



Developing a high-growth canvas for platforms

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Abstract

Multi-sided platform markets account for an important, large and fast-growing part of today's global economy. For matching and transaction platforms, growing fast to reach a critical mass is crucial for survival, as their value increases with the number of users. Nevertheless, achieving high growth has proved to be challenging: many platforms struggle and fail to rapidly grow their installed base.

Although research on platform growth already exists, high growth is not addressed in those studies. A stream of literature in which high growth is actually studied, focuses on high-growth firms. However, those studies are focused on firms in general and thus not specifically on platform businesses.

The lack of research on how platforms can achieve high growth provided a research opportunity. Based on an extensive literature review, several platform growth strategies and high-growth strategies were identified. By mapping those strategies on the business model canvas, a clear and structured theoretical framework was developed.

Based on this theoretical framework, multiple case studies have been conducted to investigate how matching and transaction platforms can innovate their business model to achieve high growth. Seven business representatives representing high-growth platforms, less fast-growing platforms and external experts, have been interviewed to investigate which platform growth strategies and high-growth strategies can help platforms in achieving high growth. In this way, the literature on platform growth and high-growth firms could be integrated to arrive at a set of platform high-growth strategies. In turn, this allowed to update the theoretical framework by eliminating, adjusting, combining or adding platform high-growth strategies, thereby creating a high-growth canvas for platforms.

This study revealed twenty-two strategies that are related to high-growth. Causality could be assumed for fifteen of those strategies, namely: building relationships; increasing brand awareness; HRM practices; automating business processes; possessing human capital; availability of financial capital; acquiring, analysing and using data; distinctive positioning; building trust; customer knowledge and customer loyalty; open to acquisitions; international orientation; ambition, drive and courage; availability of complements and platform envelopment. For the remaining seven strategies, it could not be concluded whether they contribute to achieving high growth, as causality could not be assumed. Besides, this research has revealed six strategies whose execution might partly explain the difference in growth between high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms.

The high-growth canvas for platforms that is developed in this study provides platforms, regardless of the growth phase they are in, with valuable insights and a useful tool from which they can benefit in their journey towards achieving and sustaining high growth.

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1. Glossary

Business model

Describes how an organisation creates, delivers and captures value (Osterwalder, 2004; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; Teece, 2010).

Business model canvas

A tool that can be used to describe, visualise, assess and change business models (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). The tool consists of nine building blocks (i.e. customer segments, value propositions, channels, customer relationships, key resources, key activities, key partnerships, revenue streams and cost structure) that cover a business' main areas (i.e. customers, offer, infrastructure and financial viability).

Business model innovation

Updating a business model by making changes in the nine building blocks of the business model canvas and/or by establishing innovative connections between them (Amit & Zott, 2012; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

Critical mass

A minimum amount of users that, if attracted, provides a market that is thick enough to enable sustainable future growth (D. S. Evans, 2009).

Chicken-and-egg problem

A platform needs users on one side to attract users on the other side and vice versa (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003; Eisenmann, Parker, & Van Alstyne, 2010).

High growth

A firm has achieved high growth if it realised an annual growth of at least 20 per cent over a three- or four-year period measured in turnover and/or employees

High-growth platform

A platform that has at least once been included in the list of 'Top 250 growth firms', the 'FD Gazellen Awards' and/or the German 'Deloitte Technology Fast 50 Award'.

Installed base

The number of users that are using a platform (Suarez, 2005).

Less fast-growing platform

A platform that has not (yet) been included in the list of 'Top 250 growth firms', the 'FD Gazellen Awards' and/or the German 'Deloitte Technology Fast 50 Award'.

Matching and transaction platform

Platforms that match different sides of a two- or multi-sided market and/or facilitate and coordinate transactions and interactions between those sides (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; D. S. Evans, 2003; D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2007; Gawer, 2009a; Hagiu & Wright, 2015; Rochet & Tirole, 2003; Rochet & Tirole, 2006; Rysman, 2009).

Network effects

The value of a platform depends on the number of actors using it (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; Clements & Ohashi, 2005; Economides, 1996; Katz & Shapiro, 1985; S. M. Lee, Kim, Noh, & Lee, 2010; Shapiro & Varian, 1999).

Sustained competitive advantage

A firm has a sustained competitive advantage if it pursues a value creating strategy that (potential) competitors are not implementing currently and when those (potential) competitors are unable to duplicate the benefits of this strategy (Barney, 1991).

2. Introduction

2.1 High-growth Firms and Platforms

2.1.1 High-growth firms

Over the past few years, both researchers and practitioners devoted more attention to high-growth firms (HGFs) (Arrighetti & Lasagni, 2013; Bilbao-Osorio & Rückert, 2018; Coad, Daunfeldt, Hözl, Johansson, & Nightingale, 2014; Goswami, Medvedev, & Olafsen, 2019; Hözl, 2016; Monteiro, 2019; Moreno & Casillas, 2007).

Although HGFs also have a positive effect on productivity, innovation and internationalisation (Anyadike-Danes, Bonner, Hart, & Mason, 2009; Hözl, 2016), the main factor that explains this increased interest in HGFs is the fact that HGFs contribute disproportionately to employment growth (Arrighetti & Lasagni, 2013; Coad, Daunfeldt, et al., 2014; Goswami et al., 2019; Henrekson & Johansson, 2010; Hözl, 2016). Even though HGFs often only represent a small part of all businesses, they are responsible for at least half of the employment change (Anyadike-Danes et al., 2009; Goswami et al., 2019; Henrekson & Johansson, 2010).

Although no single agreed-upon definition of HGFs exists, HGFs are considered to show exceptional growth expressed in terms of turnover and/or employees in a relatively short period of time (Birch, Haggerty, & Parsons, 1995; Eurostat, 2014; Eurostat & OECD, 2007; Hoffmann, 2011).

2.1.2 Platforms

Another topic for which interest has increased recently is the rise of the platform business model (P. C. Evans & Gawer, 2016). Nowadays, multi-sided platform markets represent an important, large and fast-growing part of the global economy (Eisenmann, Parker, & Van Alstyne, 2011; D. S. Evans, 2003).

In those two- or multi-sided markets, interactions between multiple groups of customers are coordinated by so-called matching and transaction platforms (from now on abbreviated to 'platforms') (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; D. S. Evans, 2003; D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2007; Hagiu & Wright, 2015; Rochet & Tirole, 2003; Rochet & Tirole, 2006; Rysman, 2009), which can be found in many industries (Gawer, 2009b; Hagiu, 2009). In case of two-sided markets, there is often a supply and a demand side, whereby the suppliers provide users with complements (Eisenmann et al., 2011).

Platforms can benefit from positive network externalities or a positive network effect (Eisenmann, Parker, & Van Alstyne, 2006; Rochet & Tirole, 2006), which means that the value of a platform increases with the number of actors using it (Katz & Shapiro, 1985). This explains why it is important for platforms to reach a critical mass, which is a minimum amount of users that if attracted, provides a market that is thick enough to enable sustainable future growth (D. S. Evans, 2009). Platforms that manage to attract a large user base are able to outcompete platforms that have not reached a critical mass yet and this causes many two-sided markets to be dominated by only a few large platforms or even a single platform leader (Eisenmann et al., 2006). Therefore, it can be stated that growing fast in order to reach a critical mass is crucial for platform start-ups in order to survive (Deloitte MCS Limited, 2014, November).

2.2 Problem Statement

However, growing fast to achieve this critical mass has proven to be difficult. This is illustrated by Van Alstyne, Parker and Choudary (2016, March 31), who state that “for every successful platform, there are many more that struggle or simply don’t make it”. Indeed, although some platforms are able to rapidly grow their installed base, most of them fail to achieve this (D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2010), which can be explained by the multi-sidedness of the markets they operate in. Becoming a viable business is the largest challenge for all start-ups, but is especially difficult for platform businesses, as they have to solve the chicken-and-egg problem (D. S. Evans, 2009), which means that a platform needs users on one side to attract users on the other side and vice versa (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003; Eisenmann et al., 2010). Where start-ups operating in one-sided markets only have to attract one group of customers, a platform start-up has to find a way to attract users on both sides in order to create and deliver value (D. S. Evans, 2009).

The fact that fast growth is important for platform businesses leads to the presumption that the literature on HGFs can be of help for platforms in their attempt to achieve a critical mass and might thus be useful in solving the start-up problem for platforms. Although platform growth is mainly focused on attracting a large number of users and not on increasing turnover or the number of employees, those two indicators used to classify HGFs can still be useful. As a larger number of users that are connected to the platform increases the amount of transactions and interactions that a platform coordinates, this is likely to result in an increase in turnover and the need to hire more employees to operate the platform. Furthermore, research has shown that HGFs are more likely to survive (Anyadike-Danes et al., 2009), which supports the presumption that the literature on HGFs might be valuable for platform businesses.

Although literature on platform growth already exists, a specific focus on high growth is lacking. Moreover, articles on HGFs are focused on high growth in general, thus not making a distinction between the traditional linear business model and the platform business model. With the linear business model, a firm receives inputs from an upstream supply chain actor, performs value-adding activities and passes on its outputs to a firm downstream in the supply chain (Normann & Ramírez, 1993; Van Alstyne, Parker, & Choudary, 2016). Therefore, value moves from left to right and costs are on the left side of the firm and revenues on the right side (Eisenmann et al., 2006). The platform business model is clearly different, as value is created by enabling and coordinating interactions between users (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Here, the focus is on co-creating value within the value-creating system in contrast to one supply chain actor creating value on its own (Normann & Ramírez, 1993). In this business model, there are user groups on two or more sides of the platform, which implies that costs and revenues are also present on both sides (Eisenmann et al., 2006). As those two business models clearly differ, the strategies that can lead to high growth are also expected to be different for those business models.

In short, there is literature on how platforms can grow and what the determinants of high growth are, but those topics have not yet been combined into literature on how platforms can achieve high growth. However, an integration of those two topics can be useful in solving the start-up problem for platforms. It would provide both researchers and practitioners with new insights about which strategies can be implemented by platforms in order to grow fast and thus to increase their likelihood of survival.

2.3 Research Question

The lack of research on how platforms can achieve high growth provides a research opportunity. This, together with a personal interest in the platform business model, resulted in the aim to try to fill the above-mentioned research gap. The goal of this research is therefore to come up with a theoretical model that clarifies which strategies platforms can use in order to successfully achieve high growth.

As has been stated before, growing fast is crucial for platform start-ups to survive (Deloitte MCS Limited, 2014, November). However, besides surviving, platforms have to deal with another fundamental aspect of doing business, namely building a sustainable competitive advantage and earning an above average profit (Teece, 2010).

A firm has a sustained competitive advantage if it pursues a value creating strategy that (potential) competitors are not implementing currently and when those (potential) competitors are unable to duplicate the benefits of this strategy (Barney, 1991). This definition shows that value creation is important for building a sustained competitive advantage. This is in line with Porter (1996), who argues that in order to outcompete rivals, a firm has to develop a competitive strategy, which means that a firm selects activities that are different compared to those of its competitors in order to "deliver a unique mix of value" (p. 64).

To ensure that the theoretical model that will be developed is clear and structured, thereby increasing its usefulness for both practitioners and researchers, it will be linked to the concept of business models and more specifically, business model innovation. As a sound business model is the foundation of every viable firm (Magretta, 2002) and since business model innovation is gaining popularity these days (Amit & Zott, 2012), those concepts are widely known, thus being a proper foundation for the theoretical model to be developed.

A business model describes how a business creates, delivers and captures value (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). In seeking to create new value, this business model can be innovated by making changes in the elements of a business model and/or by linking those elements in innovative ways (Amit & Zott, 2012; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Business model innovation allows a firm to compete differently (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010; R. G. McGrath, 2010; Teece, 2010) and can thereby help a firm both to grow (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010; Johnson, Christensen, & Kagermann, 2008) and to gain a competitive advantage (R. G. McGrath, 2010; Teece, 2010). Due to its contribution to growth and building a competitive advantage, it is likely that platforms innovate their business models as well in their growth path. Linking the high-growth strategies for platforms to the concept of business model innovation would therefore enable to build a bridge between two essential aspects for platforms, namely (1) fast growth and (2) building a sustained competitive advantage and generating profits that exceed the average.

Therefore, the strategies will be mapped on a business model canvas, which is a well-known tool to visualise, describe, evaluate and modify business models (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). This tool facilitates the process of business model innovation, as it provides a shared language. The use of this framework will result in a high-growth canvas for platforms, which is a clear overview of how platforms can use business model innovation (i.e. using the platform high-growth strategies and thereby making changes in the elements of a business model) to achieve high growth. This approach shows that those high-growth strategies for platforms can, besides being useful for achieving high growth, also help a platform to innovate their business model and thus to create a sustained competitive advantage.

As the way in which platforms can use business model innovation to achieve high growth will be studied, the following research question can be formulated:

How can matching and transaction platforms innovate their business model to achieve high growth?

In order to answer the research question, the following sub-questions can be formulated:

- i. *What is business model innovation?*
- ii. *What is a matching and transaction platform?*
- iii. *How can value be created and captured by matching and transaction platforms?*
- iv. *What is high growth?*
- v. *Which organisational strategies can contribute to platform growth or high growth and how can they be mapped on the business model canvas?*
- vi. *Which organisational strategies can help matching and transaction platforms to achieve high growth and how can they be mapped on the business model canvas?*

Theoretical background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Definitions and explanations of key concepts •Development of high-growth canvas for platforms
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Explanation of research strategy •Descriptions of case companies •Explanation of data collection and data analysis processes
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Descriptions of interview findings
Discussion and implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Interpretations of results based on theoretical model •Update of high-growth canvas for platforms •Theoretical and practical implications •Limitations and ideas for future research
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Answer to research question

Figure 1 Overview of research structure

A summarised overview of the structure of this research can be found in figure 1. The first five subquestions will be answered in chapter 3 by performing a literature review. This literature review will provide a detailed understanding of concepts that are of importance in this research, namely business model innovation, platform businesses and high growth. Furthermore, it will result in a set of organisational strategies that can contribute to platform growth or high growth. In turn, those organisational strategies will be mapped on a business model canvas to arrive at a theoretical framework which can guide the empirical research.

The theoretical framework will include organisational strategies that either contribute to platform growth or to high growth, thereby explaining how platforms can grow and how firms in general can achieve high growth according to the literature. This means that the theoretical framework is not explaining how platforms specifically can achieve high growth. In order to establish such an

overview that specifically applies to platform businesses, several case studies will be performed. Detailed information about this can be found in chapter 4 about the methodology. In short, several platforms, both those that achieved high growth and those that did not, and experts will be interviewed to investigate which organisational strategies can help platforms to achieve high growth. The insights and findings from the case studies will be presented in chapter 5. In chapter 6, those results will be discussed by interpreting them and by revising the mapping performed at the end of the literature review to arrive at a high-growth canvas tailored to platforms, which in turn will answer the last subquestion of this research. Finally, chapter 7 will include some concluding remarks.

To summarise, by answering the research question and the corresponding subquestions, a research gap will be closed by revealing how platforms, by undertaking particular strategies, can innovate their business model in order to achieve high growth.

3. Theoretical Background

In this section, the following subquestions will be answered:

- i. *What is business model innovation?*
- ii. *What is a matching and transaction platform?*
- iii. *How can value be created and captured by matching and transaction platforms?*
- iv. *What is high growth?*
- v. *Which organisational strategies can contribute to platform growth or high growth and how can they be mapped on the business model canvas?*

To answer the above-mentioned subquestions, the existing literature has been reviewed by using a narrative approach. This approach allows to give a fairly comprehensive overview of the relevant topics and allows to discover and include unforeseen relevant aspects (Bryman, 2012). To be more precise, the steps for doing a literature review as described by Frank and Hatak (2014) were used. However, some additional steps were added to the process. A complete overview of the steps taken can be found in appendix 10.1. Here, the literature review process will only be shortly described. Being guided by the above-mentioned subquestions, different key terms and data sources (article databases, books and search engine) were used to find articles. Those articles were screened for their usefulness and if they were considered useful, they were reviewed. Afterwards, the reference lists and citations of the relevant articles were used to find additional articles, thus making use of the snowballing technique (Wohlin, 2014). The articles that were found in the snowballing process were again screened and reviewed. In this way, it has been attempted to arrive at a complete set of platform growth strategies and high-growth strategies. However, due to the narrative approach taken, comprehensiveness of the set of strategies cannot be fully assured, thus being a limitation of this research. After multiple cycles of screening, reviewing and using reference lists, the results that were found in the articles were assembled, which resulted in a relatively comprehensive theory chapter.

The goal of this chapter is to get an understanding of the topics of interest and to create a research framework by mapping the organisational strategies that can help platforms to grow or that can be useful for firms to achieve high growth on a business model canvas. To guide the reader, this chapter is structured as follows.

The first three sections will provide information about the concepts that are important for this paper and will answer subquestions *i* to *iv*. In section 3.1, attention will be given to the business model, the business model canvas and business model innovation. Next, section 3.2 will focus on platform businesses, including a general definition of this new business model, a detailed explanation of network effects and information on how value can be created and captured within this business model. Section 3.3 will be devoted to high growth.

In section 3.4, the research framework for this research will be presented, which is essentially a business model canvas on which several organisational strategies that can contribute to platform growth and/or high growth are mapped. Those organisational strategies will thereafter be explained in detail and it will be explained why they belong to one or more of the business model canvas' building blocks.

3.1 Business Model Innovation

Hereunder, subquestion *i* will be answered. First, information about the business model in general will be given, including an explanation of the business model canvas, as this framework will be used to map the organisational growth strategies for the theoretical framework of this research. Secondly, it will be explained what business model innovation is and why it is important.

i. What is business model innovation?

3.1.1 Business model

Before being able to discuss the concept of business model innovation, it is important to understand what a business model actually is. The term business model has gained its popularity since the 1990s (Al-Debei & Avison, 2010; Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010; Ghaziani & Ventresca, 2005; Morris, Schindehutte, & Allen, 2005; Schafer, Smith, & Linder, 2005; Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2011). Despite the relevance of having a good business model, no agreed definition of business models seems to exist (Al-Debei & Avison, 2010; Chesbrough & Rosenbloom, 2002; Magretta, 2002; Morris et al., 2005; Schafer et al., 2005; Timmers, 1998; Zott et al., 2011).

According to Magretta (2002), business models explain how a firm works by presenting the activities involved in both making and selling a product.

Chesbrough and Rosenbloom (2002) argue that a business model fulfils several functions, namely: (1) express the value proposition, (2) identify a market segment, (3) describe the value chain's structure, (4) estimate the cost structure and profit potential, (5) describe a firm's position within its value network (potentially including suppliers, customers, competitors and complementors) and (6) define the competitive strategy.

Being the founder of a popular business model framework, Osterwalder (2004) states that a business model is a conceptual tool that explains the business logic (i.e. how it makes money) of a firm by showing the relationships between particular elements. It describes how value is created for (one or more) customer segments, how the architecture of a firm and its partners contribute to the creation, marketing and deliverance of this created value and relationship capital and how a firm can capture this value by the generation of revenue streams.

Other researchers suggested that "a business model is a concise representation of how an interrelated set of decision variables in the areas of venture strategy, architecture, and economics are addressed to create sustainable competitive advantage in defined markets" (Morris et al., 2005, p. 727).

In their attempt to define business models, Schafer, Smith and Linder (2005) have decomposed the term. They state that business is about creating value and capturing value and since a model represents reality, a business model shows how a firm creates and captures value. To be more precise, they define a business model as "a representation of a firm's underlying core logic and strategic choices for creating and capturing value within a value network" (p. 202)

Moreover, a business model can be defined as "four interlocking elements that, taken together, create and deliver value" (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 52). Those four elements are customer value proposition, profit formula, key resources and key processes, where the first two are about defining value and the last two about how this value will be delivered.

According to Teece (2010), a business model demonstrates how a firm creates value for its customers, how the firm delivers this value and how the firm captures part of this value. In order to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage, a differentiated, effective and efficient business model is of importance.

A business model can also be defined as referring to “the logic of the firm, the way it operates and how it creates value for its stakeholders” (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010, p. 196).

Finally, Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) state that “a business model describes the rationale of how an organisation creates, delivers, and captures value” (p. 14).

All definitions (implicitly) refer to the concept of value, with most of them referring to at least one of the following three aspects, namely value creation, value deliverance and/or value capture. Therefore, the definition proposed by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), which is quite similar to those of Osterwalder (2004) and Teece (2010), will from now on be used as the working definition. Thus, a business model is defined here as that it describes how an organisation creates, delivers and captures value (Osterwalder, 2004; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; Teece, 2010).

3.1.2 Business model canvas

A famous framework in the business model literature is the business model canvas. It has its origins in Alexander Osterwalder’s dissertation (2004), in which he comes up with a business model ontology. He identified four areas (i.e. product, customer interface, infrastructure management and financial aspects) that should be addressed by a business model and split them into nine building blocks, which will be described later, to provide more detail.

He wrote a blog about his approach and since 2006, companies from all around the world are using his ontology (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Ultimately, the book ‘Business model generation’ was published in 2010, which outlines an approach for designing or innovating business models. Specifically, this book elaborates upon the above-mentioned ontology developed by Osterwalder, which is now labelled as the business model canvas.

The business model canvas can be described as “a shared language for describing, visualizing, assessing, and changing business models” (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010, p. 12). By using the business model canvas, a business model can be conceptualised as consisting of nine blocks covering a business’ main areas (i.e. customers, offer, infrastructure and financial viability).

Although there are other canvases as well, the business model canvas of Osterwalder and Pigneur has been chosen for two reasons. Firstly, it is probably the most well-known canvas, which increases the chance that practitioners and scientists are already familiar with this tool. In turn, this makes it easier for them to understand and use the high-growth canvas for platforms that will be developed. Secondly, in their book ‘Business model generation’, Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) apply their business model canvases to multi-sided platforms, which supports the use of this specific canvas as the foundation for the high-growth canvas for platforms.

As this framework will be used to map the organisational strategies that can contribute to platform growth and/or high growth, it is important to have a proper understanding of this framework and therefore, the nine building blocks will be elaborated upon hereunder, according to how they have been defined by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010).

3.1.2.1 Customer segments

At the heart of the business model are the different groups, comprised of people or organisations, that are served by a company. Defining customer segments based on common characteristics can improve the extent to which customers can be satisfied. A well-thought decision should be made about which segments to serve or not, after which a company can create a business model using its knowledge about the needs of the customer segments it plans to serve.

3.1.2.2 Value propositions

Each specific customer segment requires a specific combination of products and/or services in order to get their need satisfied or problem solved. This specific combination of products and/or services is called a firm's value proposition and it describes the way in which value is created for specific customer segments. Often, the value proposition is what differentiates a firm from its competitors.

3.1.2.3 Channels

In order to actually serve its customer segments, a company should be able to deliver the value it has created (i.e. its value proposition). This can be done through several channels, consisting of communication, distribution and sales. Besides delivering the value proposition, those channels can also point customers attention towards the value proposition of a firm, enable customers to buy a company's products and/or services, assist customers in the evaluation of the value proposition of a firm and function as a mechanism for after-sales customer service.

3.1.2.4 Customer relationships

In order to acquire new customers, to retain existing customers or to increase sales, a firm establishes relationships with its different customer segments. Those relationships should be clear as they have a large effect on customers experience with the firm.

3.1.2.5 Key resources

In order to create value, deliver it to customers, manage relationships and generate revenue streams, a firm requires certain resources (and has to perform some key activities, as will be described in the next section). There are four categories of resources (i.e. financial, human, physical and intellectual) and they can be owned by the firm itself, acquired from its partners or leased.

3.1.2.6 Key activities

Besides the need of key resources, a firm should undertake particular activities to successfully execute its business model. Those activities fall into one of three categories, namely production, problem solving or platform/network.

3.1.2.7 Key partnerships

A firm does not operate in isolation, but is embedded in a network of partners and suppliers. Those partnerships are of essence in making its business model work, attracting resources and minimising risk. Four types of partnerships exist, namely: (1) strategic alliances (i.e. partnerships with non-competitors), (2) coopetition (i.e. strategic partnerships between competitors), (3) joint ventures and (4) buyer-supplier relationships.

3.1.2.8 Revenue streams

In exchange for offering its value proposition to the customer segments, a firm receives revenue streams. Each customer segment has its own revenue stream and each revenue stream might consist of different ways of pricing. Revenue streams can be one-time only or recurring.

3.1.2.9 Cost structure

Operating a business model comes at a cost, although some firms will be more cost-driven than others. Essentially, the cost structure of a firm is the result of all business model elements.

3.1.3 Business model innovation

3.1.3.1 Definition

More and more companies are innovating their business models (Amit & Zott, 2012). It has been argued that business model innovation is very important for a company (see section 3.1.3.2), but it is often a difficult process (Chesbrough, 2010). Before it can be explained why business model innovation is so important for companies, the concept should first be defined.

According to Gambardella and McGahan (2010), a firm that innovatively commercialises its assets is considered to be innovating its business model.

Amit and Zott (2012) argue that business model innovation is about changing the content (i.e. add new activities), structure (i.e. find new ways to link activities) and/or governance (i.e. change allocation of activities to parties) of a business model.

According to Girotra and Netessine (2014), a business model is a combination of decisions that together dictate how a firm generates money, incurs costs and deals with risks and therefore they consider business model innovation to be the alterations made to those decisions.

Business model innovation could also be defined as updating existing and obsolete business models in order to create value (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). This updating can be done by making changes in the nine building blocks of the business model canvas, but also by connecting the building blocks in innovative ways.

Although the exact definitions differ, they are quite similar in that they all explain business model innovation as changing a current business model in a novel way. Therefore, in this research, business model innovation will be defined as updating a business model by making changes in the nine building blocks of the business model canvas and/or by establishing innovative connections between them (Amit & Zott, 2012; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

3.1.3.2 Why business model innovation

Unless an innovation is commercialised via a business model, its value remains unrealised (Chesbrough, 2010). Some innovations can be commercialised via a company's current business model (Chesbrough, 2010) and it is advised that a company first investigates whether creating new products and/or services might be sufficient or better than business model innovation to outcompete the competition (Johnson et al., 2008). However, in other cases, an existing model might have to be altered or a new business model needs to be created in order to capture the innovation's value (Chesbrough, 2010).

In case a company's current business model is experiencing a crisis, business model innovation is likely to be required (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Furthermore, if a firm wants to launch new products, services or technologies, especially when they represent a radical innovation and have a challenging revenue stream (Teece, 2010), updating its current business model could be advisable (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Business model innovation might also be demanded by a changing environment (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). A business model might also be innovated to prevent competitors from replacing a firm's product or process innovations. This is because it is less easy for competitors to imitate a product or process accompanied by an innovative business model than it is for them to imitate a single innovative product or process (Amit & Zott, 2012). If a firm wants to create new opportunities in already existing markets (Amit & Zott, 2012), for example satisfying existing but unfulfilled needs and transforming, disrupting or improving the market (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), or develop entirely new markets (Amit & Zott, 2012; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), business model innovation can be a prerequisite. Furthermore, business model innovation is likely to be necessary if a firm wants to reinvent value besides only creating it (Normann & Ramírez, 1993). Finally, a company

might also perform exploration and testing of new, innovative business models in order to be prepared for the future which might require old business models being replaced (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

Having a good business model which is continuously being innovated allows a firm to be different (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010), to affect an entire industry (Johnson et al., 2008; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010) to increase profits (Chesbrough, 2010), to increase its performance (Amit & Zott, 2012; Zott & Amit, 2007), to create a competitive advantage (R. G. McGrath, 2010; Teece, 2010) and ultimately, to grow (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010; Johnson et al., 2008).

Because of its contribution to growth, it is likely that platforms also undertake business model innovation in their growth path. In this research, the business model canvas in combination with the business model innovation definition that was presented in section 3.1.3.1 is considered to be suitable as a theoretical framework for analysing the strategies used by platforms in order to grow in a structured way, since it is extensive and clear at the same time. In this way, it can be analysed how business model innovations can help platforms in achieving high growth.

However, it is important to emphasise that business model innovation is only one of the ways that firms can use in order to grow. As has been shortly mentioned at the beginning of this section, a company can also come up with new products without innovating their business model and still outcompete its rivals (Johnson et al., 2008).

Additionally, although business model innovation can help firms to grow, it does not always lead to growth. Innovating a business model is a difficult process which includes many barriers (Chesbrough, 2010). Organisational processes have to change and internal managers have to be appointed that are in charge of the change. Furthermore, the new business model needs to be incorporated in the company's culture, which requires a right attitude to change. Without the presence of those prerequisites, business model innovation will not result in growth and ultimately higher profits.

Finally, it needs to be stated that business model innovation can be used for other purposes as well. Firms that are facing declining competitiveness might innovate their business model as a protection mechanism against this threat (Lindgardt & Ayers, 2014).

3.2 Platforms

In this part, subquestions *ii* and *iii* will be answered. Furthermore, information about network effects will be given, as those often play a role in which organisational strategies are considered by platforms and in how those strategies work out.

- ii. What is a matching and transaction platform?*
- iii. How can value be created and captured by matching and transaction platforms?*

3.2.1 Definition

In the introduction of this research, the concept of matching and transaction platforms has already been briefly touched upon and has been described as businesses that operate in two- or multi-sided markets in which they coordinate interactions between the multiple groups of customers (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; D. S. Evans, 2003; D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2007; Hagiu & Wright, 2015; Rochet & Tirole, 2003; Rochet & Tirole, 2006; Rysman, 2009). This definition is focused on one specific platform type. However, there are multiple types of platforms and multiple typologies of platforms exist (D. S. Evans, 2003; P. C. Evans & Gawer, 2016; Gawer, 2009a).

3.2.1.1 Platform typology of Evans (2003)

Evans (2003) came up with three categories to classify multi-sided platforms, namely: (1) market-makers; (2) audience-makers; and (3) demand coordinators.

Market-makers facilitate transactions between different customer groups. Those platforms are subject to network effects, since their value for customers of one group increases with the number of customers in the other group. This is due to the fact that this increases the chance of finding a transaction partner, while the transaction costs involved in the searching process are reduced. Dating services, shopping malls and exchanges belong to this category.

Secondly, audience-makers create linkages between advertisers and audiences. Examples of audience-makers are newspapers, magazines and television.

Finally, demand-coordinators create products and services which generate indirect network effects between multiple customer groups. This category includes platforms which do not fulfil the requirements of either facilitating transactions or matching advertisers and audiences. Software platforms fall into this category.

3.2.1.2 Platform typology of Gawer (2009a)

Gawer (2009a) constructed a typology of platforms, which consists of four types: (1) internal platforms, (2) supply chain platforms, (3) industry platforms and (4) multi-sided markets or platforms.

