on SMEs' marketing performance.

Andrews (2020) addresses the role of Facebook and other big tech platforms in relation to the media and democracy. Although this article diverges from the SME-focused studies, it provides a broader perspective on the influence of social media platforms on political processes and raises questions about the power dynamics

between big tech companies and governments. Similarly, Djafarova and Matson (2021) examine the credibility of digital influencers on YouTube and Instagram. While not directly related to SMEs, this study explores the factors contributing to influencer credibility and has implications for marketers and consumers. The findings can be relevant to SMEs that incorporate influencer marketing into their social media strategies.

The former relates to Kay et al. (2020), who looked into the impact of macro and micro social media influencers' disclosure. Their research sheds light on how different levels of disclosure by influencers affect consumers' perceptions and engagement. The insights from this study can be valuable for SMEs when selecting and collaborating with influencers for their marketing campaigns. Silas and Junior (2020) focus on online advertising in Nigeria, specifically examining approaches used on Facebook and Instagram. Although the study does not explicitly focus on SMEs, it provides insights into online advertising strategies employed on these platforms. SMEs operating in Nigeria or similar contexts can draw valuable insights from this research to enhance their online advertising practices. These articles collectively contribute to the understanding of social media engagement, digital marketing channels, social media advertising, influencer marketing, and online advertising, with implications for small and medium enterprises.

3. Method

The study adopts a mixed methods approach, employing a case study methodology (Hong et al., 2020) within the context of businesses operating in a digital marketing environment (Ingrassia et al., 2022; Starr, 2014; Harrigan, Ramsey, Ibbotson, 2012). Specifically, the research delves into brand creation and management (Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015), using digital content analysis (Stemler, 2015) and data sourced from the Facebook and Instagram accounts of the Lima-based online dessert delivery business, 'Alfonsina Hecho en Casa'. The methodology encompasses several stages, starting with a 10-question online survey distributed to clients and followers of the business's social media accounts (Gholston, Kuofie, Hakim, 2016). This survey explores aspects such as visit and purchase frequency, overall perception, and brand awareness.

The research then incorporates a digital communication analysis (Russmann & Stevansson, 2016), evaluating elements such as publishing history, product placement, link usage, shared publications, SEO deployment, copywriting practices, and relevant web traffic metrics. The interplay between content across different social media platforms is scrutinized to comprehend their mutual influence (Coelho, Oliveira, Almeida, 2016). Subsequently, in-depth interviews were conducted with the business owner, Camila Uceda Noguero, to gain deeper insights into her perspectives and strategies (Morris, 2015).

The data collection spans two time periods, pre-COVID-19 (January to March 2020) and the equivalent timeframe in 2021. Despite amassing 32,000 followers on both accounts by March 2021, it's noteworthy that a significant following doesn't always equate to proportionate sales. For instance, the conversion rate in 2020 was less than

0.09%, underscoring the necessity for more nuanced exploration of the client base. Initially, a sample size of 31 clients was calculated, considering a 5% error margin and a population proportion of 2.1%. However, to account for potential variations, the sample size was increased to 64 clients.

The surveys aimed at Alfonsina Hecho en Casa's Facebook and Instagram-using customers, and it was administered anonymously online, ensuring respondents' comfort in sharing their opinions. To ensure the survey's relevance to the company's customers, it's promoted on the brand's social media platforms. Following the surveys, an in-depth email interview was conducted with the business's owner, Camila Uceda Noguero. This interview comprised 16 open-ended questions to glean precise insights into the company's strategies on the two platforms.

The analysis centers on Facebook and Instagram, scrutinizing aspects such as branding, content strategy, conversations, fan activity, and user support management. The aim is to unravel the inherent qualities of these platforms that contribute to bolstering the brand. Furthermore, the analysis encompasses social media and web metrics during both the quarantine and post-quarantine periods, reflecting changes in content due to pandemic restrictions. Lastly, a survey gauges customer perceptions following content alterations and the introduction of new services, like creative drawings.

