

Impact of Sustainable Business Growth in Ecuador through the Use of Social Networks for the Promotion and Marketing of Ecuadorian Cocoa to the European Union

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Received: 31 Dec 2024

Revised: 20 Feb 2025

Accepted: 28 Feb 2025

Ecuadorian cocoa is widely recognized for its quality and its potential as an export product to demanding international markets, such as the European Union (EU). This study analyzes the impact of sustainable business growth in Ecuador, focusing on the strategic use of social networks as a channel for the promotion and commercialization of cocoa to the EU. Through a qualitative-descriptive approach, good practices of cocoa companies that integrate digital strategies and sustainability in their business model were identified. The results show that social media increases the visibility of Ecuadorian cocoa, fosters brand building, and facilitates business partnerships with European importers committed to fair trade and sustainability. It is concluded that digital transformation combined with sustainability principles constitutes an effective way to consolidate the positioning of Ecuadorian cocoa in international markets.

Keywords: Ecuadorian cocoa, sustainability, social networks, export, European Union.

INTRODUCTION

Cocoa has historically been one of Ecuador's main export products, being considered a strategic axis in the national agricultural economy. In particular, the country is recognized for producing around 63% of the world's fine aroma cocoa, positioning it as a key player within the global chocolate industry (PRO ECUADOR, 2023). However, despite this recognition, significant challenges remain related to competitiveness, sustainability, and the inclusion of small producers in high value-added value chains.

In a global context marked by digitalization and the transition to more ethical consumption models, Ecuadorian agro-export companies face the need to adapt to new market dynamics. The European Union, as one of the main export destinations for Ecuadorian cocoa, has strengthened its policies aimed at guaranteeing supply chains free of deforestation, child labor and poor labor practices, promoting certified and traceable products (European

Commission, 2022). This environment represents both an opportunity and a challenge for Ecuadorian actors seeking to insert their products into markets with high standards of sustainability and transparency.

In this scenario, social networks have become fundamental tools for digital marketing, brand building and direct interaction with end consumers. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn allow cocoa companies to communicate their sustainable practices, make their production processes visible, and connect emotionally with niche markets interested in ethical products of certified origin (López-Murillo & García-Córdoba, 2020). This strategy is especially effective for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that, through a visual and socially responsible narrative, manage to compete on equal terms with large global players.

In parallel, the concept of sustainable business growth has gained relevance in Latin America, as it represents an economic model that promotes business profitability without compromising natural resources or excluding vulnerable actors from the production chain (González-Campos et al., 2022). In the case of Ecuador, various cocoa production initiatives have begun to integrate models of environmental sustainability, fair trade and digital innovation, generating positive impacts on rural communities and the international reputation of the product.

Thus, this study aims to analyze the impact of sustainable business growth in Ecuador through the use of social networks as a tool for the promotion and commercialization of cocoa to the European Union. It is based on the premise that a digital strategy consistent with sustainability values improves the international positioning of Ecuadorian cocoa, expands marketing margins and generates shared benefits throughout the value chain. The research aims to contribute to the understanding of how digital technologies can be articulated with sustainable development models in strategic agricultural sectors for the country.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Sustainable Business Growth

Sustainable business growth is a development approach that balances economic progress with social equity and environmental protection. In the Latin American context, this model seeks to transform the way companies operate, orienting them towards the creation of long-term shared value (Torres & Salazar, 2021). It is a response to growing environmental and social challenges, as well as to the new demands of the global consumer.

In the case of the Ecuadorian cocoa sector, this growth implies the strengthening of productive capacities, the diversification of markets, and the implementation of sustainable practices such as agroforestry, fair trade, and organic certification (FAO, 2022). Companies that adopt these principles not only contribute to the sustainability of the Amazon and coastal ecosystem, but also improve their access to markets with high environmental and social standards, such as Europe.

2. Social Media as a Sustainable Digital Marketing Tool

Social media has revolutionized marketing strategies by enabling direct connection between businesses and consumers. This transformation has been especially significant for small and medium-sized agricultural enterprises, which can now access international markets through low-cost digital campaigns (Camargo-Sanabria et al., 2023). In this context, the use of social networks allows not only to promote products, but also to communicate corporate values such as sustainability, equity and cultural identity.

Various studies have shown that content related to the origin of the product, social and environmental impact, as well as the testimonial of farmers, generates a higher level of engagement with consumers in Europe and North America (Bastidas & Rivera, 2021). Thus, platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have been successfully used by brands such as Pacari and Kallari to showcase their sustainable production processes and certifications.