Internal platforms are product platforms within firms. Those platforms are components (some authors claim they include additional assets such as processes, knowledge, people and relationships (Krishnan & Gupta, 2001; Robertson & Ulrich, 1998)) that can be used to create new products or new features (Gawer & Cusumano, 2014; M. E. McGrath, 1995) and are thus shared by many products (Robertson & Ulrich, 1998). By adding, removing, replacing or altering features, internal platforms make it easier to meet various customer needs (Wheelwright & Clark, 2003). Objectives of those platforms are to improve the productive efficiency of the firm, to produce larger product variety at lower costs, to achieve mass customisation and to enable flexibility in new product design (Gawer, 2009a).

Supply chain platforms have a lot in common with internal platforms, but now different supply chain actors, instead of only one firm, are designing and manufacturing the components of the final product or features (Gawer, 2009a). The objectives of such platforms are the same as those of internal platforms, but now the goal is to improve the productive efficiency of the supply chain instead of that of only one firm.

Industry platforms are goods, services or technologies that serve as a foundation that can be used by other firms to develop complementary goods, services or technologies (Gawer, 2009a). Those industry platforms can be created by a single firm, but also by multiple firms. The firms that create the complements do not have to transact with each other, do not have to be supply chain partners and do not have to share cross-ownership, all those factors distinguishing them from supply chain platforms. The objective of the platform owner is to stimulate the development of complements and to extract value from it. Complementors want to benefit from the user base of the platform and from network effects.

Multi-sided markets or platforms act as intermediaries that facilitate transactions, for example in an exchange or trade (Gawer, 2009a). Their goal is thus to match different sides of the market and facilitate transactions between those sides.

3.2.1.3 Platform typology of Evans and Gawer (2016)

Evans and Gawer (2016) divide platforms into four types: (1) transaction platforms, (2) innovation platforms, (3) integrated platforms and (4) investment platforms.

Transaction platforms are intermediaries that enable and coordinate interactions or transactions between different customer groups. Uber, which mediates between travellers and providers of passenger transport, is an example of this platform category.

Innovation platforms are a foundation that can be used by other companies for developing complementary innovations. Microsoft Windows is an example of this (Gawer, 2009b).

Integrated platforms are a combination of above-mentioned types of platforms. A famous example of such a platform is Apple, since its App Store functions as a matching service, while its third-party developer ecosystem enables third parties to develop new and innovative content on the platform.

Finally, investment platforms are comprised of companies that have created a platform portfolio strategy and which operate as active platform investors, holding companies or both. The Priceline Group, which includes platforms like Booking.com and rentalcars.com, is an example of such a platform.

3.2.1.4 Platform typology and definition for this study

By combining those typologies, four different platform types can be distinguished. The first type consists of the platforms that match different sides of a market and/or facilitate interactions and transactions between them. This is the type of platform that has been defined in the introduction and that will be focused on in this research. Although this type of platform can be referred to as 'matching and transaction platforms', it will be simply abbreviated to 'platform' for this research. Furthermore, 'innovation platforms' which serve as a foundation upon which complementary innovations can be developed, form the second platform category. Next, 'product platforms' are components that can be designed and combined either by a single firm or by multiple firms to create new products or features and which are thus shared by multiple products form another platform category. The final platform type consists of 'investment platforms', which consist of active platform investors and holding companies that have developed a platform portfolio strategy.

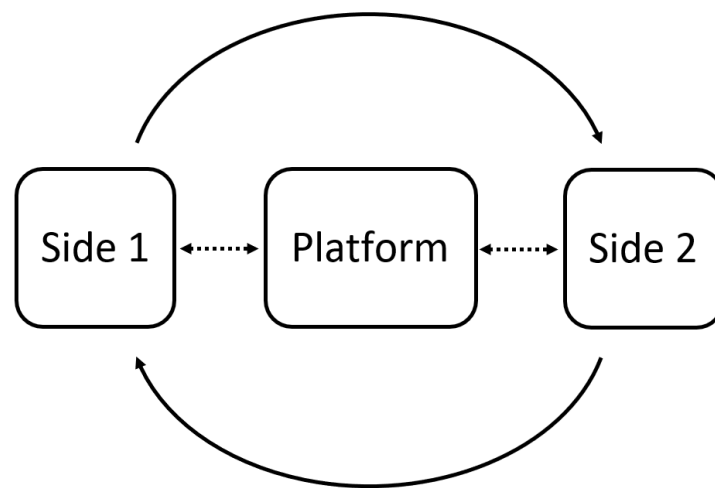


Figure 2 Visual representation of (two-sided) matching and transaction platform. The dashed arrows represent the information and communication flows used by platforms to match both sides and to facilitate and coordinate interactions and transactions between them, while the solid arrows represent the actual interactions and transactions between the two sides.

Figure 2 is a visual representation of matching and transaction platforms, which are thus the focus of this research. In short, matching and transaction platforms match different sides of a two- or multi-sided market and/or facilitate and coordinate transactions and interactions between those sides. In the case of matching and transaction platforms, customer groups can benefit from using this platform, since it reduces the transaction costs that are involved in finding and interacting with each other (D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2007). In order to attract as many customers as possible from both customer groups while also making a profit, platforms try to find the optimal pricing structure and pricing level (Rochet & Tirole, 2003; Rochet & Tirole, 2006). In contrast to the traditional linear value chains, where the value moves from left to right with costs being to the left of the company and revenues to the right, this is not the case in two-sided markets. In those markets, platforms have different customer groups on each side, thus having costs and revenues both to the left and the right side (Eisenmann et al., 2006).

3.2.2 Network effects

The two- or multi-sided markets in which platforms operate are sometimes also referred to as platform-mediated networks (McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017) as the interactions facilitated by those platforms are subject to network effects (Eisenmann et al., 2006, 2011; D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2007; Parker & Van Alstyne, 2005; Rochet & Tirole, 2003; Rysman, 2009).

As has already been shortly explained in the introduction, this means that the value of a platform depends on the number of actors using it (e.g. its installed base) (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; Clements & Ohashi, 2005; Economides, 1996; Katz & Shapiro, 1985; S. M. Lee et al., 2010; Shapiro & Varian, 1999). Oftentimes, a network effect is positive, which means that the platform's value increases with the number of users (Eisenmann et al., 2006; Katz & Shapiro, 1985; Katz & Shapiro, 1986; Shankar & Bayus, 2003; Shapiro & Varian, 1999). However, it can also be that its value decreases the larger the installed base, giving rise to a negative network effect (Eisenmann et al., 2006; Shapiro & Varian, 1999).

Due to the fact that in platform-mediated networks, a small advantage may lead to a larger future advantage, network effects intensify competition between platforms, at least until one platform dominates the market (Clements & Ohashi, 2005; Katz & Shapiro, 1994). Especially in the case of strong and positive network effects, users will converge on only a few platforms (Eisenmann et al., 2011) and this may result in a so-called 'winner-take-all' (WTA) outcome, which means that the platform with the largest installed base will dominate the market (Eisenmann et al., 2006; Rysman, 2009; Shapiro & Varian, 1999). This suggests that rapidly growing their installed base could assist platforms in winning the battle (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013) as this factor mainly influences their network value, which in

turn has a positive effect on their performance (Fuentelsaz, Garrido, & Maicas, 2012): customers are willing to pay more for access to a larger number of users, which improves margins and results in increasing returns to scale (Eisenmann et al., 2006; Shankar & Bayus, 2003). Positive feedback loops will help a platform to increase its installed base (Armstrong & Wright, 2007; Eisenmann et al., 2011; P. C. Evans & Gawer, 2016; Shapiro & Varian, 1999). This means that a platform's current growth is likely to cause further growth, since attracting more users on side A will attract more users on side B, which in turn attracts more users on side A (Armstrong & Wright, 2007).

However, such a WTA outcome does not imply that challengers cannot gain a foothold, but it does raise the bar for those late movers (Shankar & Bayus, 2003). To win market share, new entrants generally have to come up with radical innovations (Eisenmann et al., 2011). In turn, this often causes platform markets to evolve through multiple WTA battles in which a current platform is being replaced by a new platform offering revolutionary functionality (D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2001).

As has been mentioned earlier, network effects can be either positive or negative. Furthermore, a distinction can be made between direct and indirect network effects. Those different types of network effects will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

3.2.2.1 Direct Network Effects

When the value of a platform is affected by the number of users on the same side, this is called a direct or a same-side network effect (P. C. Evans & Gawer, 2016; Katz & Shapiro, 1985; McIntyre & Subramaniam, 2009; Shankar & Bayus, 2003; Shapiro & Varian, 1999).

Usually, those direct network effects are positive, meaning that a platform's value increases the more users there are on one side (Shapiro & Varian, 1999). For example, video gamers may prefer a platform with many gamers, since this allows them to play games with them (Eisenmann et al., 2006).

However, negative direct network effects also exist (Shapiro & Varian, 1999) and they are often caused by people's desire to be different or by congestion (D. S. Evans, 2009). For example, the more people that want to use Uber's driving service at the same time in the same city, the higher the price and/or the longer the time they have to wait. Another well-known example of a negative direct network effect would be sellers that want to have less competitors in a B2B exchange (Eisenmann et al., 2006). In this case, the value of the platform becomes less as the number of competitors that joins the platform increases.

3.2.2.2 Indirect Network Effects

Indirect or cross-side network effects occur when the value of a platform is affected by the availability of complements (Clements & Ohashi, 2005; D. S. Evans, 2009; Shapiro & Varian, 1999) and/or number of users on the other side (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003; Eisenmann et al., 2006; D. S. Evans, 2009; D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2007). Generally, the larger the number of users connected to a particular platform, the larger the number of complementors that will be attracted to that platform due to high selling expectations, which in turn increases the platform's value for the user side (Boudreau & Jeppesen, 2014; Katz & Shapiro, 1985; Sheremata, 2004). In other words, having more users on side A attracts more users on side B and vice versa (P. C. Evans & Gawer, 2016) since the platform's value to side A depends on the number of users on side B and vice versa (Casey & Töyli, 2012). This means that the platform's value to side A indirectly depends on the number of users on that same side (Hagiu & Wright, 2015). Those indirect network effects are the cause for the so-called "chicken-and-egg" problem: if a platform wants to attract users on side A, it needs a large number of users on side B and the other way around (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003; Eisenmann et al., 2010).

As was the case for direct network effects, indirect network effects can also be either positive or negative (D. S. Evans, 2009). An example of a positive indirect network effect related to the availability of complements occurs in the video game market. Video game users prefer to use a console

for which a large amount of video games exist (D. S. Evans, 2009). Moreover, the game developers want to work with a platform that has connections with users that actually want to buy their games.

Dating sites exhibit positive network effects based on the number of users on the other side of the platform. For a heterosexual man, a dating site with a large number of female users would be more valuable than one with only a few female users.

Having more users on the other side can also result in negative indirect network effects. This is often the case for platforms of the audience-maker type, also called advertising-supported media (Eisenmann et al., 2006). TV viewers for example would like to prefer fewer advertisements, so the value of a platform decreases if the number of advertisers increases (Eisenmann et al., 2006).

3.2.3 Value creation and value capture

The goal of this research is to investigate how platforms can innovate their business model to achieve high growth. As a platform's business model explains how it creates, delivers and captures value (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), it is important to understand how value is created, delivered and captured by platforms in order to investigate strategies that can be used to achieve high growth. This section will focus on the way in which value is created by platforms, as the strategies that platforms can use to achieve high growth will be affected by this. Furthermore, this section will describe how platforms can capture value, as this is of importance in understanding how platforms can actually grow by using the strategies that will be described in sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2. In those sections, it will also be explained how those strategies are related to value creation and/or value capture.

3.2.3.1 Value creation

In this section, it will be described how platforms can create value. In figure 3, it can be seen that two studies that have been conducted in this field are considered to be valuable for this research.

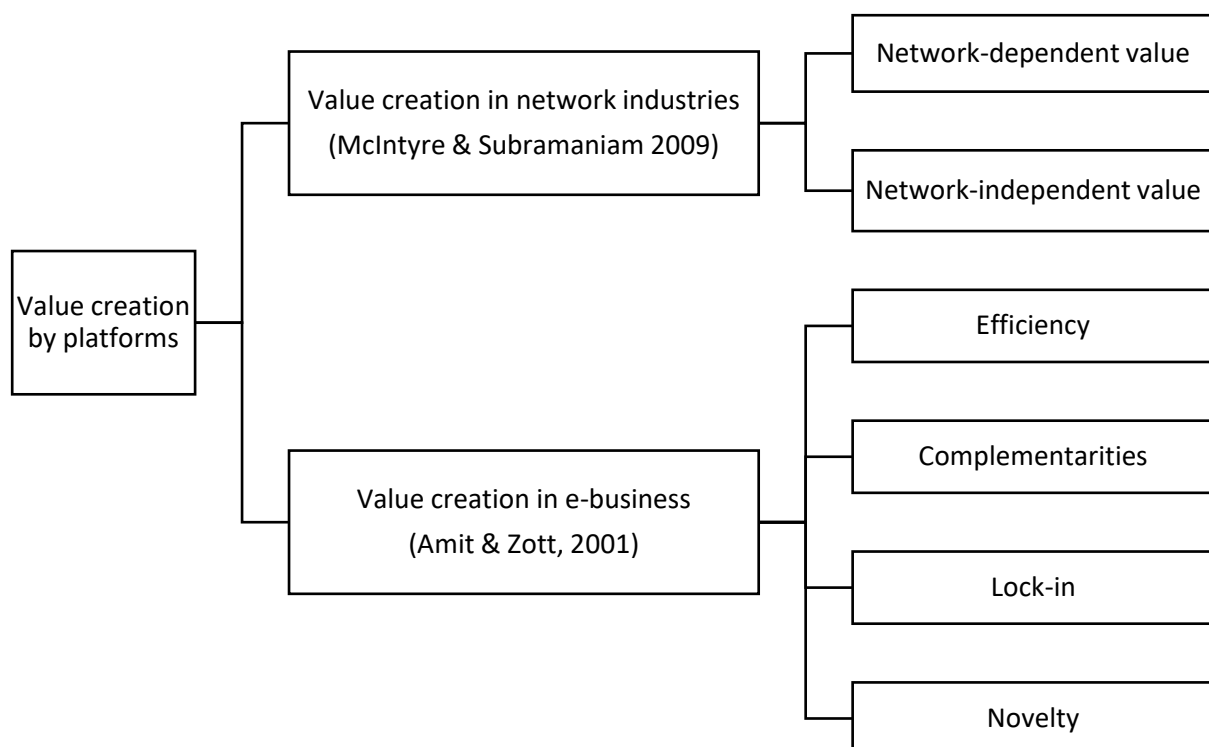


Figure 3 Overview of elements that can contribute to value creation by platforms, based on studies of McIntyre and Subramaniam (2009) and Amit and Zott (2001)

Firstly, McIntyre and Subramaniam (2009) investigated how value can be created in network industries. They identified two aspects that determine a product's value, namely network-dependent and network-independent value. Secondly, Amit and Zott (2001) discovered four elements that are of importance for e-business to create value, namely efficiency, complementarities, lock-in and novelty. Since platforms are both operating in network industries and are conducting business over the Internet, the insights provided by those two studies will apply to platform businesses. Hereunder, both value creation in network industries and value creation in e-business will be elaborated upon.

Value creation in network industries

According to McIntyre and Subramaniam (2009), two product (and thus platform) aspects determine the value derived from it by users. Those aspects could be defined as network-dependent and network-independent value.

Network-dependent value

As described in the previous section, platforms are subject to network effects, and their value is thus partly determined by the number of actors using the platform. Therefore, each platform has some degree of network-dependent value, or simply network value attached to it. Direct network value is being derived from the installed base, while the availability of complements influences indirect network value. Here, it is important to note that network value stems from both the size of the network as well as from the strength of the network effects (i.e. network intensity) present in this network (McIntyre & Subramaniam, 2009).

Network-independent value

Besides, platforms might also have some network-independent value which is derived from its intrinsic features and attributes. Whether or not a platform has a (large) installed base, this network-independent value always remains (McIntyre & Subramaniam, 2009). A platform's network-independent value can be expressed in terms of five characteristics, namely the attributes of innovations as described by Rogers (1962). Those characteristics can describe innovations and explain their rate of adoption. Therefore, it is assumed that platforms that score well on those attributes are creating more network-independent value. The five characteristics as described by Rogers are: relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability.

Relative advantage is "the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being better than the idea it supersedes." (Rogers, 1962, p. 213). If a platform outperforms its rivals or matches their performance at lower cost, this means that it is considered to create more value (Maine & Garnsey, 2006).

Compatibility is "the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters." (Rogers, 1962, p. 223). This means that if a platform is able to make the process of interacting and transacting between users easier, cheaper and more transparent (Fijneman, Kuperus, & Pasman, 2018) without requiring too many investments to establish a connection, it will be considered compatible.

Complexity is "the degree to which an innovation is perceived as relatively difficult to understand and use." (Rogers, 1962, p. 230). This means that if there are two substitutable platforms, the one which perceived ease of use is higher is most likely to be used (Davis, 1989).

Trialability is "the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis." (Rogers, 1962, p. 231). For a platform to be triable, potential users should be able to easily try it out during a trial period with the possibility to stop using it if it does not fulfil their expectations.

Finally, observability is "the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others" (Rogers, 1962, p. 232). A platform should be able to come up with a clear overview of the benefits it

offers, not only compared to competitors but also compared to the situation in which potential users do not use a platform. If the advantages of a particular platform are clear to potential users, this will increase their likelihood of adapting it.

Although platform value thus depends on both network value and network-independent value, it differs per platform how much value is accounted for dependent on the network and independent of the network. For example, the value of an auction platform such as Catawiki will mainly be network dependent and there will not be much value attached to it if there are no participants. However, a video game console such as PlayStation has both network value (e.g. playing games with your friends online) and network-independent value (e.g. playing games on your own) attached to it.

In some situations, network value might even exceed network-independent value and this can prevent new entrants having a platform with superior intrinsic features from gaining an installed base. This means that in some markets, platforms with inferior intrinsic attributes will dominate simply because of network dynamics. A famous example of a product that has become dominant despite its inferiority is the QWERTY keyboard. Due to so-called bandwagon effects, in which users tend to mirror other's actions (Leibenstein, 1950), this product was adapted because of its network value, although the Dvorak Simplified Keyboard had superior network-independent value (David, 1985; Fuentelsaz et al., 2012). Thus, its large installed base prevented another superior technology from becoming adopted (McIntyre & Subramaniam, 2009) and resulted in the market being locked into the inferior QWERTY standard.

Value creation in e-business

In their study on how value is created in e-business, Amit and Zott (2001) find that the way in which those businesses facilitate transactions and exchanges is a source of value creation. More specifically, four dimensions determine an e-business model's potential for value creation, which are: efficiency, complementarities, lock-in and novelty. They consider value creation to be the total amount of value captured in a transaction. This thus includes the value captured by all parties involved, which is in line with the definition of Brandenburger and Stuart (1996).

Efficiency

An important source of value creation for e-business is transaction efficiency, as having lower costs per transaction increases value. There are several ways in which an e-business can improve its transaction efficiency. Firstly, an e-business should focus on providing information that is up-to-date and inclusive (Amit & Zott, 2001) to reduce information asymmetries, decrease costs related to search and bargaining (Lucking-Reiley & Spulber, 2001) and reduce opportunistic behaviour (Williamson, 1975). Furthermore, e-businesses can create value by contributing to rapid and informed decision-making due to high interconnectivity (Amit & Zott, 2001). Other benefits that can be derived from e-businesses are economies of scale, faster processing of transactions and order fulfilment and a wider selection range at lower cost (Amit & Zott, 2001).

Complementarities

If the total value of separate goods is lower when compared to having them as a bundle, they are called to be complement. In turn, those complementarities are a value driver as they can increase turnover. Complements can be offered in several ways: a bundle of products and services where complementarities are present can be offered, online assets can be complemented by offline assets and complementarities between activities and technologies can be leveraged (Amit & Zott, 2001).

Lock-in

If customers repeatedly transact via an e-business and if partners of this firm are continuously improving their associations, this can contribute to value creation. Those factors can be achieved by locking in customers and partners by preventing them to transact with competitors. Customers and strategic partners can become locked in due to switching costs, which appear when a user experiences costs when switching from one e-business to a competitor (Klemperer, 1995; Shapiro & Varian, 1999). Those switching costs can be increased by putting loyalty programs in place, creating dominant designs, building trust to increase customer loyalty and giving customers the opportunity for customisation.

As e-businesses oftentimes establish connections between a lot of actors, they are in fact creating networks, thus being subject to network effects. If positive network effects are strong, this creates value for customers and complementors and reduces the chance that they will switch to a competitor.

Although Amit and Zott (2001) thus suggest that the lock in of customers can contribute to value creation, other researchers raised the question whether high switching costs positively contribute to sustainable competitive advantage (Gómez & Maícas, 2011). They argue that it can have a negative effect on user's expectations, who might be anxious that the platform will misuse their power to increase their prices (Farrell & Klemperer, 2007). Furthermore, they mention that it is unlikely that potential users, being influenced by word-of-mouth of existing customers (Rogers, 1962), will choose a platform with high switching costs due to bad image or reputation (Katz & Shapiro, 1994).

Novelty

Previous research has indicated that innovations can lead to value creation (Schumpeter, 1934). Multiple ways exist in which e-businesses innovate, namely: changing ways in which transactions are taking place, fulfilling unserved customer needs, creating new markets, connecting actors that were not connected, creating an innovative bundle of complements and working together with third parties to attract new participants (Amit & Zott, 2001).

3.2.3.3 Value capture

The extent to which a platform can capture value is likely to depend on the total value it has created and on its bargaining position (Zott & Amit, 2007) and is described by a firm's revenue model (Amit & Zott, 2001, 2012).

There are several ways in which platforms can generate revenue streams. Firstly, platforms charge their users for interacting and transacting via the platform. This charge can consist of a subscription fee and/or transaction fees (Rochet & Tirole, 2006). Furthermore, complementors might have to pay licensing and royalty fees to the platform (Clements & Ohashi, 2005). Besides, users can be charged for being granted with exclusive access (Armstrong, 2006).

In the section on platform growth strategies, part 3.4.1.8 includes a platform's pricing strategy, thus providing more information about potential revenue models a platform can use.

3.3 High Growth

By defining high growth according to the literature, subquestion *iv* will be answered in the following section:

iv. What is high growth?

3.3.1 Definition

As has been stated in the introduction, multiple definitions of HGFs exist: some are absolute while others are formulated in relative terms (Goswami et al., 2019), and concepts such as HGFs and gazelles are sometimes used interchangeably.

However, both in science and practice, the definition of HGFs as described in the Eurostat-OECD Manual on Business Demography Statistics (Eurostat & OECD, 2007), is commonly used. According to this manual, “all enterprises with average annualised growth greater than 20% per annum, over a three year period should be considered as high-growth enterprises.” (Eurostat & OECD, 2007, p. 61) This growth can be measured by turnover or by the number of employees, with a threshold of having more than 10 employees at the start of the observation period.¹ Besides, growth due to mergers and take-overs should not be taken into account, thus only looking at organic growth.

Hoffmann (2011) defines HGFs as firms whose growth rate is at least 20 per cent per year and with a growth rate that is higher than 60 per cent over a three-year period, where growth can either be expressed in turnover or employment.

In a study using data from the UK Innovation Survey (Coad, Cowling, et al., 2014), firms that were included in the top 5 per cent of firms in terms of sales and employment growth over a four-year period were defined as HGFs.

Being one of the first authors putting emphasis on the importance of rapidly growing firms, David Birch came up with the term gazelles to describe rapidly growing firms (Landström, 2012). He defined a gazelle as a firm which is up to five years old, which revenue grow by at least 20 per cent each year during a four-year period and which revenue was at least \$100,000 (approximately \$250,000 today) in its base year (Birch et al., 1995; Goswami et al., 2019).

Furthermore, gazelles are defined as a subset of high-growth enterprises in the Eurostat-OECD Manual on Business Demography Statistics. According to this definition, gazelles are “all enterprises up to 5 years old with average annualised growth greater than 20 per cent per annum, over a three year period” (Eurostat & OECD, 2007, p. 63), again using the threshold of a minimum of 10 employees at the beginning of the observation period.

To summarise, multiple definitions for the concept of HGFs and gazelles exist. Although the exact definitions differ, they all have in common that they define HGFs or gazelles as firms which realise exceptional growth, either measured in turnover and/or employees, in a short time period. By combining the most frequently mentioned elements in the definitions described above, firms that have achieved high growth have realised an annual growth of at least 20 per cent over a three- or four-year period measured in turnover and/or employees. Gazelles can then be defined using the same definition, but they have to meet the additional criteria that they can only be up to five years old.

¹ This threshold applies to turnover as well as employment measures

3.4 Theoretical Framework

Now that the concepts of business model innovation, platforms and high growth have been defined, the focus will shift towards the development of a theoretical framework. As has been explained before, this theoretical framework will be a high-growth canvas for platforms, including organisational strategies that lead to platform growth or high growth. Therefore, this section is focused on answering subquestion v.

- v. *Which organisational strategies can contribute to platform growth or high growth and how can they be mapped on the business model canvas?*

In figure 4, the high-growth canvas for platforms can be found. On the canvas, the platform growth strategies are italicised and the high growth strategies are underlined. The strategies that are mapped on this canvas have been identified via a literature review.

Those strategies will be explained in detail in sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 and will be structured according to the nine building blocks of the business model canvas. Besides an explanation of the strategy itself, it will also be described how it is linked to the concepts of value creation and/or value capture, as those concepts are central to a firm's business model. Furthermore, it will also be explained why a particular strategy has been linked to one or more building blocks of the business model canvas. If a strategy belongs to more building blocks, the particular strategy will be explained in detail for one building block and be referred to in the parts considering the other building blocks it belongs to.

<div>Key Partnerships</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Exclusive contractingStrategic alliancesBuilding relationships	<div>Key Activities</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">AcquisitionsClear strategy and prospective, external, growth-based and international orientationFocus on the coreHRM practicesGroup management style with clearly assigned rolesAutomating business processesDetermining a meeting rhythm	<div>Value Propositions</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Distinctive positioningAvailability of complementsPlatform envelopmentDifferentiated offering	<div>Customer Relationships</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Managing expectationsBuilding trustCustomer knowledge and customer loyalty	<div>Customer Segments</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Platform envelopment
	<div>Key Resources</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Possessing human capitalAvailability of financial capitalPossessing IP and intangible assetsAcquiring data		<div>Channels</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Advertising	
	<div>Cost Structure</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">PricingExclusive contracting		<div>Revenue Streams</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">PricingExclusive contracting	

Figure 4 High-growth canvas for platforms: platform growth strategies are italicised and high growth strategies are underlined

3.4.1 Platform growth strategies

Previous research has indicated multiple strategies that contribute to platform growth. Before describing those strategies in detail, it is important to devote some attention to platform growth.

In the literature, no fixed measure of platform growth exists. However, for this study, a platform is considered to be growing the more transactions it coordinates and/or the more value it is able to capture from each transaction. In turn, a platform can increase the number of transactions it coordinates by (1) attracting new users and by (2) retaining existing users and increasing their number of transactions. Furthermore, the value captured per transaction can be increased by creating more value per transaction and having a good pricing mechanism in place to capture part of this created value. Therefore, the platform growth strategies that are described in this section are focused on (1) attracting and/or retaining users and thus on creating network-dependent value by increasing the installed base and number of transactions and/or (2) increasing the value captured per transaction. Moreover, some strategies are improving a platform's network-independent value with the creation of network-dependent value as their ultimate goal. Both attracting and retaining customers and increasing the value captured per transaction are likely to lead to an increase in turnover and employees, which enables the linkage between literature on platform growth and HGFs later on.

3.4.1.1 Customer segments

Platform envelopment

This strategy will be explained in detail in the section on value propositions, as it has the strongest link with that building block. Here, it will be shortly explained why it can also be assigned to the building block of customer segments. In short, platform envelopment means that a platform takes features from other markets and combines them with its own offering (Eisenmann et al., 2011). Due to the fact that features from other markets are included, the new offering might also become attractive for customers that were only used to make use of those features from other markets. It might be that they now become aware of the platform and in fact prefer this combined and more extensive solution when compared to the standalone features they were using before. To conclude, due to platform envelopment, a platform might be able to attract new customer segments from other markets.

3.4.1.2 Value propositions

Distinctive positioning

In WTA battles, most platforms try to become the market leader, as this is associated with the fastest growth (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013). However, oftentimes multiple platforms can be present in a market and in this situation, platforms can decide to pursue a strategy of distinctive positioning, which means that a platform ecosystem is different from portfolios of competitors. In this way, platforms are trying to create network-independent value for customers by offering a relative advantage compared to other platforms. In line with differentiation strategy being a strategy that can be used to build competitive advantage (Porter, 1980), targeting market niches that are different than those targeted by competitors as a means of differentiation can actually be beneficial for a platform. Although being a platform leader in a market often leads to the fastest growth, using distinctive positioning as a means of differentiation can actually increase a platform's performance as well, as long as its position is sufficiently distinct from that of its competitors (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013), which could include creating customer value by means of novelty or supernormal transaction efficiency. However, pursuing such a strategy can be risky. If one platform takes the lead, this platform can outperform competitors

as network effects enable this company to rapidly achieve a critical mass (Hill, 1997; Katz & Shapiro, 1994).

Distinctive positioning belongs to the building block related to a platform's value proposition as it can explain why customers prefer a platform over its rivals. A value proposition satisfies customer needs (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), which is exactly what a platform can do by serving niche markets with a distinct set of products and services that are tailored to this specific niche.

Availability of complements

It has already been explained that offering complements can be a source of value creation both in network industries and for e-businesses (Amit & Zott, 2001; McIntyre & Subramaniam, 2009). Therefore, it is not surprising that the availability of complements appears in this list of strategies.

A platform that is able to have a sufficient supply of complements, thus creating indirect network value, and forms a network with the providers of those complementary products, can increase the value of its offerings and thereby increase the number of users that will attach to the platform (Gawer & Cusumano, 2008; Kingyens & Wertz, 2018; Tee & Gawer, 2009). Besides the availability of complements influencing the size of the installed base, the reverse also applies as a larger installed base makes a platform more attractive for third parties to develop complementary products (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003; Katz & Shapiro, 1994).

Platforms can either decide to offer the complements by themselves or to stimulate other companies to do so (Gawer & Cusumano, 2008; Kingyens & Wertz, 2018). If a platform decides to make use of third parties for their complementary products, decisions regarding exclusive contracting have to be made (Eisenmann et al., 2010). This includes considering whether a complementor can also offer its products to rival platforms and whether a complementor is offered the right to be the only provider of complements for a particular platform.