4. Results and Discussion

Internal metrics

The digital content analysis was conducted for the Facebook and Instagram pages of Alfonsina Hecho en Casa. The analysis focused on various aspects, including branding, content strategy, comments and dialogues, fan activity, and user support management. The findings revealed that the Facebook page had a total of 32,365 likes during a 28-day period. The net followers remained stable, with only a few unfollows recorded. The page's reach decreased slightly, and the highest interaction occurred on June 6.

Figure 2. Facebook engagement of “Alfonsina Hecho en Casa”



Source: Owner of Alfonsina Hecho en Casa

The analysis also highlighted the preferences of the target audience, with the majority of likes coming from women, and the age group of 18 to 24 being the most engaged. Overall, the analysis provided insights into the performance and audience demographics of Alfonsina Hecho en Casa's social media pages.

Alfonsina Hecho en Casa's social media platforms serve as the primary channels for order placement and brand promotion. The key tool for brand dissemination is the logo design, along with its accompanying colors.

Figure 3. Alfonsina Hecho en Casa's Logo Design



Source: Alfonsina Hecho en Casa (2020)

The logo used on the Facebook and Instagram pages consists of only two colors, white and brown. The slogan "Hecho en Casa" emphasizes the business idea of personalized desserts made with care, rather than mass-produced items. The logo's shape is wider than it is tall, and it consists solely of text without any images. The chosen font is legible and uses classic lines and strokes, ensuring the logo remains timeless and consistent.

Figure 4. Messages aimed at creating experiences towards customers



Source: Alfonsina Hecho en Casa's account (2020)

The previous figure shows an Instagram Customer asking for a specific product. The owner notifies her that the sales are done mainly through Facebook and that Instagram serves to showcase products. Her content strategy aims to evoke experiences that resonate with the audience and create a sense of identification with the brand. Product design as well as the accompanying images and text, carry strong emotional appeal. The strategy showcases to customers that personalized desserts and handwritten messages convey a deeper representation of the feelings being expressed. A significant portion of the desserts offered by *Alfonsina Hecho en Casa* are meant for marriage proposals, wedding anniversaries, graduation celebrations, baptisms, birthdays, and other similar events that symbolize love and unity. This concept is conveyed consistently across both Facebook and Instagram.

The strategy of *Alfonsina Hecho en Casa* focuses on recreating experiences and establishing a close connection with customers. This is reflected in the informal and cheerful tone of the messages accompanying product photos, including the use of emojis, links, and more. In the comments section, users interact with each other by tagging and writing encouraging messages to promote purchases. Giveaways are also utilized to encourage further dissemination, generate more likes, and increase shared posts. When customers message the company's Instagram account, they are redirected to Facebook to facilitate the purchase. In this way, Instagram serves as a parallel platform to reach a wider audience.

Interview with founder

The interview with Camila Uceda Noguerol, the founder of *Alfonsina Hecho en Casa*, revealed several key points. The brand concept revolves around being a creative and romantic pastry shop, aiming to establish an emotional connection with customers. They focus solely on selling personalized products. The communication style of *Alfonsina Hecho en Casa* is jovial and interactive, providing personalized and assertive support throughout the customer journey, from initial contact to purchase evaluation.

The visual identity of the brand is minimalistic, with the emphasis on the brand name. The packaging design follows a similar visual approach, utilizing earth-tone colors. The visual content on their social media platforms includes a watermark and subtle filters. Customer support is handled in a horizontal manner, with only two people managing the social media accounts. This personalized attention helps establish trust with customers from the very first interaction.

Alfonsina engages in occasional giveaways and gifts to enhance customer loyalty, although there is no defined strategy in place. They recognize the importance of retaining loyal customers rather than solely attracting new ones. However, they have yet to implement a post-purchase strategy. Overall, the interview highlighted the brand's focus on emotional connection, personalized customer support, and the need to develop a post-purchase strategy for enhancing customer loyalty. The business lacks a personalized strategy for each social media platform. Content is posted from both accounts without differentiation. While different consumers navigate each platform, meaning that content should be optimized for each social media channel.

