

**Research Poster from the**  
***Structure and Performance of Agriculture and Agri-Products***  
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***Enabling Research for a Competitive Agriculture***



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**Abstract SPAA-01**

**Exploring the Cultural Dimensions of how Online Social Media Networks Emerge to Bring Products to Market: the Case of the Ontario Goat Industry**

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This poster will showcase the preliminary findings of an ongoing study on the role of online social media networks in generating new products and markets in the goat industry. Online social media is reaching a groundswell as it pervades our technological landscape, from Twitter, Facebook, to online blogs there appears to be numerous online communities where consumers connect and express themselves, often sharing information about the products they consume. My interest begins with these online consumption communities and how they emerge and affect consumption patterns in the context of the Ontario goat industry.

As online communities transition to markets that were defined by traditional consumption, such as those related to food production and consumption, it becomes important to understand how it transitioned from how people relate to the objects of consumption to how people actually consume them. My motivation has been to study how cultural dynamics, such as identity, discourse, expression, and systems of meaning, within these online communities impact consumption, supply chains, and markets. Specifically: *How can online communities change conventions and consumption patterns of cultural product in new markets?* This research is related to a broader research question of interest, which asks the following: *In which of the many ways does social media and social networks significantly impact the Canadian agricultural industry?*

To date I have been engaged in this research program for over 1 year, drawing on the Ontario goat meat industry, and have collected online Twitter data from which I developed exploratory insights that suggest consumption is not about the meat but rather about the cultural dynamics the meat affords through online conversation.

Netnography as an adaptation of ethnographic methods was used to study an online goat consumption community. Precise coding revealed that the adoption of goat meat moved through phases – challenge, champion, crusade, conquers, and carnal - at the interface of the individual and community conversation.

This research contributes to the growing body of literature on social media and online communities and will help us understand how communities influence individual consumption. This treatment takes us beyond the individual to understand how communities affect what individuals do, how and what they consume, and why they consume.

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This research will help members of the Ontario goat meat industry understand how individual consumer perceptions evolve in this market, especially where online communities, and their conversations, have the potential to affect many producers.