Connecting Local Food to Global Consumers via the Internet

by

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is how local food products can market rural places on the Internet. The chapter deals with two seemingly unconnected contemporary consumer trends: the increasing consumer demand for authentic qualities in food products (Amilien 2005), and the escalation of consumer activities on the Internet (Castells 2001; Kozinets 1999; Anon 2005). It will be argued here that from a marketing perspective these trends should be considered together and that, if strategically interlinked, these trends offer interesting opportunities for the promotion of rural areas, products and communities.

In developed markets there is a growing interest in authentic, traditional, wholesome and traceable food, and a growing demand for cultural identification, culinary heritage and value-added food products that carry a strong identification with a particular geographic place or region (Holmefjord, 2000; Loureiro & McCluskey, 2000). At the

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international political level formal trademarks or branding labels have been introduced to protect local heritage foods, for example the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) trademarks established by the EU (EU council reg. No 510/2006). In addition consumer and producer communities organise globally to protect heritage food through their own brand labels (e.g. www.slowfood.com). Moreover local communities collaborate to create gastro-tourism concepts where the concept is to enjoy heritage food in its local environment (e.g. www.theseafoodtrail.com). These projects are working to increase the variety, amount and quality of locally produced food on offer, and one of their tools is the Internet.

The other trend is the escalation of consumer activities on the Internet. The Internet is now a major arena for information search and social interaction (Castells 2001; Kozinets 1999; Anon 2005). The 16 million users of computer communication in the first years of the Internet (1995) are estimated to grow to 2 billion in 2010 (Castells 2001). Moreover, networked computers empower consumers around the world to find one another and to gather in groups based on a wide range of cultural and sub-cultural interests and social affiliations (Castells 2001; Kozinets 1999; Anon 2005). The ability to get information about whatever you want whenever you want, from wherever you are, has given consumers unprecedented strength. They demand quality and can exchange their experiences world-wide. Consumers can initiate word of mouth campaigns – on the Internet called 'word of mouse' - to boycott or buycott specific goods or services (Castells 2001; Stolle et al 2004).

This chapter will explore how local food is communicated on well established websites that address consumers locally and globally, such as the Slow Food movement, local food brands and national tourism portals. First the two main concepts introduced above are reviewed: the increasing demand for authentic qualities in food products, and the escalation of consumer activities on the Internet. Second a conceptual framework is introduced and explained, and then a content analysis of specific websites is presented. The chapter will then conclude with a discussion of the marketing implications for promoting rural identities through local food on the Internet.

DOES IT MATTER WHERE OUR FOOD COMES FROM?

Food products would appear to embody strong associations with rural places as they have a geographic origin by nature. There are often strong historical and symbolic links between places and foods due to the interactions between natural resources and people's lifestyles (Tregear et al. 1998). Geographic associations may be considered quality cues by making reference to socially constructed concepts such as: authentic, healthy, and traditional (Dimara & Skuras 2003), and the use of geographic names to identify products from a particular, usually rural, region is a very ancient custom (Loureiro & McCluskey 2000). The renown and perceived value of products such as certain French wines demonstrate that geographic indication can be important to consumers (Tregear et al. 1998). The consumption of denominated food and drink may be a statement of taste, fashion, sophistication, lifestyle, status, beliefs, opinions, ethnocentrism, etc (Dimara & Skuras 2003; Loureiro & McCluskey 2000; Bjørkum 1999). It may also be a response to public health and food safety concerns by emphasising the source of production and providing a greater degree of traceability for these products (Dimara & Skuras 2003;

Tregear et al. 1998). Emphasis on the origin of rural food products can enable them to become differentiated from generic competitive offerings, enhancing their commercial appeal and competitiveness (Tregear et al. 1998). Online information can be used to attract and hold on to the hearts and minds of consumers.

Local food as terroir brands

The French concept of 'terroir' conveys a better understanding of how the source of origin of local, rural, food products may affect consumers' perceptions of these products (Amilien 2005). A place/territory may have unique social, environmental, cultural and institutional capitals that distinguish it from another place as a result of its spatial limitation. The terroir concept captures the combination these different types of capital, which constitute the symbolic capital of the terroir (Amilien 2005). Aurier et al. (2005) explored what meanings consumers associate with terroir food products, and they found three common characteristics: 1) a product made of local raw materials, 2) a localised traditional recipe or know-how, and 3) location of the firm in the terroir region for a long time (ibid). Perceived sources of terroir were categorised in a geographical and cultural dimension. The geographic dimension embodies the link between products and land and serve as an identification function – an origin cue that allows consumers to identify products. The cultural and historical dimension implies that consumers perceive that a terroir product must *not* be produced elsewhere because it is linked to the history and culture of a specific region. Consumers appreciate that local know-how is developed over time, and is embedded in unique rituals and traditions that can not be exported or copied elsewhere.