Facebook performs better in attracting customers to the brand compared to

Instagram. The Instagram strategy is merely a replication of Facebook's content. Instagram's utility lies in generating more traffic to the Facebook page and serving as a visual communication medium to engage with users. There is a lack of separate approaches for each social media platform. The brand lacks differentiation in its communication. Everything posted on Facebook is automatically replicated on Instagram. There is a need for a differentiated strategy regarding content formats and topics for each social media channel.

There is no scheduled posting plan for social media. All posts are spontaneous, without tracking user behavior on social media platforms. Utilizing the metrics provided by Facebook and Instagram to determine the peak hours when most followers are active could increase the chances of impressions and interactions. Facebook is considered the main platform for product sales. It can be inferred that a significant portion of Instagram traffic ultimately converts into sales on Facebook. Despite fewer messages on Instagram, a large percentage of people who reach the platform may choose not to message directly due to the information provided in the page's biography, instead going straight to Facebook to place their orders. The purchasing process is concise and clear thanks to the incorporated form. The brand offers various delivery methods, which facilitates customer purchases.

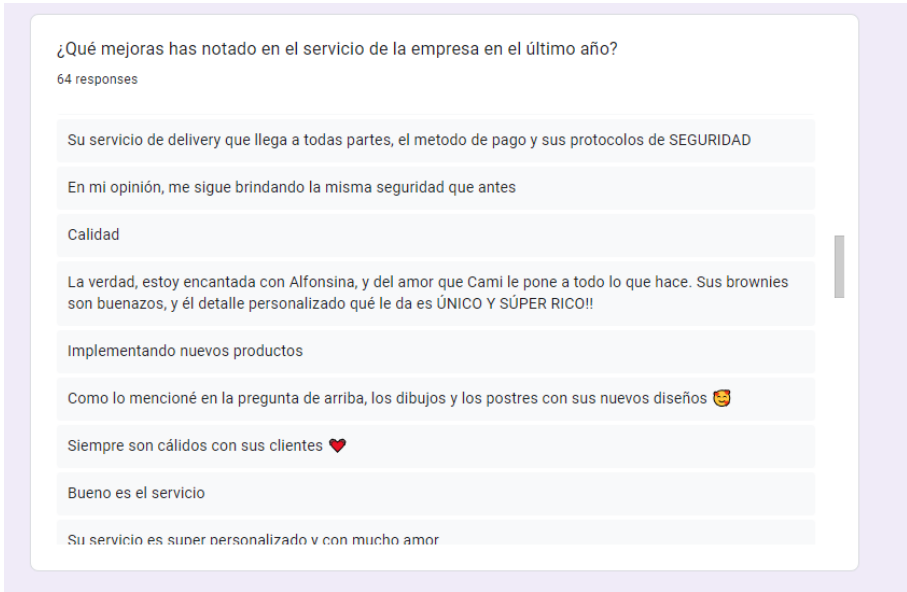
Alfonsina Hecho en Casa currently only has a presence on social media platforms as it does not have an e-commerce store. Product sales are conducted through social media because they do not have the capacity for larger production. If they had more people involved in dessert preparation, they could meet higher demand and consider opening an e-commerce store. The company generates higher engagement when posting photos that depict positive customer experiences and utilizes storytelling. The presence of micro-influencers helps increase the community's size. Sharing the stories behind orders resonates with people and motivates them to make purchases.

The Facebook account is more popular than the Instagram account, which can be attributed to user perceptions. In recent years, Facebook has evolved from being solely an entertainment platform to a portal hosting various types of content (news, complaints, games, etc.). In contrast, Instagram's communication dynamic is more inspirational, as everything posted is positive content. This perception makes Instagram appear lighter compared to Facebook, leading people to have a more positive perception of it. The brand is well-positioned within its industry due to its success on social media, resulting in media outlets using it as a reference for content about entrepreneurship in the country. The presence of micro-influencers has influenced the reach of the brand's content. By partnering with public figures, the brand has gained more credibility with its audience and increased visibility. It is important to evaluate the communities of each micro-influencer to ensure a match with Alfonsina's target audience and secure sales.

