

Today's consumer is raising their voice on social platforms and testing the limits of individual influence. They are empowered and enabled, and on a mission to matter. They're no longer just complaining – they're flexing social muscle to force brands to change.

Whether an individual is campaigning for a cause, or on a quest for influence, or joining a rage-in on social media they can cause irreparable damage to a brand.

If an Instagram feeding frenzy can push a brand into the stratosphere when the reviews are good, what happens when a brand finds itself under fire – fairly or unfairly?

We are in a brutal cultural moment when the good, bad and ugly are indistinguishable to a call-out culture that can seem to care very little for the 'why' behind the 'what'. Whether a brand has made an honest mistake or taken an ill-judged decision, social media enables and amplifies cycles of cruelty.

To survive in the call-out culture world, brands need to think differently about how they react when they're put under the spotlight, and how to make their brands less likely to be called out in the first place. Brands can take steps to have the upper hand, before tweets go flying and influencers start influencing.

Here's what food brands need to know about the impact of complainers, campaigners and haters, and our 5-step plan to guide brands in response.

Elise Craft
Global Planning Partner
September 2019

The Wellness Movement and Food Activism

The rise of the wellness movement is the most significant and sensitive trend influencing attitudes towards the food sector. This is especially true for the food brands that provide us with convenience foods, out-of-home dining and institutional food services. As younger generations rely less on the grocery store and more on prepared food and restaurants, the stakes for brands are higher.

Consider also that we're more connected and empowered than ever before – but we're using that to drive disruption in many sectors, including food. We have access to more information than at any time in history – but we're also producing 'fake news' that polarises debates along ideological lines.

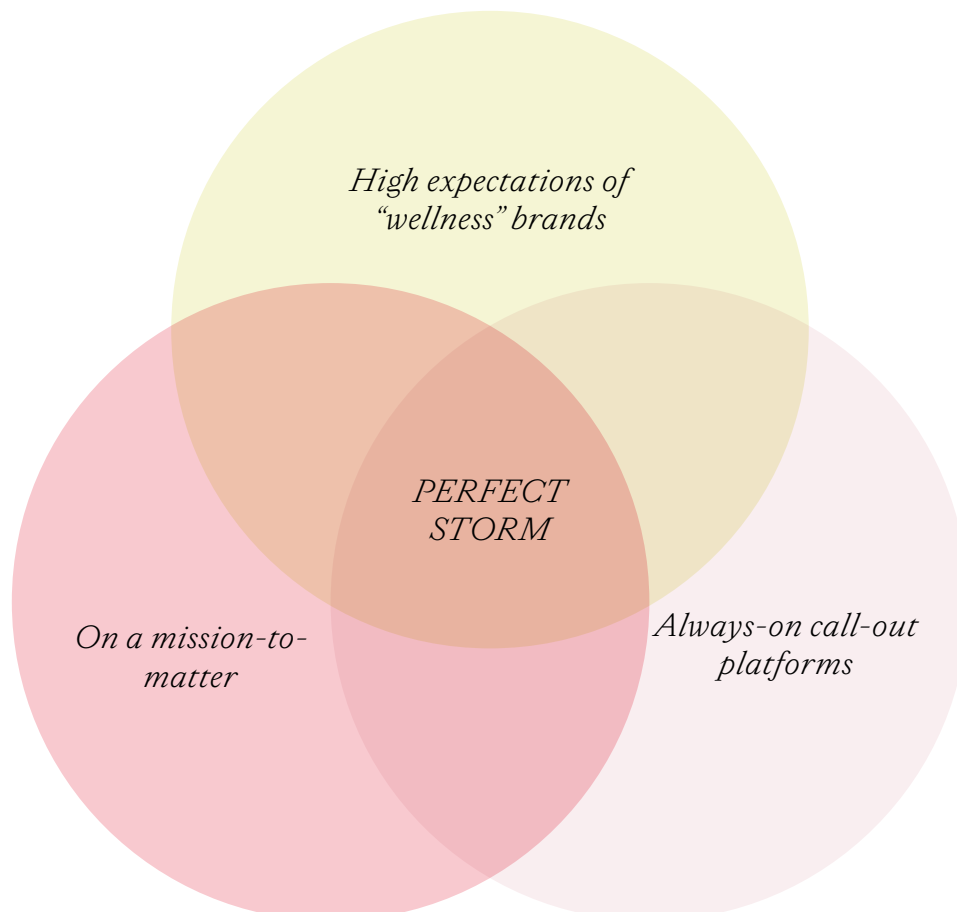
In this environment, food brands are particularly vulnerable to increased scrutiny and influence by consumers.

Millennials and Gens Y and Z all have high expectations of brands, especially from those that they connect with personal wellness and health.

They also like to tell the world what they're eating – Instagram posts hashtagged #avocado number more than 10 million, 'food and drink' is the most popular Pinterest category, and more than 1.5 million subscribers engage with a Japanese YouTube cooking channel fronted by a French Poodle! In short, food has become central to our online lives.

That's great when all is rosy, but the flip side is we feel strongly motivated to speak out or take action when we're faced with food that doesn't look safe, healthy, responsible or carefully prepared.

This is a perfect opportunity – and a perfect storm – for brands.



We are rage monsters.



Food in a Call-Out Culture World

Research around the world paints a consistent picture – we’re getting angrier online. The EU Commission reports a 42% increase in hateful content being removed from Facebook, Twitter and YouTube since 2016.

Brands are accordingly finding themselves confronted with the online activist – empowered consumers angered by a specific issue and enabled by social media to demand change. The right response can lead to satisfying outcomes for both brand and the activist, but it’s easy to fumble this and end in disaster.

It’s important to remember that often-times a complaint is just a complaint, and good customer service can bring brands and consumers closer than ever before. Even an angry customer who lashes out can help you identify potential roots of the issues your brand might be facing and could even trigger a discovery moment.