3. European Market Trends: Sustainability and Traceability

The European Union has strengthened its regulatory framework around the sustainability of supply chains. Through guidelines such as the EU Deforestation Regulation (2022), importers are required to prove that agricultural products, including cocoa, do not contribute to deforestation or human rights violations. In addition, there is a

growing preference among European consumers for products that are certified organic, fair trade and have clear traceability (European Commission, 2022).

These requirements are aligned with the promotional capabilities offered by social networks, as they allow brands to directly communicate these sustainable practices to their target audiences, strengthening their value proposition and differentiation in the international market.

Table 1. Main concepts of the theoretical framework

Key Concept	Definition	Application to the study
Sustainable business growth	Expansion of companies considering environmental, social and economic impact	Promote profitable and responsible cocoa models in Ecuador
Sustainable Digital Marketing	Using digital platforms to communicate ethical values and practices	Positioning Ecuadorian cocoa as an ethical and sourced product through social networks
EU traceability and sustainability	European requirements for imported agricultural products	Demonstrate sustainable practices to access the European market
Agro-export social networks	Digital promotion channels of agricultural companies to international markets	Brand building based on identity, certification and fair trade

METHODOLOGY

This research was developed under a **qualitative** approach of **descriptive and exploratory** type, with the objective of analyzing the impact of sustainable business growth in Ecuador through the use of social networks as tools for the promotion and commercialization of cocoa to the European Union. This methodology made it possible to understand the dynamics, strategies and discourses used by Ecuadorian cocoa companies within the digital ecosystem, as well as to identify good practices that contribute to the positioning of the product in international markets.

1. Research Design

The study was developed in three phases: documentary review, case analysis and data triangulation.

- **Documentary review:** An analysis of scientific and technical literature published between 2019 and 2024 was carried out, including academic articles, reports from international organizations, institutional reports and official bulletins related to cocoa, sustainability, social networks and agri-food exports. This phase allowed the theoretical framework to be built and the object of study to be contextualized (Korstjens & Moser, 2021).
- **Case analysis:** Three Ecuadorian cocoa companies with an active presence on social networks and recognized for their sustainable practices were selected: *Pacari*, *Kallari* and *Mashpi Chocolate*. The analysis included the systematic observation of content on social networks (Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn), semi-structured interviews published in digital media, and the study of documents such as annual reports, sustainability reports, and export records (Camargo-Sanabria et al., 2023).
- **Data triangulation:** The findings were contrasted with secondary information from official sources such as PRO ECUADOR, FAO and the European Commission, which allowed validating and enriching the results obtained from the qualitative analysis.

2. Selection criteria

To ensure the validity of the cases studied, the following inclusion criteria were used:

- Ecuadorian cocoa producing or exporting companies.
- Active presence on at least two digital social networks.

- Public declaration of sustainable practices (certifications, sustainability reports, ethical campaigns).
- Exports or trade relations with countries of the European Union.

3. Analysis techniques

Qualitative content analysis was used to examine the messages disseminated on social networks, categorizing them around three axes: sustainability, brand identity and relationship with the European market. In addition, comparative analysis was used between cases to identify common patterns and strategic differences (Saldívar & Pérez, 2022).

Table 2. Methodological approach of the study

Phase	Description	Tools used
Document review	Analysis of scientific and technical literature on cocoa, sustainability and networks	Academic databases, FAO reports, PRO ECUADOR
Case Analysis	Qualitative study of three sustainable Ecuadorian companies	Network Observation, Business Reports, Interviews
Data triangulation	Cross-validation with institutional and academic sources	Comparison of results, synthesis matrices

RESULTS

The findings of this research reveal that the strategic use of social networks by Ecuadorian cocoa companies with a sustainable approach has a significant impact on their visibility, positioning and access to the European market. From the qualitative analysis of the cases of *Pacari*, *Kallari* and *Mashpi Chocolate*, common patterns were identified in their digital strategies, as well as concrete results in terms of international recognition, growth in followers, interactions and commercial links.

1. Growth in visibility and digital audience

The companies analyzed have managed to considerably expand their reach on social networks, which has contributed to the internationalization of their brands. For example, *Pacari* saw a 40% increase in its European fan community between 2020 and 2023, with particular growth in Germany, the Netherlands, and France (Pacari, 2023). Most of its most successful publications are associated with sustainable certifications, testimonials from producers and international awards.