Client's survey

Responses from a survey conducted among 64 clients of "Alfonsina Hecho en Casa" offer diverse insights into the business's response to the pandemic and the corresponding changes. The key findings will be discussed below.

Figure 5. Sample of customers' qualitative responses



Source: Survey data of 64 respondents

The survey responses from customers provide a multifaceted view of the changes and adaptations implemented by "Alfonsina Hecho en Casa" during the pandemic, highlighting areas of innovation, service, communication, and overall quality.

The customer feedback revealed diverse levels of awareness and perception regarding the adjustments made by the business. For instance, some clients, like C1 (2020), noticed the introduction of creative elements such as personalized drawings during the quarantine, which underscored a proactive effort to adapt and maintain relevance despite market challenges. This innovation reflected the brand's ability to pivot in response to changing customer expectations, infusing creativity into the product offerings. In contrast, C7 (2020) noted a lack of noticeable change, pointing to possible communication gaps in conveying these adjustments to the broader audience. This disparity underscores the challenges of ensuring that all customers perceive and appreciate the innovations introduced, emphasizing the need for more consistent and clear communication strategies.

Product innovation emerged as a significant theme in the survey feedback. Some respondents viewed the new offerings positively, appreciating the business's effort to "reinvent itself" amid the pandemic with creative items like personalized portraits, as noted by C3 (2020). This shift toward customization aligned well with the brand's focus on emotional and personalized service, appealing to its core audience. However, not all customers perceived these changes equally. For example, C8 (2020) did not recognize substantial product diversification, and C10 (2020) expressed a desire for a broader range of offerings, signaling a need for continued expansion in the product line to meet varying tastes and expectations.

Service quality and responsiveness were frequently mentioned in customer feedback, with notable improvements observed by some clients. C4 (2020) highlighted quicker response times and greater flexibility, indicating that the business successfully adapted to new consumer demands during a challenging period. This adaptation reflects the brand's agility in providing prompt customer service, an essential factor in retaining loyalty during uncertain times. Conversely, C11 (2020) perceived consistency rather than innovation in service quality, suggesting that while the business maintained its standards, it might have missed opportunities to further differentiate and elevate its service experience during the pandemic.

The brand's digital communication strategies received a largely positive reception from customers. Respondents appreciated the increased virtual engagement, with C22 (2020) noting the heightened interaction through social media platforms, a crucial strategy for maintaining visibility and customer connection during the pandemic's social distancing measures. Regular updates and engaging content kept the audience connected, as C26 (2020) observed, indicating that the business effectively utilized its online channels to maintain brand awareness and customer loyalty even in periods of restricted physical contact.

Customer responses also highlighted the importance of health protocols and delivery adaptations. The pandemic emphasized the need for safe and reliable service, and C20 (2020) acknowledged the brand's implementation of stringent safety measures, which became a key factor in maintaining customer trust. The practice of contactless delivery, praised by C25 (2020), not only met health expectations but also aligned with a broader shift towards safety-conscious consumer behavior. This attention to health-conscious delivery reassured customers, reinforcing the brand's reliability during a time of heightened health awareness.

Promotional strategies played a vital role in customer engagement during the pandemic. The survey data showed that creative promotions, such as the "crazy" discounts and special offers, effectively attracted attention and drove engagement. C9 (2020) and C32 (2020) both highlighted the appeal of these deals, demonstrating that value-driven promotions resonate strongly with the target audience. Additionally, C38 (2020) appreciated the brand's outreach to support other entrepreneurs, indicating a sense of community involvement that not only strengthened customer relationships but also aligned the brand with broader societal values.

Several customers praised the consistent quality of both the products and services throughout the pandemic, a crucial factor in maintaining customer satisfaction. C14 (2020) and C30 (2020) emphasized that despite the challenges of COVID-19, the business upheld its standards, showcasing resilience and a strong commitment to excellence. This consistency likely played a pivotal role in customer retention, as sustained quality assurance is a key component of building and maintaining trust.