Today’s challenge for brands is what to do when the tone shifts to targeted call-outs, bullying or even trolling. In 2018, 89% of brands admitted to silencing hateful comments by deleting or hiding them.

It’s precisely when things aren’t perfect that brands are best served by someone who takes the time to complain, (even if that complaint takes the form of a burn-it-all-down review).

When the online world is watching, accepting fair criticism shows humility and openness. Hiding comments shows fear and shame. Taking a stand against an unfair attack shows you have the courage to stand up against a bully.

Brands need to be more confident in responding, and **this starts with having the right strategic framework in place. This can even help reduce the likelihood of getting called out in the first place.**

What’s driving our rage?

The roots of online rage are complex. In the context of food, there are some trends that seem to be influencing our individual and collective acting out.

***Information overload** – too much to take in, and sometimes too confusing to verify*

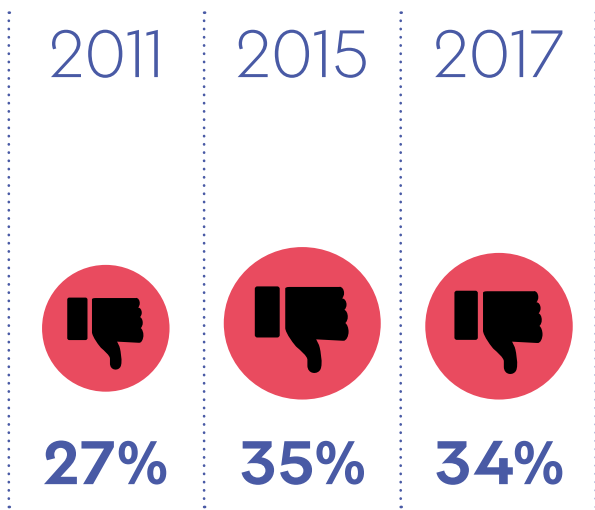
***Fractured social connections** – we use social media to feel connected, even if we only have anger in common*

***Vulnerability** – loneliness is on the rise, and we feel socially isolated*

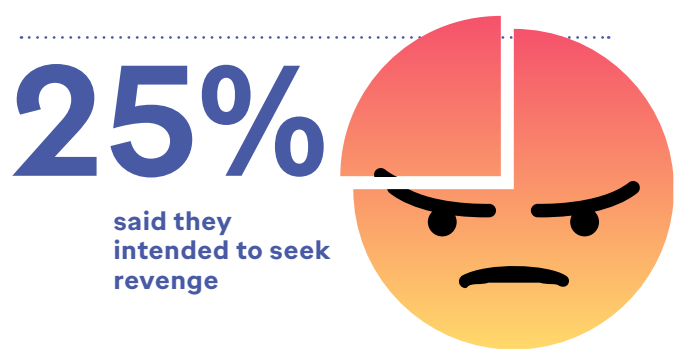
***Instant-expert syndrome** – always-on pressure to have an opinion*

***Sky-high expectations** – there’s a growing expectation that what we pay for must be perfect*

The percentage of complainants who posted online is relatively stable:



Of customers who had a bad experience:



* The Customer Rage Survey 2015, 2017. Conducted by Customer Care Measurement & Consulting in collaboration with the Center for Services Leadership at the W. P. Carey School of Business, Arizona State University, Conformat, and Bernett

What's Call-Out Culture

Call-out culture began as a social justice movement to influence by holding each other publicly accountable for unacceptable behaviours. The idea is that by standing up and "calling out" things, we drive them into the light and motivate change.

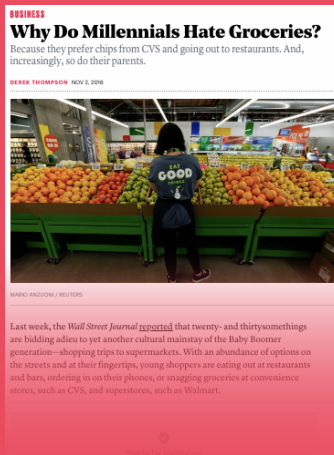
What may have started with good intentions though, has devolved into punishing and bullying.

Calling-out has become taking-down when extreme complainers and haters get caught up in the act of shaming.

Writing in Medium, Rachael Wayne says, "Like many attempts to promote social justice, calling out has benign beginnings and legitimate uses, but has, among many people, devolved into bullying."

(The Problem With Call-out Culture, Medium, Jan. 12, 2019)

Here are some food trends to watch, in order to better understand what triggers the complainers, campaigners and haters of today:



Eating out vs. in

Millennials and Gen Z are eating out more than generations before them. They are grocery shopping less as a result, enough that it's hitting the bottom line of grocery brands. They're also influencing their parents' behavior.

Healthier, cleaner food

Consumers are willing to change their lifestyles to be healthier, and this includes seeking out foods without additives, made with whole ingredients and excluding or limiting refined ingredients like sugars and GMOs. The **Clean** movement is part of this, a consumer driven movement demanding a return to real food and transparency through authenticity. Food products containing natural, familiar, simple ingredients that are easy to recognise, understand, and pronounce. No artificial ingredients or synthetic chemicals.

Transparency & ethics

This trend continues to grow and dominate across all sectors. Brands that are open and purposeful outperform with younger audiences, and for food brands it is a fundamental principle.

Healthy indulgence

We want to balance healthy eating with treating ourselves. Healthy indulgence delivers a food experience – smaller portions, perhaps not often, but exquisitely prepared and delicious without guilt.

Realness & Authenticity

Beyond ingredients, people are seeking out food that reflects cultures and practices, that has roots in community or traditions. We want food with a story behind it. Whether that's regional dishes or traditional ingredients from interesting places – we're buying into authenticity.

Who's Talking? Segmenting the voices

Getting your response right begins with understanding where your foodie customers are coming from.

