

## The Impact of Social Networks on Supply Chain Management: Case Studies of the Food, Fashion, and Cosmetics Industries

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**Abstract.** As the world has faced changes due to the pandemic and war in Ukraine, social networks are gaining growing importance in global supply chain management. In the article, the authors analyze the impact of social networks on global supply chains and identify the negative and positive factors of social media for supply chains. The conducted analysis of the literature, media, and social networks revealed dual effects of social media, such as the phenomenon of "cancel culture", and "boycott". However, it is worth noting that there were noticed to be more negative than positive effects on the business supply chain. First, the insufficient risk assessment of social networks can cause negative consequences for businesses, including damaged reputation, discontinued production and supply of a product or a brand, financial losses, fines, shareholder dissatisfaction, and other damages. Second, social networks not only provide opportunities to promote business products but also directly contribute to increasing brand and business success. Furthermore, the authors argue that there is an additional positive effect on public and social awareness. Although the paper analyzes various international companies and industries (food, fashion, cosmetics, etc.), this research can create some value for other industries as well.

**Keywords:** social networks; social media; "cancel culture," "boycott," supply chains; food, fashion, and cosmetics industries.

## **1. Introduction**

Over the past few decades, there have been significant changes in production, transportation, and logistics, as well as the integration of IT systems, free trade, increased social responsibility, and communication. These areas have witnessed fundamental changes within supply chains. Numerous companies have begun employing containers for transporting goods, industrial robots, and resource planning systems (ERP) for their daily business processes. Barcodes have become widely used in production, and new markets have emerged (Basu, 2023). Additionally, social networks are gaining growing importance in global supply chain management.

Although businesses are constantly faced with various internal and external changes and challenges, the aim is to define the impact of social networks on global supply chains. The objective is to identify the negative and positive factors of social media for supply chains.

On the one hand, the aim is to answer whether an insufficient risk assessment of social networks can cause negative consequences for businesses. For example, damaged reputation, discontinued production and supply of a product or a brand, financial losses, fines, shareholder dissatisfaction, and other damages. On the other hand, it aims to find out whether social networks not only provide opportunities to promote business products but also directly contribute to increasing brand and business success. Although the paper analyzes various international companies and industries (food, fashion, cosmetics, etc.), this research can create some value for other industries as well. The study also adds value to the field of enterprise risk management in general. In addition, the identified factors can also be useful for the cognitive process. Furthermore, searching for ways to reduce reputational and financial losses by identifying negative and positive consequences of social networks gives this work not only practical but also theoretical relevance. The results could be used in other academic works as an analysis of literature, media, and social networks was carried out in this research.

## **2. Literature review**

The world has faced unprecedented changes in the past few years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine. First, people have spent an exceptionally large amount of time at home during the pandemic. Therefore, social networks, social media, e-commerce, personalized shopping, and phenomena such as "cancel culture" have become even more popular. Although Kemp (2023) argues that the number of social network users grew accordingly, accounting for almost 60% of the world's population (4.8 billion active users), growth has slowed down compared to the previous period. According to Statista's 2023 data (Statista, 2023), Facebook remains the leader, with almost 3 billion active users worldwide. Next in line are YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, WeChat, and TikTok. Facebook also topped the ranking of the most visited social networking sites, followed by Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp, TikTok, and Reddit (Similarweb, 2023). The competition among the most popular social networks remains fierce, and it can be assumed that the rankings will change in the future.