The customer feedback also provided constructive insights for further improvements. Suggestions included expanding delivery coverage to reach more areas, as recommended by C19 (2020), which could tap into new markets and increase the brand's visibility. Additionally, the call for a more diverse product range, mentioned by C27 (2020), highlights the importance of continual product development to meet

evolving customer needs. These suggestions emphasize that while the business has adapted effectively, there are opportunities to further refine and expand its strategies to enhance brand positioning and customer satisfaction.

The qualitative feedback underscores the complexity of micro business responses to crises, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies catering to diverse customer perceptions. The blend of positive responses toward innovation, safety measures, and engagement strategies underscores the business's adaptability and strategic alignment with evolving circumstances. However, the range of responses suggests a potential gap in communication, necessitating clearer dissemination of changes. This insight aligns with the view that transparent communication bridges the awareness gap and fosters customer understanding.

In a holistic perspective, the survey data illuminates that the success of micro businesses like "Alfonsina Hecho en Casa" hinges on synchronizing foundational values with adaptable strategies. The nuanced insights provided by customers, preserved in the form of qualitative responses, offer valuable guidance for the business's ongoing journey toward sustainable growth and customer contentment.

Pre and Post Pandemic period analysis

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the communication strategy implemented by Alfonsina Hecho en Casa, a detailed social media analysis was conducted. This analysis, following the methodology proposed by Jiménez Carreira and Álvarez Marcos, was segmented into three distinct phases: the pre-pandemic, quarantine, and post-quarantine periods, allowing for a thorough examination of how the brand adapted its strategies in response to the evolving social context.

Before the pandemic, Alfonsina Hecho en Casa focused heavily on creating emotional connections with its audience. The brand's communication strategy was designed around personalized dessert presentations, highlighting the emotional value of its products through carefully crafted visual elements. Instagram, in particular, played a pivotal role during this time as the primary platform for engagement and customer inquiries. Here, the brand utilized the visually-driven nature of Instagram, posting a variety of images and videos that showcased the aesthetic appeal of their desserts, which encouraged higher levels of interaction. The emphasis was on making each product feel unique and special, resonating with customers who sought personalized and emotionally significant gifts. In contrast, Facebook was more strategically utilized for facilitating orders and transactions, establishing itself as the main sales platform for the business. This division of roles between platforms reflected a calculated strategy, catering to the specific strengths of each social media channel, and aligning with studies that underscore the importance of stakeholder-oriented online presence, emphasizing how visual and interactive content can engage different audiences.

As the pandemic took hold and strict quarantine measures were imposed, the business faced the challenge of maintaining customer engagement amidst widespread uncertainty. During this period, Alfonsina Hecho en Casa adjusted its communication approach to focus on themes of unity and positivity. The content evolved to include messages of encouragement, aiming to foster a sense of

connection and hope among its audience. A key innovation introduced during this time was the addition of a personalized illustration service, where customers could send photographs to be transformed into customized drawings. This service gained considerable traction, particularly with posts that featured tributes to frontline workers, which resonated deeply with the audience. The use of these personalized drawings not only added a new dimension to the brand’s offerings but also tapped into the collective empathy of the community during a time of heightened emotional vulnerability. These efforts were a clear indication of the brand’s capacity to pivot and adapt, maintaining relevance by aligning its content with the prevailing social mood and finding innovative ways to engage customers even as traditional methods were disrupted.