Examples of complements for matching and transaction platforms could be after-sales services. Another example would be a platform for booking travel accommodations, by linking to partner websites, providing information about the weather, currency exchange rates, car rentals, flights, taxis, restaurants and travel communities (Amit & Zott, 2001).

By offering complementary products, a platform essentially enhances its value proposition. The availability of a wide and diverse set of complementary products will result in a bundle of products and services that fulfils needs of and thus creates value for specific customer segments.

Platform envelopment

Gawer and Cusumano (2008) identified two strategies that can be used by platforms in order to acquire a leading position in their market. The first approach is "coring", which deals with the challenges inherent in setting up a new platform in a market where no such platform already exists. "Tipping", the second strategy, focuses on how you can tip the market in your favour in order to outcompete other platforms in a market.

A specific type of tipping, namely "tipping across markets" (Gawer & Cusumano, 2008) or "platform envelopment" (Eisenmann et al., 2011) can improve a firm's position with respect to its competitors by incorporating technical features from another market and combining those with its own platform. In this way, a platform provider can benefit from similar components and overlapping user bases and be a threat to dominant firms in adjacent markets (Eisenmann et al., 2011). Since value in network industries is derived from (1) the installed base (network-dependent value) and (2) the product's attributes and functionality (network-independent value) (McIntyre & Subramaniam, 2009), platform envelopment will increase value for customers due to a larger number of users and an

increase in functionality. Furthermore, the newly created bundle will also create value if it is novel and/or if complementarities are present. Previous research has suggested that in order to benefit from platform envelopment and realise growth, a clear envelopment strategy is a precondition (Müller, Kijl, & Visnjic, 2018).

According to Eisenmann et al. (2011), either (1) complements, (2) weak substitutes or (3) unrelated platforms can be the target of an envelopment attack. An example of a firm that has successfully applied this strategy is Microsoft (Eisenmann et al., 2011). In 1998, RealNetworks was the dominant streaming media platform. End users could use its media player for free and the content providers were charged for server software. Microsoft initiated an envelopment attack, as it decided to develop Windows Media Player, incorporated it into its Windows operating system and did not charge end users for this particular feature. Moreover, the server software was bundled with its Windows NT server at no additional cost for content providers. Although Windows Media Player's functionalities were comparable to those of RealNetworks media player, RealNetworks quickly lost market share due to the fact that the bundle offered by Microsoft was more appealing.

The strategy of platform envelopment belongs to both the value propositions and the customer segments building block. It has already been explained why it belongs to the latter, so now it will be explained why it can be assigned to the value propositions building block as well. With platform envelopment, a new bundle of products is created by incorporating technical features of other markets into the current platform. This new bundle of products leads to an increase in functionality, fulfils customer needs and creates value for them. Therefore, this strategy belongs to the value propositions building block.

3.4.1.3 Channels

Advertising

In order to grow by attracting more users, a platform can make use of advertising. If a platform advertises on one side, this will attract more users on this side. Due to network effects, this will also attract more users on the other side (Rysman, 2009), thus leading to an increase of the overall installed base and the creation of network-dependent value.

By using advertising, a platform can make potential users aware of its offerings, which is one of the functions that is represented by the channels building block (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). This strategy thus shows a way of how a platform can reach its customer segments.

3.4.1.4 Customer relationships

Managing expectations

Another strategy that platforms can use to grow is managing users' expectations. Previous research has indicated that the size of the installed base has an effect on the expectations of users about whether a platform will become dominant in a market or not (Farrell & Saloner, 1986). Users will connect to the platform with the largest installed base (Birke & Swann, 2006; Katz & Shapiro, 1985; Kim & Kwon, 2003; Zhu & Iansiti, 2007), as they expect this platform to dominate the market in the future (Katz & Shapiro, 1985), both due to network effects and network-independent value (e.g. a larger installed base might be an indication of platform quality (Kim & Kwon, 2003)). Therefore, their expectations about whether a platform will dominate in the future are highly important, as those expectations will actually cause a platform to become dominant (Katz & Shapiro, 1985).

Firms can try to influence the expectations of users by signalling about their potential future dominance (Fuentelsaz et al., 2012). Those signals can be launched for example via advertising and contractual agreements (Zhu & Iansiti, 2007). Both network-dependent and network-independent value can be emphasised through those signals. Examples of signals that can be used are emphasising the size of the current installed base (Kim & Kwon, 2003), pointing attention towards a platform having captured a large market share relatively quickly (Brynjolfsson & Kemerer, 1996), preannouncing a new service that will be offered (Dranove & Gandal, 2003) and using brand value and reputation (Katz & Shapiro, 1985; Katz & Shapiro, 1994). Besides creating positive expectations about the services that a platform will offer in the future, which can actually accelerate the growth of the installed base (Staykova & Damsgaard, 2015), pre-announcements will also result in customers waiting to connect to a competitive platform until the new service offering is launched (Farrell & Saloner, 1986).

One of the reasons why platforms are likely to focus on customer relationships is because they want to acquire new customers (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). As has been described above, multiple signals can be launched via different channels in order to attract more users. By managing users' expectations, platforms are in fact trying to establish a relationship with potential customers in their strive for customer acquisition.

Building trust

For platforms, it is important that users perceive them as a party which they can trust. Trust can be defined as how users perceive the integrity, benevolence, ability and predictability of a platform (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003b). If customers feel that a platform can be trusted, this often results in a lower risk perception and a more favourable attitude towards transacting, which will increase customers' willingness to transact (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003a; Gefen et al., 2003b; Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky, & Vitale, 2000; McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002; Pavlou & Gefen, 2002). Furthermore, increased trust makes customers more loyal (Chen, Zhang, & Xu, 2009; Gefen, 2002), thereby creating value by means of lock-in. Trust can thus contribute to platform growth both by increasing the installed base and increasing the number of transactions.

Both factors related to network-dependent and network-independent value can help a platform to build trust. Platforms can build trust by providing customers with high quality service, which can be characterised by reliability, assurance and responsiveness (Gefen, 2002). Furthermore, a good reputation and a large customer base can be antecedents of trust (Jarvenpaa et al., 2000). Moreover, platforms should ensure that their websites or online environments are of high quality, as this can also contribute to trust building (McKnight et al., 2002). Besides, platforms should assure integrity, security and sometimes confidentiality (Lu, Wang, & Hayes, 2012). Finally, transparency is a good way to build both trust and credibility and can be realised by making use of ratings and user reviews (Kinyens & Wertz, 2018).

Besides the desire to acquire new customers, retaining existing customers can also be a reason to establish customer relationships (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). The strategy of building trust applies to both motivations as it makes new users more willing to transact and existing users more loyal. For this strategy to be successful, it is important that a platform has high-quality channels, which has been illustrated by the importance of a high-quality service and a high-quality website and online environments.

3.4.1.5 Key resources

In the literature, no platform growth strategies have been found that belong to the building block of key resources. However, as will be described in the next sections, the platform strategies of acquisitions, which is linked to the key activities building block, and of building strategic alliances with firms, which belongs to the key partnerships building block, can help a platform to get access to key resources. Therefore, those platform growth strategies also indirectly affect the key resources building block.

3.4.1.6 Key activities

Acquisitions

Another strategy that can contribute to platform growth is the usage of acquisitions. By acquiring one or more small platform(s), a platform can increase their presence in the platform market, thereby increasing their direct network value, and acquire some additional capabilities as well (P. C. Evans & Gawer, 2016). Recent examples of this growth strategy are the acquisition of Delivery Hero's Germany food delivery operations by Takeaway.com (Takeaway.com N.V., 2018) and Uber's acquisition of Careem, a platform including ride-hailing, delivery and payments for the Middle East (Uber Technologies Inc., 2019, March 26).

This building block represents the most important activities that a platform should perform in order to operate successfully (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). As acquisitions have shown to be an important strategy for a platform to grow successfully, it can be linked to this specific building block. To be more specific, the activity of acquisitions allows a platform to attract key resources that are necessary for a successful growth path. Besides, it enables a platform to reach its customer segments, as acquisitions increase market presence.

3.4.1.7 Key partnerships

Exclusive contracting

Another strategy that can contribute to platform growth via the creation of direct network value is using exclusive contracts (Armstrong & Wright, 2007; Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; Eisenmann et al., 2010; R. S. Lee, 2013). In this way, a platform can for example create linkages with more sellers or complementors and could secure exclusive content by preventing sellers or complementors from multihoming (Armstrong & Wright, 2007; Eisenmann et al., 2010), thus creating value by locking in those sellers. Signing those exclusive contracts with sellers results in buyers, that want access to this exclusive content, being attracted to the platform, which in turn makes the decision to sign those exclusive contracts more valuable for sellers (Armstrong & Wright, 2007). Exclusive contracts are particularly valuable if they can be concluded with marquee users (e.g. premium suppliers or very big buyers), as this not only allows the platform to charge the other side a premium in order to get access to this highly attractive group of users (D. S. Evans, 2003; Rochet & Tirole, 2003), but will also attract more users on the other side, thereby having a positive effect on the size of its installed base and thus its growth rate (Eisenmann et al., 2006).

Exclusive contracts might especially be useful for entrants that are using a tipping approach, since having exclusive access to particular content or goods can give a boost to the adoption of its platform and can also increase competition between platforms (R. S. Lee, 2013).

Sellers would usually want to avoid entering into exclusive contracts, because it prohibits them from selling their goods and content to customers not making use of that particular platform

(Mantena, Sankaranarayanan, & Viswanathan, 2010). However, if a platform offers favourable contract terms (e.g. a somewhat lower price than its competitors), it can persuade sellers to enter into exclusive contracts (Armstrong & Wright, 2007; Mantena et al., 2010).

Due to the incentives that have to be offered, this strategy can turn out to be costly (Eisenmann et al., 2006). Platforms can try to make up for the loss due to offering sellers lower prices in exchange for exclusivity by charging its buyers a higher price (Armstrong & Wright, 2007). Buyers are probably willing to pay this price premium, since they prefer a platform with a lot of sellers, thus having access to a larger number and variety of goods and content. The price premium that buyers have to pay, represents a value capture mechanism for platforms.

An important factor to consider is that sellers might choose a competitor's platform as a result of being forced to choose one (Armstrong & Wright, 2007), which can thus hinder instead of accelerate growth.

This strategy belongs to three building blocks of the business model canvas, namely key partnerships, revenue streams and cost structure. In this section, the reason why it has been assigned to the first of those three building blocks will be explained. Exclusive contracts are signed with complementors, and thus represent the buyer-supplier type of partnership as described by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010). Therefore, this strategy can thus be assigned to the key partnerships building block. By establishing this partnership, a platform gains access to exclusive content, which contributes to its unique value proposition and the ability to reach more customers.

Strategic alliances

Another strategy that can prove to be useful in growing a platform-based business is to make use of strategic alliances, especially for rapidly increasing the installed base (P. C. Evans & Gawer, 2016). By establishing strategic alliances, a platform has the ability to benefit from the large network of its alliance partner(s), who might become connected to the platform as well. In practice, many examples of strategic alliances between platform companies and other businesses exist, such as strategic alliances between platforms for booking travel accommodations and airlines (Conghaile, 2014, November 24), between food ordering and delivery platforms and restaurant operators (Maede, 2017, April 1) and between passenger transportation platforms and audio streaming platforms (Kleinman, 2014, November 17). In this way, novel ways of fulfilling latent customer needs can contribute to value creation. Those alliances are often focused on strengthening a platform's position, improving its offering, leveraging the network of the alliance partner, enhancing customer experience and ultimately attracting more users. Therefore, this strategy has the potential to improve both a platform's network-dependent and network-independent value.

Strategic alliances between firms that are not competing with each other is one type of partnership (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), which explains why the strategy described above belongs to this building block. By pursuing this strategy, a platform can acquire resources and improve its offering, which shows that, although it belongs to the key partnerships building block, this strategy affects the key resources and value proposition building block as well.

3.4.1.8 Revenue streams

Exclusive contracting

This strategy has been explained in detail in the section on key partnerships, so here it will only be explained why this strategy can also be assigned to the revenue streams building block. The exclusive content that is accessed via this strategy enables a platform to attract more users. In turn, those users

have to pay a premium price in order to get access to the platform that has connections with sellers that offer exclusive content. Those premium prices charged represent a revenue stream for the platform.

Pricing

Selecting the right pricing strategy that will maximise profits is a key challenge for platforms (Eisenmann et al., 2006; D. S. Evans, 2003; Hagiu, 2009). It plays an important role not only in getting, but also in keeping both sides on board (D. S. Evans, 2003). As this strategy plays an important role in increasing the installed base, it can create direct network value for customers. However, as has been explained before, this strategy is also related to value capture, as it is concerned with the revenue models that can be used by a platform. When choosing a pricing strategy, a platform has to make decisions about the pricing level and the pricing structure (Rochet & Tirole, 2003; Rochet & Tirole, 2006) as the amount of transactions between the two sides is dependent on both of them (Rochet & Tirole, 2006). The price level is the total price charged by the platform and the price structure is how the total price is divided between the two sides (Rochet & Tirole, 2006).

Price level

The total price that a platform can charge depends on the value it provides and the fragmentation of the market. If a platform creates a lot of value, for example by enabling suppliers to get in contact with new buyers, it can charge higher fees as the users, in this case the suppliers, are willing to tolerate this. Secondly, if a platform operates in a highly fragmented market, this allows the platform to charge higher fees due to reduced bargaining power of its users (Kinyens & Wertz, 2018).

In determining the right price level, a platform should assure that the total price charged is not too high as this will cause users to switch to other platforms that charge lower fees (Kinyens & Wertz, 2018).

Price structure

Many economists and decision-makers are convinced that the price structure has a large impact on both profits and efficiency and therefore, it is important that a platform makes the right decisions on this aspect of its pricing strategy (Rochet & Tirole, 2006). A platform's price structure can often be decomposed into fixed charges, also called registration fees or membership fee, and variable charges, also called transaction fees (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003; D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2007; Rochet & Tirole, 2003; Rochet & Tirole, 2006). The fixed charges that have to be paid upfront determine whether potential users will join the platform, while the variable charges determine the extent to which both sides are willing to transact as soon as they are connected to the platform (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003; D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2007; Rochet & Tirole, 2006). A platform with high transaction fees is likely to have a lower registration fee and because of the latter, the platform might attract more users, which in turn increases the number of transactions and thus money earned by the platform (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003). Transaction fees are said to be the fairest price structure, as users only have to pay if they actually transact on the platform (Kinyens & Wertz, 2018). In contrast, fixed charges can be seen as less fair, as all users are charged equally, thus not taking their number of transactions into account (Kinyens & Wertz, 2018). However, platforms charge fixed charges for several reasons. First, transactions between both sides might be hard to monitor, thus preventing the platform from charging them (Rochet & Tirole, 2006). Besides, it is often efficient to use both fixed and variable pricing in order to recover a platform's fixed costs (Rochet & Tirole, 2006). Finally, if sellers are charged fixed fees, it encourages them to offer high-quality products with a high selling chance via the platform, which in turn increases the quality of the platform overall (Kinyens & Wertz, 2018).

Subsidisation strategy

In situations where indirect network effects are present, platforms often choose to subsidise one side and to charge the other side a premium to make up for the losses incurred on the subsidised side (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003; Casey & Töyli, 2012; Eisenmann et al., 2006; D. S. Evans, 2003; D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2007; Gawer & Cusumano, 2008; Rochet & Tirole, 2003; Rochet & Tirole, 2006). This strategy might result in losses in the early phase, but the platform is willing to incur them since they are expected to be recovered as soon as it has gained a foothold in the market (Schilling, 2009). Examples of subsidies could be giveaways (e.g. free upgrades, equipment, services etc.), discounts or even payments for usage (Casey & Töyli, 2012; D. S. Evans, 2003; McIntyre & Subramaniam, 2009). For the side that is being subsidised, registration fees are often said to be negative (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003).

This strategy is especially useful in the early phase of a platform, since it can allow a platform to penetrate the market (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; McIntyre & Subramaniam, 2009; Rysman, 2009; Schilling, 2009). By charging one side a very low price, this will result in an installed base on this side. In turn, the platform can use this installed base to earn money on the other side of the market that wants to get access to the highly valued users on the other side (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013; Eisenmann et al., 2006). In fact, the platform is creating cross-side network effects in two directions: attracting the subsidy-side automatically attracts the money-side and having the money-side on board also attracts more users on the subsidy-side (Eisenmann et al., 2006; Parker & Van Alstyne, 2005). As was being concluded by Evans and Gawer (2016), subsidisation can “get the flywheel going faster” (p. 6).

An example of using subsidising as a penetration strategy has been exemplified by Clements and Ohashi (2005). In a study on the U.S. video game market, they have illustrated that this penetration pricing just after a console has been launched is useful to stimulate the adoption of a console, since demand for consoles very much depends on the price of the console at this point in time. In those markets, platform providers (e.g. Nintendo or Sony) sell their consoles at relatively low prices to attract as many consumers as possible. This will make the platform more attractive for game providers, who are charged licensing and royalty fees. Besides, the availability of many games will increase the number of consoles sold. Besides showing the usefulness of this penetration pricing in the beginning phase, they also found evidence that near the end of a product’s life cycle, subsidising is relatively less effective. This is due to the fact that demand is not so dependent on price anymore, since consumers then prefer new consoles.

In deciding on whether to subsidise or not and the subsequent decisions if a platform decides to subsidise (e.g. which side, amount and duration), a platform should take a number of factors into account. Although those factors can provide some guidance, the amount of subsidisation depends on many factors and cannot be determined by just using some prescribed rules (Gawer & Cusumano, 2008).

Taking output costs into consideration is important in making a decision about subsidising (Eisenmann et al., 2006). In some situations, a new user on the subsidy-side does not cost the platform that much due to the fact that the subsidy is a free software program or a free service. However, the platform has to be more cautious when its subsidy does have relatively high costs. It is therefore always important to monitor whether the subsidy strategy actually leads to more money-side users and thus more premia for the platform (Eisenmann et al., 2006; Rysman, 2009).

Moreover, the elasticity of demand should be considered (Rochet & Tirole, 2006). The price that one side has to pay, depends on what that side can handle. Thus, the higher the elasticity of demand on that side, the lower the price for that side and vice versa. Charging the side with high elasticity of demand a lower price will attract more elastic users on that side. Taking indirect network effects into account, having those users on board will attract users on the other side, which are characterised by a relatively inelastic demand, thus allowing the platform to charge them a higher

price. This in turn will make the platform more valuable for the first side, which causes an even lower price and higher quantity for this side (D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2007; Rysman, 2009). Here, a platform has to make sure that there is no possibility that its subsidy-side users can make transactions with money-side users of another platform, thus ensuring that it is able to actually capture cross-side network effects (Eisenmann et al., 2006). To summarise, the user group which is most sensitive to price is usually chosen as the subsidy-side and the side whose demand most strongly depends on the growth in the number of users on the other side, should become the money-side (Eisenmann et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the subsidy side should include the most quality-sensitive users, which means that the side that has to deliver quality has to pay a premium (Eisenmann et al., 2006).

Finally, when platforms make use of complementors, it might be beneficial to subsidise them in order to stimulate them in connecting to the platform, which can make the platform more attractive to end-users (Schilling, 2009).

After a platform has successfully managed to get an installed base and penetrate the market, it can decide to increase its price level, thus making use of dynamic pricing (Rysman, 2009).

Monopoly platform vs. platform competition

In some markets, only one platform exists, while multiple platforms might be active in another market. In the first situation, the platform has a monopoly position, while in the second situation, the platform faces competition. In the literature, some authors have specifically investigated and described pricing strategies that can be used depending on whether a platform faces competition or not.

Monopoly platform

For platforms with a monopoly position, Hagiu (2009) explains which side should be subsidised, based on the extent of product variety demanded and the market power of sellers over buyers. A monopoly platform will make their profits especially on the seller side if the consumers demand more product variety. Due to consumers' demand for diverse products, the products' substitutability decreases, thus enabling sellers to capture more of the joint surplus from their transactions with consumers. Following the same logic, a platform will thus also try to capture the main part of its profits on the seller side if they have market power over the consumer side. Concluding, in markets where product variety is highly valued, the seller side will be the money-side, while the consumer side will be the money-side if product diversity is not really asked for.

Platform competition

Pricing can also be a powerful weapon in situations where there are rival platforms, as the price charged by one platform will have an impact on the amount of transactions on the other platform (Eisenmann et al., 2010). When there are multiple platforms in a market, a common situation is that users multihome (e.g. one side singlehomes and one side multihomes or even both sides multihome). However, it is likely that a platform wants to stimulate as many users to connect only to its own platform, thus having the desire to reduce the number of users that multihomes. Hereunder, a few pricing strategies that can be of help here are described.

In a situation where users are multihoming, a platform can for example distinguish itself from competitors by using different combinations of fees, where one intermediary can combine a low registration fee with a high transaction fee and the other asks a high registration fee but low transaction fees (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003). Here, users are expected to use a platform with low transaction fees as their first choice and the platform with higher transaction fees as their second choice (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003).

If a platform wants to reduce the number of consumers that multihome, it can decrease the price for sellers. In this way, platforms make it attractive for sellers to only make use of that platform,

which in turn will make it less attractive for consumers to multihome. However, sellers will only exclusively connect to the platform if there are not that many consumers that singlehome (Rochet & Tirole, 2003).

However, a platform might also want to focus on stealing sellers from its rivals. A strategy that can be used here has been described by Hagiu (2009). By charging consumers with lower prices, a platform is likely to attract consumers from a rival platform (Hagiu, 2009; Rysman, 2009). This in turn makes the rival platform less attractive to sellers, who might also switch to the particular platform (Hagiu, 2009). The fact that sellers switch will cause even more consumers to leave the rival platform, thus creating a vicious cycle (Hagiu, 2009). However, there are three situations in which lowering prices for consumers in order to steal sellers from rival platforms is not a very useful strategy, namely (1) if consumers have strong demand for variety, (2) if sellers have market power over consumers, and/or (3) if sellers experience economies of scale when they multihome. In the first two situations, the optimal pricing structure is to earn more money on the buyer side relative to sellers. In the third situation, when economies of scale are sufficiently strong, the platform will make more money on the seller side relative to the buyer side. (Hagiu, 2009)

If one side of a platform singlehomes while the other side multihomes, the platform has exclusive access to the users that singlehome. For platforms, the singlehoming side is thus of huge value and therefore, competition on this side is aggressive and a platform might use subsidisation strategies to attract singlehomers. If a platform namely establishes links with those singlehomers, it gives the platform the ability to charge the multihomers, that want to get access to the singlehomers, a relatively high price (Armstrong, 2006; Armstrong & Wright, 2007).

There are also situations in which the multihoming side can be offered an exclusivity contract. This means that the multihomers have to pay a very high price to the platform if they multihome (thus preventing them from multihoming) and are offered a small discount compared to other platforms if they singlehome in order to attract them all. This in turn enables the platform to make money on the other side due to network effects (Armstrong & Wright, 2007).

Finally, the pricing level also depends on the type of innovation offered by a platform. In case of an incremental innovation compared to rival platforms, only a small price increase is allowed due to the fact that the improvement offered is only small. However, if a platform comes up with a radical innovation and thus highly distinguishes itself from its competitors, it can charge higher prices, since it offers something of larger value (Sheremata, 2004).

Intraplatform competition

There can also be competition within a platform (Armstrong, 2006). Sometimes, sellers prefer to be the only seller on a platform. For example, a retailer would prefer to be the only retailer of that type in a shopping mall and a platform can charge this retailer a higher price in exchange for granting this exclusivity. A platform can also choose to allow for competition between sellers. Although this will lower the price and profit on the seller side, a platform can recoup this by making more money on the buyer side. It would therefore be plausible that a platform will allow for competition as long as it can charge the buyer side and that it will restrict competition if it cannot charge the buyer side, thus making money on the seller side instead by granting them exclusivity.

Although there is thus quite some literature on using pricing as a growth strategy, either by attracting more users or by increasing its turnover, pricing strategies are dependent on a lot of factors. Therefore, no predetermined set of pricing rules exists that platforms can follow in order to grow.

As this strategy is related to how a platform generates cash, it belongs to the revenue streams building block (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Both the pricing level and pricing structure have been discussed.

The former deals with what customer segments are willing to pay and allows a platform to generate revenue streams from those customer segments. The latter focuses on the type of revenue stream, which can result from subscription fees or transaction fees. If platforms use a subsidisation strategy, one side is often charged a premium price, which represents a revenue stream. Furthermore, pricing strategies for different situations have been described (e.g. monopoly platform, platform competition and intra-platform competition), which again links this strategy to the revenue streams building block. However, it also belongs to the cost structure block, which will be explained in detail in the next part.

3.1.4.9 Cost structure

Implementing the strategies that have been described costs money. Therefore, all strategies could be assigned to this building block. However, Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) state that only the most important costs incurred to run a business model belong to this building block, which explains why only the strategies of pricing and exclusive contracting have been linked to the cost structure building block. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that it costs money to make a business model work, and that the costs that have to be made to implement all strategies together determine a platform's cost structure.

Exclusive contracting

Since sellers have to be incentivised for signing an exclusive contract, for example by a lower price, implementing this strategy comes at a cost. In fact, a platform will lose money on the seller side when using this strategy. This means that this is an important cost and explains why it belongs to the cost structure building block (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). A platform has to find a way to recover this loss, which can be done by charging customers a premium price. In turn, this illustrates that this strategy includes a link between the building blocks related to cost structure and revenue streams.

Pricing

The subsidisation strategy that has been described result in one side being the money-side and the other side being the subsidy or cost-side. In this situation, a platform incurs cost to subsidise one side of the platform. As this strategy is often used by platforms, it is considered to be an important cost and should therefore be linked to the cost structure building block. Furthermore, it has been described that platforms sometimes lower their prices to steal customers from rival platforms. As this can enable a platform to attract a substantial number of users on both sides, it can be said to be an important cost.

3.4.2 High-growth strategies

Several attributes and practices can influence whether a firm is able to achieve high growth, which indicates that becoming an HGF is not purely random (Barringer, Jones, & Neubaum, 2005). Furthermore, the determinants of normal growth and high growth are not necessarily the same (Lopez-Garcia & Puente, 2012). This section will describe strategies that can be useful in achieving high growth.

However, not much is known about which factors cause firms to realise high growth (Coad, Daunfeldt, et al., 2014). Oftentimes, research is focused on factors that distinguish HGFs from their counterparts, without establishing causal relationships. Therefore, strategies that will be described are not necessarily causally related to high growth, as it can also be that HGFs are more likely to undertake the strategies that will be described.

Besides describing general high-growth strategies, strategies that are useful to scale up are considered as well. Oftentimes, scale-ups are defined using the HGF definition of the OECD (Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship & Rotterdam School of Management Erasmus University, 2018; ScaleUp Institute, 2018) and in one study, scale-ups have been defined as HGFs that derive their growth from the scalability of their business model (Monteiro, 2019). Therefore, it can be argued that scale up strategies are likely to apply to HGFs as well.

Although HGFs are not necessarily platform businesses, it will be assessed whether the high-growth strategies can create network value if they are to be implemented by platforms.

3.4.2.1 Customer segments

None of the high-growth strategies that have been described in the literature belongs to this building block. However, as will be explained in the next sections, some high-growth strategies that belong to other building blocks have an impact on the building block of customer segments as well.

3.4.2.2 Value propositions

Differentiated offering

Previous research shows that an HGF's offering is often differentiated compared to those of competitors (Littunen & Virtanen, 2004). Furthermore, HGFs have a strong focus on creating unique value for their customers, which means that their offerings assist a customer in maximising utility, lower costs and increase a firm's effectiveness in unique ways. It appears that this factor strongly distinguishes HGFs from their counterparts (Barringer et al., 2005). In the case of platforms, this strategy would be focused on generating network-independent value, namely by offering a relative advantage which would be based on novelty and transaction efficiency, which are two sources of value creation (Amit & Zott, 2001).

It is worth mentioning that the platform growth strategy of distinctive positioning and the high-growth strategy of differentiated offering are strongly related. Several factors have to be considered to arrive at a distinctive position, namely the company's offering, the price charged and, when facing competition, also the positioning of competitors (D'Aveni, 2007; Lauga & Ofek, 2011). Therefore, it can be stated that a differentiated offering is required for a platform if it wants to distinctively position itself, as its position will to a large extent be based on the differentiating characteristics of its offering.

By having a differentiated offering, HGFs create unique value for customer segments. Therefore, this differentiated offering explains why customers decide to do business with a particular company instead of its competitors and thus represents part of a company's value proposition.

3.4.2.3 Channels

No high-growth strategies have been identified that can be assigned to the channels building block.

3.4.2.4 Customer relationships

Customer knowledge and customer loyalty

HGFs appear to have more knowledge about what customers demand and need than non-HGFs (Barringer et al., 2005).

Besides, firms should continuously focus on attracting new customers and retaining their existing customers, thus increasing direct network value when taking the platform business model into account. Creating customer loyalty, which can create value for a platform by locking in users, is very important for successfully growing a scale-up. Loyal customers do not only buy repeatedly from a firm, but they often also promote the firm and provide positive reviews, which contribute to a good reputation (De Bree, 2018).

Here, the same reasoning applies as for why the platform growth strategy of building trust had been linked to the customer relationships building block. By increasing customer loyalty, an HGF can retain customers, which is a reason to establish and manage customer relationships (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). Besides, it is likely that HGFs can do this more effectively if they have sufficient customer knowledge.

3.4.2.5 Key resources

Possessing human capital

In growing a company it is important to possess human, managerial and entrepreneurial capital (Arrighetti & Lasagni, 2013). Previous research has indicated that the education, skills and work experience of founders have a large effect on growth (Cooper, Gimeno-Gascon, & Woo, 1994; Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (BERR), 2008). Growth is positively influenced by founders' years of university education in economic, managerial, scientific and technical fields, founders' technical work experience in the industry in which the particular firm is operating and founders' entrepreneurial experiences (Colombo & Grilli, 2005). Above mentioned findings were related to growth in general. However, specific research on high growth has found that human capital can also help a firm to realise high growth.

Having knowledge about a specific industry is important to become an HGF. It increases a firm's understanding of what might be important success factors for that industry and assures that there is sufficient knowledge about products, processes and technologies. Furthermore, industry specific know-how might also include relationships with customers, suppliers and stakeholders (Cooper et al., 1994).

Besides, the share of permanent workers versus temporary workers positively influences fast growth, which might be explained by the fact that those employees are more likely to be trained and are more motivated compared to temporary employees (Lopez-Garcia & Puente, 2012).

Moreover, having a qualified workforce is found to be an important determinant of high growth (Lopez-Garcia & Puente, 2012). It improves the recognition and exploitation of opportunities and enables a firm to deal with radical changes in the organisation (Arrighetti & Lasagni, 2013).