Second, consumer behavior has changed: the share of people shopping using social networks has increased. According to Drenik (2021), 43% of consumers discovered new brands through social networks, of which 36% made purchases and 33% recommended brands to their family and relatives. This suggests that social networks have a strong and growing influence on consumer behavior. Furthermore, personalized, social shopping is gaining popularity. Drenik (2021) claims that it is driven by the "Shop Now" feature on social channels. Additionally, all major social networks already provide users with the option for such shopping. For example, Instagram created "Live Shopping," Facebook created "Marketplace"; while YouTube and TikTok partnered with Shopify (Becdach et al., 2022; Sheikh, 2022). According to Drenik (2021), the rise of social shopping was also influenced by personalized shopping, where goods and services are offered to the buyer based on information from previous purchases or reviews. Nevertheless, negative influences have also occurred. Kar et al. (2022) observed conflicting behavior of consumers in terms of spending (varied between ensuring financial

security and compensatory consumption), which was particularly relevant during the pandemic and at the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Due to the panic spread through social networks, there was an irrational mass purchase of toilet paper and other supplies in various countries. Social networks have had a dual effect on consumers (positive - increased convenience and accessibility, negative - panic and irrational buying).

Third, during the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, key supply chain processes, including production, inventory, warehousing, logistics, and information management, also experienced changes and disruptions (Hugos, 2018). Firstly, the cataclysms have shown how fragile global supply chains are. According to Norris William et al. (2020), several decades of globalization, digitization, and specialization have made supply chains international and increased their vulnerability. The once commonly used LEAN manufacturing, known for its efficiency, has become unsuitable for unpredictable and geographically extended supply chains. Browning and DeTreville (2023), from the Association for Supply Chain Management (ASCM), suggest turning to LEAN alternatives, buffers with inventory or capacity to help manage change and disruption, provide resilience, and improve performance in the supply chain. They also recommend the following alternatives: "Theory of Constraints," "Rapid Response Manufacturing," "Seru," etc. Modern business organizations should look for alternative practical approaches, be prepared, and discuss various scenarios, risks, and challenges in their management plans.

Fourth, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a lack of national resilience and a failure to fully assess and address risks (Dowse and Blackburn, 2020). It started with the inability to reorient quickly and ensure a smooth supply of medical resources. For instance, Disparte and Tillemann (2020) highlight specific examples such as the production and supply of protective face masks and respirators, disinfectant liquid, lung ventilators, and vaccines against the pandemic virus. The food supply chain and its availability have also faced challenges due to increased demand from vulnerable populations and disruptions in meat production caused by outbreaks at processing plants. Salik and Suleri (2020) state that quarantines and labor shortages have affected food production and distribution. Additionally, misinformation about food safety on social media and increased consumer hoarding have contributed to the scale of the problem.

Fifth, global cataclysms have highlighted the dependence of supply chains and consumers on one or more suppliers or manufacturers. A few authors, including Runde and Ramanujam (2020), acknowledge that the pandemic has disrupted various industries, including pharmaceuticals, consumer goods manufacturing, logistics, automotive, and electronics. As a result, countries are now looking to diversify supply chains. According to Hellyer (2020), the US is pursuing sourcing diversity, inventory growth, and domestic manufacturing expansion. Yoganathan (2020) recommends that companies strategically diversify their operations by creating multi-source supply chain networks in different regions. Kar et al. (2022) identified that supply chains had observed a "bullwhip effect" - a distortion of demand due to a higher volume of orders to suppliers than sales volume to buyers, which leads to an increase in inventory and storage space occupancy (CIPS, n.d.). This only confirms the assumption that it is important for business organizations to forecast the response to various cataclysms and geopolitical changes constantly.

Finally, smart supply chains of the future continue to be promoted. According to the Association for Supply Chain Management (ASCM, 2023), big data, advanced data analysis, business analytics, and automation enable organizations to effectively manage digital supply chains, increasing visibility, synchronized planning, and execution. It also enables data-driven decision-making, predictability, and increased profitability. As the ASCM states (ASCM, 2023), the supply chains of the future must be based on smart logistics and robotics powered by artificial intelligence and machine learning. This could contribute to the solution of contemporary problems: labor shortages, supply disruptions, and increased demand. It can be summarized that technological advancements are crucial for future-oriented

businesses and their supply chains.