As the restrictions eased and the post-quarantine phase began, Alfonsina Hecho en Casa shifted its focus back to its core product: brownies. This product became central to the brand's communication strategy across both Facebook and Instagram, which saw an increase in posting frequency, particularly on Facebook. The consistent focus on brownies aimed to reinforce the brand's identity and maintain continuity with its established customer base. Despite the greater volume of posts, the messaging remained uniform across platforms, ensuring that the brand’s tone and identity were cohesive. This emphasis on consistency in communication was crucial for long-term brand-building, adhering to best practices in digital marketing that stress the importance of maintaining a clear and targeted message for brand stability and audience loyalty. The strategy highlights the importance of not only sustaining customer engagement through high-quality content but also nurturing a loyal customer base by reinforcing core values and maintaining a recognizable brand image throughout fluctuating circumstances. This approach ensured that the brand remained relevant and visible during a period of global disruption, while also solidifying its reputation for quality and emotional connection in the minds of its audience.

Table 1. Time period and content in Alfonsina Hecho en Casa’s accounts

Time period	Facebook	Instagram
Pre-pandemic	Content and Services	Visual Content Strategy
Quarantine	Uplifting and Unity	Introduction of New Service: Illustrations
Post-Quarantine	Emphasis on Brownies	Continued Brownie Focus

Source: Compiled based on information supplied by ‘Alfonsina Hecho en Casa’ (2021)

The former table presents the content periods and strategies used by Alfonsina Hecho en Casa on Facebook and Instagram. Prior to the pandemic, the brand focused on reproducing experiences and conveying emotions through personalized desserts. Instagram served as a secondary tool for inquiries, while Facebook was the main platform for sales. The management of both platforms was handled by the founder. During the quarantine period, the brand continued to emphasize emotional content, introduced a new drawing service, and engaged with essential workers. The founder remained in charge of sales channels.

In the post-quarantine period, Facebook had more frequent content updates, with a focus on brownies and customized products. Instagram had fewer posts but followed

a similar approach. The founder continued to manage the sales channels, and the target audience remained the same with a consistent communication style. On Instagram, it's evident that interaction with photographs was notably higher on Facebook during all three periods, with most posts garnering over 120 likes. Interestingly, the introduction of a new service involving animated drawings from photographs resulted in more posts of this kind on Instagram than on Facebook. The utilization of carousels led to increased interaction, leveraging the platform's visual nature. Instagram's aspirational nature, resonating emotions with users, is vital. Aligning with Dahlström (2020), messages should fit user context, considering their age and interests. Alfonsina's flexibility in creating customized designs promotes user engagement, as customers seek products that convey motivating messages.

The company has focused on visual content, particularly photographs, to generate greater product visibility and attract customers. This approach aligns with the concept of "Calm Technology," which aims to communicate product attributes without being intrusive or demanding excessive attention from users. According to Case (2015), overwhelming users with too many elements can hinder decision-making and create more stressful interactions. Therefore, it is important to strike a balance by providing clear and concise messages that do not overload users, allowing them to quickly understand and respond to the call to action. In the context of social media, achieving visibility and impressions is crucial for the purchasing process, but it should be done in a way that respects users' primary actions and does not disrupt their experience.

March-April 2020 Period: Pandemic Influence and New Services

During the pandemic's early stages, Alfonsina adjusted its content frequency and introduced photo editing as a new service. The emotional connection with the audience persisted, aligning with the notion of involving customers in the product design process. The observed strategies align with literature on brand management and digital communication. Consistent with Dahlström (2020), Alfonsina effectively used storytelling, creating emotional connections through product design and personalized content. The adoption of different content strategies during the pandemic resonates with the adaptability advocated by Case (2015), emphasizing concise and non-intrusive messaging.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the significance of maintaining core brand messaging, as discussed by Harrigan, Ramsey, and Ibbotson (2012). The alignment between content and target audience observed throughout the study is in line with the principles of effective brand communication (Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015).

Variation in Sales

Information was collected on Alfonsina Hecho en Casa's sales variation and the impact of its presence on Facebook and Instagram. Data provided by the founder, Camila Uceda Nogueroles, revealed progressive sales growth since 2018. Notably, brownie sales were paused between March and June 2020.