Scale-up related experiences from practitioners confirm that having the right people at the right place is important (De Bree, 2018; Harnish, 2014). Employees should have the right mindset and the right skills and knowledge to perform their jobs. Attention should be pointed towards attracting

people with specialised knowledge and experience, but also older, more experienced people that can fulfil higher positions within the company (De Bree, 2018).

Since human capital is a type of key resources as described by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), this strategy belongs to the key resources building block. Human capital is important for HGFs in order to successfully operate their business. The knowledge, skills, know-how, motivation, mindset and experience that an HGFs workforce possesses, allow an HGF to create and maintain relationships with both partners and customers, to reach their customers and to create value with their value proposition.

Availability of financial capital

The availability of financial capital is also having a positive impact on realising rapid growth. Firms that have access to a sufficient amount of financial capital can pursue more ambitious strategies, have a buffer that they can use in case of rare events or if they want to change course and can meet the financing demands that are associated with high growth (Cooper et al., 1994). This finding is confirmed by experiences from practitioners, who argue that firms should have access to financing to be able to execute their plans (De Bree, 2018; Harnish, 2014).

This strategy also falls into the category of key resources, as it is a type of key resource (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). The availability of financial capital allows HGFs to pursue ambitious strategies, which in turn are likely to result in a unique value proposition. As was the case with the strategy related to human capital, financial capital is required to make the business model work as well.

Possessing intellectual property and intangible assets

Previous research has indicated that many HGFs possess intellectual property and intangible assets such as brand names and trademarks, thus revealing a positive association between possessing IP and intangible assets and high growth (Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (BERR), 2008). This leads to the presumption that innovation, which can lead to value creation (Amit & Zott, 2001), is of high importance in becoming an HGF (Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (BERR), 2008). Indeed, several studies have revealed a positive impact of innovation on (fast) growth (Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 2000; Harms, Reschke, Kraus, & Fink, 2010).

Intellectual resources are important as well for successfully running a business (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). As those resources have the potential to create a lot of value, HGFs that pursue this strategy are able to create value for their customers.

Acquiring data

Data, both quantitative and qualitative, can provide clarity and can contribute to farsightedness. Not only big data, but also a feeling about what is happening in both the market and the firm itself are important for making the right decisions. Furthermore, getting feedback from employees and customers is important to identify both opportunities and barriers (Harnish, 2014).

Data is an important key resource for making the right decisions, which shows its importance for making a business model work. Besides, it facilitates a firm to manage customer relationships due to the feedback received by its customers. The data provide the firm with knowledge about what the customers want and allows the firm to better satisfy their needs.

3.4.2.6 Key activities

Clear strategy and prospective, external, growth-based and international orientation

A key to high growth is a clearly formulated and differentiated strategy which is supported by a strong company culture. Furthermore, thinking about potential actions competitors might take and knowing how to react to this is crucial (Harnish, 2014). Firms should continuously monitor their environment, which includes trends, stakeholders and competitors. This allows a firm to spot factors that might impact their business, to recognise and exploit opportunities and to react to potential threats (De Bree, 2018).

O'Regan, Ghobadian and Gallea (2006) also show that a prospective strategic orientation has a positive impact on high growth. This means that HGFs are often externally oriented, undertake a lot of environment scanning and put large emphasis on opportunity recognition, thus not only focusing on existing markets. Furthermore, prospectors are open to change and perceive the environment they operate in to be uncertain (R. E. Miles, Snow, Meyer, & Coleman Jr., 1978).

Furthermore, HGFs' vision is often more growth oriented and their higher commitment to growth serves as a motivational factor for employees to realise the desired growth (Barringer et al., 2005).

Another predictor of fast growth are international operations. Many HGFs are having international operations and it might be seen as a factor to differentiate themselves (Mohr, Garnsey, & Theyel, 2013). If platforms are using this strategy for differentiation, they can offer a relative advantage and thus create network-independent value.

Other research indicated as well that HGFs received a higher percentage of their turnover from international operations than did non-HGFs (Feesser & Willard, 1990). Although causality has not been addressed, this finding confirms that it is important to look beyond traditional markets and search for opportunities elsewhere, thus putting greater emphasis on opportunity recognition.

This strategy includes things a company must do to become an HGF and thus belongs to the key activities building block on the canvas. Those elements are required to create value and offer a value proposition and to reach markets. Especially, firms can reach new markets by having a prospective vision and international orientation.

Focus on the core

It is advisable that a firm focuses on its distinctive core competencies and core capabilities to realise its unique customer value proposition and to outsource non-essential skills, knowledge, experience and processes. In this way, the firm remains flexible and agile, which facilitates the process of growth and scaling (De Bree, 2018).

If firms do not set priorities, they are likely to perform a lot of work while achieving nothing of value. Having priorities leads to focus, which assures that everybody is on the same page and working in the same direction (Harnish, 2014).

This strategy represents another activity that a firm must undertake in order to make its business model work, and thus to become an HGF. Therefore, it belongs to the key activities building block. This strategy allows a firm to create value for its customers.

HRM practices

Previous research illustrates that HGFs are more likely to have training programs in place than their counterparts. Those training programs can help the company to achieve its objectives or to improve

the skills and capabilities of its employees. They also put emphasis on employee development, which indicates that employees are seen as key resources in achieving high growth (Barringer et al., 2005).

Furthermore, HGFs are more likely to provide employees with financial incentives and stock options than non-HGFs. Those incentives are rewarded to promote high performance, to give employees a sense of ownership, to attract and retain employees and to let them bear part of the company's risk (Barringer et al., 2005).

Stimulating a good and safe working environment and offering interesting and challenging jobs are just as important as offering a good salary to attract and retain employees. Furthermore, four HRM functions should be well-manged to ensure that the right people are at the right place, which are: recruitment and selection, training and development, coaching and evaluation (De Bree, 2018).

Another important factor in making the business work are the HRM practices that are in place. Therefore, this strategy can be linked to the key activities block as well. This strategy is focused on improving a firm's human capital, which belongs to the key resources building block, and therefore indirectly influences how customer relationships are managed and whether markets are reached.

Group management style with clearly assigned roles

It appears that HGFs are often using a group management style, which means that the most important issues are dealt with by a group of people (Littunen & Virtanen, 2004).

However, it is important that liability is borne by one person, that all people involved in a (decision-making) process are responsible and that one person or team has the authority to make decisions. Experiences from practice illustrate that firms have to clearly assign those roles in order to scale up (Harnish, 2014).

For managers, it is important that they ensure that employees leverage their strong points, that they unburden employees, that they establish clear expectations and provide a visible time frame to realise them and that they recognise and acknowledge the work they do (Harnish, 2014).

Having a group management style with clearly assigned roles has proved to be an important strategy in becoming an HGF. Since this strategy is of importance for the decision-making process and therefore required to make the business model work, it can be assigned to the key activities building block. A link can also be established to the key resources building block, as the presence of a group management style with clearly assigned roles enables the firm to leverage the full potential of its employees, who represent a firm's human resources.

Automating business processes

Furthermore, it is important to automate as many business processes as possible (De Bree, 2018). This ensures that those process run smoothly and can reduce waste. Furthermore, it makes the processes more structured and easier to repeat.

Again, this strategy is important for making the business model work and can therefore be seen as a key activity.

Determining a meeting rhythm

It is important to have a pre-determined meeting rhythm, as it stimulates and facilitates communication, discussion, problem-solving and decision-making. The meeting rhythm can consist of daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual meetings. The faster a company grows, the faster the meeting rhythm should be to respond to changes (Harnish, 2014).

This is the final strategy that can be linked to the key activities building block. A pre-determined meeting rhythm is considered to be of importance in problem-solving processes, which can be defined as a type of key activity (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

3.4.2.7 Key partnerships

Building relationships

Another factor that might be helpful in becoming an HGF is building relationships. It has been observed that HGFs heavily invest in building relationships within their supply chain and in creating strategic alliances (Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (BERR), 2008). However, causality has not been proved in this study, so it does not clarify whether building relationships leads to becoming an HGF or whether HGFs are more likely to build relationships.

According to Mohr, Garnesey and Theyel (2013), strategic alliances can predict rapid growth. The most important benefits of being part of a strategic alliance is better access to resources and improved market access. In two-sided markets, this strategy can thus help to increase the installed base, thereby generating direct network value.

Other research indicated that HGFs are more likely to establish interorganisational relationships than non-HGFs. This enables them to obtain resources from their partners, which is a well-known way in which firms can accelerate their growth (Barringer et al., 2005), especially when those resources are valuable, rare, hard to imitate and difficult to substitute (Barney, 1991).

Since relationships within the supply chain and strategic alliances between non-competing firms are both different types of partnerships (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), the strategy of building relationships can be assigned to the building block of key partnerships. As HGFs establish such relationships to attract resources and to improve their market access, this strategy also has a link with the building blocks of key resources and customer segments.

3.4.2.8 Revenue streams

In the literature, no high-growth strategies have been found that can be assigned to this building block. Although the availability of financial capital, a strategy which belongs to the building block of key resources, does provide a firm with money, it cannot be seen as a revenue stream, since the money has not been generated from a customer segment.

3.4.2.9 Cost structure

As was the case for platform growth strategies, firms also incur costs when implementing high-growth strategies. Nevertheless, no high-growth strategy has been linked to this building block, as none of them represents one of the most important costs by a firm. However, one has to remind that a firm's cost structure is affected by the implementation of the high-growth strategies.

3.4.3 Competitive advantage

In the introduction, it has been mentioned that business model innovation can help a firm to gain a competitive advantage (R. G. McGrath, 2010; Teece, 2010) and to grow (Casadesus-Masanell & Ricart, 2010; Johnson et al., 2008). Nevertheless, a competitive advantage does not necessarily stem from business model innovation. Business model innovation is about making changes in the nine building blocks of the business model canvas or connecting those blocks in a novel way (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010), but companies do not necessarily have to make those changes in order to arrive at a competitive advantage, as they might already possess one. A competitive advantage can namely stem from different sources.

According to Porter (1985), offering superior value is at the heart of competitive advantage. Superior value can be created in two ways, either by matching competitor's performance at lower cost or by outperforming them which offsets a premium price (Maine & Garnsey, 2006; Porter, 1985). There are two types of competitive advantage, as a competitive advantage can either be the result of low cost or differentiation. In turn, low costs can be the result of, inter alia, economies of scale, advantageous access to raw materials and proprietary technology (Porter, 1985). With differentiation, a firm can, amongst others, differentiate its product, marketing strategy, customer service, technology, brand image and delivery system (Porter, 1980, 1985). Other authors have argued that competitive advantage can be derived from competencies (Reed & DeFillippi, 1990). Barney stated that a firm's resources can potentially lead to a competitive advantage, as long as they are rare, valuable, hard to substitute and difficult to imitate (Barney, 1991). Furthermore, according to Peters and Waterman (as cited in Cosier & Dalton, 1986, p. 64), "excellent companies were, above all, brilliant on the basics."

Having such a competitive advantage enables firms to outperform their competitors (Liu, 2013) and is crucial to maintain long-term superior performance (Porter, 1985). Harnish (2014) calls this competitive advantage 'the 'X-factor' and he states that it enables companies to be 10 to 100 times better than their competitors and that companies that have this X-factor will enter a phase of rapid growth that can last for a long time (Harnish, 2014). However, in this situation, firms already possess a competitive advantage and will therefore not have to innovate their business model in order to achieve one. As the focus of this research is on how platforms can use business model innovation to realise fast growth, this possession of a competitive advantage beforehand has not been included in the theoretical framework.

4. Methodology

The aim of this research is to investigate how platforms can innovate their business model to achieve high growth. To reach this goal, empirical evidence needs to be collected and analysed and therefore a research strategy needs to be chosen. In the field of social sciences, five major research strategies exist, namely histories, archival analysis, surveys, experiments and case studies (Yin, 1994).

As this research is explorative and deals with contemporary events in which behaviour cannot be manipulated (M. B. Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994), it has been decided to use a case study as the research strategy. Furthermore, the other research strategies are considered to be inappropriate for this study. Histories are considered to be unsuitable for this study. This research strategy is used when past events are studied for which no people can be found to be interviewed, as they are not alive anymore (Yin, 1994). However, for the research topic at hand, there will be enough people that can be interviewed as it is a relatively new topic, thus making the use of histories as a research strategy unsuitable. Since it is expected that there will be no archival records available about how platforms can achieve high growth, archival analysis will not be used in this research. Furthermore, it has been decided not to use surveys as a research strategy, as they cannot fully account for contextual factors (Yin, 1994), which are considered relevant in this study. Finally, experiments ignore contextual factors and require manipulation of behaviour, which has led to the decision that this research strategy does not fit this study (Yin, 1994).

4.1 Case Companies

As can be seen in figure 5, three types of case companies were identified for this research, namely high-growth platforms, less fast-growing platforms and external experts. To find high-growth platforms that could be contacted, convenience sampling together with research on the Internet was used. This resulted in a list of 21 high-growth platforms. Furthermore, 11 less fast-growing platforms were found, again by making use of convenience sampling and desk research. Moreover, 5 external experts were found by using the aforementioned sampling methods. All platforms and experts were contacted by e-mail and this resulted in 7 research participants, consisting of 3 high-growth platforms, 2 less fast-growing platforms and 2 experts. On the next pages, it will be argued why the different types of case companies were considered valuable for this study. Besides, it will be explained how a distinction has been made between high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms and how they were found.

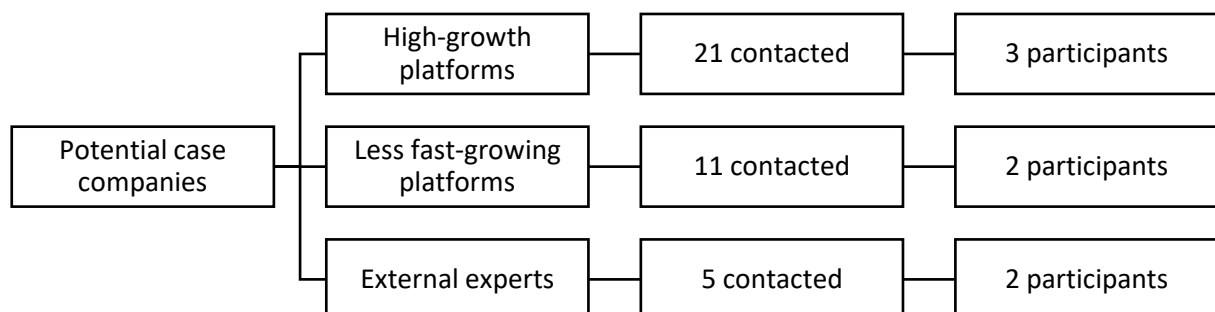


Figure 5 Overview of potential case companies

4.1.1 Selecting case companies

4.1.1.1 High-growth platforms

For this study, several platform businesses are selected as case companies. As the focus of this research is to investigate how platforms can use BMI to achieve high growth, platforms that are or were high-growth platforms are subjects for this research. For this study, data from two well-known Dutch initiatives that award prizes to Dutch HGFs, which are the 'Top 250 growth firms' and the 'FD Gazellen Awards', will be used. Both have compiled a list of the fastest growing Dutch firms and those lists will be used to select high-growth platforms.

The 'Top 250 growth firms' is based on the Scale-up Dashboard of the Rotterdam School of Management and the Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship and is published in collaboration with *nlgroeit*, a platform where entrepreneurs help each other to take their next growth step (*nlgroeit*, 2019a, 2019b). Firms that are included in the 'Top 250 growth firms' have to meet several criteria (*nlgroeit*, 2019b). Those firms should have at least 10 fulltime employees and/or at least 5 million euros of turnover. Besides, they should have realised an annual growth of at least 20 per cent in FTE and/or turnover for three consecutive years.

The 'FD Gazellen Awards' are awarded by 'Het Financieele Dagblad' (i.e. the financial daily newspaper) to the fastest growing Dutch firms (Kakebeeke, 2018, May 3). The most important criteria that should be met to qualify for the 'FD Gazellen Awards' is a growth rate in turnover of at least 20 per cent for a period of three years. Furthermore, some other conditions have to be met, namely: the growth in turnover over the three-year period is consecutive and thus not interrupted, the turnover for the first year is at least €250,000, the firm was economically active on the first of January 2015, the net result should be positive for the final year and can only be negative for one of the preceding two years and the company should be financially healthy. The final ranking of the qualified firms is based on three indicators: growth in turnover, increase in employees (measured in FTE's) and profit margin (Kakebeeke, 2018, May 3).

It can be seen that the criteria that have to be met to be qualified for those awards match quite well with the definition for high growth (i.e. firms that have realised an annual growth of at least 20 per cent over a three- or four-year period measured in turnover and/or employees). In fact, to be qualified for those awards, firms have to meet the criteria that were indicated by the definition for high growth, but also have to meet additional conditions. It can therefore be concluded that all firms that are included in the lists that are compiled for those awards have achieved high growth according to the definition that was mentioned before.

Besides selecting high-growth platforms using the lists from the two Dutch initiatives mentioned before, one foreign platform, namely Transporeon, will be selected by means of convenience sampling. The researcher already established contact with this platform in previous research, so it is expected that this organisation might be willing to participate in this research again. Transporeon has already received the Deloitte Technology Fast 50 Award five times (Transporeon GmbH, 2019a). This means that the company is one of the 50 fastest-growing technology firms headquartered in Germany, measured by the average percentage revenue growth over the last four financial years (Deloitte, 2019). Therefore, Transporeon can be classified as a high-growth platform.

4.1.1.2 Less fast-growing platforms

However, some platforms that are not high-growth platforms were also considered relevant subjects to provide additional insights into the subject. As only a small amount of firms manage to achieve high growth (Anyadike-Danes et al., 2009; Arrighetti & Lasagni, 2013; Goswami et al., 2019), taking the large group of non-high-growth platforms into account is of importance to get a full understanding of the research topic. Especially, those platforms might have tried to achieve high growth, but were

confronted with barriers which hindered their growth process. Those barriers can be relevant for this research. Moreover, interviewing those less fast-growing platforms as well enables a comparison between the two groups, which in turn might enable to discover factors that can explain their differences in growth. Platforms that have not (yet) been included in the list of 'Top 250 growth firms', the 'FD Gazellen Awards' and/or the German 'Deloitte Technology Fast 50 Award' are considered to be less fast-growing platforms.

It is important to mention that only a distinction between high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms has been made, thus not further distinguishing in growth rates. This means that platforms that have at least once been included in the list of 'Top 250 growth firms', the 'FD Gazellen Awards' and/or the German 'Deloitte Technology Fast 50 Award' are considered to be high-growth platforms, while platforms that have not yet been included in those lists are considered to be less fast-growing platforms. Although the specific criteria to be included in the different lists differ, the high-growth platforms can be said to have realised an annual growth of at least 20 per cent over a three- or four-year period measured in turnover and/or employees, while this does not hold for the less fast-growing platforms.

4.1.1.3 External experts

Finally, external experts that can provide additional insights into the topic of this research are considered to be valuable subjects. Those experts have knowledge about and experience with the growth trajectories of platforms and/or HGFs and can thus provide relevant input for this research.

4.1.2 Description of case companies

In the following sections, short descriptions about the case companies will be provided. Those descriptions are based on the interview data, information from company websites and news articles. A reference will only be added if data originates from the last two sources, meaning that data without a specific reference originates from the interviews.

It has to be mentioned that the platforms that have participated in this research operate in very different industries. Although two of them are operating in the employment sector, the other platforms operate in the construction industry, logistics/transport sector and another sector that cannot be mentioned for anonymity reasons. In the ideal situation, a comparison would be made between high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms from the same industry, as this allows to account for industry-specific factors. However, due to the fact that the focus was mainly on Dutch platforms combined with the fact that only a few platforms were willing to participate, it was not possible to arrive at this ideal research design. Although it is expected that a comparison between the participating platforms will still provide valuable insights, the fact that they operate in different industries is a limitation of this research.

4.1.2.1 High-growth platforms

12Build

12Build was founded in 2007, has approximately 45 employees and is a B2B tendering platform for the European construction industry. It creates value for main contractors by increasing market transparency and optimising processes. The platform creates value for the construction specialists by improving their findability and by making the tendering process easier. The company's mission is to connect partners in the construction industry based on their expertise and to facilitate more efficient online collaboration. The company offers four cloud-based solutions. 'Matchmaker' allows main contractors to search in 12Build's database of construction specialists and enables them to easily

request and compare quotes. 'Activator' is used by construction specialists and offers them the possibility to claim and activate their company profile, which includes for example their expertise, certificates, reference projects and corporate videos (12Build, 2019a). 'Promoter' can in turn be used by construction specialists to stand out more in the search results with their company profile. This improves their findability and provides them with functionalities that can save costs (12Build, 2019b). 'Evaluator' is 12Build's rating system and main contractors can use it to evaluate construction specialists and suppliers. By evaluating each other fairly and openly, the parties can bring each other to the next level (12Build, 2017). The company is market leader and within the Netherlands, there are no similar competing platforms in the market. There are some other SaaS-solutions that optimise and facilitate the tendering process, but those companies do not have a database of construction specialists like 12Build.

Daan

Daan is an employment agency that was founded in 2012. It supports professionals in finding a job that meets their ambitions and supports clients in finding personnel. The company strongly focuses on the human match, where supply and demand are matched on a person-by-person basis. Therefore, the company does not make use of automated matchmaking. The professionals are not only supported in finding a job, but are also offered career guidance. Daan serves a niche market, as it focuses on the public sector. Daan's internal employees are viewed to be most important. If the internal employee is happy and treated well, the company believes that this will also hold for the professionals and clients that are served by the internal employees. The company is market leader and operates in a market with tough competition. The market is large and mature with many players.

Transporeon

Transporeon was established in 2000 and is a cloud-based collaboration platform between shippers and carriers. It offers end-to-end software solutions for supply chains in the logistics sector (Transporeon GmbH, 2019c). The aim is to get as many shippers and carriers as possible worldwide connected to the platform and to increase efficiency, reliability and eco-friendliness. Transporeon assists its shippers, carriers, suppliers and goods recipients in increasing transparency, minimising empty transports, reducing waiting times and removing redundant work. When a shipper decides to make a connection with the platform, the firm could come into contact with all its carriers worldwide that are already connected to the platform. It offers a wide range of services, such as market intelligence, transportation sourcing, transport assignment, time slot management, tracking and visibility, freight settlement and analysis. The Transporeon Group consists of three platforms. Its flagship is Transporeon, which is focused on the operational side. The technology is modular and can be customised. Ticontract optimises online freight tenders and contract management between shippers and carriers (Transporeon GmbH, 2019c). Finally, Mercareon is a time slot management and yard management solution that is specifically designed for retailers (Transporeon GmbH, 2019c). Additionally, the Transporeon Group has acquired Tim Consult in 2018. This consulting company provides market intelligence for the logistics sector. Furthermore, the company entered a strategic alliance with Sixfold in 2019 to be able to provide real-time visibility and tracking. The company has managed to become Europe's market leader and has approximately 700 employees.

4.1.2.2 *Less fast-growing platforms*

Platform N²

Platform N is a C2B platform, whereby the customer sells its product to a purchasing company. The seller reports his product, after which Platform N matches supply and demand. Platform N thereby makes life easier for both parties. It is important to find out where the seller is in the sales process, as some sellers are ready to sell their product immediately, while others find it rather exciting and want some additional information first. Platform N operates in an emotional trade, which means that building trust is important. Therefore, the company distinguishes itself by being a trusted partner. The market in which platform N operates has multiple competing platforms and other types of competitors as well.

Value is created for sellers in multiple ways. Platform N is an authority in the field and can therefore enrich the seller's product with additional information, which results in a detailed product description. Furthermore, a seller can sell his product relatively quickly, due to the fact that there is always a suitable buyer in Platform N's large network. Moreover, sellers know that they are dealing with buyers that meet certain standards. Besides, the seller remains anonymous until both parties agree on a deal, the seller does not have to pay for Platform N's services and if there is no deal, the seller is not committed to anything. Finally, the seller is guided through the sale process.

Platform N also creates value for the buyers. For buyers, the platform is a large repository of products and with the help of several selection criteria, they can easily filter and search for the desired products and easily bid for and buy products in one place. By using the platform, buyers can save a lot of time, as it offers them a more active approach: they can now choose what they want and do not have to wait for a suitable product to pop up. Finally, the buyer also remains anonymous until both parties have agreed on a deal.

YoungOnes

Founded in November 2017, YoungOnes is a digital platform that matches supply and demand, whereby the platform is the piece of technique between the client that offers day jobs and the freelancer who performs day jobs. YoungOnes ensures that clients can easily upload a day job and that freelancers can easily take a day job. Only day jobs and no permanent jobs are offered on the platform and those day jobs are mainly in logistics, promotion, food service industry and events, whereby it is important that the job can easily be performed by a freelancer. Nowadays, temporary work becomes more common and permanent jobs are being replaced by short-term jobs. This is due to the fact that employers only want to use expertise where and when needed combined with an unpredictable demand for labour (YoungOnes, 2019). Additionally, young people prefer to work on-demand, as they value flexibility and determining their own work hours (YoungOnes, 2019). YoungOnes offers a solution for this and brings demand and supply together as fast and easy as possible. The company is a startup which employs twelve people. The company faces competition from similar platforms and employment agencies. It is founded by the founders of YoungCapital, an employment agency that is focused on students, starters and young professionals.

² This is a pseudonymised company name

4.1.2.3 Experts

Expert 1³

Expert 1 has knowledge and insights about (high-growth) platforms. For anonymity reasons, more information about this expert cannot be provided.

ECE

The Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship (ECE) can be seen as “the leading centre for entrepreneurship in Europe” (Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship BV, 2019a). Amongst others, it conducts research on scale-ups, of which the ScaleUp Dashboard is an example. Furthermore, research is conducted on which factors could be indicative of HGFs and which factors are barriers to expansion (Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship BV, 2019b). Moreover, it is part of the collaboration that composes and publishes the ‘Top 250 Groeibedrijven’ (Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship BV, 2019b). Although ECE does not have insight in platform companies specifically, it does have a lot of knowledge about how and why startups develop into scale-ups. Therefore, ECE has been included as an expert organisation. The interview questions for ECE have been tailored towards its knowledge domains and are therefore focused on the high-growth strategies.

4.2 Data Collection

By interviewing multiple platforms and experts, data for this study were collected. It has been decided to make use of semi-structured interviews as this allows to have some flexibility in the interview process (e.g. ask follow-up questions and change the sequence of questions), while making sure that all relevant topics are covered in each interview (Bryman, 2012). The interview templates that were used for this study can be found in appendix 10.2. The duration of the interviews varied between 35 and 105 minutes. An overview of the interviews that have been conducted can be found in appendix 10.3 and the informed consent form that the interviewees were requested to sign, can be found in appendix 10.4. According to Yin (1994), actions should be undertaken to improve the quality of an exploratory case study. Those actions relate to three quality aspects, which are: construct validity, external validity and reliability.

Multiple actions were taken to improve construct validity, which is the selection of appropriate measures for the concepts that are studied (Yin, 1994). Firstly, it was made sure that all strategies included in the theoretical framework were captured, either directly or indirectly, by the interview questions. In this way, it could be assured that all relevant topics were covered and correctly measured during the interviews. Secondly, various sources have been used to acquire as much insights about the participating platforms as possible. Besides gathering additional information, triangulation of sources was also used to verify and validate the information that was provided by the interviewees (Patton, 1999). The semi-structured interviews were therefore complemented by information from the websites of the participating platforms and by news articles in which their company name was mentioned. Besides, the number of data sources used was increased by interviewing multiple parties of different types (i.e. multiple platforms and experts). Moreover, all research participants were asked to validate the notes that were taken during the interview and to review the draft version of this report, which resulted in five parties that actually validated the notes and two parties that reviewed the draft version.

³ This is a pseudonymised company name

External validity deals with selecting the domain to which the results of a case study can be generalised (Yin, 1994). The fact that multiple platforms were interviewed contributes to the generalisability of the findings of this research. Based on the insights provided by the participating platforms, it can be concluded which strategies have been most successful for them in realising high growth. As the successfulness of the different strategies is based on the experiences of multiple platforms, this improves the generalisability of this research. Nevertheless, the external validity of this research would have been higher if more platforms would have participated in the study.

Finally, attention has been devoted towards improving the reliability of the study. The interview templates that were developed are an important aspect in assuring reliability as those templates ensured that all platforms of the same type (i.e. high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms) were asked the same questions. Although all parties were asked more or less the same questions, different interview templates were constructed for the different types of research subjects to make sure that the questions were matching their growth pace or knowledge areas. Nevertheless, all interview templates were based on the theoretical framework that has been developed and were structured in the same way. All interviews started with some general questions about the firms itself, after which the focus shifted towards growth strategies. The questions about growth strategies were structured in line with the four decision areas in which no mistakes can be made by companies that want to grow fast. Those decision areas consist of strategy, execution, people and cash and have been identified by Verne Harnish, a famous American growth guru. According to Harnish (2014), not making mistakes in those four decision areas is crucial in order to achieve the maximum result. To be more precise, in order to grow fast, companies have to (1) define a strategy that is truly distinctive, (2) make no mistakes in execution, (3) hire and bind the right employees and (4) have enough cash to defend themselves against unforeseen events (Harnish, 2014). Since leaders of all companies have to deal with those decision areas, it was decided to group the interview questions that belong to the same decision area together in order to ensure a logical interview structure. In the interview templates in appendix 10.2, it has been indicated to which decision area a question belongs. In each template, some questions could not be assigned to a specific decision area, as those questions applied to multiple growth strategies and therefore multiple decision areas.

After the first interview, it became clear that it would also be relevant to investigate whether the growth strategies used by the platforms change over time. It might for example be that a platform does not make use of acquisitions in the early growth phase, but that it does acquire other businesses in later growth stages. Therefore, in the remaining five interviews, it has been tried to ask about this time element as well. However, due to time constraints, this time element could not be fully integrated into the interview questions and was therefore not covered by all business representatives for all growth strategies. Besides, it was only asked whether a strategy was used in the past, is used in the present and will be used in the future. However, to really be able to say something about the phases in which a particular strategy is useful or not, it would have been necessary to ask more specifically in which stage of the business life cycle (e.g. embryonic stage, emergent stage, growth stage or maturity stage) (Muzellec, Ronteau, & Lambkin, 2015) a strategy was, is or will be used. As the case companies are in very different stages of their business life cycle, it might for example be that one platform that has used a strategy in the past might have used it during the embryonic stage, while another one might have used it in the growth stage. Nevertheless, due to time constraints and due to the fact that the main focus of this research is to identify which strategies a platform can use to innovate its business model and thereby achieve high growth, it has been decided to focus on past, current and future use to provide some initial insights into the time element.