Moreover, perceptions of proximity in local food production, distribution and consumption come forward as very crucial in consumers' representations and evocations associated with terroir (ibid). Proximity between producer and consumer, with region, with product, and with the producer are all strong associations. Proximity implies an intimate relationship with local products meaning that knowing the region includes knowing its most typical food products and not only its monuments or tourist areas. Ability to see, feel, and interact are important in terroir production and distribution.

The image of a terroir product is generally associated with a production style such as 'craft', 'small scale producer', 'traditional', or 'from a farm' (ibid). Each terroir producer is different and distribution channels must be as short as possible. The look of terroir products should be authentic and should be distinguished from perfectly or professionally styled consumer goods. The link with the geographic origin is also important, as illustrated by a quote from the study by Aurier et al. (2005) - 'when purchasing a terroir product, it is just as if you buy the image of the place, not only the product quality' (ibid., p. 8). Terroir products have a strong affective dimension and consumers link nostalgic and idealised associations of past times and indigenous cultures and regions to terroir products.

Labelling of foods with their source of origin offers a method of differentiation through branding in response to consumer needs, and a change in labelling or information can change consumers' perceptions and behaviour (Loureiro & McCluskey 2000). The

concept of terroir fits well with the hypothesis that place can be viewed as a type of brand. Indeed terroir could be viewed as a specialist type of place brand for food and drink products. In marketing terms terroir would translate into unique, complex, and authentic brand association as well as having a level of awareness amongst consumers. Terroir as a brand is unique because a source of origin can not be copied. The nature of terroir associations is anchored in the unique interaction between nature and people evolved over a long period of time and embodied in institutions and culture. Information published on the Internet is used to support these food traditions.

THE INTERNET IS A SOCIAL ARENA

Over the last 15 years the information available to ordinary users of the Internet and the Web has taken immense proportions (Castells 2001). The development is so rapid that even the concepts used to describe the activities on the Internet are still in the making – at least how the concepts are used by the layman[3].

The Internet has radically changed the nature of and motivation for social interactions. Communities are networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, and a sense of belonging and social identity, with the family playing an important role in the construction of these ties (Wellman 2000; Wellman & Giulia 1999). Place-based interaction has traditionally been an important source of support,

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[3] See definition of internet terms after the reference list

information and social interaction, with this interaction based not just on neighbourhoods but also workplaces (Castells 2001). These traditional, family and place-based interactions are what can be termed 'real-life' communities. One of the drawbacks with real life communities is that they are not so easy to maintain once people move away, and these people end up joining communities in their new home neighbourhood and work place.

Initially seen as a sophisticated method of information exchange the Internet has led to the establishment of a new type of community: the virtual community (Kozinets 1998; Castells 2001). This new type of community brings people together on-line around shared values and interests, and creates ties of support and friendship that can also extend into face-to-face or real life interaction. Kozinets (1999) goes further and defines virtual communities as affiliate groups whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group activities. Two of the greatest benefits of the Internet are the ease with which people with similar values or interests can find each other (for example via search engines), and the ease with which weak ties can be maintained that may otherwise be lost in the trade-off between the effort to keep in contact and the value of doing so (Castells 2001).

Using the Internet as a social space is to a large extent a grass-roots driven process (Anon 2005). Democratic ideology gives the Internet credibility and integrity as a social arena (Anon 2005; Kozinets 1999). For the first time in history the Internet both allows 'many-to-many' and`'one-to-one' communication on a global scale (Castells 2001).

Hence the marketing value of the Internet as a social space is unprecedented (Briscoe et al. 2006; Reiss 2005; Reed 2001). Core economic, social, political and cultural activities throughout the planet are being structured by and around the Internet, and other computer networks. Exclusion from these networks is one of the most damaging forms of exclusion in our economy and in our culture (Castells 2001; Kelley 1997). Therefore everybody wants to be on the Internet; nation-states, geographical regions, places, companies, and private individuals.

Since the social content of the Internet has grown from grass-roots and user activity, the enormous amount of information lacks governance, structure, and hierarchy (Castells 2001; Leiner 2003; Reiss 2006). The impact of information search engines, such as Google and Yahoo!, are therefore formidable, both as retrievers and gatekeepers of information on the Internet. One of the most recent businesses concepts is to assist companies and other agents who want to be on the Internet to design their websites in such a way that they can climb higher in the search hierarchy. Presence on the Internet alone is not enough - accessibility for relevant users of information is also necessary.

What this chapter seeks to explore is how the Internet can influence the development of brand knowledge for terroir products. Based on the above discussion we propose that:

- Rural places can be promoted on the Internet through terroir food products

- Active Internet consumer communities and information portals designed for consumers can enhance the impact of such promotion

FRAMEWORK

If we assume that terroir is a special type of brand, the knowledge held by consumers

about a terroir can be broken down into two key elements: brand image, a combination

of the strength, uniqueness and favourability of brand associations; and brand

awareness, a measure of the consumers' ability to recall and recognise a brand (Keller

1993). It is the development and spread of this knowledge that is of interest to this

chapter.