Table 2. Variation in units sold

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2018	100	200	90	110	227	152	259	127	149	276	203	291
2019	120	150	175	208	200	226	254	153	243	195	351	337
2020	250	200	20	0	0	0	264	214	249	259	237	360

Source: Compiled based on information supplied by ‘Alfonsina Hecho en Casa’ (2020)

The table presents the units sold by Alfonsina Hecho en Casa over the course of three years: 2018, 2019, and 2020. Upon analyzing the sales data, several significant patterns and trends emerge. There is a consistent growth trajectory in units sold from 2018 to 2019, reflecting a positive expansion. In 2018, the company sold a total of 2,193 units, and this number notably increased to 2,747 units in 2019, indicating a growth of approximately 25%.

Within each year, there are distinct monthly variations in units sold. Throughout 2018, sales experienced fluctuations, with higher counts in months such as May, July, October, and December. Similarly, 2019 displayed similar patterns, with peak sales occurring in April, June, November, and December. The sales data for 2020 reveals a marked impact from the COVID-19 pandemic. The first quarter of the year (January to March) saw relatively strong sales, totaling 470 units. However, the subsequent months of April, May, and June recorded a drastic drop, with sales almost ceasing due to the pandemic-induced lockdowns and restrictions.

Interestingly, 2020 witnessed a rebound in sales following the initial pandemic-induced slump. Starting from July, there is a consistent upward trajectory in units sold, with months like July, August, October, and December particularly notable for their strong sales. By the end of 2020, the company managed to surpass its 2019 sales, reaching a total of 2,363 units. Seasonal trends are evident in the data. November and December consistently record higher sales, potentially driven by holiday season demand and festive celebrations.

The substantial growth in units sold during 2020, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, suggests effective adaptation strategies by the company. These strategies could include the introduction of new products or innovative marketing approaches. The company's engagement strategies on social media, discussed earlier, likely played a role in maintaining sales growth, especially during the pandemic period when traditional sales channels were limited. The increasing sales in the latter months of 2020 might also reflect heightened consumer confidence and demand as restrictions eased. It would be pertinent to consider whether the company expanded its product offerings or altered marketing strategies during this period.

Customer Engagement and Social Media Strategies for Alfonsina Hecho en Casa

The brand identity has firmly positioned itself as a creative and romantic pastry shop, focusing on emotional connections with its customers. Survey data revealed that women represent 68.3% of the audience, while men make up 31.7%. This demographic breakdown underscores the effectiveness of a communication strategy that favors a delicate, personalized style, which strongly appeals to a predominantly female target group. Founder Camila Uceda describes the brand as colorful, creative,

and romantic, qualities that have clearly captured the attention of its followers. This well-defined visual identity sets it apart in a crowded marketplace, where competition is fierce, and creating a unique and relatable brand persona is essential (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Iseli, 2021).

The content strategy has been meticulously tailored to engage a younger, primarily female audience, emphasizing emotionally resonant visuals and thoughtful personalization. Imagery, such as the hand-painted dessert boxes and carefully staged product photos, is a fundamental part of the brand's identity, serving to convey a sense of uniqueness and care. This approach aligns with existing research, which stresses the importance of visual storytelling in digital marketing as a way to create emotional bonds and reinforce brand identity (Coelho et al., 2016; Kay et al., 2020). The aesthetic consistency across posts not only enhances engagement but deepens customer loyalty by providing a cohesive brand experience that resonates strongly with the target demographic.

The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic required a strategic pivot to maintain customer engagement. The business responded by seeking feedback from its audience to better understand their needs and expectations during the crisis. Although circumstances forced some adjustments in product presentation, the brand's core identity remained consistent, which customers found reassuring. These subtle innovations introduced during the pandemic, such as refined product visuals, did not deviate from the established romantic and creative brand theme but instead added fresh layers that appealed to a customer base seeking comfort and familiarity. This adaptability aligns with broader research on maintaining brand stability and customer trust during crises, where consistent branding plays a vital role in consumer retention (Durst et al., 2021; Saleh, 2021).