4.3 Data Analysis

To enable the process of data analysis, notes were taken during the interviews. These notes were worked out afterwards to make sure that all relevant information was included. It has been decided not to tape-record the interviews, as it was expected that this might cause potential research participants to withdraw from this study.

As each interview question was related to one or two growth strategies, the data has been coded by linking the answers to each interview question to the growth strategies to which they belonged. During the coding process, the time element was also taken into account by indicating whether the interview answers applied to the past, current or future situation.

Afterwards, four tables, which can be found in the results section, have been constructed to display the main findings. The use of tables not only ensures that the data is visualised in a structured way, but it also facilitates comparison-making between cases in order to discover similarities, differences and patterns (M. B. Miles & Huberman, 1994). Two tables include the results from the interviews with the platform companies and the other two tables visualise the results from the interviews with the experts. For both the platforms and experts, a table including the findings concerning the use of platform growth strategies and a table including the results concerning the use of high-growth strategies have been created. For the tables including the results from the interviews with the platforms, it has been indicated for each growth strategy whether it was, is or will be used by the separate platforms. For the tables displaying the results from the interviews with the experts, it has been shown for each growth strategy whether an expert indicated that it was, is or will be used by either platforms or start-ups.

5. Results

In this part, the main findings of the interviews will be described. In section 5.1, the results from the separate interviews will be presented in tables, after which section 5.2 focuses on merging the results of the three high-growth platforms and the two less fast-growing platforms into two categories, namely high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms. This will result in two comprehensive tables, which in turn will be more explicitly described.

5.1 Company-specific Results

Based on the statements made by the business representatives, information from the companies' websites and news articles in which the companies were mentioned, table 2 to 5 indicate for each growth strategy whether it was, is or will be used by the different case companies. In appendix 10.5, the extensive results including the detailed information based on which it was concluded whether a particular strategy was, is or will be used can be found.

The main findings are displayed in table 2 to 5. Table 2 and 3 include the results regarding platform growth strategies and table 4 and 5 include the results regarding high-growth strategies. Colours have been used to display the findings in a clear way. The legend in table 1 hereunder explains what each colour represents.

Table 1 Legend for tables with results

Colour	Explanation
	Strategy is or will be applied.
	Strategy is not or will not be applied.
	Strategy is not applied, but company is open to it and it might be applied in the future.
	Application of the strategy has not been covered during the interview.
	Part of the strategy is or will be applied and part of the strategy is not or will not be applied (For the experts tables: Differs per platform whether strategy was (not), is (not) or will (not) be applied).
	Part of the strategy is or will be applied and part of the strategy is not applied, but company is open to it and might apply it in the future.
	Part of the strategy is or will be applied and part of the strategy has not been covered during the interview.

5.1.1 Platform growth strategies

Table 2 Use of platform growth strategies, results from interviews with platform representatives

Type of growth strategy	Strategy	Application by case companies														
		12Build			Daan			Transporeon			Platform N			YoungOnes		
		Past	Now	Future	Past	Now	Future	Past	Now	Future	Past	Now	Future	Past	Now	Future
Platform growth strategies	Distinctive positioning															
	Availability of complements															
	Platform envelopment															
	Advertising															
	Managing expectations															
	Building trust															
	Acquisitions															
	Exclusive contracting															
	Strategic alliances															
	Pricing															

Table 3 Use of platform growth strategies, results from interviews with experts

Type of growth strategy	Strategy	Application by high-growth platforms or high-growth startups according to experts					
		Expert 1			ECE Research		
		Start	Now	Later	Start	Now	Later
Platform growth strategies	Distinctive positioning						
	Availability of complements						
	Platform envelopment						
	Advertising						
	Managing expectations						
	Building trust						
	Acquisitions						
	Exclusive contracting						
	Strategic alliances						
	Pricing						

5.1.2 High-growth strategies

Table 4 Use of high-growth strategies, results from interviews with platform representatives

Type of growth strategy	Strategy	Application by case companies														
		12Build			Daan			Transporeon			Platform N			YoungOnes		
		Past	Now	Future	Past	Now	Future	Past	Now	Future	Past	Now	Future	Past	Now	Future
High growth strategies	Differentiated offering															
	Customer knowledge and customer loyalty															
	Possessing human capital															
	Availability of financial capital															
	Possessing IP and intangible assets															
	Acquiring data															
	Clear strat. & prosp., ext, growth based, int. orient.															
	Focus on the core															
	HRM practices															
	Group management style, clear roles															
	Automating business processes															
	Determining a meeting rhythm															
	Building relationships															

Table 5 Use of high-growth strategies, results from interviews with experts

Type of growth strategy	Strategy	Application by high-growth platforms or high-growth startups according to experts					
		Expert 1			ECE Research		
		Start	Now	Later	Start	Now	Later
High-growth strategies	Differentiated offering						
	Customer knowledge and customer loyalty						
	Possessing human capital						
	Availability of financial capital						
	Possessing IP and intangible assets						
	Acquiring data						
	Clear strat. & prosp., ext., growth-based, int. orient.						
	Focus on the core						
	HRM practices						
	Group management style, clear roles						
	Automating business processes						
	Determining a meeting rhythm						
	Building relationships						

5.2 Merged Results

In this part, the company-specific results will be merged to arrive at two categories: high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms. The results that were presented in the results tables have been combined, where the results of 12Build, Daan and Transporeon are merged into the category 'high-growth platforms' and the results of Platform N and YoungOnes are merged into the category 'less fast-growing platforms'. Section 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 will focus on the merged results for the platform growth strategies and the merged results for the high-growth strategies respectively. Those merged results are displayed in table 7 and 8. It will be shortly discussed for each strategy whether it was, is or will (not) be used by the two groups.

It is important to mention that the merged results in table 7 and 8 are based on the statements provided by the platforms. Oftentimes, their statements matched the view of the Expert 1 and the representative from ECE. However, there were instances in which the statements of the platforms and the experts deviated somewhat. Those deviations will be elaborated upon and will be taken into considerations when making decisions about how to update the high-growth canvas for platforms.

Some remarks have to be made concerning the merging process. Sometimes the use of the strategies differed between the platforms within the same group. In table 7 and 8, this is represented by some cells having multiple colours. Furthermore, sometimes a strategy was not covered for a particular period for one of the companies. In those instances, the following reasoning was applied. If two of the three high-growth platforms or one of the less fast-growing platforms (do not) use a particular strategy in the respective period and the use of this strategy for the respective period was not covered for one of the platforms, it is assumed that the latter does (not) use the strategy during that period if it was or is (not) used in the period before or after the respective period. For the high-growth platforms for example, Daan and Transporeon did use the strategy of building trust in the past, but the use of this strategy in the past has not been covered for 12Build. Since 12Build does use this strategy currently, it is assumed that 12Build did use this strategy in the past as well. Therefore, table 7 shows that high-growth platforms used the strategy of building trust in the past. To illustrate the reasoning for less fast-growing platforms, the strategy of distinctive positioning can be used as an example. Platform N will use this strategy in the future, but the use of this strategy in the future has not been covered for YoungOnes. Since YoungOnes does use this strategy currently, it is assumed that YoungOnes will use this strategy in the future as well. That is why it is displayed in table 7 that less fast-growing platforms will use the strategy of distinctive positioning in the future. However, in all other situations where the above-mentioned reasoning cannot be implied, table 7 and 8 indicate a strategy not to be covered for a particular period.

On page 60, table 7 and 8 can be found. Colours are used to display the findings in a clear way. The legend in table 6 on the next page explains what each colour represents.

Table 6 Legend for tables 7 and 8 with merged results

Colour		Explanation
		Strategy is or will be applied.
		Strategy is not or will not be applied.
		Strategy is not applied, but platforms are open to it and it might be applied in the future.
		Application of the strategy has not been covered during the interview.
		Differs per platform whether strategy is or will be applied OR whether strategy is not or will not be applied.
		Differs per platform whether strategy is or will be applied OR whether strategy is not applied, but platform is open to it and might apply it in the future.
		Differs per platform whether strategy is or will be applied OR whether application of the strategy has not been covered during the interview.
		Differs per platform whether strategy is not or will not be applied OR whether strategy is not applied, but platform is open to it and it might apply it in the future.
		Differs per platform whether strategy is not or will not be applied OR whether application of the strategy has not been covered during the interview.
		Differs per platform if strategy is not applied, but platform is open to it and might apply it in the future OR whether application of the strategy has not been covered during the interview.

Table 7 Merged results for platform growth strategies

Type of growth strategy	Strategy	Application by case companies					
		High-growth platforms			Less fast-growing platforms		
		Past	Now	Future	Past	Now	Future
Platform growth strategies	Distinctive positioning						
	Availability of complements						
	Platform envelopment						
	Advertising						
	Managing expectations						
	Building trust						
	Acquisitions						
	Exclusive contracting						
	Strategic alliances						
	Pricing						

Table 8 Merged results for high-growth strategies

Type of growth strategy	Strategy	Application by case companies					
		High-growth platforms			Less fast-growing platforms		
		Past	Now	Future	Past	Now	Future
High-growth strategies	Differentiated offering						
	Customer knowledge and customer loyalty						
	Possessing human capital						
	Availability of financial capital						
	Possessing IP and intangible assets						
	Acquiring data						
	Clear strat. & prosp., ext., growth-based, int. orient.						
	Focus on the core						
	HRM practices						
	Group management style, clear roles						
	Automating business processes						
	Determining a meeting rhythm						
	Building relationships						

5.2.1 Platform growth strategies

Hereunder, table 7 will be shortly explained by describing whether platforms did, do or will use the different platform growth strategies. If it differs per platform whether it is used or not, possible explanations for the differences will be discussed. Furthermore, if a strategy was not covered for a particular period, assumptions will be made and explained.

5.2.1.1 High-growth platforms

Distinctive positioning

As can be seen in table 7, high-growth platforms did, do and will use the strategy of distinctive positioning and this is also confirmed by the experts. They all have a differentiated offering and some of them also distinctively position themselves by targeting niche markets or by being a closed platform while their competitors are more open.

Availability of complements

The current use of this strategy differs per platform and both its past and future use are assumed to differ per platform as well. For the platforms that offer complements, it improves the value offered for its customers. Nevertheless, having complements available seems not to be necessary if the core offering is sufficiently differentiated and valuable. The fact that the use of this strategy differs per platform is reinforced by the experts: one of them mentioned that high-growth platforms offer complements by opening up physical stores, while the other one mentioned that high-growth digital startups only start to consider this strategy later in their growth process.

Platform envelopment

Although no specific questions regarding this strategy were asked during the interview, business representatives were asked to provide information about the products and services that they offer. Based on this, it can be concluded that the use of this strategy differs per platform: Transporeon did and does use this strategy, while 12Build and Daan did and do not. Transporeon uses platform envelopment by incorporating solutions offered by others into its own platform, either by starting a new company or by adding a new module. This results in an overall solution that grows with tomorrow's demand. Based on the products and services offered by the other two platforms, it is assumed that they do not use this strategy. Although it would require more information to give an explanation why they do not use platform envelopment, it could be possible that the platforms do not perceive other markets to offer suitable features that they should incorporate and combine with their platforms. Furthermore, platform envelopment requires cross-unit coordination (Eisenmann et al., 2011) and is therefore likely to cost time and money and to require manpower and particular skills. As Transporeon has way more employees than the platforms that do not use this strategy (i.e. 700 vs. approximately 50), the former might be in a better position to apply this strategy.

Advertising

As can be seen in table 7, in the past, it differed per platform whether this strategy was used. Transporeon used advertising (e.g. social media) in the past in order to increase its brand awareness and attract customers, while 12Build deliberately decided not to do so. This difference might be explained by the fact that Transporeon was facing competition, while 12Build did not, as it was the only tendering platform in the construction industry. Therefore, the former had to put more emphasis on creating brand awareness to get or stay ahead of competition, while the latter one could take things more slowly and focus on other things first. Summarising, using this strategy from the beginning can

be very useful, especially when facing competition, but does not need to be necessary, for example when being the only player in the market.

Although not all platforms used this strategy in the past, it is used by all of them nowadays. Presumably, 12Build has finetuned its initial offering and is now ready to increase its brand awareness, which can be supported by its desire to expand in Europe. Besides, all platforms use advertising to increase brand awareness and attract customers. The advertising channels used are social media and online campaigns. Nevertheless, advertising is not the main channel that is used to increase brand awareness. The platforms use other channels to increase their brand awareness as well, which include direct marketing, being present at trade fairs and/or events (and giving a presentation), leveraging the community's word-of-mouth, high-quality website with the right keywords, mailings, job boards and universities. Both experts also indicated that advertising is used, but they also pointed attention towards the use of other channels to increase brand awareness, such as opening up physical stores or using content marketing.

Regarding the future, the platforms are assumed to use this strategy. They are all pursuing this strategy currently and stress its importance in increasing brand awareness and attracting new users. Furthermore, 12Build and Transporeon are expanding internationally, which implies that they have to create brand awareness in the countries they want to expand to. Furthermore, Daan is operating in a large and mature market with tough competition, which leads to the presumption that increasing brand awareness will remain to be an important strategy.

Managing expectations

It differs per platform whether this strategy was used in the past or not. Based on the interview results, it can be concluded that this strategy is only used if it is actually necessary to convince (potential) users that the platform will become market leader. When it was established, 12Build was the only tendering platform for the construction industry, which automatically caused the (potential) users to expect that it would become market leader. Therefore, it was not needed to actively manage users' expectations. However, Daan had to manage users' expectations in the past, because it was facing competition and Transporeon also had to manage expectations due to competition and the fact that it aimed to achieve a 'winner-takes-all' situation. This leads to the conclusion that expectations do not need to be managed from the beginning if the platform is already expected to become market leader by (potential) users (for example due to contextual factors) or if it does not want to become market leader. However, if a platform is facing competition that it wants to get or stay ahead of, managing expectations is likely to be a necessary strategy.

For the current situation, the same logic applies as for the past situation and a platform only needs to manage expectations if it required to convince (potential) users that it will become market leader. 12Build and Daan are both market leader in the Netherlands and therefore do not have to manage user's expectations anymore. Moreover, it is also not needed if the market already expects a company to become market leader or if becoming a market leader is not desired at all. Transporeon is market leader in Europe, but wants to become market leader worldwide and achieve a winner-takes-all situation and is therefore still managing its users' expectations. However, it also needs to be mentioned that Transporeon is also still managing its users' expectations in Europe, thereby probably using it to strengthen its position of Europe's market leader.

For the future, it is assumed that platforms will only put effort into convincing customers if there is a real need to do so, which has been described above.

Building trust

High-growth platforms were, are and probably will use this strategy, which is confirmed by both experts. It is perceived to be very important, as it provides added value for the users, increases customer satisfaction, makes users loyal and helps to attract new users. Several ways for creating trust are used, such as building and maintaining customer relationships (e.g. customer service, human contact, using user's feedback), transparency, proving by doing, stability of the platform, growing with tomorrow's demand, the firm's appearance and data security certifications.

Acquisitions

12Build and Transporeon did acquire a business in the past, while Daan did not. However, it could be concluded that acquiring other companies is not a direct strategy for at least one of the former two platforms. 12Build did acquire a company because it was the right possibility at the right time, but in general, there are hardly any suitable acquisition candidates and investing in new salespeople is perceived to be a better strategy. Furthermore, Transporeon mentioned that it was very important that it had no negative influence on the platform's stability and uptime. Thus, for the platforms that did use this strategy, acquisitions were not a priority, but they had the opportunity to take over a company that met their criteria and therefore they decided to act upon it. Overall, it can be concluded that taking over other businesses was no direct strategy for high-growth platforms, although they did consider and actually used it when there was a suitable acquisition candidate. Furthermore, the experts indicated that acquiring other businesses is often not a possibility during the early growth phases yet, thus bringing up an additional reason why it can differ per platform whether this strategy is used.

Currently, none of the high-growth platforms is using this strategy, but they are all open to it. However, they are all quite selective and have criteria that should be met if a business is indeed to be taken over. Those criteria include suitability, small enough to have no influence on company culture and no negative impact on stability and uptime. To conclude, acquiring other businesses is not a direct strategy on itself and it depends on several factors whether a platform will act upon an acquisition opportunity. The experts also confirm that high-growth platforms (and digital startups) are open to this strategy.

Similar to the current situation, all platforms are open to this strategy in the future.

Exclusive contracting

It is assumed that all high-growth platforms did, do and will not use exclusive contracting. 12Build perceives it not to be a good strategy and Transporeon emphasised that its users are free to go wherever they want to and that this also happens sometimes. Although this strategy might be useful for other platforms, as has been illustrated in the literature review, it is not applied by the platform case companies and thus apparently not a precondition for high growth.

Strategic alliances

It is assumed that the use of this strategy in the past differed per company based on the information provided for the current situation. Moreover, based on the statement from an expert, it could be stated that startups need to grow fast to be interesting for a strategic partner, which indicates that it might depend on a platform's growth pace whether it establishes a strategic alliance early on.

This strategy is used by some high-growth platforms but not by all of them, again confirmed by one of the experts. Strategic alliances are entered to create value for the users and to meet their demands. Besides, 12Build benefits from the network of its strategic partner. Although not explicitly mentioned in the interview, an example of this would be that 12Build is referred to by its partner, for example on its website, which could lead to clients of the partner considering whether using 12Build

would be valuable as well. Furthermore, Transporeon indicated that it carefully assesses whether a strategic alliance should be established: it develops many things itself, but is more likely to establish an interface or strategic alliance if it falls outside its core proposition. For Daan, which is not being part of a strategic alliance, it is also not a priority. It might be that for this platform, strategic alliances are not required or maybe not useful in serving customer demand or attracting new users. Overall, it can be concluded that high-growth platforms are often part of a strategic alliance, as it can create value for current users and be of help in attracting new ones. However, it appears not to be a necessary precondition for high growth.

Although this strategy has not been covered for Daan, the other two will continue to be part of strategic alliances. 12Build's representative even stressed its increasing importance for the platform's growth. Strategic alliances will be continued to be used for the same reasons as nowadays, but attracting new users in Europe is an additional goal for 12Build. To conclude, it is assumed that high-growth platforms do often consider this strategy to be important for generating future growth.

Pricing

All-high growth platforms have had a revenue model from the start and will also have it in the future, as this is needed to generate cash from their operations. Part of those revenue models is pricing, which can be split up into pricing structure and pricing level. Regarding the pricing structure, the high-growth platforms all use transaction fees for one side of the platform and 12Build and Transporeon also charge fixed fees to the other side for premium versions of the solutions or because the tool has to be adjusted based on company specific demands. For most of them, the side paying the transaction fees is the main revenue stream. For Daan, the side not charged is thus subsidised. Concerning price level, it differs per platform whether it had always been the same or whether it was adjusted over time. The representative of 12Build indicated that its price level has changed over time to stimulate the adoption of its platform.

5.2.1.2 Less fast-growing platforms

Distinctive positioning

In the past, present and future, the less fast-growing platforms use this strategy. They use their differentiated offering to arrive at a distinctive position. Other ways that are used to distinctively position themselves are: targeting market niches, being a trusted partner and/or by purely focusing on matching supply and demand instead of purchasing the goods themselves to resell them.

Availability of complements

Both less fast-growing platforms used this strategy in the past. Most complements were offered by external parties, but some complementary services were offered by the platforms themselves.

Nowadays, it depends on the platform whether there are complements available. All less fast-growing platforms offer good customer service, which is an example of a complement. However, although being open to it, Platform N does not offer any other complements. Platform N's representative indicated that it offered complementary products in the past, but that this strategy is not pursued anymore due to low usage. YoungOnes does offer some complementary services, either provided by itself or by an external party.

In the future, it is assumed that both platforms will be open to the strategy of offering complements.

Platform envelopment

Although this strategy was not covered by a specific question in the interview, based on the goods and services offered by the platforms, it can be assumed that they did, do and probably will not use this strategy. YoungOnes is probably too young to pursue this strategy as it first has to finetune its main offering. No statements can be made about Platform N, but it might be explained by the fact that the company has scaled down to get focused again and platform envelopment is likely to fall outside their current focus. Moreover, it might be the case that there are no suitable features available in other markets that can be incorporated and combined with its current platform.

Advertising

Even though the past situation was not touched upon during the interviews, it is assumed that advertising was used in the past. Both platforms were facing competition and because YoungOnes is relatively young, it is expected that they were using advertising in the past to become known in the field and to get or stay ahead of their competitors.

Nowadays, less fast-growing platforms use advertising to increase their brand awareness, which can help them to attract new users. Types of advertising that are used include social media, Google and radio and TV commercials. Nevertheless, besides advertising, other ways are used to generate brand awareness, namely (online) marketing and leveraging the network, database and mailings of another firm.

It is assumed that the platforms will continue to use this strategy in the future.

Managing expectations

Based on the information about the current situation, one could say that it is assumable that they have used this strategy in the past, as they both wanted to become market leader.

Currently, the less fast-growing platforms are applying this strategy. For YoungOnes, this is because it wants to become market leader in a market with competition. Platform N, however, is already market leader. This leads to the presumption that this platform is managing users' expectations to strengthen its position as market leader.

As the less fast-growing platforms are currently managing their users' expectations, they are likely to continue doing this. YoungOnes is relatively young and still has a way to go before becoming market leader. Platform N is market leader already, but faces tough competition and will probably use this strategy in the future to secure its position.

Building trust

From the beginning, less fast-growing platforms have put a lot of emphasis on building trust and they will continue to do this. It is important in attracting and retaining customers and is a very important growth strategy for one of them. The platforms indicated to create trust by devoting attention to customer relationships (e.g. customer service, human contact, creating understanding), proving trustworthiness, being independent, being transparent and having a review system.

Acquisitions

In the past, the less fast-growing platforms did not acquire other businesses or business units. YoungOnes is simply not ready yet to focus on this and Platform N has considered acquisition opportunities, but discontinued. For the latter one, it was easier to scale up the platform itself and merging the two companies would have taken a lot of time.

It differs per platform whether it is open to this strategy or not. YoungOnes is not open to it currently. It is a very young company that first wants to focus on improving its core offering in order to organically grow with that. Platform N is open to the strategy and will consider it if there is a suitable

acquisition candidate. However, merging two companies and their systems is time-consuming and this will be taken into consideration if a suitable candidate passes by.

Towards the future, Platform N will remain open to it. The representative of YoungOnes indicated that no statements regarding this strategy could be made yet due to its young age. However, it is expected that less fast-growing platforms will probably be open to acquisitions in the future if there is a right possibility at the right time.

Exclusive contracting

Both platforms indicated that they did and do not use this strategy. They think that you should not want to restrict your users from using competitors' offerings and one of them actually perceives it to be a good thing if competitor's services are used as well. In fact, their customers do also actually use the offerings of competitors. Due to the fact that both did and do not use exclusive contracting as they think it is not the right way to go, it is assumed that this strategy will not be used in the future.

Strategic alliances

It differs per platform whether this strategy was and is used. Platform N did have strategic alliances with external parties who provided complementary services. Young Ones was not part of a strategic alliance in the past.

Currently, none of them is part of a strategic alliance, but the representative of Platform N mentioned that it is open to the strategy, for example to provide complementary products or services again.

Although the representative of YoungOnes did not mention whether this strategy will be used in the future, the representative of Platform N indicated that it will be open to it. It is expected that in general, less fast-growing platforms will be open to the strategy in the future. One of them is still a startup, which explains why it might be too early to focus on this strategy or why the platform is not interesting for strategic partners yet. However, as the company grows, it is expected that this platform will become more interesting for potential strategic partners and will be able to point more attention to this strategy.

Pricing

The less fast-growing platforms were, are and will be focusing on pricing. The pricing level is transparent and equal for everyone. YoungOnes used exactly the same revenue model as it does currently. It charges one side transaction fees of a fixed pricing level. Therefore, it can be stated that this platform subsidises the side that is not charged. Platform N tried some different revenue models in the past. It has tried to charge both sides, but it soon discovered that this caused the sellers to get expectations (e.g. concerning the price that they will receive for their product). Therefore, the company switched to its current revenue model, whereby only the buying side is charged a transaction fee. Thus, it can be concluded that less fast-growing platforms currently subsidise one side by not charging them.

5.2.2 High-growth strategies

Table 8 will be explained in this section by shortly describing whether both high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms did, do or will use the different high-growth strategies. In cases where it differs per platform whether a strategy is used or not, possible explanations for those differences will be investigated. Moreover, if a strategy was not covered for a particular period, assumptions will be made and explained.

5.2.2.1 High-growth platforms

Differentiated offering

All high-growth platforms did, do and will have a differentiated offering compared to their competitors, which is confirmed by both experts. Although it is very company and market specific how the platforms differentiate themselves from competitors, it stands out that two of them distinguish themselves by offering an overall solution. This leads to the presumption that in order to achieve high growth, offering an overall solution can be of great help, although such an overall solution it is not a required precondition as one platform does not have it.

Customer knowledge and customer loyalty

In the past, all high-growth platforms had a lot of customer knowledge. Their founders all had or acquired knowledge about the sector and its demands before they started their platforms, thus ensuring that they knew what their users needed and demanded. Furthermore, 12Build knew on which side (i.e. the side that could benefit from the platform right from the start due to its network independent value) it had to focus first to stimulate the adoption of its platform, again confirming its customer knowledge. Concerning customer loyalty, it can be stated that the companies focused on attracting and retaining users right from the start.

Currently, the high-growth platforms possess a lot of customer knowledge. Besides having founders that are knowledgeable about the sector and its customers, other things contribute to this as well. Firstly, 12Build and Transporeon are aware of the fact that customer's demands differ. They respond to this by offering customisable solutions, which means that users can for example select which (modular) solutions they want to use or that they choose between a free and a premium version. Besides, the platforms are acquiring knowledge about their users' demands and needs by encouraging their users to share their ideas and to provide feedback.

All platforms try to create loyal customers and Daan and Transporeon indicated that they do also actually have loyal customers. However, although the business representative of 12Build did not explicitly mention whether it has loyal customers, he did indicate that one side of the platform often refers its partners that do not work with the platform yet to it, which is an indication of loyal customers (De Bree, 2018). All of them try to create customer loyalty by building trust, for which it has already been described how this can be realised. Furthermore, they stress the importance of loyal customers in the process of attracting new users. The fact that high-growth platforms and digital startups have a lot of customer knowledge and point attention towards making their customers loyal is supported by the statements of the experts. Both indicated that repeatedly providing users with a great user experience mainly contributes to customer loyalty.

Even though only one platform explicitly mentioned that it will continue to use this strategy in the future, the other two are expected to do so as well due to the importance of this strategy for their platforms currently.

Possessing human capital

This strategy was, is and will remain to be used. High-growth platforms possess human capital and think it is very important. Actually, two platforms indicated that human capital was one of the three most important factors that have determined their growth up till now. Besides, two platforms mentioned that it will remain one of the three most important factors for their growth and the other platform also considers it to be a key factor.

The founders of 12Build and Daan had knowledge about the industry they operate in. Furthermore, 12Build's founder was familiar with entrepreneurship and Daan's founder had knowledge about platform businesses. The founders of Transporeon did not have knowledge about or experience with any of those factors, but they did field research about the industry they were going to start a company in and thus acquired knowledge about it. Therefore, it can be assumed that having knowledge about the industry can probably help to explain fast growth, while being experienced with platforms and entrepreneurship seems not to be a necessary precondition. The fact that knowledge about and experience with platforms was not a precondition for growth for those platforms can be explained by the fact that they were founded during the time when platforms started to rise. An expert namely indicated that back then, it was not necessary to have knowledge about platforms and that it was more about learning by doing. However, he stressed that possessing knowledge about platforms is crucial if you want to start and grow a platform nowadays. Therefore, it is assumed that platform knowledge is a necessary precondition if you want to start and quickly grow a platform today. Furthermore, the fact that the founders had no entrepreneurial experiences does not mean that they did not possess valuable entrepreneurial characteristics and qualities.

Besides, all companies are stressing the importance of their workforce, as those people are crucial for their success. According to the platforms and an expert, humans bring in creativity, come up with ideas, distinguish a platform from its competitors and bring you into contact with potential users. One platform indicated that it is important to hire people that strengthen the firm and all platforms agree that employees have to possess the right mindset, skills and knowledge, although those differ per job. Having the right mindset was also stressed by both experts.

What stands out is that human capital is stressed to be one of the most important factors in growing fast, but that this strategy is not always easy to pursue. 12Build and Transporeon indicated that finding and retaining the right people, especially IT-people, is challenging nowadays. Therefore, it can be presumed that the platforms that will be able to manage this challenge have an advantage compared to their competitors. Therefore, this strategy might be even more crucial than it seems at a first glance.

Availability of financial capital

All high-growth platforms did, do and will have enough financial capital available. In the early phases, one of them used its founder's money and money from the bank and another one attracted money from investors. Additionally, one of the experts mentioned that fast-growing platforms often attract money via campaigns and crowdfunding. The startup expert indicated that fast-growing startups try to attract money via investors, subsidies, pitch competitions and accelerator programmes.

All platforms indicated that sufficient financial capital is important for their growth process. The majority of the shares of one of the platforms is owned by a private equity firm that heavily invests into the firm. Besides, the platforms' cash flow is used to execute their plans. Both experts confirmed that financial capital is necessary to grow fast. Besides, they both indicated that platforms or startups grow fast by re-investing their own cash flow and/or by attracting external financial capital.

In the future, having sufficient capital available will remain viable to grow. Besides, an expert indicated that attracting financial capital will become easier as a company grows.

Possessing IP and intangible assets

It is assumed that it did and will differ per platform whether they possessed IP. Regarding the current situation, 12Build and Transporeon indicated to possess quite a lot of intellectual property, for example brand names and big data. Besides, all high-growth platforms are clearly focused on innovation in order to serve their customers better. 12Build and Transporeon mainly innovate their solutions, while Daan's innovations are focused on internal processes. Both experts confirm that high-growth platforms and fast-growing startups are clearly focused on innovation, as they are in fact innovations themselves. One of the experts indicated that it is difficult to attract IP for IT, but that it is required for brand names and content.

Acquiring data

Right from the start, all companies devoted attention to data and for one of them, it has been one of the key success factors. One of the experts confirmed that high-growth platforms are focused on acquiring and processing data from day one. Data helps the platforms to provide added value for users, to ensure better matchmaking, to make predictions and to get insights that can improve their way of working. Feedback from both users and employees is gathered. Transporeon's representatives indicated that it tries to get more data into its own system and took over the company Tim Consult which has made data a key feature. Both experts stressed the importance of data, both for high-growth platforms and fast-growing digital startups. Transporeon indicated that it wants to become the Google within its sector and that data will probably be crucial in becoming worldwide market leader. Furthermore, one platform and one expert indicated that the use of data will even intensify as a platform grows.