According to Nonaka et al. (2000) the creation and development of knowledge is a

dynamic process requiring three environmental factors to be present. The first of these is

the interaction of individuals. This deals with the dynamic interaction of different kinds

of knowledge. The second factor is the location or context where knowledge creation

takes place. This means the real cultural, social and historic context which is of

importance to each individual involved, and which enables them to understand and

appreciate information they receive. The final factor is the assets or resources required

to enable knowledge creation, such as trust that stimulates knowledge sharing, roles and

routines, so that people in different roles handle time and place and frequencies for

knowledge creation equally. One of the key issues for the development and

dissemination of knowledge is the dynamic interaction of individuals with different

types of knowledge. As more interaction occurs, the knowledge becomes more

widespread. Social networks and communities play a major role in this process, and the

rapid growth of information and communications technology has had a major impact on

the nature of this interaction..

The power of technology to scale up the size of networks or communities has been hypothesised in the formulation of Metcalfe's Law and later Reed's Law, although it has been suggested more recently that these overstate the additional value of gained by scaling up a virtual network (Briscoe et al. 2006). Metcalfe's Law states that the value of a communications network grows with the square of the number of devices or people connected to it, while Reed's Law asserts that the utility of large networks can scale exponentially with the size of the network (Briscoe et al. 2006; Reed 2001). It is the extra reach that online networks and virtual communities can provide that is the key to online marketing. In the virtual world websites and portals provided by companies, public bodies and other organisations act to disseminate information to consumers and the world at large, while virtual communities are actively gathering and sharing information on a whole variety of topics and interests. The amount of information exchanged, the number of people involved and the value of these interactions far outweighs the traditional, real life means of exchanging information. The power of the Internet can be summed up in term 'word of mouse',as opposed to the more traditional 'word of mouth'.

Spatial and technological dimensions

Two dimensions have been considered in exploring the development of terroir brand knowledge: a spatial dimension and a technological dimension. The spatial dimension refers to how widespread knowledge of a terroir product is, that is to say if the product is only known to a select few locally or if the product has become known on a larger scale. The technological dimension refers to the nature of the interaction between producers and consumers, with real life face-to-face contact on one side and Internet or

virtual communities on the other. By combining these two dimensions four theoretical

spaces are created along the axes localised versus globalised, and real life versus virtual.

Insert table 1 about here

A short description of each of the categories presented in the above framework (see

table 1) illustrates their relevance to terroir products:

Parochial. When a terroir product has localised brand knowledge that is only present or

accessible in the real world, it is generally restricted to a small area or a dedicated

groups of followers. Brand knowledge only develops outside this area/group slowly

through word of mouth interactions. An example of a parochial product would be the

local fisherman who sells fresh prawns from his boat at the quayside in a small fishing

village.

Ubiquitous. When awareness of the terroir product has been significantly raised through

traditional channels such as word of mouth and the more traditional forms of media, and

brand knowledge has become widespread on a large scale, it can be considered as being

ubiquitous. Scotch Whisky provides an example of such a product. Although strongly

linked to Scotland in the minds of consumers, the product can be found almost anywhere in the world.

Connected. The term connected implies that the terroir product has a presence on the Internet. This is likely to be a more simple presence involving a stand alone website. The site may well provide a good presentation of the terroir product and the producer, but is only known about by a select few or by those who have received a recommendation or have discovered the website by chance, for example via a search engine.

Networked. When a terroir product has a web presence, and this is linked in with consumer interest websites, tourist board portals, producer portals and other sites it becomes networked. By being connected to relevant sites that consumers are actively looking at and interacting with, a producer may greatly increase the brand knowledge of his/her products.

METHODS: SAMPLE AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The geographical frame of reference is Scotland and Norway, which have well known generic rural images (e.g. Scottish Highlands, Norwegian Fjords) but relatively few famous terroir product places. In comparison, countries like France, Greece, Italy and Spain have long traditions for promoting terroir food products through wine, olive oil, cheeses, ham and other agricultural produce. Evidence suggests that terroir products are mainly associated with agricultural produce. Of the 740 EU approved PGIs and PDOs

only nine were terroir fish or seafood products[4]. Hence there is great potential in developing terroir seafood brands. In Norway and Scotland seafood is a very important food export, which is another motivation to select seafood as exploratory cases for this study.

Another requirement for selection of cases was substantive content on the terroir products on the website. The terroir consumer associations identified in the Aurer et al. (2005) study served as a guide. Hence the consumer websites should contain information on place with name and geographical location; information on production methods and presentation of producers should be included; information on the link between product and the history, culture and climatic conditions at the place; and images or pictures of the product, place and producers. This type of information signals proximity between product and place, producers, and consumers, which are all strong consumer association for terroir produce.

Finally the framework guides the sample based on the interaction of the two dimensions: localised and globalised space and real life versus virtual technology. Two broad categories of Internet sites seemed to serve the research needs: 1) *Networked* consumer communities run by consumers and 2) Information websites and portals run by producers and public bodies that *connect* to broad groups of consumers. After

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[4] For a full list, see http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/qual/ en/1bbaa_en.htm

extensive exploration on the Internet and application of the sampling criteria a
convenience sample of three cases was selected.