### **3. Research methods**

In this work, cross-domain analysis was performed in the areas of social media and social networks to explore their impact on supply chain management. The authors conducted a detailed literature and media analysis on the following topics: social networks, social media, social commerce, scandals and controversies, misinformation, capricious opinions, boycotts, the social phenomenon as "cancel culture" and "buycotts," retail media networks, reputational and financial damage, political correctness, supply chain processes, and risks. The goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of these topics, especially how they have been affected or what impact they have caused since the pandemic outbreak.

Furthermore, real-life cases and examples related to the themes were searched and analyzed using literature and media reviews. The recent cases and examples were chosen by prioritizing international, well-known Western companies, with a primary focus on the food, fashion, and cosmetics industries. Subsequently, the authors assessed and categorized the applicability of social network factors in increasing the risks of real companies' supply chains. Such negative factors included: damaged reputation, decreased satisfaction of main stakeholders, discontinued product production and supply, financial losses, and fines from institutions. There was research on the positive cases as well, focusing on business success based on social network influence. The case studies utilized a variety of data sources, including literature, media, and social media analysis. Throughout the research, qualitative and quantitative information about the activities of companies, relevant performance indicators, and other data were collected, depending on the situation and context of the cases.

### **4. Analysis: The Influence of Social Networks on Supply Chains**

Despite the growing need for technological breakthroughs, automation, and modernization, social aspects are no less important for present and future supply chains. As businesses face an unstable external environment and various risks, social capital becomes an organization's unique competence. Social capital distinguishes the company in the context of changing IT technologies, innovation, and creativity, as well as knowledge management, enabling it to become a more flexible organization (Meidutė-Kavaliauskienė et al., 2021). In addition to technological breakthroughs and innovative supply chains, it is essential not to forget the influence of social networks. A few examples of the direct impact of social media on business supply chains will be discussed below.

First, the increased business orientation towards social network advertising and social commerce is shown by the significant increase in business expenses in this area. Global digital advertising has grown in popularity by nearly 80% over the past three years. The difference is significant - from 375 billion US dollars in 2019 to 667 billion in 2022. Social networks have become the main beneficiary of the increased advertising budget. This share increased from 26% in 2019 to 34% in 2022 (Kemp, 2023). Nevertheless, social media advertising has some fierce competitors, for example, retail media (Drenik, 2023). Despite the growing competition between different advertising tools (digital advertising on social networks and retail media), social media advertising has a direct impact on the investments of various companies' communication and marketing departments.

Second, the "cancel culture" has become popular over the past few years. This social media phenomenon has a direct impact on business reputation. According to Norris (2023), the main themes in Western cultures that most often provoke the manifestation of this phenomenon are racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, transphobia, homophobia, sexual harassment, and violence. It is also provoked by hatred or strong negative attitudes towards women and discrimination based on race, age, or gender. An inappropriate act (or inaction) of a well-known person or organization in relation to these topics can cause dissatisfaction, anger, and public condemnation of social network users, which can develop into forms of collective protest or boycott. According to Thomas (2020), social media platforms have provided various people with the opportunity to voice their opinions and demand change from

corporations. Companies may face pressure to change or be boycotted if they are perceived to promote harmful stereotypes or align themselves with controversial profits. According to Bouvier and Machin (2021), the "culture of cancellation" also manifests itself in the accused individual or organization becoming a kind of folk devil. Those advocating for social justice often employ jokes, memes, sarcasm, and irony toward the object of disgrace.

On the one hand, luxury brands have been encouraged to produce racially neutral and culturally appropriate clothing (Elan, 2020). According to BBC News (2019), "Gucci" pulled a woolen jumper because it was accused of portraying offensive and racist stereotypes. "Prada" did the same, removing certain items from the "Pradamalia" product line. In 2016, "Dolce & Gabbana" caused outrage by calling a shoe in its collection "slave sandals" (BBC News, 2019). Cartner-Morley (2022) claims that another luxury fashion brand have faced accusations of child exploitation – "Balenciaga" was forced to apologize for a controversial advertisement featuring children with sexualized teddy bears. According to Elan (2020), brands such as "Reformation" and "Urban Outfitters" have been criticized for their internal practices and insensitive clothing design as well.