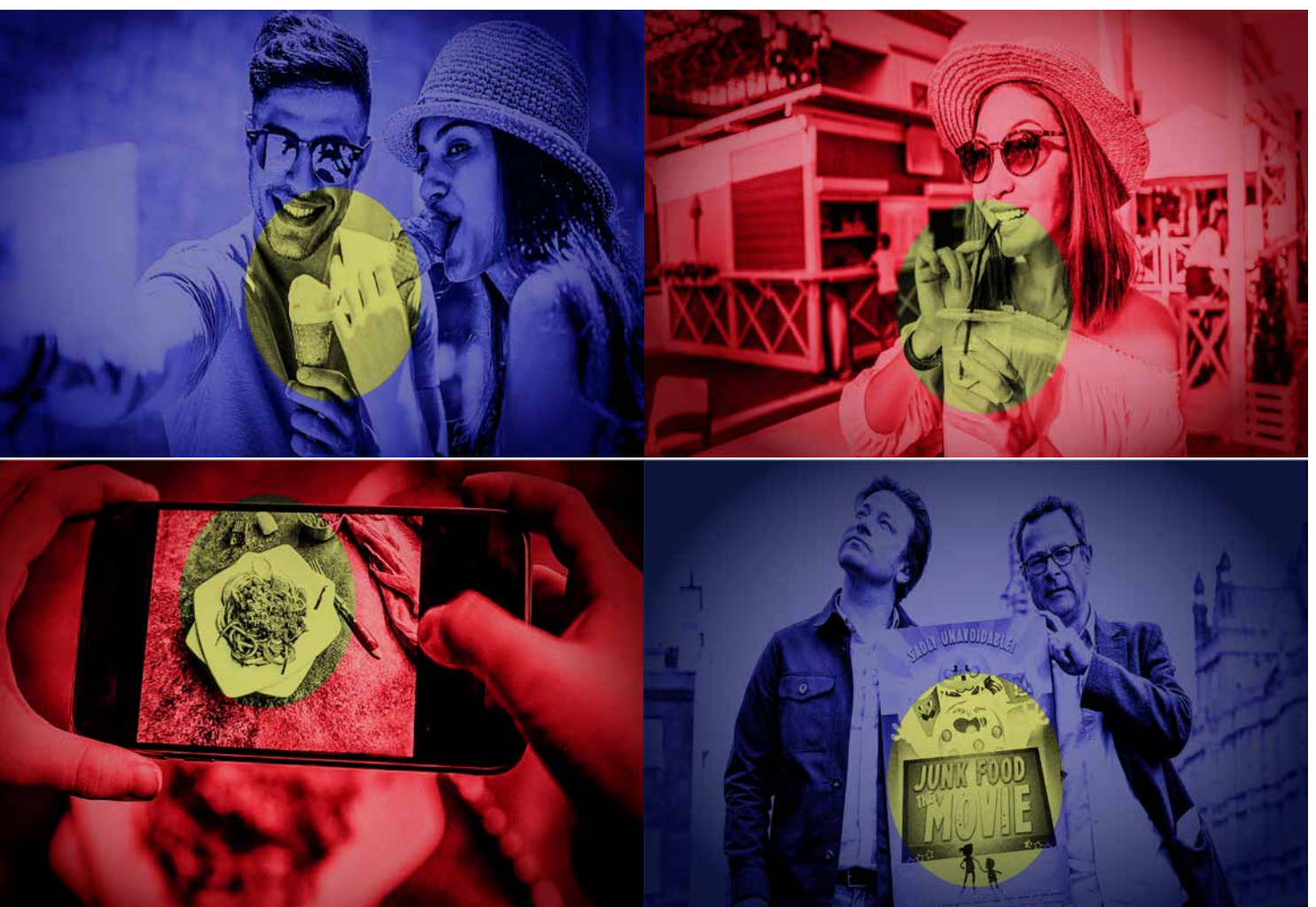
Different online foodie segments have different levels of engagement with food and wellness.

Who are the distinct voices in the current conversation? What can we know about their profile, their influences and their perspectives?

In August 2019 we mapped the emergent online foodie voices using Audiense, which uses eight different criteria which can be combined together allowing the creation of highly targeted audiences: demography, relationships, behaviour (activity), conversations, IBM Watson personality insights, location, interests and Twitter profile.

This creates the most consistent and relevant segments, as well as identifying more unique characteristics for each segment. Once we have identified the clusters/groups, we can ask the question "how do they know each other" i.e. what are the hidden trends that the platform has revealed, including interests, psychographics, influencers.

These four global segments represent brands' free and passionate focus groups (even if some are rude as heck with their feedback).



THE SOCIAL FOODIE



The Social Foodie is interested in the food conversation. They post pictures of their meals or new purchases and like their friends' #avocadotoast posts, but they don't have a strong point of view one way or the other.

Food is one of their interests but not a driving passion -so they're not emotionally or rationally invested in taking a stand about something they may dislike, or a small problem they have with a brand.

The Social Foodie goes with the flow.

Posting about food they make, eat or buy isn't political for them - it's a benign act of sharing. They are showing their friends and family their day - a shiny, filtered