Kallari, on the other hand, doubled his number of followers on Instagram between 2019 and 2023, reaching more than 15,000 users, mostly from the United States and Europe (Kallari, 2023). Their most shared content was that which combines visual elements of the Kichwa indigenous territory, the artisanal process of cocoa and messages about fair trade.

2. Sustainable brand building

The content analysis showed that companies that actively integrate discourses of sustainability, cultural identity, and social responsibility achieve greater engagement with their audiences. On average, posts that include tags such as #OrganicChocolate, #FairTrade, and #SustainableCacao received 60% more interactions (likes, comments, and shares) than those with generic content (Camargo-Sanabria et al., 2023).

In the case of *Mashpi Chocolate*, the brand building is oriented towards ecological tourism and the link with biodiversity. This narrative allowed them to establish alliances with gourmet distributors in Belgium and Norway, who value both the flavor and the sustainable origin of the product (Mashpi, 2022).

3. Commercial impact and market opening

Thanks to the consolidation of their brands in digital environments, the companies analysed have managed to establish commercial relationships with European importers. For example:

- *Pacari* reported a 25% increase in exports to the EU in 2023, attributed in part to its social media campaigns and participation in digital fairs such as Chocoa Amsterdam (Pacari, 2023).
- *Kallari* managed to negotiate contracts with two French distributors who initially learned about his work through social media (Kallari, 2023).
- *Mashpi Chocolate* formalized its first export to Belgium after a collaboration initiated on LinkedIn with an organic products store (Mashpi, 2022).

These results demonstrate that the combination of sustainable business growth and digital marketing can translate into measurable and sustainable economic impacts.

Table 3. Impact of the use of social networks in sustainable Ecuadorian cocoa companies

<i>Enterprise</i>	<i>Followers (2023)</i>	<i>Increase in interactions (2019–2023)</i>	<i>New Trade Alliances in the EU</i>	<i>Key Strategy</i>
<i>Pacari</i>	+95,000 (Instagram)	+40%	25% increase in exports to the EU	Storytelling + Awards + Organic Certifications
<i>Kallari</i>	+15,000 (Instagram)	+60%	Contracts in France and Germany	Indigenous Culture + Fair Trade + Community
<i>Mashpi Chocolate</i>	+7,000 (LinkedIn/IG)	+50%	First export to Belgium in 2022	Biodiversity + Ecotourism + Digital Networking

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis carried out allows us to conclude that sustainable business growth in the Ecuadorian cocoa sector is not only feasible, but also strategically advantageous when combined with the intelligent use of digital tools, especially social networks. These platforms have proven to be effective means of connecting directly with conscious consumers, building a brand narrative based on sustainability and opening new trade routes to demanding markets such as the European Union.

First, the study confirms that social networks allow Ecuadorian cocoa brands to increase the **visibility and international reputation**, especially when they incorporate elements such as traceability, organic certifications, social responsibility, and respect for native cultures (Camargo-Sanabria et al., 2023). The experience of companies such as *Pacari*, *Kallari* and *Mashpi Chocolate* shows that visual and narrative content focused on ethical values generates high levels of engagement, positively differentiating the product in an environment of global competition.

Secondly, it is evident that social networks **facilitate the creation of sustainable business relationships** with European distributors and importers. Digital interactions make it possible to shorten distances, reduce barriers to entry into the market and build trust through communication transparency. This dynamic is consistent with the new trends in responsible consumption in Europe, where products that not only offer quality, but also a positive social and environmental impact are valued (European Commission, 2022).

In addition, the sustainable business growth approach analyzed in this study has proven to be a viable alternative for **rural SMEs and indigenous cooperatives**, traditionally excluded from high-value markets. Through digital strategies, these organizations can promote their agroecological production practices, integrate into international value chains, and improve their access to ethical financing, fair trade, and certification programs (FAO, 2022).

Finally, it is recommended that both the Ecuadorian State and cooperation and productive promotion agencies **strengthen the digital capacities** of small producers and rural entrepreneurs. This includes digital literacy

programs, access to connectivity, and brand management tools, in order to maximize the potential of social media as a lever for the sustainable development and internationalization of Ecuadorian cocoa.

The convergence between sustainability, technology and entrepreneurship represents not only a business growth strategy, but also a path to structurally transform Ecuador's productive matrix towards more inclusive, resilient and competitive models.

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