On the other hand, although social media platforms allow the rapid dissemination of information, engagement in boycotts and social protests can be short-lived, according to Bouvier (2020). Clark (2020) argues that Twitter and YouTube allow groups that are typically marginalized to attract sympathizers and demand accountability from businesses and organizations. Sculos (2022) states that there is a growing movement against "cancel culture" in the entertainment industry. From these examples, it can be concluded that users of social networks carefully monitor the actions of various companies and demand specific changes. Mere apologies are no longer enough; manufacturers must remove the controversial products from production and sale and destroy any remnants in the warehouse. However, the attention and damage to a company's reputation can be short-lived because various other scandals constantly appear, attracting the attention of social network users, thereby rendering the previous problems irrelevant.

Third, there have been cases where brands or celebrities received a harsh response. The business sacrificed part of its profits and financial indicators for socially sensitive issues. For example, "Adidas" refused to work with the American rap artist and designer Kanye West after a decade of a financially successful partnership. This happened because of his repeated anti-Semitic comments, controversial statements in the social space, actions, and scandals. It is tentatively estimated that "Adidas" will lose about \$1.3 billion in revenue by abandoning the production of Kanye West's profitable "Yeezy" brand of clothing and shoes. Sales in the first quarter of 2023 have already decreased by about \$441 million. A first loss in three decades is possible for "Adidas." Additionally, "Adidas" faced accusations from shareholders for its inability to reduce financial losses and experienced a decline in stock prices (Cain, 2023; Husain, 2023; Valinsky, 2023).

Food manufacturers such as "Mars In" have also faced social media outrage. After criticism of racial stereotyping, "Mars" changed the brand of "Uncle Ben's Rice," modified the packaging image, and pledged to donate \$2 million in scholarships and invest \$2.5 million (Thomas, 2020; BBC News, 2020). Another food manufacturer, "Quaker Oats," faced similar challenges. In 2020, the US company announced that it would rebrand "Aunt Jemima" and donate \$5 million (BBC News, 2020a; Husain, 2023; Kowitt, 2021). In this way, the business, under the pressure of social network users, demonstrated that long-term strategic goals are more important to it than short-medium-term income and profit.

Fourth, there are cases where scandals and boycotts have been exaggerated, resulting in the opposite effect of increased demand and profits. The term "buycott," a play on words alluding to "boycott," has also been coined to describe such situations. While approximately half of US adults online claim they would boycott a brand due to unethical practices or mistreatment of employees, studies have found that the impact of "cancel culture" on brands is minimal, often overstated, and tends to affect individuals more than companies (Lentini, 2022).

A real-life example is the "Goya Foods brand." Some of the public called for a boycott of "Goya Foods," seeking alternative brands, and the hashtags "#BoycottGoya" and "#Goyaway" temporarily became popular. The reason behind this is that the CEO of this company, Robert Unanue, praised Donald Trump at the White House and referred to his leadership as a "blessing" for Latino and Hispanic Americans. Considering Trump's contentious relationship with the Latino and Hispanic communities, many users found the language unsettling. The boycott unexpectedly resulted in a surge in sales for "Goya Foods," and the company's CEO explained this by pointing to the decline of the restaurant business during the pandemic and other consumers speaking out against the boycott. The company managed to retain its existing customer base and attract new customers. While the protest did not significantly impact "Goya Foods" financial results, the incident emphasized the importance of considering political views when they differ from most of the customers. The CEO's comments may not be a major concern to most consumers, and their stance could change depending on the nature of the issue (Husain, 2023; Lentini, 2022; Sadler, 2021). Presumably, when one social group declared war on a particular brand, another social group mobilized to purchase and support the targeted business. The scandal could attract the attention of new users through hashtags, comments, or links to articles related to the controversy. In this case, the saying "bad publicity is still publicity" has a point.