Insert table 2 about here

The analytical approach is inspired by techniques from semiotic and narrative
methodology (Silverman 2005). By identifying narrative themes, frequently used
concepts and signs we will get some insight in how terroir food products are
communicated on the Internet, which subsequently will be input for the discussion of
marketing implications. The web-texts on terroir produce are typically short (from 100 –
500 words; Slow Food Presidia) and are informative in nature. The depth of the analysis
is therefore limited by this.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF CASES

Case I – Consumer community: The Slow Food case

Presentation of Slow Food. Slow Food is both real life and virtual, and local and global.
Slow Food members are organised into local groups - Condotte in Italy and Convivia
elsewhere in the world. More than 800 Convivia are active in 50 countries (including
400 Condotte in Italy). Apart from being a real life social group whose aim is to enjoy
slow food the Convivia also promote local food to the whole Slow Food organisation
internationally by proposing local food producers for the Ark of Taste. The Ark of Taste
is designed to discover, catalogue and safeguard small, quality food products and

defend biodiversity around the world. To assist artisan producers Slow Food has established Presidia, which are small projects approved by Slow Food, designed to save artisan foods. Similar to the EU's PDO and PGI trademarks, seafood products are in the minority of Presidia products – nine of the 81 international Presidia and three of the 195 Italian Presidia are represent fish or some other seafood . Each Presidia has its web page on the Slow Food website with detailed information on the terroir details embedded in the product. The product is visually presented with high quality artistic pictures (www.slowfood.com).

The Slow Food website has many functions: information, edited feature articles, bulletin boards (including information about local events), food and wine shops, web logs (or blogs), etc. Sloweb – a round-the-clock food news and review website draws on the resources of Slow Food's vast global network of collaborators. Distinguished journalists, food and wine writers, technical experts and members of Slow Food staff provide updates on the many facets of biodiversity and food in all its shapes and forms.

Norwegian fish Presidia. There are three Fish Presidia from costal Norway presented on the Slow Food website: Kristiansund Baccala (Western Norway), Stockfish from the Isle of Sørøya (Northern Norway), Cured and Smoked Herring from Sunnmøre (Western Norway). The content of these web pages promotes the complex environmental, cultural and social qualities that constitute the uniqueness of the rural production place (http://www.slowfood.com). In the following we will use quotes from these pages to illustrate terroir content.

There are three narrative themes that seem to guide the presentation of all Slow Food Presidia: 1) The name of the terroir place in the Presidia label; 2) Description of unique environmental resources and characteristics of the place; 3) The products anchoring in long cultural traditions; and 4) Detailed description of production methods. The narrative stories capture the unique interplay between people, culture, history and the environment in the local areas covered.

Environmental resources. Geographical source of origin is already established in the name of the Presidia, which signals geographical identity and uniqueness. Kristiansund Baccala can only be made in Kristiansund; Stockfish from the Isle of Sørøya is special for this place; and Cured and Smoked Herring from Sunnmøre is unique. Kristiansand, Sørøya and Sunnmøre are all known for their rich fishing grounds, and environmental conditions are communicated to establish unique qualities of the environment in each place. For example the Kristiansund area is particularly suitable for production of baccala ('klippfisk') because of the rich cod fisheries, rocks for drying the fish and a climate with long periods of good, stable weather. Moreover, information on seasonal fluctuations and constraints underline dependency and closeness to nature.

Product anchoring in local history and long traditions. The Slow Food Presidia cleverly present the products to promote terroir qualities. For example the following text is used in the online presentation of Cured and Smoked Herring from Sunnmøre:

"What generations of Norwegians born after the 1920's remember most clearly

from their childhoods is the tradition of smoked herring. Those who spent their

youth in villages along the coast can still picture the fat silver fish their mothers

would roast on burning coals and leave hanging over the fireplace. They would

serve the herring with mashed potatoes. For hundreds of years, herring have

been an essential part of the Norwegian diet: the remains of this fish have been

found all over Norway in archaeological sites dating as far back as 600 BC."

(http://www.slowfood.com)

This quote assigns historically long ties and cultural, as well as nutritional, values to smoked herring. Many would agree that the herring was instrumental in bringing coastal Norway out of poverty. The herring therefore has come to symbolise the silver fish that saved people from starvation and gave nutrition to new generations of healthy Norwegians. Because of its high fat content the herring is very versatile for different conservation methods and the picture of lines of smoked herring hanging from barns and boat houses along the coast of Norway is a classic coastal Norwegian image. The Slow Food website photographs of the smoked herring and the stockfish perfectly captures and supports the image constructed in the text.

Production methods. The production methods are embedded both in environmental, cultural, and social capital at the place. This interdependence of the multiple capital sources is communicated on the web page through an explanation of how baccala is made. The importance of the fishermen's skills, the freshness before processing and the

short-travelled distance between fisherman and the processor is documented in the text. For example the producer of baccala buys fresh, ready-salted fish from the fisherman, with the fresh fish salted using sea salt.