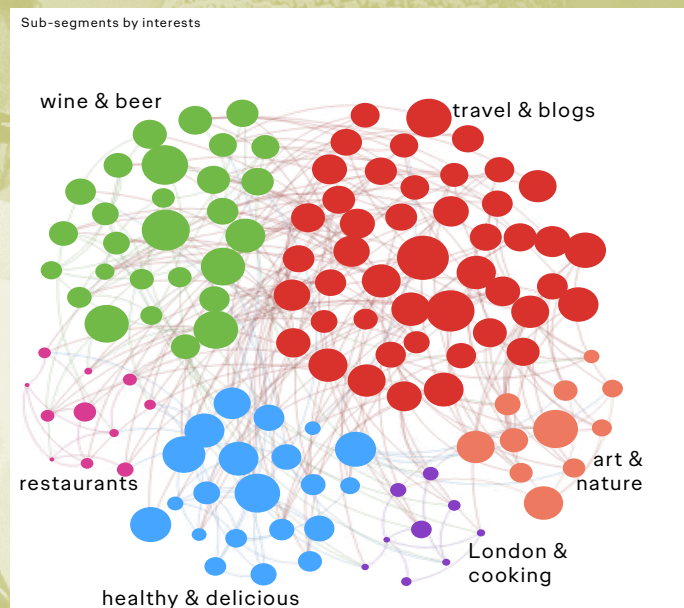
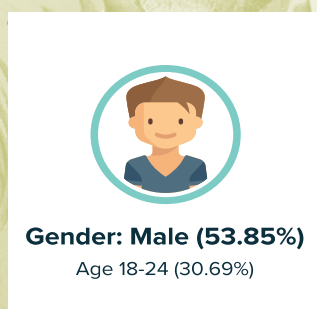
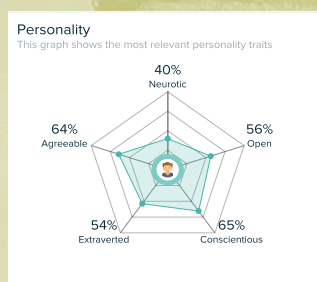
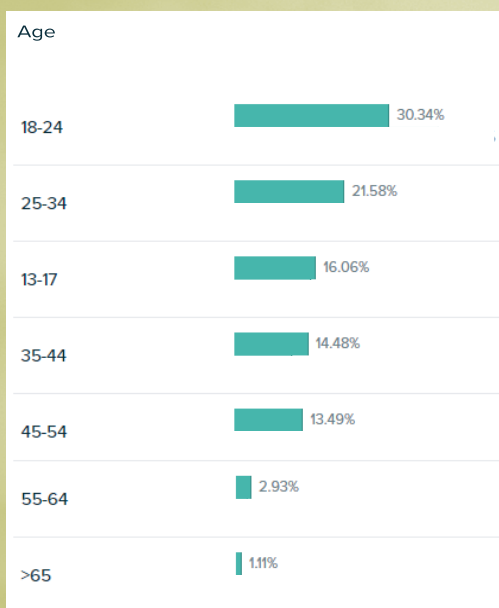
version most likely - and are far more likely to follow food trends than to shape them.

Watch and nurture the Social Foodie if they tag your brand, but don't expect them to see their platforms as a place to evangelise or campaign.

If they have a bad experience, they're likely to complain directly. They'll extend some goodwill if your customer service response is on point and in time.

This is by far the largest and most ubiquitous segment in the current online foodie environment. For food brands, they're the mainstream audiences of all ages.

Meet the Social Foodie:



THE WELLNESS SEEKER



The Wellness Seeker wants an ever more simple and holistic experience from brands – integrated mind, body & spirit solutions that help them feel good and live the lifestyle they aspire to.

They investigate, ask lots of questions, try to be an informed consumer and they look to food brands to help them navigate their choices more smoothly.

This sounds all positive, except that they experience confusion from the conflicting information they find about the wellness industry.

They want to make good choices, but they're finding it hard to sort through what's good and what's not. They find this frustrating, and part of their identity may be

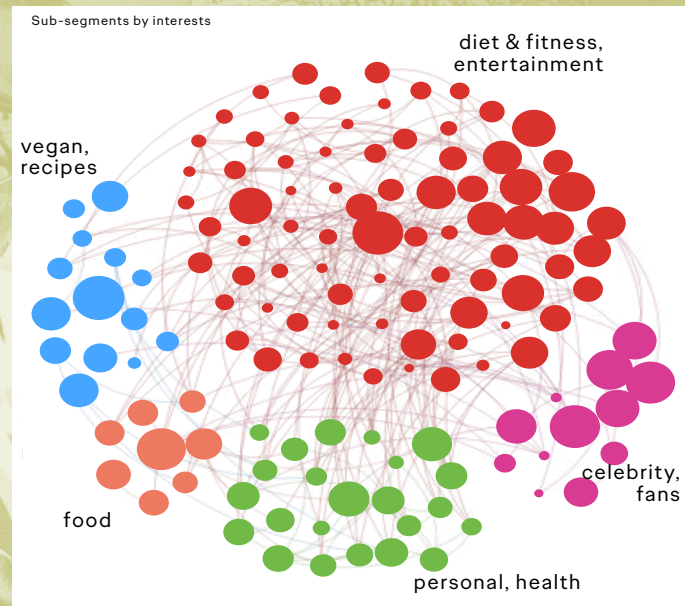
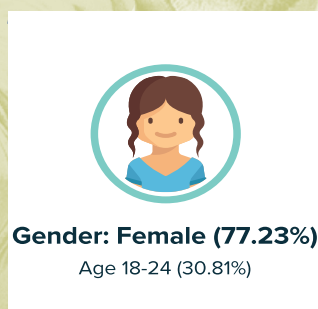
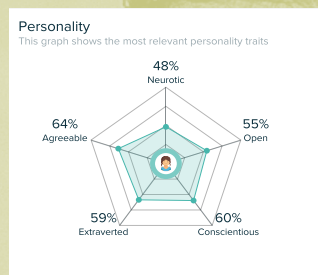
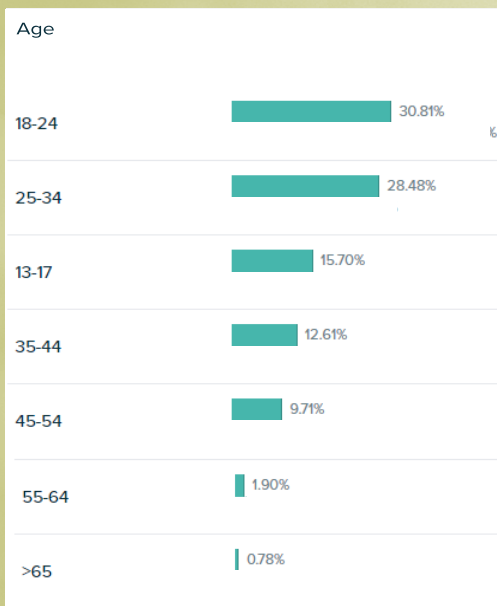
'curating' a lifestyle online that advises their friends and followers on the 'right' path to follow.