Fifth, there is an important business competitive advantage - if a customer has a positive experience on social networks, the more likely the customer will return and even increase spending on this specific brand in the future (Drenik, 2021). An example of success is the "Nike" brand, which has 294 million Instagram followers and 36.6 million Facebook followers. It is said to effectively engage its audience by highlighting the achievements of athletes and diverse cultures and advocating for social issues (for example, social distancing during a pandemic, Black Lives Matter, and girls pursuing their dreams) (Brenner, 2023; Statista, 2023a). Meanwhile, "Fenty Beauty," founded in 2017 by singer and designer Rihanna, has set itself apart in the beauty industry by addressing the lack of diversity in the cosmetics market. Social media reactions were positive, with consumers happy about the brand's inclusive approach and increased representation (Beck, 2022). "Fenty Beauty" is also praised for promoting engagement, empowering women, and changing the mindset of the beauty industry. In 2023, the brand had 12.4 million followers on Instagram (Beck, 2022; Elan, 2020; Da Silveira, 2022).

Another cosmetics brand, "Rare Beauty," founded in 2019, has successfully used social media to build a more loyal following, amassing 5.7 million followers on Instagram alone. "Rare Beauty" prominently featured founder Selena Gomez, who is a well-known singer, actress, and public figure (Fleming, 2023). According to 2023, Selena Gomez was among the five most followed people in the world on Instagram (Statista, 2023a). International store chain "Sephora," which represents the previously mentioned "Rare Beauty" and "Fenty Beauty," among other cosmetic brands, has also successfully utilized digital transformation and is considered a market model for integrating physical and digital teams in the retail sector (Sayah et al. Musari, 2023). These success stories show how direct and indirect communication between buyers and businesses has increased - social networks have been used to better understand consumer needs and strategic decision-making (Drenik, 2021). The aforementioned brands and retail chains have achieved success by focusing on social networks and leveraging the positive reputation of their founders.

## **5. Conclusions**

Based on the analysis of literature, media, and social network sources and case studies, social networks have more negative than positive influence on individual products and brands created by businesses and supply chain processes in general. However, the effect is positive for the public and social awareness. The paper identifies five key aspects of how social networks influence supply chains:

1. Significantly increased business expenses and investments for advertising on social networks

can be considered neither a positive nor a negative effect but rather a consequence. It is likely that these costs will grow even more in the future, so it is recommended to analyze these social network advertising financing trends in future research as well.

2. The damage to business reputation caused by the phenomenon of "cancel culture" prevalent on social networks is singled out as a negative factor in the short term. The analyzed organizations were accused of racism, child abuse, and other inappropriate behavior, because of which the analyzed companies had to stop the production and sale of brands or individual products. However, it appears that the damage to the reputation was short-lived, as other scandals soon attracted the attention of social media users. This could become an object of future research - it would be possible to assess whether there are cases where the attention of users has remained consistent and has not changed in proportion to the elapsed time since the start of the scandal. Moreover, what lessons the companies have learned from these scandals, and how their behavior has changed?

3. There were identified negative effects on the financial situation, income, and profit of the business due to socially sensitive issues such as accusations of anti-Semitism and racism. The analyzed business organizations changed profitable product lines, and it is likely to suffer financial losses after stopping production. They also allocated or are in plans to allocate several million US dollars to social initiatives to improve its reputation. More detailed observations and advice on how companies can improve their reputation could be analyzed and then monitored in future studies to provide relevant insights.

4. There were also analyzed such controversial effects as "boycott" when scandals and protests on social networks had the opposite effect - they increased the demand for the company's products and profits. Similar and other unusual phenomena on social networks could also be relevant during further research.

5. Several positive cases were discussed where brands became popular, increased sales, and made strategic product development decisions. However, these brands took advantage of the owners' previous awareness and popularity on social networks. Since only a few cases were analyzed, future works could pay more attention to a broader discussion and the analysis of success cases. It would also be worth analyzing in the future whether the success cases mentioned in work encountered any new challenges of social networks that had a negative impact on their supply chains, as the environment is dynamic and constantly changing.

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