Clear strategy and prospective, external, growth-based and international orientation

All platforms had a clear, differentiated and growth-based strategy from the beginning. The focus on growth seems to be embedded in all three companies, of which two wanted to become market leader from the start. Transporeon was internationally oriented from the start, due to the fact that its clients are multinationals.

All platforms use data to monitor the environment, including users and trends. Transporeon's representatives explicitly mentioned that they are constantly making projections, thinking about where the future will take them and responding to this. Besides, 12Build and Transporeon are not only focusing on existing markets as they want to expand internationally and Daan is open to this. The fact that high-growth platforms have a clear strategy, scan their environment and strive for growth is also confirmed by both experts. 12Build and Transporeon are internationally oriented. The representative of 12Build indicated that a platform is very suitable to scale up and that it is therefore logically to expand the market. Due to the fact that the Dutch market is almost saturated, going abroad makes sense. Transporeon is internationally oriented due to the fact that it wants to become the world's market leader combined with its users often operating internationally as well. The fact that operating internationally can contribute to fast growth is also confirmed by an expert. It stands out that both those platforms are having to deal with countries that are lacking behind in terms of working digitally and are therefore focusing on other countries first. Daan is not internationally oriented as there is still sufficient demand in the Netherlands. This finding illustrates that having an international orientation seems not to be necessary to grow fast, as Daan is only operating in the Netherlands. However, one expert indicated that it is necessary for digital start-ups to be internationally oriented, as they need a huge user base. That Daan is not operating internationally might be explained by the following. The respective company is an employment agency, which solution is not that digital and automated as the solutions of the other two platforms. This implies that the solution of this platform is probably less scalable, which makes expanding abroad more difficult when compared to the other two platforms.

Therefore, it is assumed that having an international orientation is useful to grow fast for platforms that offer a digital and automated solution, while platforms offering a less scalable solution are less likely and might not have to be internationally oriented.

In the future, the platforms will still pursue this strategy. However, two of them will become more internationally oriented and one of them will become open to going abroad as soon as the Dutch market is saturated.

Focus on the core

It differs per platform whether there was, is and will be a focus on the core. While Daan and Transporeon did not outsource non-essential matters in the past, 12Build did. Furthermore, one platform explicitly mentioned that it had a clear focus from the start. Both experts indicated that both high-growth platforms and fast-growing startups have a clear vision of where they want to go to, but that they have a broad orientation and switch from one direction to another in the early phases. Therefore, it is assumed that the platforms had a clear focus from the beginning in the form of a clear goal, but that the way of how to achieve this goal was not completely known and defined yet.

Currently, 12Build outsources non-essential matters, while the other two do not. However, the representative of 12Build indicated that it is good to get some aspects on board again now that it has grown a lot. The fact that all high-growth platforms are performing most things including non-essential matters in-house is not in line with the literature, according to which outsourcing non-essential matters is necessary for high growth. Apparently, outsourcing non-essential matters is not necessary for high growth, as doing everything in-house can lead to high growth as well. The representatives of Transporeon even indicated that doing everything in-house from the start has been crucial for its success. In fact, it has enabled Transporeon to offer customised solutions that are continuously innovated, which is a crucial growth factor for this company. Therefore, it can be concluded that outsourcing non-essential skills can be helpful for some platforms in their growth process, while doing everything in-house might also be a good strategy. It might be that the availability of financial capital in combination with the presence of competitors can explain the decision for doing everything in-house. Both platforms, Daan and Transporeon, that do everything in-house had enough financial capital available right from start, which enabled them to do everything in-house as they could hire the employees for it. It might be that those platforms think that they can distinguish themselves from their competitors by having full control over all aspects of their business. This full control, which is an advantage of doing things in-house (Ketler & Walstrom, 1993; Rochester & Rochester, 1995), enables them to quickly react to their competitors' actions in all areas. The other high-growth platform, 12Build, did not face competition, which might explain that this company did not require full control and could outsource non-essential matters. Another aspect of focusing on the core is setting priorities. This is done by all high-growth platforms. They have a main goal or priority which is split up into smaller goals or priorities.

In the future, Daan and Transporeon will continue to do everything in-house, while 12Build will probably continue with getting aspects on board again. Furthermore, they will continue working towards a clear main goal that is split up into smaller goals. 12Build indicated that it aims to bring together the goals of the different departments a bit more to make sure that everybody works in the same direction.

HRM practices

To attract and retain employees, all platforms devote attention to this strategy. To retain employees, all platforms offer training and education activities which allow the employees to develop themselves both professionally and personally. Moreover, secondary employment conditions, listening to the employees, personal development plans and offering possibilities to pursue career opportunities within the firm are some of the aspects that are important as well. Overall, it can be concluded that the platforms do perceive HRM practices to be important, which makes sense due to the importance of their human capital in their growth process.

Although not covered during the interviews, it is very likely that the companies used and will use HRM practices in the past, due to the fact that they all stressed the importance of attracting and retaining human capital.

Group management style with clearly assigned roles

It can be stated that all high-growth platforms have a group management style, which is also confirmed by an expert. The most important decisions are dealt with by teams, either by deciding jointly or by gathering input from multiple people before an individual makes the decision.

Regarding other aspects of the management style, the representatives of Transporeon clearly indicated that its managers coach their employees and enable them to reach their goals. The representative of 12Build indicated that managers work together with the employees as a cooperating foreman. Furthermore, it seems that all platforms have some kind of structure, while still being relatively flat and not authoritarian. Everybody is quite open and sharing ideas and giving each other feedback is being valued and stimulated. Those presumptions can be supported by the statements of both experts.

Finally, all platforms were asked about whether it was clear who bear(s) liability, responsibility and authority. The representative of 12Build indicated that this is not always clear, due to the fact that they are an organisation in which everybody helps each other, thus having the risk that no decisions are made at all. The other two platforms indicated that it is always clear who is responsible. However, it seems that the platforms do not make a difference between liability, responsibility and authority as they only talk about responsibility. Nevertheless, if interpreting their statements, it can be argued that the three roles are more or less implicitly clearly assigned. Daan's representative indicated every individual, team or department is responsible for his/their own responsibilities (i.e. responsibility) and that decisions are made by individuals (i.e. authority). The representatives of Transporeon mentioned that everyone takes his/her responsibility (i.e. responsibility), that board members take responsibility for their own departments and teams (i.e. liability) and that it is clear who takes the final decision (e.g. authority). This indicates that one platform did not clearly assign one role, namely liability. Furthermore, for both platforms it is clear that everyone involved bears responsibility and the platform that clearly assigned the role of liability also assigned it to one person, namely the respective board member, as advocated by the literature. This has two implications, as it indicates (a) that 12Build could invest time in clearly assigning all roles and that clearly assigning the role of liability is advised for Daan and (b) that explicitly using the terms liability, responsibility and authority is not a required precondition for high growth as long as it is more or less clear to who those roles, even if they are all labelled as responsibility, are assigned. Therefore, it is concluded that oftentimes, it is important to know who takes decisions, who is responsible and who is liable, but that this does not have to be as implicitly defined as stated in the literature.

Although no statements about the use of this strategy in the past and future were made, it is assumed that its implementation was similar to the current implementation of this strategy.

Automating business processes

It is assumed that the platforms automated quite some business processes from the beginning, as they stressed its importance for today's situation.

Currently, high-growth platforms have a lot of automated business processes. 12Build's representative indicated that this makes an organisation scalable and agile, while Daan's representative stated that this ensures that its employees only have to focus on the core. Thus, it can be concluded that automating business processes helps a platform in its growth process, which is also confirmed by both experts.

All platforms will continue to use automated business processes in the future and two of them explicitly mentioned that they will automate even more processes.

Determining a meeting rhythm

Currently, all high-growth platforms have a pre-determined meeting rhythm as this makes it clear for everybody when they will discuss things with each other. This leads to the presumption that having fixed moments of discussion can be useful during a growth process. However, the rhythm on itself differs per platform. 12Build is planning on meeting more frequently, while Daan tries to minimise it. This first finding is in line with the literature, which prescribes that a meeting rhythm should be faster the faster a company grows (Harnish, 2014). However, the last finding contradicts with this advice, which indicates that the rhythm might partly depend on company specific factors.

It is assumed that there was and will be a pre-determined meeting rhythm, due to the fact that the platforms also have one currently.

Building relationships

It is assumed that the platforms' current relationships with other organisations already exist for quite a while, meaning that they used this strategy in the past.

Currently, high-growth platforms build relationships with other organisations, either in the form of collaborations or strategic alliances, of which the latter has already been discussed previously. Motives to build such relationships are improving its offering, increasing brand awareness and benefiting from a partner's network. Apparently, building relationships is very important and may be even crucial in realising high growth.

High-growth platforms will continue to build relationships in the future. In fact, one of them stated that it will even become a very important factor for its future growth.

5.2.2.2 Less fast-growing platforms

Differentiated offering

All less fast-growing platforms had, have and will have a differentiated offering. However, it depends on the specific platform and market how a platform differentiates itself from competitors by their offering.

Customer knowledge and customer loyalty

It is assumed that this strategy was, is and will be used. The founders of both platforms had knowledge about and experience with the industry and therefore had a lot of customer knowledge. Customer loyalty has not been covered for one of them, but the other one indicated that creating loyal customers has been important from the beginning.

Less fast-growing platforms know what their customers need. They not only have this knowledge due to their founders, but also acquire this knowledge by attracting the right employees,

building and maintaining relationships and collecting users' feedback. Only one platform explicitly mentioned to focus on creating customer loyalty especially through trust building.

Both platforms will continue to focus on ensuring that they have customer knowledge. Furthermore, Platform N will remain to build trust in order to create loyal customers while the future use of this part of the strategy was not covered for YoungOnes.

Possessing human capital

Possessing human capital has always been and will remain an important strategy for less fast-growing platforms. The representative of Platform N indicated that human capital had been especially important in the beginning. The founders of both platforms had knowledge about and experience with the industry and entrepreneurship. However, none of them possessed knowledge about platforms. Besides, the founders already knew potential clients or already had relationships with them, which has positively contributed to their growth process as this made it easier to increase the installed base.

Both platforms are looking for employees with the right knowledge, skills and mindset, where one of them emphasises that employees should have a growth mindset.

Human capital will remain vital for less fast-growing platforms and one platform representative explicitly indicated that they will continue to use this strategy in the future.

Availability of financial capital

In the past, Platform N had only little capital available and was bootstrapping. It grew organically in the first few years and needed to critically make decisions and only performed the really necessary things, which had made the company very lean. YoungOnes had sufficient financial capital available from the beginning, as it was founded by its investors.

Both platforms stress the importance of having sufficient financial capital available to pursue their (future) plans, which can include development and increasing brand awareness. They have sufficient capital available and use both their own turnover and external financial capital such as money from investors to grow.

Possessing IP and intangible assets

Both platforms are strongly focused on innovation. Platform N possesses a limited amount of intellectual property, while YoungOnes does not possess this. The past and future use of this strategy is assumed to be similar to its current use.

Acquiring data

For less fast-growing platforms, acquiring and analysing data is very important. Both use it to measure their operations and one of them indicates that it is used for making improvements.

YoungOnes explicitly mentioned that it will use data to measure more and more things in the future. The future use of this strategy was not covered for Platform N, but as it uses data currently, it is expected to do so in the future.

Clear strategy and prospective, external, growth-based and international orientation

In the past, both platforms have had a clear strategy and a focus on growth. YoungOnes was not internationally oriented, while Platform N was.

Currently, less fast-growing platforms have a clear strategy. However, due to its young age and fast growth, YoungOnes sometimes needs to deviate from or adjust the strategy. Both platforms use data to monitor what is going on in the firm and one of them also uses data to spot and implement opportunities for improvement. While YoungOnes wants to become market leader and has a strong orientation on growth, Platform N expanded too fast internationally, which led to the decision to scale

back to get focused again. YoungOnes is not internationally oriented due to its young age. Platform N does operate in multiple European countries, although it had been more active internationally.

Towards the future, it is assumed that the platforms will continue to implement this strategy as they do now. However, Platform N will become more active in Europe again.

Focus on the core

In the past, Platform N had no clear focus on the core and was an organisation that consisted of quite some layers. It did not always set clear priorities and expanded too fast internationally. However, it did outsource non-essential matters. YoungOnes did set clear priorities from the start.

Less fast-growing platforms indicate that they currently have a clear focus and that they set priorities. Platform N decided to switch from outsourcing non-essential matters to doing everything in-house, as this enables the company to exert more influence and stay on top of things. YoungOnes outsources some non-essential matters, which enables the company to focus on the core. Nevertheless, it also outsources IT, including its platform development, while this could be argued to be an essential matter. This leads to the conclusion that although the platforms indicate that they do have a clear focus, this is not supported by their outsourcing decisions. Platform N does not outsource non-essential matters at all and YoungOnes does outsource non-essential matters, but also outsources essential matters. Therefore, one might conclude that less fast-growing platforms might not have a real focus. However, a more plausible conclusion would be the same as for the high-growth platforms, namely that outsourcing non-essential matters can be helpful to grow, but that doing everything in-house can also be a good strategy. In fact, Platform N is facing tough competition and has enough financial capital available to perform everything in-house. Moreover, it was indicated that it does everything in-house to exert control and stay on top of things. It might thus be that this platform performs everything in-house to distinguish itself from its competitors by having full control over all aspects, which enables quick responses to competitor's actions.

The use of this strategy in the future has not been covered during the interviews and therefore, it is assumed that its use will remain the same as in the current situation. However, the representative of YoungOnes indicated that it will hire some IT-people by itself in the future. This would be an indication that this company's focus will improve in the future.

HRM practices

Although only Platform N was asked about HRM practices, both less fast-growing platforms indicated that they offer training and education activities. Besides, Platform N offers a nice working environment with a good atmosphere. Employees are coached and encouraged to learn from each other. The past and future use of this strategy has not been covered, but is assumed to be similar to its current use.

Group management style with clearly assigned roles

Less fast-growing platforms have a group management style, as the most important issues are often dealt with by a group of people. Both platforms indicated that it is clear who bears liability, responsibility and/or authority, but as with the high-growth platforms, they seem not distinguish between the terms as they only refer to responsibility. Besides making decisions in teams, they both indicated that the different teams and departments are responsible for their own targets and within one firm, every team has a person who bears final responsibility. This could be interpreted as that within both firms, multiple people bear responsibility and authority is borne by teams, which is also advised by literature. Moreover, Platform N explicitly mentioned that one person bears final responsibility, which can probably be interpreted as one person bearing liability. This means that Platform N has clearly assigned all roles and that YoungOnes has clearly assigned responsibility and authority, but that liability could be more explicitly defined.

Although the use of this strategy in the past and future was not covered, it is assumed that the strategy was and will be implemented as it is currently.

Automating business processes

In the past, both platforms already had many automated business processes. However, more activities were still performed manually back then when compared to today's situation.

Currently, less fast-growing platforms have many automated business processes. However, it depends on the industry and age of the firm how many processes are and can actually be automated.

In the future, less fast-growing platforms will automate even more and more business processes, thus increasing the use of this strategy.

Determining a meeting rhythm

Less fast-growing platforms do not have a pre-determined meeting rhythm. As the literature indicated that having a meeting rhythm is important to achieve high growth, the fact that less fast-growing platforms do not use this strategy might be a factor explaining their lower growth rate.

Although the use of this strategy in the past and the future was not covered, it is expected that they did not and will not have a pre-determined meeting rhythm as they also do not have one currently.

Building relationships

In the past, less fast-growing were focused on building relationship, with Platform N using strategic alliances and YoungOnes using collaborations. Both used this strategy to offer complementary goods and services via third parties and one of them also used it for the development of its platform.

Currently, it depends on the platform whether this strategy is used. Platform N discontinued its strategic alliances, while YoungOnes still has the same relationships as in the past.

The representative of Platform N indicated that it is open to this strategy in the future. YoungOnes will continue to build relationships, as it does currently.

6. Discussion and Implications

In this chapter, the results that have been elaborated upon in chapter 5 will be discussed. In section 6.1, the findings will be interpreted in order to update the high-growth canvas for platforms that has been presented in section 3.4, thereby answering subquestion question vi.

- vi. *Which organisational strategies can help matching and transaction platforms to achieve high growth and how can they be mapped on the business model canvas?*

Furthermore, theoretical and practical implications will be explained in section 6.2. In section 6.3, limitations of the research will be discussed and ideas for future research will be presented.

6.1 Discussion

Previously, it has been discussed which growth strategies were, are and will (not) be used by high-growth platforms. Furthermore, it was explained how they implement those strategies. Now, an updated version of the high-growth canvas for platforms that was presented in section 3.4 will be provided. Based on the interview findings, it will be discussed which strategies should or should not be kept in the updated canvas and why. The platform growth and high-growth strategies that are used by high-growth platforms will be combined into one group, namely platform high-growth strategies. The high-growth canvas for platforms has been updated by mapping this integrated set of twenty-two platform high-growth strategies on the business model canvas, thereby only displaying the strategies that contribute to high growth for platforms specifically. In figure 6, the updated high-growth canvas for platforms can be found. On the subsequent pages, the twenty-two platform high-growth strategies will be explained in detail. Overall, this section will provide an answer to subquestion vi:

- vi. *Which organisational strategies can help matching and transaction platforms to achieve high growth and how can they be mapped on the business model canvas?*

In the updated high-growth canvas, it is again indicated to which building block a particular strategy belongs. However, as the canvas now presents an integrated set of platform high-growth strategies, no distinction is being made anymore between platform growth and high-growth strategies. If considered appropriate, multiple strategies will be combined, a single strategy will be split up or a strategy will be named differently. Moreover, some other strategies that were not covered by the literature review, but that were indicated by one or more research participants to be important platform high-growth strategies will be added and discussed.

Furthermore, the updated version of the canvas illustrates which strategies are considered to be particularly contributing to high growth. This holds for the strategies for which causality is assumed and which also are a necessary precondition to achieve high growth. Causality is assumed if the business representatives of the high-growth platforms indicated that a particular strategy had contributed to their fast growth. Besides, it is indicated which strategies might partly explain the difference in growth rate between the two platform groups. Finally, in contrast to the previous version, this version includes a time element to show whether some strategies are especially useful during particular phases. However, as has been mentioned before, the business representatives were only asked whether they did, do or will use a particular strategy. It was thus not asked in which stage of the business life cycle (e.g. embryonic stage, emergent stage, growth stage or maturity stage) (Muzellec et al., 2015) particular strategies were used. Due to the fact that the platforms are in different growth

stages, it can therefore not be concluded during which specific stage(s) of a platform's life cycle the strategies are particularly useful. Nevertheless, based on the statements made regarding past, current and future use, presumptions can be made about whether a strategy is useful in earlier or later phases of a platform.

In table 9, the formatting styles and their corresponding meaning can be found.

Table 9 Formatting styles for platform high-growth strategies

Formatting	Explanation
Bold	Strategy for which a causal relationship between the strategy and high growth is assumed AND which is a necessary precondition to achieve high growth.
<u>Underlined</u>	Strategy for which a causal relationship between the strategy and high growth is assumed AND which might partly explain why high-growth platforms grow faster than less fast-growing platforms.
<i>Italics</i>	Strategy that is only useful in later phases.
Not bold or underlined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategy for which a causal relationship between the strategy and high growth is assumed ('international orientation', 'ambition, drive and courage' and 'platform envelopment') - Strategy for which an associative relationship between the strategy and high growth is assumed (remaining strategies that are not bold or underlined)

<div>Key Partners</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Building relationships</u></div>	<div>Key Activities</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Open to acquisitions</u>• <u>Increasing brand awareness</u>• Clear strategy and prospective, external and growth-based orientation• International orientation• Focus on the core• HRM practices• Leadership, group management style and clearly assigned roles• Automating business processes• Determining a meeting rhythm</div>	<div>Value Propositions</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Distinctive positioning</u>• <u>Availability of complements</u>• <i>Platform envelopment</i></div>	<div>Customer Relationships</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managing expectations• Building trust• <u>Customer knowledge and customer loyalty</u></div>	<div>Customer Segments</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Platform envelopment</i></div>
	<div>Key Resources</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Possessing human capital• Availability of financial capital• Possessing IP and intangible assets• Acquiring, analysing and using data• Ambition, drive and courage</div>		<div>Channels</div>	
<div>Cost Structure</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pricing</div>			<div>Revenue Streams</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pricing</div>	

Figure 6 Updated high-growth canvas for platforms

6.1.1 Strategies that are not part of updated high-growth canvas for platforms

Before discussing the set of platform high-growth strategies, it has to be explained why one of the strategies, namely exclusive contracting, and part of another strategy, namely outsourcing non-essential matters, were eliminated from the canvas.

6.1.1.1 *Exclusive contracting*

This strategy was, is and will not be used by any of the high-growth platforms and they stressed that it is not a good strategy. However, it was not mentioned why they consider it to be a bad strategy. Nevertheless, it might be that they are afraid that forcing their users to use only their platform might actually result in their users choosing a competitor's platform, a potential outcome that is also described in the literature (Armstrong & Wright, 2007). As this would hinder instead of accelerate their growth, it makes sense that the high-growth platforms decided not to use this strategy. However, it is important to mention that this strategy might be useful in other situations or markets. For example, the game Marvel's Spider-Man, the fastest-selling superhero game of all times in the United States, has been launched exclusively for the PlayStation 4 (Barker, 2018, 21 December). This exclusivity contract has therefore been likely to be very beneficial for both parties, indicating that although exclusive contracting is not displayed in the updated high-growth canvas for platforms, it can be useful in some situations or markets.

6.1.1.2 *Outsourcing non-essential matters*

According to the literature, outsourcing non-essential matters facilitates the growth process as it makes a platform agile (De Bree, 2018). Despite the fact that this seems reasonable, the results of this study do not confirm this. In fact, most high-growth platforms perform everything in-house from the beginning and the platform that did use outsourcing in the beginning reduced its use as it grows. This can probably be explained as follows. If a platform faces tough competition, it could be useful to perform everything in-house. In this way, a platform can exert full control over all business aspects (Ketler & Walstrom, 1993; Rochester & Rochester, 1995), which enables it to quickly respond to its competitors' movements. In this case, it is important that there is sufficient financial capital available to hire the employees necessary to perform everything in-house, otherwise outsourcing might be the only option. This reasoning also explains why one platform did use outsourcing in the beginning: it did not face tough competition and therefore, having full control was probably not necessary as it did not have to react to competitors' actions. Furthermore, outsourcing was likely to be a less expensive option during the early phases, again supporting its use back then. It was not explicitly mentioned why this platform reduced the use of outsourcing over time, but it is likely that the non-essential matters that it outsourced in the past have become essential matters along its growth path. Concluding, it depends on the situation whether outsourcing is the preferred option, but the findings of this study lead to the presumption that doing everything in-house can be a good strategy as well. Therefore, this part of the 'focus on the core' strategy is not included in the updated version of the high-growth canvas for platforms.

6.1.2 Strategies that are part of updated high-growth canvas for platforms

Hereunder, the integrated set of platform high-growth strategies is explained. For each strategy, its use by the high-growth platforms will be described. Furthermore, in case multiple strategies are combined, a single strategy is split up or if a strategy is named differently, this will be explained. Moreover, it will be indicated whether causality can be assumed and whether a strategy seems to be a precondition for high growth. Furthermore, outstanding differences between high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms that might explain their difference in growth rate will be discussed. In appendix 10.6, an extensive comparison including differences and similarities between the two groups concerning their use of the different growth strategies can be found. If applicable, findings that are not in line with the literature will be discussed and explained. Finally, it will be indicated during which phases, and sometimes also in which situations, the use of a particular strategy might be especially useful.

6.1.2.1 *Distinctive positioning*

As has been described before, three factors are important to achieve a distinctive position. Those factors are a firm's offering, the price charged and competitors' positioning (D'Aveni, 2007; Lauga & Ofek, 2011). As having a differentiated offering is thus an element of a platform's distinctive positioning, it has been decided to merge the two into the strategy of distinctive positioning. High-growth platforms distinctively position themselves in various ways, but mainly by having an offering that is different from competitors' offerings.

This makes sense, as a platform's offering is the core factor for customers to start using the platform. If a platform's offering is not valuable and attractive, customers will not connect to the platform, which will therefore not survive. This also illustrates that offering network-independent value right from the start can be very useful, as this would attract users, even though there is no network-dependent value offered yet. This is in line with the literature, which states that network-independent value is also important for value creation and stimulating adoption (McIntyre & Subramaniam, 2009; Rogers, 1962). As soon as a platform has managed to get some users on board, it will become easier to attract more users due to network effects. Concluding, a platform's offering is the foundation of its success and offering network-independent value right from the beginning can help a platform in increasing its installed base.

As all high-growth platforms indicated that distinctive positioning contributed to their fast growth, causality is assumed here. Moreover, it can be concluded to be a necessary precondition for high growth. Nevertheless, as less fast-growing platforms are pursuing this strategy as well, this strategy in general does not explain the different growth rate between both groups.

Many of the ways in which a differentiated offering is created are company-specific, but it stands out that high-growth platforms, also compared to less fast-growing platforms, do often offer an overall solution. This leads to the presumption that this specific execution of this strategy can partly explain the difference in growth rates between the two groups. An overall solution increases a platform's network-independent value for customers and could therefore partly explain their higher rate of adoption (Rogers, 1962). However, as not all high-growth platforms use this strategy, this presumption has to be made with caution, since the difference in growth rate between the high-growth platform that does not use this strategy and the less fast-growing ones cannot be explained by it. Overall, offering an overall solution can be useful in achieving high growth, but is not a necessary precondition.

In the literature, distinctive positioning is presented as an alternative towards striving to become market leader (Cennamo & Santalo, 2013). Nevertheless, all high-growth platforms in this study are market leader and still use the strategy of distinctive positioning. Moreover, they all indicated

that their distinctive positioning contributed to their high growth. Therefore, the findings from this study show that distinctive positioning can also be used as a means of becoming and remaining market leader.

Finally, this strategy can be useful during both early and later phases, since it can be seen as one of the most important ways in which network-independent value is created for customers by offering a relative advantage compared to competitors.

6.1.2.2 Availability of complements

It differs per platform whether complements are offered. Platforms that use this strategy do this to create added value for the customer, which leads to the presumption that the strategy is not necessary if a platform's core offering is already sufficiently differentiated and providing its users with enough added value.

As high-growth platforms offer complements to make their offering more valuable for the users, it helps in realising a distinctive position. Since having such a position is said to contribute to high growth, having complements available indirectly helps platforms to grow fast, which explains why causality is assumed here.

The complements that are offered by the high-growth platforms that use this strategy are extensive and mainly offered (and often developed) by themselves, whereas less fast-growing platforms offer less-extensive complements via third parties. Therefore, it is assumed that this can partly explain the difference in growth rates between high-growth platforms and their less fast-growing counterparts. This can be explained by the fact that a platform's network-independent value probably increases the more extensive the complements are. In turn, this would explain the higher rate of adoption of the platforms that offer such extensive complements (Rogers, 1962). Furthermore, developing and offering complements by yourself instead of via third parties probably results in complements that are differentiated, novel and really tailored towards specific customer needs. This would create value for customers due to novelty and increases their switching costs (Amit & Zott, 2001), which in turn explains why platforms offering such extensive complements by themselves are more likely to achieve high growth. Thus, offering (and developing) extensive complements by yourself probably leads to faster growth than offering less-extensive complements via external parties.

Due to the fact that complements can create added value for a platform's users, this strategy is helpful during all phases.

6.1.2.3 Platform envelopment

The use of platform envelopment differs per platform. It is presumed that a platform will use this strategy if there are suitable features or solutions available in other markets that can be incorporated and combined with its own platform and if it also has enough time, money, manpower and skills to execute the strategy and manage the required cross-unit coordination (Eisenmann et al., 2011). If there are no such suitable options available and/or if a platform does not have sufficient time, money, manpower and skills for incorporating those options into its own platform, this strategy is not likely to be used.

The platform that uses this strategy incorporates other's solutions into its own platform by adding a new module or by starting a new company. Platform envelopment enables this platform to expand its offering and grow with tomorrow's demand, which in turn helps the firm to grow fast. That is why a causal relationship is assumed. Nevertheless, as only one high-growth platform uses this strategy, it can be concluded that using platform envelopment is helpful but not necessary to achieve high growth. Besides, this platform is likely to be the only case company that has sufficient manpower for pursuing this strategy and managing the cross-unit coordination, which indicates that the use of this strategy might be company-specific instead of group-specific.

It is assumed that this strategy is especially useful in later phases. In the beginning, a platform is expected not to have sufficient resources available to pursue this strategy and to manage the required cross-unit coordination (Eisenmann et al., 2011). However, as a platform starts to grow, those resources will more likely be available, which facilitates the use of this strategy.

6.1.2.4 Managing expectations

It differs per high-growth platform whether this strategy is applied. High-growth platforms for example try to manage their users' expectations by making the right strategic choices or by emphasising their fast growth and aim to become market leader.

As not all high-growth platforms manage their users' expectations, this strategy is also not a necessary precondition for growth. Moreover, only one high-growth platform explicitly mentioned that this strategy contributed to its fast growth, which explains why causality cannot be assumed for this strategy. Furthermore, as platforms from both groups use this strategy, the difference between their growth rates is not accounted for by this particular strategy.

In the literature, it has only been described that managing expectations can be useful for a platform to become dominant (Katz & Shapiro, 1985). However, this study shows that this strategy can also help to strengthen a platform's position as market leader. Two platforms, one high-growth and one less fast-growing, that are market leader already are namely still pursuing and stressing the usefulness of this strategy. Nevertheless, it is not needed to manage expectations if you have already secured your position as market leader, as two high-growth platforms are being market leader without managing expectations.

Whether and when to use this strategy, depends on situational and contextual factors. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that a platform will use this strategy if it wants to become market leader and when managing expectations is necessary. This necessity is there (a) when a platform faces competition that it needs to get or stay ahead of and/or (b) when it wants to win a WTA battle. A platform does not have to use this strategy (a) if it does not want to become market leader, (b) if it wants to become market leader and the market already expects it to become market leader (e.g. due to the fact that there is no competition) and/or (3) if it is market leader already. Thus, on the platform-high growth canvas it is indicated that this strategy is useful during all phases, but it has to be considered that its actual use depends on the situation.

6.1.2.5 Building trust

High-growth platforms devote a lot of attention towards building trust. They state that existing users will become more loyal and new users will be attracted if trust is built, which is in line with the literature on this topic (Chen et al., 2009; Gefen, 2002; Gefen et al., 2003a, 2003b; Jarvenpaa et al., 2000; McKnight et al., 2002; Pavlou & Gefen, 2002). The high-growth platforms build trust in many ways, which include building and maintaining customer relationships, creating transparency, having a stable platform, proving by doing, having data security certifications, using the firm's appearance and growing with tomorrow's demand.