Embrace their motivations. When your product information is clear and accessible and your brand transparent the Wellness Seeker will be inclined to like you.

If they have an issue with you, they'll express it with reference to specifics and you can agree to disagree, or split the difference.

If they feel your brand fits their wellness lifestyle, they'll be loyal. If they don't, you're just not in their selection set. They'll not go out of their way to call out those they reject – the wellness seeker is an advocate, not a natural hater.

Meet the Wellness Seeker:



THE HACKTIVIST



The Hacktivist has a strong point of view about the responsibility of food brands and has followers who share this POV. Bon Appetit called this kind of social foodie influencer “the new culinary brat pack.”

The Hacktivist’s focus could be on anything from nutrition, food self-reliance, animal ethics and industrial food production, climate crisis and associated vegetarian/vegan diets, to food intolerances (eg. Coeliac, allergies) or how diet can heal illness or promote longevity.

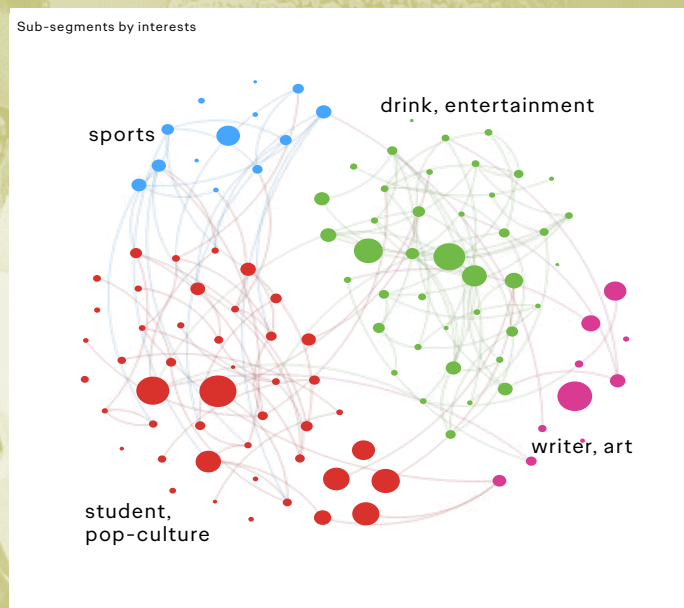
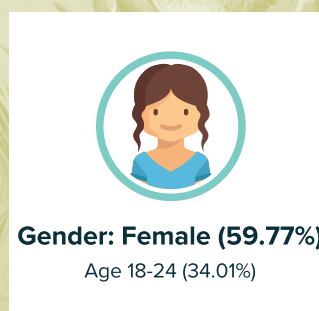
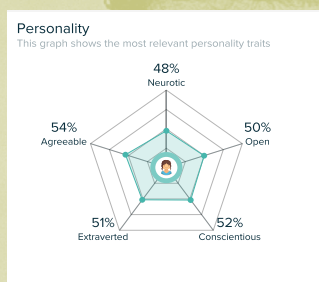
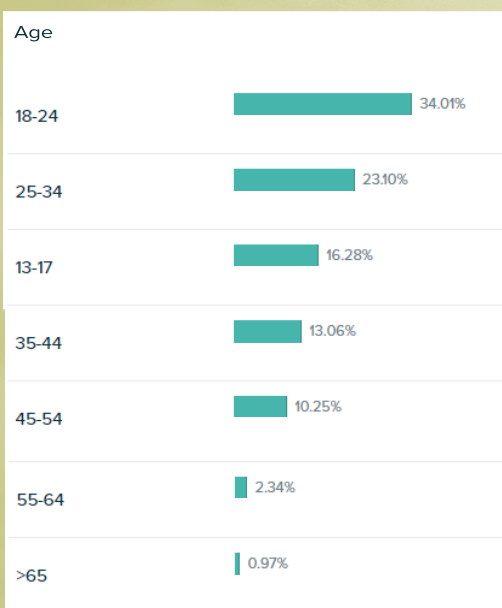
This segment give **all** the damns about how and what we eat – as individuals and as a society. They are well-informed and they believe that food can play a transformative role for all of us.

They may also be intolerant when a brand doesn’t meet their high standards or seems to be ignoring the wellness movement’s imperative to live better and be better.

As such the Food Hacktivist is a self-appointed guardian of the people and feels a strong rational and emotional responsibility to call attention to what they may see as irresponsible or unethical food production and/or wastage. They’re comfortable – even driven – to call out brands for perceived poor behaviours.

Learn from them where you can – they may well be the innovators of your best new ideas. They can be an incredible source of insight and positive hacks they propose can transform brands and products.

Meet the Hacktivist:



THE ABSOLUTIST

The Absolutist tends towards an anti-corporate stance, rejecting the role of big brands and the industrial food system in delivering healthy, sustainable food to a growing world. Their positive influence is often aligned with a “buy local” passion or a focus on farm-to-plate supply chain transparency.

The Absolutist distrusts the role of agri-business, large corporations and big chains in providing healthy and sustainable food. Targeted brands often view them as belligerent, misinformed, amplifying misinformation and unlikely to shift their perspective.