> "The salted fish is washed and placed to mature at about 10-13ºC for 23 days. The fish is then moved to cold storage, at a temperature of about 2-5ºC. Then it will be washed and salted once more. It is being stacked and thereafter laid out to dry. The fish must be stacked every evening and covered with a fle, a circular wooden cover, to protect it from moisture. The fish shall dry for 14-21 days, depending on the size. After being dried, the fish will be moved to storage for a few days in a cool room, so that the salting process can continue. Then the actual klippfisk production starts. First, the fish is sorted in three sizes. Then it is cured with salt at above 10ºC. It will be stored and restacked every seven day for at least 23 days. The fish is sorted in three sizes. Then the fish will be washed and the black membrane removed. The fish is then stored under pressure at 2-5 ºC. The drying is started once more, and the fish are then sorted by quality. There are 8 degrees of dryness. If the fish was exported dry it was at 8/8. Then there is a new round with storing and pressing at 2-5 ºC. The fish can now be placed in storage to mature for 1-3 years. The klippfisk is then sorted and graded for export in the categories: Superior extra, Superior and Imperial."

 (http://www.slowfood.com)

This detailed description on the website illuminates the strong interplay between man and nature. The production process - very dependent on nature – is complex and time-consuming and demands sophisticated skills. Every day, for the three weeks it is laid out to dry on the cliffs, the fish has to be carefully attended in order to protect it from

moisture and environmental hazards. The very fine tuned sorting in quality categories is an indication of sophisticated craftsmanship and pride in providing the customers with the best product.

Case II: Information portal - The www.eatscotland.com case

Presentation of EatScotland. EatScotland is an initiative launched by VisitScotland (formerly the Scottish Tourist Board) in January 2005 to promote excellence wherever food is served in Scotland. The scheme was initially conceived as a simple pass-or-fail quality assurance scheme for all eating places in Scotland, replacing the one-to-five medal system used by its predecessor organisation, Taste of Scotland. EastScotland has since expanded to include a series of annual awards and an eating and drinking guide (both printed and online) to Scotland that promotes traditional, natural cuisine as well as local eating places and local specialities. The guide also provide information on food and drink trails that tourists can follow to indulge themselves in particular types of food.

VisitScotland estimates that the eating and drinking market is worth £719 million to the UK's tourism each year. A recent survey of tourist perceptions found that two-thirds of Britons said that food and drink influenced their holiday choice, with the West Country, Wales and Scotland being the top three destinations. EatScotland aims to capitalise on this.

As well as promoting quality in the Scottish food and drink and hospitality sectors, EastScotland also provides a bridge between local businesses and people (mostly

tourists) who are interested in finding more authentic, original food and drink experiences. The initial pilot involved a cross-section of 100 volunteer businesses from across Scotland, and the scheme is now actively recruiting businesses to continue building and developing the content of the eating and drinking guide. Companies pay a fee of between £125 and £195 to take part in the scheme, and they must pass the required quality standards before they are allowed to join.

The online guide has a searchable database of quality assured places to eat, special offers from members, suggestions for activities (such as food trails, festivals, culinary breaks and specific visitor attractions), a database of accommodation quality assured by VisitScotland, guides to traditional and natural food and drink products and producers, profiles of chefs and individual businesses, a guide to regional specialities, and the ability to register for an e-newsletter.

Narrative themes. The EatScotland online guide provides an efficient and relatively easy way for people, both familiar and unfamiliar with Scottish food and drink, to find out more about authentic, natural and traditional cuisine, while enjoying the beautiful nature of Scotland. People and their background and local culture are also important in the context of food and drink, and much space is given to talk about individuals and their links to food and drink. These themes are all key elements of the terroir, and they are made clear in the language used on the website. A feature web page about the Seafood Trail provides an illustration of how the themes of authentic, natural and traditional cuisine, the beautiful nature of Scotland, and the people involved in

producing and preparing Scottish food and drink are woven into the texts presenting the food places. The scene is set early on: "The idea is to lap up the beauty of this magical area from Tighnabruaich and the Mull of Kintyre to Loch Fyne and Oban, while relishing a sensory feast of some of the world's best seafood" (http://www.eatscotland.com).

The link between freshness, natural produce, local producers and the nature itself is reinforced through the web page. Much is made of the "breathtaking views, unique waterfront locations, access to the freshest local produce and an understanding of the environmental issues that concern the Scottish fishing industry." In addition the web page emphasises that "Seafood Trail members are determined to showcase Argyll's natural larder from the deep and have built strong relationships with local producers" (http://www.eatscotland.com).

The link between the local people and the produce is established with phrases such as "the real heroes are the fishermen themselves who deliver the lobsters, halibut, crabs and scallops all the way to our shores" (http://www.eatscotland.com). Each establishment along the seafood trail is described with introduction to the people that run them and the nature around them. The web page provides maps and more detailed information, as well as links to a stand alone website for the Seafood Trail (http://www.theseafoodtrail.com), and websites for each individual restaurant. In this way, potential visitors are provided with a lot of information and at the same time they

are put in contact with the local restaurants themselves, instead of just being left with some vague generalisations about seafood along the west coast of Scotland.