It is assumed that there is a causal relationship between building trust and growth, as all high-growth platforms stated that this strategy contributed to their high growth. This also leads to the presumption that building trust is a necessary precondition if platforms want to achieve high growth. Since less fast-growing platforms also build trust, this strategy does not explain the growth differences between the groups.

Building trust is important both during early and later phases, as it helps to both attract and retain users, which are two indicators of platform growth.

6.1.2.6 Customer knowledge and customer loyalty

This strategy is used by high-growth platforms. All high-growth platforms' founders had or acquired knowledge about the industry and all high-growth platforms have a good understanding of their customers' demands and needs. Furthermore, they focus on creating customer loyalty, which is done in several ways, but of which building trust and repeatedly providing a great user experience are used by all of them. Actually, they do not only try to make their customers loyal, but they also succeed in this.

For all platforms, this strategy has contributed to their high growth, and therefore, causality is assumed. Besides, it is a necessary precondition for fast growth. Furthermore, although less fast-growing platforms use this strategy as well, the execution of this strategy differs between the groups and might partly explain the difference in growth rates between them. This will be explained hereunder.

First of all, both platform groups collect their users' ideas and feedback. Nevertheless, the fast-high growth platforms stated that they actively encourage them to do so, while this was not explicitly mentioned by the less fast-growing platforms. Therefore, it is assumed that high-growth platforms put more emphasis on actively encouraging users to share their ideas and feedback, while the other group does collect it, but does not actively encourage it.

Moreover, two high-growth platforms recognise that demands differ between customers and therefore offer customisable solutions and/or premium versions. On the other hand, less fast-growing platforms do not offer this kind of solutions and versions. This leads to the presumption that offering customisable and premium versions might explain their differences in growth rate. Previous literature on value creation in network industries and e-business can confirm this presumption. Firstly, customisable and premium versions are likely to increase a platform's network-independent value, thereby explaining its higher rate of adoption (Rogers, 1962). Furthermore, offering customisation increases customers' switching costs, who will therefore be less likely to switch to competitors' platforms and can become locked in (Amit & Zott, 2001). Thus, offering customisable and premium solutions helps a platform to attract new users in the first place, but is also useful in retaining them. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that offering customisable solutions and premium versions can contribute to high growth. However, this presumption has to be made with caution, as one high-growth platform also does not offer this kind of solutions, which means that this specific implementation of this strategy cannot explain the difference in growth rate between this platform and the less fast-growing ones.

Additionally, getting into contact with potential users in a very early stage is advisable. It can help platforms with getting knowledge about what their users want and need, but also confirm or contradict their own assumptions, thus giving them a good sense of the market.

Regarding customer loyalty, high-growth platforms seem to be more successful in actually realising this, as they all have loyal customers. As less fast-growing platforms did not mention whether they have loyal customers or not, drawing conclusion from this finding seems difficult. Nevertheless, it would have made sense if the less fast-growing platforms would have indicated that they have managed to create loyal customers, since this is something that a company is likely to be proud of as it can be quite challenging (Ng & Liu, 2000). Therefore, it is presumed that both platform groups devote attention towards customer loyalty, but that high-growth platforms excel in actually realising it. As loyal customers can both retain and attract users, it is likely that this is a factor that explains the growth differences between the two groups.

Whether users' processes are integrated with the platform might also partly explain the extent of customer loyalty. If users' processes are integrated with a platform, customers are more likely to be loyal than if this integration is less strong. This is due to the fact that customers experience higher switching costs if their integration with a platform is stronger (Klemperer, 1995; Shapiro & Varian,

1999). As two of the high-growth platforms, namely 12Build and Transporeon, have this integration with users' processes, while the two less fast-growing platforms do not have it, this leads to the presumption that the extent to which a platform is integrated into its users' processes might explain the difference in customer loyalty between the two groups. Nevertheless, this presumption has to be made with caution, as one high-growth platform, namely Daan, is also not really integrated with its users' processes, while still having loyal customers. Apparently, this platform has managed to create customer loyalty in another way.

Besides being successful in creating loyal customers, high-growth platforms also seem to be more aware of the direct network value that loyal customers can create by attracting new users than their less fast-growing counterparts are. High-growth platforms realise that loyal customers will be likely to refer others to their platform through word-of-mouth, something that literature confirms (De Bree, 2018). This is something that was not mentioned by the less fast-growing platforms. Thus, it can be concluded that the fact that high-growth platforms realise that loyal customers can help to attract new users might also be a factor that partly explains the variation in growth rates between the two groups. Nonetheless, this presumption has to be made with caution. One high-growth platform also did not explicitly recognise the value of loyal customers in attracting new customers, so this specific execution of this strategy cannot explain the different growth rates between this platform and the less fast-growing platforms.

This strategy is useful during all phases. In order to add value for your customers, which is at the heart of a company's business model, it is important that platforms know what customers want and need. Furthermore, customer loyalty is important in increasing a platform's installed base.

6.1.2.7 Possessing human capital

For all high-growth platforms, human capital is of great importance. Their founders all had and/or acquired knowledge about the specific industry before they started their platforms. Besides, their workforce is perceived to be a key resource as they, amongst others, bring in creativity and distinguish their platform from competitors. Having the right skills, knowledge and mindset are important factors for their employees.

Due to the fact that all high-growth platforms stated that human capital is crucial for their fast growth, it is assumed that there is a causal relationship and that it is a precondition for high growth. Nevertheless, it does not distinguish those platforms from their less fast-growing counterparts in terms of growth rate, as they also use this strategy and stress the importance of it.

Although knowledge about and experience with platforms and entrepreneurial experiences could contribute to growth according to the literature (Arrighetti & Lasagni, 2013; Colombo & Grilli, 2005; Cooper et al., 1994; Department for Business Enterprise & Regulatory Reform (BERR), 2008), this study shows that it is not a necessary precondition, since not all high-growth platforms' founders were familiar with those aspects. As stated before, platform knowledge was not required for those companies as they were founded during the time that platforms stated to rise. However, nowadays this knowledge is crucial, which can be confirmed by the fact that the relatively young platform hired expertise on this. Besides, it might be that the founders had no entrepreneurial experiences, but that they do possess entrepreneurial characteristics and qualities. Nevertheless, it might also be the case that having a founder with less experience might positively contribute to growth. In another study, it was namely discovered that there seems to be a positive relationship between CEO's with less experience and growth (Harms, 2009). It might for example be that founders' previous experiences might hinder their creativity to flourish, while creativity is likely to be required to achieve high growth. Besides, previous experiences might not be that important for achieving high growth, due to the fact that achieving high growth comes with new demands.

What stands out is that two high-growth platforms mentioned that attracting and retaining human capital, especially IT-people and software engineers, is a challenge. They spend a lot of effort in dealing with this challenge, as this is necessary to secure their future growth. Therefore, it is expected that platforms that will be able to manage this challenge have an advantage compared to those that do not. Selecting strategic locations, for example being closely located to (technical) universities, for a platform's headquarters might be useful in dealing with this challenge.

This strategy should be used during all phases, as human capital is essential in running and growing a platform.

6.1.2.8 Availability of financial capital

Having sufficient financial capital available is important for all high-growth platforms to execute their growth plans, which is in line with the literature (De Bree, 2018; Harnish, 2014). Although the source of financial capital differs per platform, the founder's money, their own turnover and money from investors are commonly used.

It is assumed that there is a causal relationship between having sufficient financial capital and high growth, as all high-growth platforms indicated that it is a necessary precondition to grow fast. Nevertheless, this also applies to less fast-growing platforms and therefore, the variation in growth rates between the two groups cannot be explained by the use of this strategy.

A platform should have sufficient financial capital during all phases, as it is needed to run and grow a company. In the beginning, it is likely that the platform's founder invests money into it. After a while, the platform starts to generate turnover, which can be reinvested in the company to facilitate its growth. Furthermore, investors might be willing to invest in it, which can boost a platform's growth even further.

6.1.2.9 Possessing intellectual property and intangible assets

Some high-growth platforms use this strategy, while others do not. Examples of IP possessed by high-growth platforms are brand names and big data.

Nonetheless, none of them indicated this strategy to have contributed to their growth, which means that only an associative relationship can be concluded to exist. Furthermore, to grow fast, using this strategy is not necessary as one high-growth platform does not possess IP and intangible assets. However, it stands out that while two of the high-growth platforms have quite some intellectual property, while only one of the less fast-growing platforms possesses a limited amount of IP. Due to the fact that only an associative relationship could be confirmed to exist, it cannot be stated that possessing IP and intangible assets explains the varying growth rates between the two groups.

This strategy is considered to be useful during all phases. IP and intangible assets are often a sign of innovation and innovation can be seen as the foundation of platforms according to one of the experts.

6.1.2.10 Acquiring, analysing and using data

The name of this strategy has been altered to stress that data should not only be acquired, but also analysed and used in order to be of value. High-growth platforms recognise and emphasise the importance of this strategy, as it creates added value for customers, facilitates better matchmaking, provides insights to implement improvements and enables to make predictions. Data is gathered from multiple sources, including users and employees.

As all high-growth platforms mentioned that data was and is important for their high growth rate, a causal relationship is assumed. Moreover, it is a necessary precondition for high growth.

However, less fast-growing platforms use this strategy as well and it is therefore not explaining the different growth rates between the two groups.

Data is considered to be important during all phases, as it can help to facilitate better matchmaking, which is the core value proposition of matching and transaction platforms. Nevertheless, as gathering data takes time, it is expected that the amount of data that platforms possess is limited in the beginning and increases over time.

6.1.2.11 Open to acquisitions

Due to the fact that all high-growth platforms are open to acquisitions but do not see it to be a direct strategy, it has been decided to change the name of this strategy to represent this. Growth by means of acquisitions is thus not a direct strategy for the high-growth platforms, but if a suitable acquisition candidate passes by at the right time, it will be considered. Nevertheless, whether the candidate will actually be taken over depends on many factors and criteria.

The high-growth platforms that acquired another company in the past, have grown because of this, thus pointing towards a causal relationship. However, one high-growth platform did not acquire another business, which leads to the conclusion that, although useful, acquisitions are not necessary to grow fast.

What stands out is that although platforms from both groups are open to the strategy, high-growth platforms seem to be more likely to actually pursue it. Two high-growth platforms namely already acquired another business in the past, while the less fast-growing platform that is open to it, discontinued after considering it. This leads to the presumption that the difference in growth rate between the two groups might partly be explained by the fact that less fast-growing platforms do not acquire other companies. Nevertheless, this presumption has to be made with caution, as there is also one high-growth platform that did not acquire another firm, so acquisitions do not explain the difference in growth rate between this particular high-growth platform and the two less fast-growing platforms.

This strategy is considered to be useful in later phases. In the early phases, high-growth platforms will probably not be able to acquire another firm and will more likely to be acquisition candidates themselves. As a platform grows, it will possess the resources that are necessary for acquiring a firm, which explains the strategy's usefulness during later phases.

6.1.2.12 Increasing brand awareness

In the theoretical framework, advertising was included as a platform growth strategy. Based on the findings of this study, it was decided to extend the strategy of advertising to the strategy of increasing brand awareness. The strategy of advertising is used to increase brand awareness and thereby the installed base (Rysman, 2009). However, during this study it became clear that high-growth platforms (and less fast-growing platforms as well) use many other channels as well to create direct network value by increasing their brand awareness. This is confirmed by Keller (2009), who found out that establishing brand awareness requires a mix of different communication options. Therefore, it was decided to combine those different channels into one strategy that represents the key activity of increasing brand awareness. Thus, this strategy is moved from the channels building block to the key activities building block, as it now focuses on the activity (i.e. increasing brand awareness) the channels are used for.

As the high-growth platforms indicated that increasing brand awareness was of importance in attracting new users, it is assumed that this strategy contributed to their growth and is a necessary precondition for it. Therefore, a causal relationship between increasing brand awareness and fast growth is assumed.

In increasing brand awareness, high-growth platforms use many different channels, such as direct and content marketing, leveraging the community's word-of-mouth, mailings, universities, physical stores, high-quality website with the right keywords, job boards and being present at trade fairs and/or events (and giving a presentation). What stands out is that high-growth platforms do use certain channels which less fast-growing firms do not use. Those include content marketing, the community's word-of-mouth, being present at trade fairs and/or events, universities and physical stores. Those channels in particular are thus assumed to lead to high growth. Therefore, although both high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms increase brand awareness, the specific channels that are used to realise this differ between the two groups and might partly explain their difference in growth pace.

Whether and when to increase brand awareness depends on the situation. Based on the findings, using this strategy is advisable (a) if a platform faces tough competition that it wants to get or stay ahead of and/or (b) if a platform wants to expand internationally. However, using this strategy might not need to be necessary if a platform does not face (that much) competition and wants to focus on other things, for example fine tuning its offering, first. Therefore, although it is indicated on the platform high-growth canvas that this strategy is useful during all phases, it has to be taken into account that its actual use depends on the situation.

6.1.2.13 Clear strategy and prospective, external and growth-based orientation

In the theoretical framework, this strategy included having an international orientation as well. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that not all high-growth platforms are internationally oriented, while they do all use the rest of this strategy. Therefore, it has been decided to split up the strategy into two separate strategies. High-growth platforms have a clear and differentiated strategy that is driven by a strong desire for growth. Data is used for environment scanning, both focusing on users and trends. They have a prospective vision in that they scan for and are open to new opportunities.

As none of the representatives explicitly mentioned that this strategy has contributed to their high growth, causality cannot be assumed based on this study's results. Due to the fact that less fast-growing platforms use this strategy as well, it is also not the strategy that explains the difference in growth rates between the two groups.

Platforms could benefit from this strategy during all phases. A platform's strategy is crucial for superior performance (Porter, 1996) and having a prospective, external and growth-based orientation help a firm in properly acting and reacting during their course of business.

6.1.2.14 International orientation

It differs per high-growth platform whether this strategy is used. High-growth platforms that are internationally oriented use this strategy for different reasons, including that a platform is suitable for this way of scaling, that users are multinationals and that it wants to become worldwide market leader.

It probably depends on the type of platform whether it is internationally oriented or not. If a platform's solution is almost fully automated and digital, this means that it is very scalable, which in turn means that it is easy to expand internationally as well. If a platform's solution is not that automated and digital, this makes it less scalable and less suitable for international expansion.

The high-growth platforms that are internationally operating confirm that it contributes to their fast-growth. That is why a causal relationship is assumed. However, as one high-growth platform is not internationally oriented, it is not required to be internationally oriented to grow fast. Besides, as one of the less fast-growing platforms uses this strategy as well, having an international orientation is not what distinguishes high-growth platforms from their less fast-growing counterparts.

Based on the findings of this study, it would be advisable to first expand to countries that are used to working digitally and that have a proper infrastructure. Expanding to those countries is not only easier, but also provides the countries that are lacking behind some additional time to catch up. Furthermore, the countries that are lacking behind will be more likely to be convinced to catch up if they see that a platform is already successful in many other countries.

Additionally, having headquarters at strategic locations can be crucial for international expansion. Some countries will only use your platform if you have a headquarters in their country, thus illustrating the importance of this in getting business in those countries.

Whether and when to use this strategy thus depends on the type of solution that is offered. For platforms offering a fully digital and automated solution, being internationally oriented from the beginning will be a good growth strategy as it helps in increasing the installed base. However, an international orientation is less necessary (and less easy) for the other group.

6.1.2.15 Focus on the core

In the theoretical framework, the high-growth strategy of focusing on the core basically consisted of two parts: outsourcing non-essential matters and setting priorities. Based on the findings of this study, setting priorities only seems to be related to high growth and therefore, the part about outsourcing is excluded. All high-growth platforms have a clear focus and set clear priorities: they have a main goal or main priority, which is in turn split up into smaller sub-priorities.

As only one high-growth platform indicated that focusing on the core is important for their growth, no causal relationship can be concluded to exist. Besides, the less fast-growing platforms were less focused in the past compared to their fast-growing counterparts, which leads to the presumption that high-growth platforms distinguish themselves by having a clear focus right from the start. Although this might give them a head start, it cannot be concluded that it explains the different growth rates between the platform groups, as only an associative relationship could be said to exist.

Overall, this strategy can be concluded to be useful both in the early and later phases. It is important that a platform knows where it wants to go and how it wants to achieve that. Although keeping all options open would not be unexpected and might even be useful in the early stages, setting priorities and being focused can probably provide platforms with a head start.

6.1.2.16 HRM practices

It is not surprising that this strategy is used by high-growth platforms, as it is needed to attract and retain the human capital that is so highly valued by them. Most of the ways in which employees are attracted and retained are company specific, but all high-growth platforms assist employees in their professional and personal development, for example by offering training- and education activities.

Due to the fact that there is assumed to be a causal relationship between human capital and high growth, this is also assumed for the strategy of HRM practices, as this strategy is essential in attracting and retaining this human capital in the first place. Although being a precondition for fast growth, the difference in growth rates between the two platform groups cannot be explained by it, because less fast-growing platforms also have HRM practices in place.

Platforms should have HRM practices in place during all phases to make sure that they have the human capital that is needed to run and grow their company. Besides, treating those humans properly is of huge importance, as they need to be motivated to contribute to the platform's growth.

6.1.2.17 Leadership, group management style and clearly assigned roles

The strategy of group management style and clearly assigned roles is used by all high-growth platforms. Moreover, two of them stressed the importance of leadership for their fast growth and as

an additional search in the literature confirmed its contribution to high growth (Taylor, Gilinsky, Hilmi, Hahn, & Grab, 1990), this strategy has been extended with the aspect of leadership. Within the high-growth platforms, important decisions are dealt with by teams and the roles of liability, responsibility and authority are clearly assigned most of the time. Furthermore, high-growth platforms are structured, yet flat and not authoritarian. There is an open atmosphere in which sharing ideas and giving each other feedback is valued and stimulated.

As two high-growth platforms indicated that leadership contributed to their fast growth, a causal relationship is assumed here for those platforms. For the rest of this strategy, only an associative relationship can be concluded to exist, as none of the high-growth platforms clearly indicated that it contributed to their high growth. Moreover, the less fast-growing platforms use this strategy, excluding the leadership part which has not been covered, as well and therefore this strategy is not explaining the different growth rates between the platform groups.

As has been explained before, the specific terms of liability, responsibility and authority do not have to be explicitly used in order to clearly assign those roles. If a platform only uses the term responsibility and still assigns the three different roles properly, this is also perceived to be a good way to implement this strategy.

This strategy is useful in both the early and later phases. It is important that everybody knows what is expected from them and there are people in place that guide them through this process.

6.1.2.18 Automating business processes

Automating business processes is a strategy that is used by high-growth platforms and which use intensifies over time. Reasons for using this strategy differ per platform, but include ensuring that employees can focus on the core and making the organisation scalable and agile.

A causal relationship between having automated business processes and growth is assumed, as the findings of all high-growth platforms point towards this. Despite the fact that this strategy is thus probably a necessary precondition for high growth, it does not explain why some platforms grow less fast than others, since the less fast-growing platforms also apply this strategy.

As one expert called automated business processes to be the backbone of high-growth platform's value creation, this strategy is useful and important both in early and later phases. However, it needs to be stated that more and more processes become automated over time.

6.1.2.19 Determining a meeting rhythm

Although the rhythm differs per platform, high-growth platforms have a pre-determined meeting rhythm, as this makes it clear for everybody when particular things will be discussed and allows everybody to catch up with each other.

Nevertheless, none of the platforms mentioned that having such a pre-determined meeting rhythm contributes to their fast growth and therefore only an associative relationship can be concluded to be present. It can thus not be said whether a pre-determined meeting rhythm leads to fast growth or whether fast growth causes platforms to decide on a meeting rhythm.

What stands out is that all high-growth platforms have a pre-determined meeting rhythm, while none of the less fast-growing platforms has one. However, due to the fact that a causal relationship cannot be assumed, it cannot be concluded that this strategy partly explains their different growth rates.

Platforms could benefit from this strategy both during the early and later phases. It facilitates decision-making and problem-solving (Harnish, 2014), which are activities that platforms have to deal with in both phases.

6.1.2.20 Building relationships

As the high-growth strategy of building relationships includes the platform growth strategy of creating strategic alliances, it has been decided to combine the two strategies into one. High-growth platforms spend quite some time on building relationships, because they can be of help in creating value for users and meeting their demands. Other motives for building relationships for some platforms are focused on creating direct network value by increasing brand awareness and benefiting from their partner's network. Two high-growth platforms are part of strategic alliances, while all of them use other types of collaborations.

For two high-growth platforms, building relationships has contributed to their high growth, thereby leading to the assumption of a causal relationship. Furthermore, all high-growth platforms use this strategy and therefore it is reasonable to presume that building relationships is a required precondition for fast growth. However, the variation in growth rate between the two platform groups cannot be explained by this strategy, because both groups use it.

Being part of a strategic alliance is not a precondition for high growth, since one high-growth platform has not established one. This is confirmed by one of the experts who mentioned that it depends on the type of platform whether strategic alliances are used. Nevertheless, it seems that high-growth platforms are more often part of a strategic alliance than less fast-growing platforms. Therefore, it is presumed that the difference in growth pace between the two platform groups could be partly due to the fact that less fast-growing platforms do not use strategic alliances. It has to be mentioned however, that strategic alliances do not explain the different growth rates between the less fast-growing platforms and the high-growth platform that also does not use strategic alliances.

This strategy will be useful during all phases, as it can help platforms to meet the demands of their users. However, it is expected that strategic alliances will only become a possibility after a platform has already realised some growth. Only then it will be interesting for a potential partner to enter a strategic alliance with the platform.

6.1.2.21 Pricing

All high-growth platforms make considerations related to pricing. Regarding price structure, all high-growth platforms charge transaction fees to one side and two high-growth platforms also charge the other side with fixed fees either to get access to premium versions or because the tool had to be adapted to the specific user's processes and demands. Therefore, the platform charging only one side transaction fees subsidises the side that is not charged. In case the users of the platform that offers premium versions against a fixed fee decide to only use the free versions, this platform can be said to use subsidising as well. Although the price levels are platform-specific, one platform indicated that adjusting its price level was beneficial for the adoption of its platform.

All high-growth platforms use this strategy, but only one of them mentioned that pricing considerations have contributed to its platform's growth. Therefore, only an associative relationship is assumed. Moreover, less fast-growing platforms also use this strategy and therefore it cannot explain the different growth rates between the two platform groups.

It appears that some high-growth platforms do charge two sides and use fixed fees for one side, while this does not hold for the less fast-growing platforms. However, this can be explained by the fact that those high-growth platforms are offering the possibility of upgrades and/or customisable solutions, while the less fast-growing platforms do not offer this.

What stands out is that high-growth platforms have used the same pricing structure from the beginning, while one of the less fast-growing platforms used another price structure and switched to its current one. Due to the fact that the right pricing strategy, including the right pricing structure, is so important for getting and keeping both sides on board (D. S. Evans, 2003) and has a large impact on a platform's profits and efficiency (Rochet & Tirole, 2006), it can be presumed that the high-growth

platforms that managed to get a good price structure right from the beginning were able to get a head start compared to their less fast-growing counterparts. Nevertheless, this presumption has to be made with caution due to the fact that (a) no causality is assumed for this strategy and (b) it is based on only a few cases.

It is advisable that platforms continuously monitor and adapt their pricing when necessary, as this may be beneficial for the adoption of their platform. Moreover, based on a statement by an expert, ensuring that there is a good balance between the value offered and price asked by a platform is important, not only from an ethical aspect, but also as it can prevent counter movements from within the industry.

This strategy is very important during all phases, as it is part of a platform's revenue model that in turn determines how a company will generate cash from its operations, which is the aim of commercial companies.

6.1.2.22 Ambition, drive and courage

This strategy was not discovered during the literature reviewing process and therefore not included in the theoretical framework. However, both some high-growth platforms and the experts indicated that this strategy also helps platforms to grow fast. This is indeed assumable, as previous research has indicated that concepts like passion, tenacity and self-efficacy can either directly or indirectly contribute to venture growth (Baum & Locke, 2004; Baum, Locke, & Smith, 2001). This strategy is considered to belong to the key resources building block, as it is a human resource (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). One platform indicated that the founder's ambition and his almost naïve belief that it would work out mainly contributed to its high growth. Another platform mentioned that it had always been the ambition to end at a winner takes all situation and also emphasised its drive to get as many carriers on its platform as possible. Furthermore, an expert indicated that having the courage to just do it, to fail, to act quickly and to change is what clearly distinguishes fast-growing startups from their less fast-growing counterparts. Those findings have led to the conclusion that ambition, drive and courage are of huge importance in becoming a high-growth platform.

Based on those findings, a causal relationship exists between this strategy and high growth, at least for the platforms that indicated that this strategy contributed to their fast growth. As the other platforms did not mention and were also not asked about this strategy, it cannot be stated whether there is an associative or causal relationship for them as well.

This strategy is useful during all phases. At the start, an entrepreneur's ambition, drive and courage will probably lead to the decision to establish a company. Afterwards, the strategy is still very important, as running and growing a company is an intensive and challenging process that could use an ambitious, driven and courageous leader.

6.1.3 Reflection on updated high-growth canvas for platforms

Now that the high-growth canvas for platforms has been updated, it can be reflected upon.

First of all, it can be concluded that there are quite some similarities between the theoretical framework presented in section 3.4 and the updated high-growth canvas for platforms. This means that many of the platform growth strategies and high-growth strategies that are described in the literature can actually help platforms to achieve high growth, although the specific execution of a strategy might differ sometimes from what was described in the literature.

Moreover, there are also some main differences between the theoretical framework and the updated high-growth canvas for platforms. Firstly, the strategies of 'exclusive contracting' and 'outsourcing non-essential matters' have been eliminated, as they are not used by the high-growth platforms. Furthermore, two strategies were added based on the interview findings, namely 'leadership' and 'ambition, drive and courage'. Next, the strategies of distinctive positioning and differentiated offering were combined into 'distinctive positioning' and the strategies of strategic alliances and building relationships were combined into 'building relationships'. Moreover, the strategy 'clear strategy and prospective, external, growth-based and international orientation' was split up into 'clear strategy and prospective, external and growth-based orientation' and 'international orientation'. Finally, three strategies were changed. 'Acquiring data' was turned into 'acquiring, analysing and using data', 'acquisitions' was transformed into 'open to acquisitions' and 'advertising' became 'increasing brand awareness'.

Additionally, the updated high-growth canvas for platforms indicates (1) which strategies are causally related to high growth and are a necessary precondition for high growth, (2) which strategies have a causal relationship with high growth and clearly distinguish the high-growth platforms from the less fast-growing platforms, (3) which strategies are only useful during later phases, (4) which strategies are only causally related to high growth and (5) which strategies have an associative relationship with high growth.

For seven strategies, it was not explicitly mentioned by the business representatives that they contributed to their high growth. Therefore, only an associative and no causal relationship could be assumed. However, it might be that some of those strategies might still have a causal relationship with high growth, but that the business representatives did not mention this because they were not directly asked about it. Besides, it might be that causality could have been assumed for platforms that were not included as a case study. Therefore, it will hereunder be argued for each strategy whether causal relationships might still exist in some situations.

Due to the fact that only one high-growth platform representative explicitly indicated that having a clear focus on the core contributed to the platform's high growth, it was not possible to assume causality. However, this shows that, if a platform decides to use this strategy, having a focus on the core will probably have a positive impact on their growth rate. Nevertheless, it seems not to be a necessary strategy for achieving high growth, as not all high-growth platforms used it.

Regarding the strategy of determining a meeting rhythm, it is likely that platforms that already grow fast decide to introduce a pre-determined meeting rhythm, which in turn will help them to deal with the challenges of high growth and thereby enable them to grow even further. This would mean that growth could lead to the use of this strategy and that using this strategy could then support further growth. Nevertheless, it might also be that platforms have a meeting rhythm from the beginning. In this situation, it could be that this pre-determined meeting rhythm contributes to high growth, but that this is hard to observe as its effects might be more indirect. For example, a pre-determined meeting rhythm allows everybody within an organisation to be on the same page and to work in the

same direction, which in turn facilitates decision-making and enables the organisation to set priorities and deal with the challenges of high growth, which in turn accelerates their growth.

It is expected that high-growth platforms are more likely to possess IP and intangible assets rather than that this strategy contributes to their high growth. If a platform grows fast, it probably develops more and more IP and intangible assets due to its innovation efforts.

No causal relationship could be assumed between having a clear strategy and prospective, external and growth-based orientation and high growth. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to expect that having some sort of plan of where you want to go and how you will achieve that combined with being oriented towards growth, does actually positively contribute to achieving high growth. It might not be the key success factor, but it will probably have a positive influence during a platform's growth process.

Causality could not be assumed for the strategy of managing expectations, as only one platform representative explicitly mentioned that this strategy contributed to its high-growth. Nevertheless, this shows that, while probably not being a precondition for high growth for all platforms, this strategy probably contributes to high growth if a platform decides to use it.

Although no causal relationship between pricing and high growth could be assumed in this research, it is very likely that there is one as previous literature indicated that the right pricing strategy is crucial in attracting and retaining users, to maximise profits and for efficiency (D. S. Evans, 2003; Rochet & Tirole, 2006). Platforms have to generate cash in order to grow and as their revenue model, which is part of the pricing strategy, describes how they generate this cash, the strategy of pricing is thus probably a precondition for high growth. Besides, although not covered during the interviews with the representatives of the case companies, platforms can also use subscription fees that have to be paid upfront (Caillaud & Jullien, 2003). This means that those platforms already receive cash up front, which in turn can be used to finance their growth. For platforms that use such a pricing structure, the strategy of pricing is probably crucial for achieving high growth.

Finally, although a causal relationship could be assumed for the first part of this strategy, namely leadership, it could not be assumed for the rest of it, namely having a group management style and clearly assigned roles. Although it might be that there indeed exists no causal relationship, it might also be that the causal effect of this strategy cannot be easily observed because it is indirect. A group management style and clearly assigned roles could for example facilitate decision-making and problem-solving, which in turn helps a firm in dealing with the challenges of a growth process, which ultimately contributes to achieving high growth.

6.2 Implications

6.2.1 Theoretical implications

By studying how platforms can innovate their business model to achieve high growth, this research contributes to the current literature. Platforms are springing up nowadays and account for a large part of the global economy (Eisenmann et al., 2011; D. S. Evans, 2003). Although high growth is crucial for those businesses to survive (Deloitte MCS Limited, 2014, November), many struggle to achieve high growth (D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2010; Van Alstyne et al., 2016, March 31) and no literature on this topic existed: high growth and platform growth have been studied, but those topics have not been connected to specifically study how platforms can achieve high growth. However, as platform business models are really different from the traditional linear business model, it makes sense that platform businesses need to pursue different and/or additional strategies to achieve high growth than other types of businesses. Thus, it can be stated that this study fills a research gap by (a) integrating the literature on platform growth and high growth and (b) providing a clear and structured tool including strategies that platforms can use to achieve and sustain high growth. Thereby, it adds to both platform literature and high-growth literature by providing insights about a very relevant topic.