The positive side of the Absolutist is that they're willing to take a stand when taking a stand is hard. They will relentlessly pursue an issue and are sometimes whistle-blowers on topics that are critically important

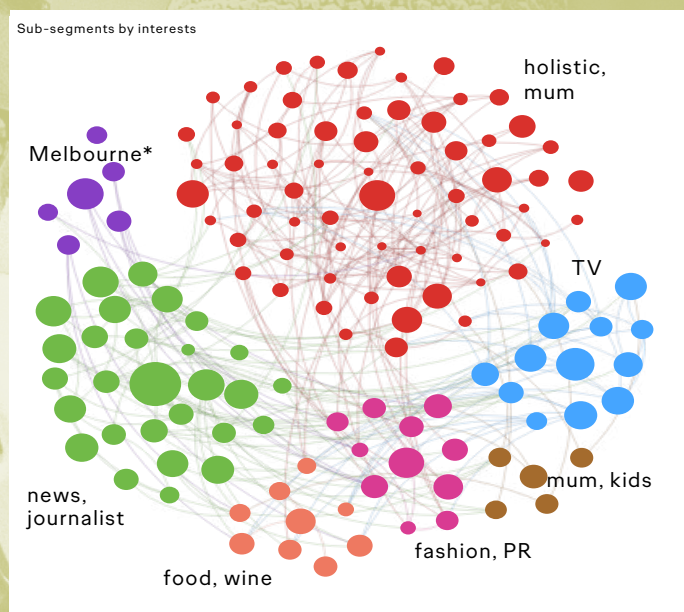
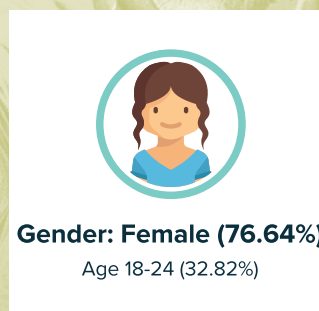
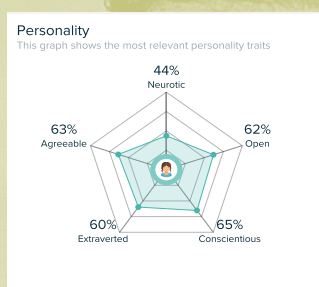
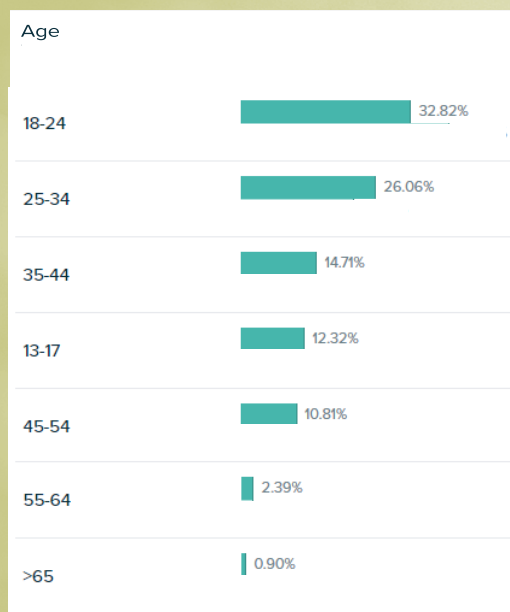
to our collective health and wellness. They can raise the alarm, force brands and governments into action, and galvanise us collectively to change.

The negative is that the Absolutist isn't flexible in their beliefs. They have a strong opinion, based on selective 'facts', and they've no problem calling out brands that don't do things the way they believe they should be.

They also don't necessarily feel responsible for the harm they might do – to others by giving poor advice, or to the brands they call out.

Pay attention to them. They are polarising – their positive attention can leave a brand short of product, and when they take a stance against your brand they can shift public opinion in a way that you may struggle to recover from.

Meet the Absolutist:



* Melbourne pops up because of an influential Absolutist who lives there – Sarah Wilson of #IQuitSugar

Our 5-Step Plan

Embracing online food campaigners and haters as the voice of a passionate customer takes solid strategic thinking, preparation and a willingness to embrace doing things a bit differently.

Their voices represent one side of an important conversation.

Brands are the other voice.

Understanding how to work with each other and offer mutual benefit in the call-out culture provides new opportunities to engage consumers, gather insights and drive innovation and growth.

Some truths before you read on:

- 1 *What can be exposed will be exposed*
- 2 *Local events hardly ever stay local*
- 3 *Bad reviews almost always have a bit of truth in them*
- 4 *You gain nothing from doing nothing*

OWN YOUR MESS



Take a good, hard look in the mirror objectively. This can be quite challenging when you live and breathe the positive in your brand every day.

Ask yourself, is your brand exceeding what you promise your customers? Are your standards up to the very toughest of expectations? Could you find new avenues for growth through unlocking the views your adversaries have of your brand? If you've been called out for any reason, hunt for a kernel of truth.

A problem half way around the world that a head office brand leader could not have easy sight of is no longer an acceptable explanation. You have to own the mess, even if someone else made it.

Examine everything from customer pledges to ingredients and ask if they're just enough, or if they're the best you can possibly do. Bolster your adaptive internal systems – evolve and strip out layers of complexity, restructure to reduce the ways in which hierarchy leads to disengagement internally – become faster, more balanced, and become more able to make change happen.

A proactive exercise is to run your own internal “destroy your brand” workshop through the eyes of the Hactivist or Absolutist. Consider inviting some of these voices to participate in the workshop and learn from them. They may not change their mind as a result, but they will credit your courage in listening.

Example: Sodexo

French brand Sodexo feeds millions of people around the world.

They have been a food services sector leader for more than 30 years and are experts in food service and catering with clients in healthcare, defence, higher education, public services, education and more.

They track and report their social responsibility commitments and have thousands of clients around the world. They are innovative and committed to

fresh food. Their chefs and nutritionists are award-winning, highly accomplished professionals. They are seen as innovators in providing healthy food options at scale.