Direct and personalized customer engagement has been central to the brand's strategy, with a small team handling social media interactions while prioritizing strong customer relationships. Facebook Messenger has proven to be the most effective platform for direct communication, fostering loyal relationships with its users. Instagram, while not the primary channel for transactions, complements this by serving as a visual showcase, directing traffic to Facebook where most sales occur. This integration of platforms demonstrates the effectiveness of a diversified strategy tailored to the strengths of each social media channel (Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015; Devereux et al., 2020). Furthermore, the brand's growth has been organic, driven by authentic interactions and high-quality content rather than paid promotions, a strategy that has not only solidified a strong local customer base but also attracted an international following. This organic expansion underscores the impact of authentic and quality-driven interactions on small business growth, consistent with findings in digital marketing literature (Angelyn & Kodrat, 2021; Drummond et al., 2018).

The findings from this case are aligned with broader research that highlights the importance of social media for SMEs in engaging customers and expanding their reach (Ahmad et al., 2018; Kübler et al., 2020). Studies have consistently shown that platforms like Facebook and Instagram are effective tools for enhancing brand visibility and customer engagement (Alkhowaiter, 2016; Harrigan et al., 2012). This

case also underscores the significance of emotional connections and personalized communication in fostering customer loyalty, particularly during uncertain times. Maintaining a consistent brand image during the pandemic was crucial in sustaining trust and keeping the audience engaged (Olsson & Bernhard, 2021).

Visual content, in particular, has played a crucial role in conveying brand personality and drawing in the target demographic. The emphasis on authentic and emotionally compelling visuals aligns with research that highlights the power of imagery in engaging audiences and conveying brand values (Arora & Stoner, 2009; Coelho et al., 2016). The brand's organic growth, driven by genuine interactions rather than aggressive marketing, reflects trends in digital marketing that favor authenticity and deeper engagement over superficial tactics (Durst et al., 2021; Drummond et al., 2018).

This case exemplifies how small businesses can leverage social media to enhance brand positioning, even amid challenging circumstances. By focusing on targeted content, personalized interactions, and a consistent brand image, the business not only navigated the difficulties of the pandemic but also strengthened its customer base. These strategies are reflective of broader trends in digital marketing, which emphasize the importance of authentic connections, emotional engagement, and cohesive storytelling. This case offers valuable insights for other SMEs seeking to build a robust online presence in an increasingly digital world, illustrating how clear brand identity and genuine customer engagement can lead to significant visibility and loyalty, even in a fluctuating market (Ahmad et al., 2018; Cesaroni & Consoli, 2015; Olsson & Bernhard, 2021).

5. Conclusion

This research employed mixed methods in order to provide insights into the brand positioning strategies of the Peruvian online Bakery 'Alfonsina Hecho en Casa', specifically on its Facebook and Instagram accounts. Its target audience primarily comprises of young Peruvian women aged 18 to 24, with peak social media activity observed during weekends between 7 PM and 9 PM. Notably, contest engagement on Facebook was found to significantly enhance the fan page's reach and interactions.

Both social networks were utilized for content dissemination, with Instagram complementing Facebook's visual appeal and serving as a gateway to the company's transactional interface. A remarkable finding was the consistency of the use of emojis to enhance engagement, consistent with prior years. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted adaptive strategies, including a reduced posting frequency and the introduction of a photo editing service. These strategies underlined the company's agility and ability to resonate with customers even during challenging times. This however has certain limitations. The investigation focused solely on a Peruvian online micro business in the food industry and might not be universally applicable to all SMEs. Additionally, the research lacks a longitudinal perspective, limiting the understanding of long-term impacts.

Future research could explore the effects of these strategies on brand loyalty and

sales performance over an extended period. Comparative studies across different industries and geographical locations could provide a broader perspective on the observed trends. Furthermore, a more in-depth analysis of consumer responses to specific content formats, such as videos or stories, could offer valuable insights for refining social media strategies. Nonetheless, this case showcases how a micro business can become adept navigation of digital platforms for effective brand positioning during a sanitary crisis, underscoring the dynamic nature of digital marketing strategies in response to evolving market scenarios.

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