Authenticity reinforced through language. Scots words are also used in the text to reinforce the feeling of authenticity and originality, whilst lending an extra helping of local flavour. This is illustrated on the web page by a reference to the owner of the Cairnbaan Hotel, who is described as being "a lover of wine and seafood, (who) also likes a good blether and enjoys telling the tale of the hotel's more seedy reputation in the past, dating back as it does to 1801" (http://www.eatscotland.com). Blether is an old Scots word meaning to talk, and it is also used to describe someone who talks a lot.

Use of stereotypes. Stereotypes are another tool used in the text, as in the case of the description of the owner of The Hunting Lodge at Bellochantuy, who is introduced to readers as being "the bearded, kilted, exuberant owner" with "a penchant for malt whisky, which he loves to bestow on his unsuspecting guests" (http://www.eatscotland.com). To connect to a more outward, cosmopolitan focus this stereotype is challenged when it is mentioned further on that he and his wife brought up their family in "diverse destinations such as Yemen, Poland and the extremely remote island of Tristan da Cuna before coming back to roost on the dramatic coast of the Kintyre peninsula.

Case III: Being Connected –Loch Fyne Oysters

Introduction to the company. Loch Fyne Oysters was originally set up in 1977 by two oyster enthusiasts John Noble and Andrew Lane. Both Noble and Lane thought the pure water of Loch Fyne would add distinction to the flavour of their product, and after some experimenting they started farming oysters and selling them to restaurants and hotels all over the UK. In the following decade the company, took over a local smokehouse, broadened its product range, opened a seafood shop and a restaurant in an old cattle shed at the head of Loch Fyne. The company also started exporting, and in 1994 it won the Queen's Award for Exports - During the 1990's a chain of restaurants was developed in the UK under the Loch Fyne Restaurants brand, and by 2005 the company owned 25 restaurants. In 2002 John Noble died, and in 2003 ownership of Loch Fyne Oysters was transferred to a trust on behalf of the employees. The Loch Fyne Restaurants chain (excluding the original Loch Fyne Oyster Bar) was sold to a management buy-out, backed by private equity, for £33 million (Bolger 2005).

Terroir is one of the key elements to the Loch Fyne success story. From early on the company focussed on the quality of their produce, their natural production methods, sustainability, the clean, pure environment their products come from, and the close bonds with the local area it comes from. The company has also branched out to sell local meat products under the Glen Fyne brand, as well as a selection of other authentic and artisan products.

Total sustainability is a key concept on the Loch Fyne website, and the following analysis concentrates on this topic. Loch Fyne's mission statement has a direct link with

an elaborate text documenting how they live up to the ideal. The presentation of a key supplier of fresh farmed salmon on the website, Loch Duart, emphasises Loch Fyne's commitment to Total Sustainability. Although Loch Fyne does not farm salmon themselves, they do operate a smokehouse and sell their own smoked salmon. The close relationship with Loch Duart illustrates how important it is for Loch Fyne that their suppliers share their principles. It may be useful to have in mind that farmed seafood often is perceived as modern, high-tech and in conflict with nature, notions which are quite different from core terroir associations such as natural, sustainable, and in harmony with nature. Loch Fyne is therefore a particularly interesting case since the company has managed to build a famous terroir food brand for farmed seafood, whilst working closely with other companies and organisations that share the same ethos.

Narrative themes. The themes in the mission statement of the company are to: 1) respect the animal and its habitat by actively working for an understanding of the environment and the needs and welfare of the animals that are grown, 2) actively work to enhance biodiversity, 3) underpin the economy of the community by the provision of skilled work, fairly rewarded and in line with the tradition of the locality (http://www.lochfyne.com).

Respect for the animal and its habitat is documented on the web pages by referring to several accreditations awarded to the company. The company has earned endorsement for their production methods as being "operated in a sustainable and conservation friendly manner" from the Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department; the Scottish

Natural Heritage; and the Marine Conservation Society's Good Fish Guide. The website also documents that Loch Fyne's salmon supplier, Loch Duart, became the first fish farming company in the world to be approved under the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' (RSPCA) Freedom Foods animal welfare scheme (http://www.rspca.org.uk). The RSPCA is a UK charity, founded in 1824, and dedicated to improving animal welfare. The Freedom Food certification mark gives consumers the assurance that the producers involved in the scheme are backed by the RSPCA, one of the most respected animal charities in the world. Moreover, Freedom Food is recognised by the UK government as a 'higher level' assurance scheme. A link is provided to the RSPCA to enable consumers to find out more about the Freedom Foods scheme.

Documenting these awards and approvals on the website provides external validity to the company's mission statements. The company has proven not only through words but also through action that their production and processing routines are sustainable and animal friendly. This is an important documentation that makes the company stand out among the many fish farming companies who would like to project a similar image often without such solid approval from certifying bodies.