But in 2015 they got called out by members of the UK military for poorly cooked food. As a contracted supplier, technically the fault lay with the kitchens on-site.

Sodexo's response was silence - perhaps leaving it to the on-site team or client to step in. But no one did, and complainers

became campaigners and filled the silence with social media posts of moldy eggs and undercooked chicken. In response the army ordered service members to stop publicly sharing. Soldiers went to MPs crying censorship, and the UK government ended up debating the issue in parliament.

An easier response - one that could have mitigated brand damage and restored trust - would have been to own the mess, thank the soldiers for the time to point it out, and take swift action to bring the service back to Sodexo standards.



The official Instagram



The reality on the plate

Soldiers who shared photographs of their disgusting meals - including mouldy eggs and maggot-infested tomatoes - are warned by senior staff they may face legal action

- Service personnel have posted pictures of their disgusting meals online
- They hoped to shame Ministry of Defence and caterers over food quality
- Army bosses now 'warned soldiers could face legal action for slander'
- But food suppliers Sodexo say they are not threatening to sue anyone
- If you are in the forces and have been served disgusting food, send your meal photos to pictures@mailonline.co.uk

By JAMES DUNN FOR MAILONLINE
PUBLISHED: 14:57, 24 March 2016 | UPDATED: 10:17, 25 March 2016

The reaction

LEARN OUT LOUD



Transparency has been a brand buzzword for much of the past decade. Reporting on strategic objectives, sourcing, or progress against goals is not considered transparency. That's the bare minimum for entry into the conversation. Brands must go beyond transparency and show – don't tell – your process.

Food brands have to go beyond this kind of passive transparency and actively narrate their learning and growth process with specifics about what, why and how.

If something does go wrong for a brand that learns out loud, their audiences will already have a clear view on the journey of change that brand has been on, and this openness makes it possible to embrace mis-steps as a way to continue to learn and improve. For your audiences, mistakes may solicit empathy rather than ire,

if they have a clear view of what you are trying to deliver.

To do this, brands need to train their teams in the value of emotional storytelling and support them as they engage and build empathy with customers. Stories layered with rich details of your discoveries and changes made - by the actual humans involved - build credibility.

They stick in our imagination and change views, but only if they begin with empathy towards commonly held pre-existing views and not a factual download. Telling, rather than showing, people what you're doing backfires. Stories need to show and engage us emotionally in your progress.

Brands that don't learn in the face of clear complaints and criticisms from customers will ultimately fail.

Example: Jamie Oliver



Jamie Oliver's former global restaurant empire is in bankruptcy after a long period of decline and significant investment from Oliver himself.

His closure statement indicated his shock at this outcome – but social media and customer review platforms show that customers have been shouting their dissatisfaction for years.

Jamie's Italian perhaps missed early opportunities to engage brand loyalists in this way, and to learn from them. In the end, changes came too late.

From quality issues to service failures, customers on TripAdvisor gave wildly inconsistent reviews: "From customers complaining of "dire and dirty" settings, to an experience "below expectations" and the brand "trading on its name", [reviews] tell a mixed story.1"

Restaurant critics had also savaged the brand, one calling the food a "hoax." Had Oliver listened and changed in response – learning out loud along the way – the fate of his empire may perhaps have been different.

SHOW YOUR WORK



There can be no more closed doors - keeping secrets is a strategy of bygone days. One of the most effective defences against being called out is to do business with radical openness - throwing open access to your brand and inviting people to explore all aspects of your business and products.

This strategy allows brands to continuously engage with their audiences and supports great storytelling. It ensures that the important information about who you are and what you do is current in the minds of your audiences, and this audience can come to your aid against mis-informed campaigners or haters.

They will also give a brand an early warning if something is going wrong - a product whose standards have slipped for example, or if there are health and safety issues. Leadership is earned - everyday - and closed shops are relics of the past.

The examples here show how Chipotle managed a stunning turnaround by throwing open access and inviting people to explore every ingredient, and how being open has gained Starbucks the trust of millions of followers - who backed the brand over Ariana Grande.



Chipotle and GMO

Chipotle won at Cannes in 2013 for their groundbreaking "The Scientist" ad. Featuring a cover of the Coldplay song by Willie Nelson, Chipotle used this Superbowl ad to beautifully humanize their commitment to sustainably farmed meats and real ingredients by illustrating the negative side of factory farming. It was groundbreaking at the time and positioned Chipotle as disruptive, ethical leader in fast food.

But consumers have short memories, and credibility needs to be constantly refreshed in the food sector. This authenticity leader was called out by campaigners with questions around GMO ingredients and concerns about poor food standards.

As a result, Chipotle returned to their roots and are being radically open - down to the individual ingredients in each and every product.

Reality Check: Chipotle Returns to Authentic Roots in New Ads

Posted September 26, 2016 by Dale Russ

f t in



Starbucks Superfans

Starbucks is very open and are great at sharing all the details about how they've created new product when it comes time to launch. So in early 2019 when Ariana Grande - a Starbucks official partner - announced her Cloud Macchiato and advised her fans to try the soymilk versions, they assumed it would be vegan because Grande had famously gone vegan in 2013.

Imagine their surprise when they went to order it, only to find egg whites are the essential ingredient in the "cloud". Fans went into an angry frenzy but not at Starbucks. It was Grande they called out, because it had been Starbucks own baristas who'd caught the disconnect and flagged to vegan customers that the product isn't vegan.

Ariana Grande Blasted For Promoting Non-Vegan Starbucks Drink

The celebrity - who has often spoken out about being vegan and loving animals - has faced a backlash on social media fans

Maria Chiorando



Ariana Grande's non-vegan Starbucks drink has fans, baristas steamed

Jayne Deerwester | USA TODAY
Published 3:07 PM EDT Mar 11, 2019

OPEN THE FLOOR



Collaborate, co-create, partner. A clear signal that a brand is a leader is that they open themselves to co-creation and collaboration.

Opening the floor is no longer about running an annual ‘new product’ competition or asking the public to pick a flavour for a snack. It’s about showing that you are willing to listen to ongoing conversations about your products, take criticism with humility, and surrender power to your customers.

In our empowered and connected world, brands that are open to considering changes proposed from outside show confidence and trust in their customers. They earn respect when we see them go through the process of learning from us, and changing in response to our

influence.

Because consumers do expect to have an influence over what a brand offers them – especially when it comes to food. Embracing this can drive innovation and create a strong positive bond between a brand and their customers.

The flip side is that this also means also giving consideration to voices raised in challenging ways - when the tone isn’t collaborative, but is confrontational. Often an advocate for change can become a complainer (or hater) when a brand refuses to engage with them.

This example shows the benefits that opening the floor, even to a hater, can bring.

Example: The Food Babe Army

The Food Babe (Vani Hari) is on a personal mission to expose brands that use ingredients and additives she believes to be unsafe and unhealthy. Hari is a tech-savvy influencer and a relentless campaigner but she’s no scientist. As Forbes writes, she has been widely discredited by the scientific community – but the general public aren’t reading scientific literature, we’re reading BuzzFeed and Facebook.

Hari’s tactic is to leverage fears we have about the safety of food to rally public opinion and force brands to change - whether they’re violating food standards or not. In 2017 she targeted Kraft food in the US for use of dyes in Kraft Dinner that are banned for use in Europe. A petition drew more than a quarter of a million signatures calling for them to be removed.

Kraft’s initial response was an open letter to its customers about how much they love KD as it was – and pointed to US regulations that confirm the safety of the dyes. Hari and her petition were rejected, so they increased their pressure, including social media stunts and calls for boycotts. What could have been a storm in a teacup exploded into global media coverage amplifying Hari’s questions about artificial dyes.

Kraft relented and invited Hari to come and speak with them, showed they listened and shifted their language about her criticism. They also revised their US recipe to exclude the dyes in question. Opening the floor turned the tide of the conversation, and re-established Kraft’s credibility.



The initial petition



The turning point



The reaction

STAND YOUR GROUND



Brands understand that there's a limit to adapting to pressures from campaigners and haters – and standing up to bullies can earn respect.

If you're confident that a call-out isn't fair, and when the call-out goes too far, brands should draw a line and refuse to back down. This kind of decision is of course never taken lightly, and brands should feel confident to stand their ground in circumstances that require it.

KFC Malaysia

In 2009 a disgruntled employee made a video of himself tampering with food at a KFC branch in Malaysia, styled to look like it was footage exposing practices at the branch.

Armed with the video a family member tried to extort money from the company. The worker was fired, the police were informed. For KFC Malaysia the matter was closed.

Yet two years later the original video resurfaced on YouTube. In just three days the video went viral and haters piled onto KFC, horrified by what looked like a legitimately disgusting action.

This had the potential to seriously damage the KFC brand, the KFC Malaysia business and divide KFC Malaysia employees working in over 500 restaurants. It was also 100% 'fake news', and KFC were not going to stand for it.

We're living in the age of the troll and the take down, and this can take many forms. It can be a coordinated attack meant to damage a business, customer fraud intended to elicit financial gain, or a viral story that is rooted in misinformation.

These kinds of call-outs are a perfect example of what a brand can challenge and take a stand against. This kind of swift and confident action can build a brand's reputation and attract new customers.

They were the victim of an exploitative and deliberate attempt to undermine the integrity of the brand, and their reaction is a perfect example of standing your ground.

KFC immediately took to their social channels in response, laying out the situation in straightforward terms. They created dedicated areas on Facebook and YouTube to share their response, with their CEO speaking frankly about what happened. They expressed their dismay at these isolated acts that undermined the integrity of the KFC brand.

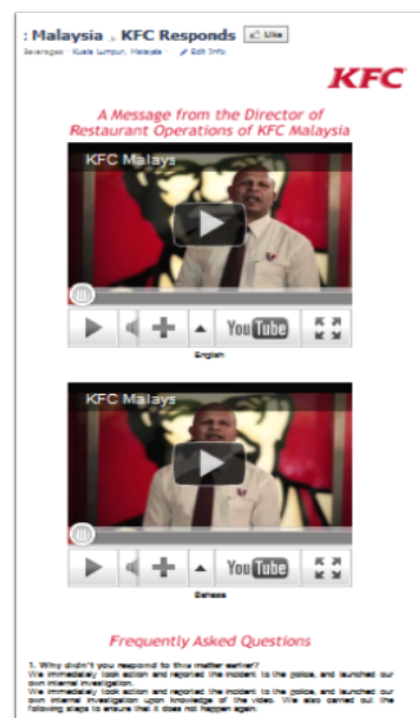
As a result, anger quickly turned to empathy and KFC restored customer trust.

This swift, humble but uncompromising action by KFC Malaysia took control of the take-down attempt – and restored customer trust.

The moment of crisis



The response



Resilient, hack ready brands:



**Check
their
mess**



**Learn
out
loud**



**Show
their
work**



**Open
the
floor**



**Stand
their
ground**

How can Ogilvy Health & Wellness help?



*Diagnosis &
Development*

5-Step Plan Analysis
of your current
approach

Risk evaluation



*Strategy &
Transformation*

Strategic planning

Transformation
roadmap

Brand and business
strategy



*Audience
Management*

Engagement
planning

Identifying and
quantifying
influencers

Influencer
recruitment



*PR &
Reputation*

PR and media
engagement

Crisis response

Scenario planning



*Content
Creation*

Real-time content
studios

Channel planning

Proactive and
reactive content

Want to know more?

marion.mcdonald@ogilvy.com

*Global Practice Lead,
Ogilvy Health & Wellness*

elise.craft@ogilvy.com

*Global Planning Partner,
Ogilvy Health & Wellness*