Food safety and quality control are linked to terroir capital. The Loch Fyne website documents how the company anchor the entire value chain in terroir capital. First they have specified their own feeds with a small local feed supplier whom they know and can survey. They oppose GM feed and use only 'sustainable' diets that are low in

dioxins/PCBs. The low level of these substances in their final produce is documented to be way below the EU and UN standards. Since fish farming cannot document quality in accordance with long traditions, Loch Fyne emphasise Loch Duart's pioneering spirit in securing animal welfare and food safety. External endorsements, accreditations, and awards support their claims.

Active work to enhance biodiversity. One of the most controversial issues in salmon farming is the conflict between wild and farmed salmon. The website also visits this discourse and informs the reader that the decline in wild salmon is a result of several factors – farming just being one factor. Instead of defending farmed salmon the website explains how Loch Fyne's supplier, Loch Duart, have been active in the establishment of West Sutherland Fisheries Trusts which aims is to restore the stocks of wild salmon and sea trout (http://www.lochfyne.com).

The website communicates that they want their farmed salmon to be as similar to wild salmon as possible. In the text the company disassociates its salmon from farmed salmon that are considered to be round (instead of torpedo shaped) and "not flabby like a lot of farmed salmon" (http://www.lochfyne.com). This is accomplished by putting priority on quality before quantity in the fish pens.

Underpin the community. Loch Fynes's ownership structure, suppliers, productions methods, and marketing are all locally based, and this message runs through all the text on the website. When promoting sales worldwide it is their local competence, skills,

pride, and environmental resources that constitute the unique selling position. All their product labels include the name of the place – Loch Fyne. This gives brand consistency across product categories and enhances the terroir qualities in their produce.

DISCUSSION

The concept of terroir food reflects the complex relationship between environmental, social, cultural and institutional capital at a specific place (Amilien 2006). Together these forms of capital constitute symbolic capital that can be associated to the terroir. In brand management terms this symbolic capital can be understood as the 'brand equity' of a place and its terroir produce. The three cases of terroir seafood products from Norway and Scotland share common features in how they present and document terroir features associated with their products on their Internet websites. First the cases use similar key concepts or attributes to describe their terroir food products. Second, the narratives focus on similar key themes that describe the interaction and interdependencies between different forms of terroir capital. Third, the three cases are all linked to international or national bodies of accreditation of terroir qualities, which guarantee signals exclusivity and quality to consumers.

Key concepts

The websites use similar concepts and attributes to describe terroir qualities. Common concepts and phrases used to describe the environment were for example: *clean sea, beautiful scenery, good climate, rich fish grounds, biodiversity, and descriptions of space specific animal habitat.* Needless to say these attributes should be central in the

branding process for any terroir product. However, on the Internet each of these concepts alone can not enhance awareness of a terroir product. Using any of these concepts as a search word on an Internet search engine will give thousands, if not millions, of hits, and the specific terroir product will continue to live in obscurity in the Internet. Since terroir products are defined by their total package of attributes (Aurier et al 2005), promotion of terroir products on the Internet requires Internet spaces where consumers can read the whole terroir story, as well as finding external validation of this information. Consumers also need a virtual space where they expect to find such information.

Terroir Themes

One narrative theme was prominent in all of the cases examined, describing three forms of interdependencies or relationships: *people/man and the environment; culture and the environment; and production methods and the environment*. Descriptions of these relationships explain how each terroir product is developed over a long time in respectful interplay with the local environment. The terms sustainability, biodiversity, and animal welfare links the terroir product not only to local but also to global environmental concerns. The narratives presented on the web pages explain that the attitudes of the fishermen and other parties involved in the production processes are built on long traditions dating back to times when respect for man's dependency on nature was more acknowledged. The cultural and institutional capital of the terroir place is typically explained as the result of long traditions and close interdependency between man and nature. The Loch Fyne presentation of their farmed salmon is interesting because salmon farming is modern high-tech food production industry. To get around

this conflict with terroir associations the Loch Fyne story focuses on the role of the founders as *pioneers* in connecting principles for farmed salmon to local traditions, biodiversity, and sustainability. Much of the narrative content on the Loch Fyne website is framed to explain their attitudes and efforts to harmonise production methods with the wild fish habitat.

National and international accreditation

The content of the Internet presentation of the three cases gives a rich, interesting and appealing portrait of the terroir products. However, as individual websites the consumers must know of the products in advance in order to find them on the Internet. To connect to target consumer groups the three terroir brands are associated with different types of societies in the virtual space. Slow Food is an internationally fast growing consumer and producer movement anchored both in real life and in the virtual world. The Slow Food concept has become a symbol of the rural and natural as opposed to the life on the fast lane in the cities (Featherstone and Lash 1999). Slow Food and Slow Cities can be considered as brands of a lifestyle in harmony with nature and human needs. The Slow Food Presidia and membership in the Ark of Taste is an exclusive accreditation scheme for terroir food. The local Slow Food Convivia suggest local producers of terroir food to the Slow Food international headquarter in Italy, which approves the terroir product to be catalogued in the Ark of Taste. This procedure gives the Presidia both local integrity and an internationally standardised status. As a global Internet community, Slow Food connects terroir food products to target consumer groups on a global scale.

The EatScotland case is an important link on the VisitScotland website. National/regional tourist boards all over the world promote their country or region through this standard web address format: www.VisitCountry/Regionname.com. These national/regional tourist portals officially represent the country or regions, and local food producers can raise expectations of quality and authenticity by being referred to on such a portal. Being connected to the national tourist board portal raises expectations of quality and authenticity, and brings each individual producer in contact with the target audience on a global scale.

Loch Fyne Oysters is an individual website marketing the Loch Fyne brand. As such it requires knowledge and awareness of the brand name to find the Loch Fyne website. What makes Loch Fyne stand out on the Internet is the ability to document consistency of terroir values throughout their supply chain. By highlighting the names of suppliers such as Loch Duart and accreditation schemes such as Freedom Food, the Loch Fyne brand can leverage their brand equity both through increased credibility and increased awareness by appearing on these organisations' websites. The approval of organisations such as the RSPCA has the potential to increase the awareness of a brand globally since their agenda deals with one of the most prominent topics on animal welfare in the politics of food (Bjørkum 1999).

CONCLUSION AND MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

There is an increasing consumer demand for authentic, original food products, and the concept of terroir presents an opportunity for rural areas to capitalise on this opportunity by developing terroir brands for food products from their areas. The power of the Internet makes it much easier for rural areas to present themselves and their products to consumers all over the world. As this chapter aims to show, successful marketing of local, rural food products on the Internet can be linked to two factors: the development of a terroir brand, and being networked through information websites and portals and consumer communities.

Development of a terroir brand that emphasises the characteristics of an area can enhance the commercial appeal and competitiveness of local food products, but this is not enough in itself. As the case analysis in this chapter illustrates, similar rural areas in different countries can present similar images of themselves. The difference with genuine terroir products is that they have a credibility that comes from external sources. This credibility engenders trust in consumers, and this is one of the important resources required for the formation and development of knowledge. A major source of credibility can come from being associated with organisations that by nature confirm the claims made by the terroir product, for example this would be the Freedom Food scheme and the Slow Food movement. Seeking to build credibility through co-branding a terroir product with famous consumer community brands can reinforce the image and values of the core terroir brand. A terroir brand with credibility can offer a real opportunity for differentiation and value creation.

In order to reach a wider group of potential consumers, it is important for terroir products to establish a web presence (get connected) and to become networked. By having links and references in the right places on the Internet, terroir products can reach far more potential consumers, in much shorter time and most likely at a lower cost than traditional methods of marketing. They can also increase their credibility by being associated with websites and portals that can reinforce their core brand image. Moreover using links strategically companies can document consistency in terroir brand values along the value chain. Linking with other relevant websites and portals, and increasing the 'search-ability' of the terroir product's website, can also provide access to consumers that are more likely to be interested in the terroir product. In addition the power of 'word of mouse' should not be underestimated, as consumers share their information, knowledge and experience with other consumers who share similar interests. The Internet provides wide-ranging opportunities for terroir products to build, develop and reinforce brand knowledge amongst a global pool of consumers.

The concept of terroir brands and the networking potential offered by the Internet provide rural areas with the opportunity to develop new, high-value markets for local food products at a potentially much lower cost that traditional marketing methods. They can also empower local people in rural areas to create new, exciting marketing concepts that can bring additional income to these areas.

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DEFINITION OF INTERNET TERMS

The Internet represents the technological infrastructure that enables a worldwide, publicly accessible network of interconnected computer networks. The Web on the other hand is a global information space where users can both read and write information, and where text documents, images, multimedia and many other items of information are identified by short, unique, global identifiers so that each can be found, accessed and cross-referenced in the simplest possible way. The Web is available via the Internet technology, although in daily use the terms are frequently used interchangeably. For consistency and ease of use, this chapter uses the term 'Internet' when referring to both the Internet and the World Wide Web.

With regard to the terminology used to describe elements of the Internet, the following definitions are taken from the online version of the Oxford English Dictionary (http://www.askoxford.com/):

Portal – an Internet site providing a directory of links to other sites.

Website – a location connected to the Internet that maintains one or more web pages.

Web page – a hypertext document accessible via the Internet

Link – short form of hyperlink: a link from a hypertext document to another location, activated by clicking on a highlighted word or image

Search engine – a program for the retrieval of data, files, or documents from a database or network, especially the Internet

Table 1. Framework: Conceptual typology of real life, virtual and global, local spaces

	Real Life	*Virtual*
Global	**Ubiquitous**	**Networked**
Local	**Parochial**	**Connected**

Table2. Presentation of sample of websites

Virtual

Networked

Global - **Global consumer food community**:
Case I: The Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity websites
presenting three Norwegian Fish Presidia
  - **Consumer information and sales portals**
Case II: The www.VisitScotland.com Sea Food Trail website

Connected

Local

  - **Terroir food brand:**
Case III: The Scottish seafood company Loch Fyne Oysters Ltd. website