This research also contributes to the current literature by showing that many of the platform growth and high-growth strategies that were identified in the literature review are also platform high-growth strategies. However, the empirical research has also indicated that some of those platform growth and high-growth strategies cannot be classified as platform high-growth strategies. As explained in section 6.1.1, the strategy of exclusive contracting is not used at all and even considered to be a bad strategy and the strategy of outsourcing non-essential matters is not used as well or only to a limited extent.

Furthermore, as has been described in section 6.1.2, it has been discovered that some strategies (e.g. availability of complements) are particularly useful if implemented in specific ways that have not been discussed in the literature. Besides, the study shows that some strategies (e.g. distinctive positioning) can also be valuable in ways other than described in the literature. Moreover, it has been uncovered that the use of several strategies (e.g. managing expectations) depends on the phase a platform is in and/or on situational and contextual factors that were also not touched upon in the existing literature.

Moreover, this research also contributes to the literature on business model innovation, as it indicates novel ways in which platforms can change their current business model in order to grow and achieve a competitive advantage by creating and capturing value. In this way, it specifically adds to the business model literature that is focused on its potential for creating competitive advantage and growth.

A final contribution to the literature is that this research has indicated six strategies whose execution seems to partly explain the difference in growth rate between high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms. High-growth platforms (1) are more often part of a strategic alliance, (2) actually acquire another business more often, (3) use other additional channels for creating brand awareness, (4) frequently offer an overall solution, (5) often offer (and develop) extensive complements by themselves and (6) put more emphasis on actively encouraging users to share feedback, offer customisable and premium versions tailored towards customer needs, realise the value of loyal customers and excel in achieving customer loyalty.

6.2.2 Practical implications

This study has several practical implications. The most important one is that it provides platforms with valuable insights and strategies they can pursue to achieve high growth. Due to the fact that those strategies are linked to the business model canvas, practitioners can take advantage of the clear and structured visual high-growth canvas for platforms that has been developed as a result. This is extremely valuable for platforms, as growing fast to reach a critical mass is crucial for their survival (Deloitte MCS Limited, 2014, November).

Besides, it can also provide platforms that have already achieved high growth with new insights. It might be that they become inspired by strategies pursued by the high-growth platforms that took part in this study and that they will consider taking those steps as well. Therefore, the outcomes of this study do not only help platforms to achieve high growth, but are also useful for high-growth platforms to strengthen their position and to sustain or even increase their current growth rate.

Additionally, for some strategies, it is explained in which situations and phases they are likely to be useful or not and how implementing them in a specific way can be particularly useful. This provides platforms with some additional guidance on when and how to implement the strategies that are included in the high-growth canvas for platforms.

Moreover, the high-growth strategies are not only useful for achieving high growth by means of business model innovation, but can also provide guidance for platforms in innovating their business model to create a sustainable competitive advantage.

Finally, the high-growth canvas for platforms might also provide businesses that use a linear business model with some valuable insights. Although future research would be required to investigate whether the tool is generalisable to those business types as well, it is assumable that some strategies (e.g. distinctive positioning, possessing human capital and building relationships) are also useful for other business types to innovate their business model and thereby achieve high growth.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

6.3.1 Limitations

As has been described, this research adds to theory and practice in multiple ways. Nevertheless, it comes with limitations that have to be addressed.

The small number of case studies used in this study limits the generalisability of the research results. Although generalisability has been improved by interviewing representatives from multiple platforms and by interviewing an expert who had knowledge about how platforms in general achieve high growth, a larger number of case studies would have been useful in further improving generalisability.

Moreover, although several prescribed steps were used to perform the literature review, the comprehensiveness of the set of platform growth and high-growth strategies cannot be fully assured, as a narrative approach was used. However, before asking the business representatives about the specific growth strategies, they were first asked to indicate which strategies had mainly contributed to the fast growth of their company according to them. This enabled them to come up with strategies that were not identified during the literature review and it actually resulted in two additional strategies, namely leadership and having ambition, drive and courage. Furthermore, at the end of the interview, the business representatives were asked if they had additional information about the subject of this research that should be included or whether they thought that an important growth strategy was not covered during the interview, again enabling them to come up with strategies that were not discovered during the literature reviewing process. Thus, it was tried to compensate the potential lack of comprehensiveness by enabling the research participants to come up with additional growth strategies.

Furthermore, the platforms that have participated in this research operate in very different industries. This means that differences between them might also be explained by industry-specific factors. Although valuable insights have still been provided based on the information provided by the participating platforms, the fact that they operate in different industries is a limitation of this research.

In this study, external and contextual factors such as age, type of industry, growth rate of the market, size of the industry, regulation, nature of the solution (e.g. digital and automated or not), competition and entry timing have not been explicitly considered. Although some statements regarding contextual factors could be made based on the interview data, taking those contextual factors into account would have improved this research, as those factors are also strongly related to growth. However, due to the limited scope of this research, it was decided to focus on the growth strategies. Nevertheless, the fact that no contextual factors were studied is a limitation of this research.

Another important limitation deals with causality. Based on statements made by the interview representatives, it was decided whether causality could be assumed. If it was mentioned by the business representatives that a particular strategy contributed to their high growth, a causal relationship between this particular growth strategy and high growth was assumed. However, causality could not be proved. Moreover, for some strategies, only an associative relationship could be assumed. For example, it could not be determined whether a pre-determined meeting rhythm leads to fast growth or whether platforms start to use a pre-determined meeting rhythm when they have already achieved fast growth. To be able to prove whether causal relationships exist, it would be required to perform longitudinal case studies in which it is continually measured whether a specific strategy indeed contributes to high growth. Nevertheless, this might be almost impossible. Firstly, it requires to monitor a platform from the start, which means that it cannot be proven anymore whether strategies used by platforms that have already achieved high growth did actually contribute to this growth.

Secondly, it is likely that several strategies are used at the same time, which makes it difficult to measure which one(s) cause(s) a firm to grow fast. Finally, such a case study requires a lot of time.

Moreover, due to time constraints, the time element could not be fully integrated into the interview questions and was thus not covered by all case companies for all growth strategies. Furthermore, it was not asked during which specific stages of the platform's life cycle the strategies were used, as only questions about past, current and future use were included. Besides, business representatives were asked whether particular strategies were also used in the past. It might be that they did not mention that a strategy was used in the past, while it had actually been used. In this case, it might be that they have forgotten that those strategies were used due to the passage of time. It might also be explained by the fact that some representatives had not been working for the company right from when it was founded and therefore do not know that this strategy was used.

Additionally, it has to be mentioned that one of the high-growth platforms is an employment agency, which solution is not that digital and automated as the solutions of most matching and transaction platforms. It stood out that there were quite some differences between this platform and the other two high-growth platforms that offer more digital and automated solutions. Therefore, it could sometimes not be concluded whether (the specific way of) using a strategy was a necessary precondition for fast growth, while it would have been if only the findings of the two high-growth platforms offering more digital and automated solutions were considered. This leads to the presumption that the findings and conclusions of this study might have been slightly different if only platforms offering digital and automated solutions were included.

Furthermore, one of the less fast-growing platforms has only been around for a year. The fact that it is not a high-growth platform can therefore not be explained by the fact that it did not select the right strategies, as it is a consequence of its young age. Therefore, it might be that it does not use some strategies that are proven to be useful for the high-growth platforms and that it becomes clear in the future that a different course of action has also enabled this young platform to achieve high growth.

Finally, the updated high-growth canvas for platforms has not been validated, again being a limitation of this study.

6.3.2 Future research

This research opens up new opportunities for future research.

First of all, it would be valuable to perform this research again with a larger sample size and in a longitudinal way. This would improve generalisability and would enable to prove whether causal relationships exist between the platform high-growth strategies and fast growth.

Besides, a study that includes a more structured literature review would be valuable to improve the comprehensiveness of the set of platform growth strategies and high-growth strategies that were identified before developing the initial theoretical framework.

Conducting research in which high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms that operate in the same industry are studied and compared would also be an opportunity for future research. This would be a better research design, as it eliminates the chance that differences in growth are caused by industry-specific factors.

Moreover, investigating the difference in growth rates between high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms would be valuable. Although it has been slightly touched upon in this study, it would be interesting to have detailed insights into which other factors distinguish the fast-growers from their less fast-growing counterparts. As has been mentioned before, it makes sense that not only the (specific implementation of the) growth strategies used, but other aspects like age, nature of the solution (e.g. digital and automated or not), industry, competition, regulation and entry timing can also

be of help in explaining the differences in growth rates. Although it was a limitation of this research that contextual factors were not taken into account, it thus opens an opportunity for future research.

Additionally, future research could devote more attention towards adding a time element to the canvas. Although it has been discovered that the strategies of acquisitions and platform development tend to be used in later phases only, it is expected that a pure focus on the time element could reveal more insights into whether particular strategies are more useful in particular growth phases. Moreover, it would be valuable to investigate during which stages of the business life cycle the strategies should or should not be used.

It would also be interesting to investigate whether having a digital and automated platform solution contributes to achieving high growth. In this study, two high-growth platforms had such a solution, while the other one did not. As this study revealed quite some differences between the former two high-growth platforms and the latter one, it would be valuable to investigate whether those differences can be explained by the nature of their solution.

Furthermore, a limitation of this research is that the high-growth canvas for platforms has not been validated and this opens up a future research opportunity. This would require that multiple platforms use it in order to check whether the proposed platform high-growth strategies actually do lead to high growth for all of them.

Devoting research solely to the strategy of pricing would also be worthwhile. This strategy has been discussed in this study, but only to a limited extent. Finding the right pricing strategy is very important, yet challenging, as considerations concerning both attracting and retaining users and maximising profits play a role (Eisenmann et al., 2006; D. S. Evans, 2003; Hagiu, 2009). Besides, decisions regarding both price structure and price level have to be made by taking into account many factors including the value a platform provides, the fragmentation of the market, subsidisation, cross-side network effects, elasticity of demand and competition (both between platforms and within a platform). A study that would fully focus on how pricing strategies and decisions can contribute to high growth would therefore be able to provide valuable insights.

Moreover, looking whether specific combinations of platform high-growth strategies are particularly useful in achieving high growth would be an interesting topic for future research. This study revealed how platforms can apply the platform high-growth strategies to make changes in the building blocks of their business model in order to achieve high growth. Nevertheless, as a business model can also be innovated by innovatively linking those building blocks, discovering which combinations of platform high-growth strategies are particularly useful in specific growth phases and situations could also be very valuable.

Lastly, it would be interesting to investigate the extent to which the high-growth canvas for platforms is generalisable to other business types as well. If it turns out that (part of) the strategies can also help other types of firms to grow fast, this means that the literature on HGFs could be extended with those strategies. It can for example be expected that strategies such as building relationships, possessing human capital and distinctive positioning could help all businesses to realise fast growth, while platform envelopment, offering complements and increasing brand awareness might be only or particularly valuable for platform businesses in achieving high growth. In this case, special attention should then be devoted towards network effects, as those might be helpful in explaining while some strategies are only or particularly useful for platform businesses. An example of this would be increasing brand awareness. This strategy is likely to be useful for all businesses, as it helps them in attracting customers and thereby growing their business. However, it can be said to be particularly useful for platforms, as a platform has higher value for its users the more users that are connected to it.

7. Conclusion

Multi-sided platform markets account for an important, large and fast-growing part of today's global economy (Eisenmann et al., 2011; D. S. Evans, 2003). As the value of those platforms increases with the number of users (Katz & Shapiro, 1985), growing fast to reach a critical mass is crucial for platforms to survive (Deloitte MCS Limited, 2014, November). However, realising a high growth rate is quite a challenge. Most platforms struggle and do not manage a quick growth of their number of users (D. S. Evans & Schmalensee, 2010; Van Alstyne et al., 2016, March 31). Although research on platform growth already exists, the issue of high growth is not addressed in those studies.

A stream of literature in which high growth is actually studied, is focused on high-growth firms, which are firms that realise exceptional growth in a relatively short time period. Nevertheless, those studies are focused on firms in general and thus not specifically on platform businesses.

That is why this study has integrated those two research topics in order to investigate how platforms business can realise high growth. Based on an extensive literature review and multiple case studies, this study provides a high-growth canvas for platforms that explains how platforms can innovate their business model to achieve high growth. The high-growth canvas for platforms includes twenty-two strategies that are related to high growth.

Ten of those strategies seem to be a necessary precondition for achieving high growth, as they are used by all high-growth platforms. Those strategies are:

- building relationships;
- increasing brand awareness;
- HRM practices;
- automating business processes;
- possessing human capital;
- availability of financial capital;
- acquiring, analysing and using data;
- distinctive positioning;
- building trust; and
- customer knowledge and customer loyalty.

Besides there are some other strategies that were not used by all high-growth platforms, thus not being a precondition for fast growth, but which can nevertheless be helpful in achieving high growth, as causality could be assumed. Those strategies are:

- open to acquisitions;
- international orientation;
- ambition, drive and courage;
- availability of complements; and
- platform envelopment.

Therefore, other platforms could innovate their business models by implementing the fifteen strategies listed above in order to achieve high growth as well.

Finally, there are some strategies for which only an associative relationship could be assumed, meaning that they are applied by high-growth platforms, but that it cannot be concluded whether they contributed to their high growth. Those strategies are:

- focus on the core;
- determining a meeting rhythm;
- possessing IP and intangible assets;
- clear strategy and prospective, external and growth-based orientation;
- managing expectations;
- pricing; and
- leadership, group management style and clearly assigned roles;

Although the challenge of rapidly growing a platform will remain to exist, this research provides platforms, regardless of the growth phase they are in, with valuable insights and a useful tool that they can use in their journey towards achieving and sustaining high growth.

8. Epilogue

Platforms can use the strategies from the high-growth canvas for platforms to make novel changes in the building blocks of their business model, thereby guiding them in their journey towards achieving and sustaining high growth. However, as all building blocks of a platform's business model are interrelated, platforms that treat the platform high-growth strategies in isolation will not realise the full potential of the high-growth canvas for platforms. Therefore, managing to find the right combination of platform high-growth strategies for the growth phase and situation a platform is in, thereby connecting the building blocks of its business model in innovative ways, seems to be the real key to success.

9. References

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10. Appendices

10.1 Literature Review Process

Table 10 Overview of steps taken in literature review process

Step	Explanation
1. Formulating research question	Five theoretical subquestions, see below
2. Selecting data sources	<p>Article databases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scopus • Google Scholar <p>Books</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About fast growth and scaling • About methodology (e.g. data collection and data analysis) <p>Search engine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google: to find articles, research reports, whitepapers, practical examples of growth strategies and to identify high-growth platforms
3. Defining search terms	<p><i>i. What is business model innovation?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'business model', 'business model canvas', 'business model innovation', 'business model innovation AND growth' <p><i>ii. What is a matching and transaction platform?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'platforms', 'two-sided markets', 'multi-sided markets', 'platform types', 'network effects', 'network externalities', 'WTA battles', winner-take-all AND platform' <p><i>iii. How can value be created and captured by matching and transaction platforms?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'value creation', 'value creation AND platforms', 'value creation AND two-sided markets', 'value creation AND multi-sided markets', 'value creation and network effects', 'value creation AND networks', 'value capture', 'value capture AND platforms', 'value capture AND two-sided markets', 'value capture AND multi-sided markets', 'value capture and network effects', 'value capture AND networks' <p><i>iv. What is high growth?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'high-growth', 'high-growth firm', 'HGF', 'fast growing firm', 'fast growing start-up', 'scale-ups', 'gazelle(s)', 'rapidly growing firms' <p><i>v. Which organisational strategies can contribute to platform growth or high growth and how can they be mapped on the business model canvas?</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'platform growth (strategies)', 'fast growth (strategies)', 'high growth (strategies)', 'rapid growth (strategies)', 'scale up (strategies)' • Search terms have also been used to find more information about each platform growth or high-growth strategy (e.g. for platform envelopment: 'platform envelopment', 'tipping', 'coring', 'tipping across markets', 'platforms AND tipping')
4. Screening for usefulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading abstract - Scanning article, book, report, whitepaper or webpage - Scanning reference list
5. Reviewing articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading article, book, report, whitepaper or webpage - Highlighting relevant elements
6. Using reference lists to find additional articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Find primary source - Find additional articles on a topic
7. Repeating step 4, 5 and 6 (last repetition cycle excludes step 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For all subquestions, but especially for subquestion <i>iv</i> and <i>v</i> - To make theory chapter as comprehensive as possible
8. Synthesising results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assembling highlighted elements about same topic in one document - Writing comprehensive theory part about topic based on assembled findings

10.2 Interview Templates

10.2.1 Interview template high-growth platforms (12Build, Daan and Transporeon)

Decision area	Questions
Strategy	1 - 6 and 8 - 15
Execution	6 and 16
People	17 - 20
Cash	21
Not focused on specific growth strategy	7 and 22

Title of the research: “How can matching and transaction platforms innovate their business model to achieve high growth?”

Responsible researcher: Anouk ten Dam

1. Could you briefly describe the core of your platform? Could you explain how you create value?
2. What services does your platform offer? Does your company offer complementary goods/services as well?
3. Are there competitive platforms in the market? What distinguishes your platform you're your competitors? Are customers free to use other platforms as well? If yes, does this also happen?
4. Are there other types of competitors? What distinguishes your platform from those other types of competitors?
5. To what extent is your company internationally oriented?
 - Do you only operate in the Netherlands or also abroad?
 - What are your future plans for internationalisation?
 - Why do you choose for this extent of internationalisation?
6. Does your company have a clear focus?
 - Is there a clear strategy and is it easy to express/articulate?
 - Do you set clear priorities?
 - Do you outsource non-essential issues?
 - Are many processes within your company automated?
 - Is there a fixed meeting rhythm within your organisation?
7. According to you, which actions/strategies have mainly contributed to the fast growth of your company?
8. Which revenue model does your platform use? Have other revenue models been used in the past?
9. For platforms, it is important to quickly attract users on both sides. How did your company manage this and how do you deal with this currently?
10. In which way(s) did you try and/or are you trying to increase the awareness of your platform?

11. In practice, it appears that the platform that users expect to become the market leader in the future, often become the market leader. Therefore, it can be important to manage the expectations of users. Have you tried or are you trying to manage the expectations of users? If yes, how?
12. Do you pay a lot of attention to building and maintaining relationships with customers?
 - Building trust can make existing customers loyal and encourage potential customers to use the platform. How does your platform create this trust?
 - Are particular clients being given preferential treatment? If yes, why and how?
13. Do you pay a lot of attention to building and maintaining relationships with other companies?
 - Are you part of one or more strategic alliances? Why (not)?
14. Have you taken over other companies/business units in the past and/or do you intend to do this in the future? Why (not)?
15. Does your company possess (a lot of) intellectual property?
16. Does your company make extensive use of acquiring and analysing data? Why (not)?
17. How many employees does your company have? How many are developers and how many sales?
18. Did the founder(s) of this platform have some knowledge/experience with (a) platforms, (b) the industry in which the company operates and/or (c) entrepreneurship?
19. According to you, what is the importance of human capital in the growth process of a platform?
 - Which knowledge and skills are important?
 - What does your company do to attract and retain new talents?
 - Does your company employ part-time and/or fulltime employees? Why?
 - Does your company pay attention to training and education activities?
20. How would you describe the management style of your organisation?
 - Are important decisions being made by individuals or teams?
 - Is it clear who has liability, responsibility and/or authority? Are those roles borne by one or multiple persons?
21. To what extent is having (access to) enough money important to grow fast? In which way(s) did your company obtain sufficient capital to grow fast?
22. Hereunder, several aspects that are important for the success of platforms are listed. Could you make a top 3 including the most important aspects that have determined your success until now and a top 3 including the most important aspects that will determine your success in the future? Could you explain your choice?
 - a. Added value for customers
 - b. Timing and growth rate
 - c. Focus
 - d. Revenue model

- e. Relationships with customers
- f. Relationships with other companies (strategic alliances)
- g. Database and data
- h. Human capital
- i. Leadership
- j. Internal organisation and software systems
- k. Routine and discipline
- l. Financial capital
- m. Other, namely...

Finally, do you have additional information about the subject of my thesis that I should include in my research?

10.2.2 Interview template less fast-growing platforms (Platform N and YoungOnes)

Decision area	Questions
Strategy	1 - 6 and 9 - 16
Execution	6 and 17
People	18 - 21
Cash	22
Not focused on specific growth strategy	7 and 23

Title of the research: “How can matching and transaction platforms innovate their business model to achieve high growth?”

Responsible researcher: Anouk ten Dam

1. Could you briefly describe the core of your platform? Could you explain how you create value?
2. What services does your platform offer? Does your company offer complementary goods/services as well?
3. Are there competitive platforms in the market? What distinguishes your platform you're your competitors? Are customers free to use other platforms as well? If yes, does this also happen?
4. Are there other types of competitors? What distinguishes your platform from those other types of competitors?
5. To what extent is your company internationally oriented?
 - Do you only operate in the Netherlands or also abroad?
 - What are your future plans for internationalisation?
 - Why do you choose for this extent of internationalisation?
6. Does your company have a clear focus?
 - Is there a clear strategy and is it easy to express/articulate?
 - Do you set clear priorities?
 - Do you outsource non-essential issues?
 - Are many processes within your company automated?
 - Is there a fixed meeting rhythm within your organisation?
7. According to you, which actions/strategies are mainly important for the growth of your company?
8. According to you, what is the cause of your company growing less fast than the platforms that have been included in the lists of the 'Top 250 Groeibedrijven' and/or the 'FD Gazellen'?
9. Which revenue model does your platform use? Have other revenue models been used in the past?
10. For platforms, it is important to quickly attract users on both sides. How did your company manage this and how do you deal with this currently?

11. In which way(s) did you try and/or are you trying to increase the awareness of your platform?
12. In practice, it appears that the platform that users expect to become the market leader in the future, often become the market leader. Therefore, it can be important to manage the expectations of users. Have you tried or are you trying to manage the expectations of users? If yes, how?
13. Do you pay a lot of attention to building and maintaining relationships with customers?
 - Building trust can make existing customers loyal and encourage potential customers to use the platform. How does your platform create this trust?
 - Are particular clients being given preferential treatment? If yes, why and how?
14. Do you pay a lot of attention to building and maintaining relationships with other companies?
 - Are you part of one or more strategic alliances? Why (not)?
15. Have you taken over other companies/business units in the past and/or do you intend to do this in the future? Why (not)?
16. Does your company possess (a lot of) intellectual property?
17. Does your company make extensive use of acquiring and analysing data? Why (not)?
18. How many employees does your company have? How many are developers and how many sales?
19. Did the founder(s) of this platform have some knowledge/experience with (a) platforms, (b) the industry in which the company operates and/or (c) entrepreneurship?
20. According to you, what is the importance of human capital in the growth process of a platform?
 - Which knowledge and skills are important?
 - What does your company do to attract and retain new talents?
 - Does your company employ part-time and/or fulltime employees? Why?
 - Does your company pay attention to training and education activities?
21. How would you describe the management style of your organisation?
 - Are important decisions being made by individuals or teams?
 - Is it clear who has liability, responsibility and/or authority? Are those roles borne by one or multiple persons?
22. To what extent is having (access to) enough money important to grow fast? In which way(s) did your company obtain sufficient capital to grow fast?
23. Hereunder, several aspects that are important for the success of platforms are listed. Could you make a top 3 including the most important aspects that have determined your success until now and a top 3 including the most important aspects that will determine your success in the future? Could you explain your choice?
 - a. Added value for customers
 - b. Timing and growth rate
 - c. Focus

- d. Revenue model
- e. Relationships with customers
- f. Relationships with other companies (strategic alliances)
- g. Database and data
- h. Human capital
- i. Leadership
- j. Internal organisation and software systems
- k. Routine and discipline
- l. Financial capital
- m. Other, namely...

Finally, do you have additional information about the subject of my thesis that I should include in my research?

10.2.3 Interview template expert 1

Decision area	Questions
Strategy	1 - 14
Execution	6 and 15
People	16 - 18
Cash	19
Not focused on specific growth strategy	20

Title of the research: “How can matching and transaction platforms innovate their business model to achieve high growth?”

Responsible researcher: Anouk ten Dam

1. According to you, which actions/strategies mainly contribute to the fast growth of platforms. What distinguishes high-growth platforms from platforms that grow less fast?
2. Do high-growth platforms often offer complementary goods/services as well?
3. Do high-growth platforms have to deal with competing platforms in the market? What distinguishes them from those competitors? Are customers free to use other platforms as well? If yes, does this also happen?
4. Do high-growth platforms have to deal with non-platform competitors? What distinguishes them from those other types of competitors?
5. To what extent are high-growth platforms internationally oriented?
6. To what extent do high-growth platforms have a clear focus?
 - Is there a clear strategy and is it easy to express/articulate?
 - Do they set clear priorities?
 - Do they outsource non-essential issues?
 - Are many processes within their company automated?
 - Is there a fixed meeting rhythm within their company?
7. Which revenue model is often used by high-growth platforms?
8. For platforms, it is important to quickly attract users on both sides. How do high-growth platforms manage this generally?
9. In which way(s) do high-growth platforms try to increase the awareness of their platform?
10. In practice, it appears that the platform that users expect to become the market leader in the future, often become the market leader. Therefore, it can be important to manage the expectations of users. Do high-growth platforms try to manage the expectations of users? If yes, how?
11. Do high-growth platforms pay a lot of attention to building and maintaining relationships with customers?

- Building trust can make existing customers loyal and encourage potential customers to use the platform. How do high-growth platforms create this trust?
 - Are particular clients being given preferential treatment? If yes, why and how?
12. Do high-growth platforms pay a lot of attention to building and maintaining relationships with other companies?
 - Are high-growth platforms often part of one or more strategic alliances? Why (not)?
 13. Do high-growth platforms pay attention to taking over other companies/business units? Why (not)?
 14. Are high-growth platforms clearly focused on innovation?
 15. Do high-growth platforms make extensive use of acquiring and analysing data? Why (not)?
 16. Do the founder(s) of high-growth platforms often have some knowledge/experience with (a) platforms, (b) the industry in which the company operates and/or (c) entrepreneurship?
 17. According to you, what is the importance of human capital in the growth process of a platform?
 - Which knowledge and skills are important?
 - What do high-growth platforms do to attract and retain new talents?
 - Do high-growth platforms employ part-time and/or fulltime employees? Why?
 - Do high-growth platforms pay attention to training and education activities?
 18. How would you describe the management style of high-growth platforms?
 - Are important decisions being made by individuals or teams?
 - Is it clear who has liability, responsibility and/or authority? Are those roles borne by one or multiple persons?
 19. To what extent is having (access to) enough money important to grow fast? In which way(s) do platforms obtain sufficient capital to grow fast?
 20. Hereunder, several aspects that are important for the success of platforms are listed. Could you make a top 3 including the most important aspects that determine the success of platforms? Could you explain your choice?
 - a. Added value for customers
 - b. Timing and growth rate
 - c. Focus
 - d. Revenue model
 - e. Relationships with customers
 - f. Relationships with other companies (strategic alliances)
 - g. Database and data
 - h. Human capital
 - i. Leadership
 - j. Internal organisation and software systems
 - k. Routine and discipline
 - l. Financial capital
 - m. Other, namely...

Finally, do you have additional information about the subject of my thesis that I should include in my research?

10.2.4 Interview template expert 2 (ECE)

Decision area	Questions
Strategy	1 - 10
Execution	5 and 11
People	12 - 14
Cash	15
Not focused on specific growth strategy	16

Title of the research: “How can matching and transaction platforms innovate their business model to achieve high growth?”

Responsible researcher: Anouk ten Dam

1. According to you, which actions/strategies mainly contribute to the fast growth of start-ups. What distinguishes fast-growing startups from startups that grow less fast?
2. Do fast-growing startups often offer complementary goods/services as well?
3. What distinguishes fast-growing startups from their competitors? Are customers free to use the services of competitors as well? If yes, does this also happen?
4. To what extent are fast-growing startups internationally oriented?
5. To what extent do fast-growing startups have a clear focus?
 - Is there a clear strategy and is it easy to express/articulate?
 - Do they set clear priorities?
 - Do they outsource non-essential issues?
 - Are many processes within their company automated?
 - Is there a fixed meeting rhythm within their company?
6. In which way(s) do fast-growing startups try to increase the awareness of their platform?
7. Do fast-growing startups pay a lot of attention to building and maintaining relationships with customers?
 - Building trust can make existing customers loyal and encourage potential customers to use the products/services of the startup. How do fast-growing startups create this trust?
8. Do fast-growing startups pay a lot of attention to building and maintaining relationships with other companies?
 - Are fast-growing startups often part of one or more strategic alliances? Why (not)?
9. Do fast-growing startups pay attention to taking over other companies/business units? Why (not)?
10. Are fast-growing startups clearly focused on innovation? Do they possess (a lot of) intellectual property?
11. Do fast-growing startups make extensive use of acquiring and analysing data? Why (not)?

12. Do the founder(s) of fast-growing startups often have some knowledge/experience with (a) the industry in which the company operates and/or (b) entrepreneurship?
13. According to you, what is the importance of human capital in the growth process of a startup?
- Which knowledge and skills are important?
 - What do fast-growing startups do to attract and retain new talents?
 - Do fast-growing startups employ part-time and/or fulltime employees? Why?
 - Do fast-growing startups pay attention to training and education activities?
14. How would you describe the management style of fast-growing startups?
- Are important decisions being made by individuals or teams?
 - Is it clear who has liability, responsibility and/or authority? Are those roles borne by one or multiple persons?
15. To what extent is having (access to) enough money important to grow fast? In which way(s) do startups obtain sufficient capital to grow fast?
16. Hereunder, several aspects that are important for the success of startups are listed. Could you make a top 3 including the most important aspects that determine the success of startups in the early phases and a top 3 including the most important aspects that determine the success of startups in later phases? Could you explain your choice?
- a. Added value for customers
 - b. Timing and growth rate
 - c. Focus
 - d. Revenue model
 - e. Relationships with customers
 - f. Relationships with other companies (strategic alliances)
 - g. Database and data
 - h. Human capital
 - i. Leadership
 - j. Internal organisation and software systems
 - k. Routine and discipline
 - l. Financial capital
 - m. Other, namely...

Finally, do you have additional information about the subject of my thesis that I should include in my research?

10.3 Overview of Interviews

Table 11 Overview of interviews

Type of organisation	Name of organisation	Date	Type of interview	Approximate length**
High-growth platform	12Build	25-06-2019	Face to face	60 minutes
High-growth platform	Daan	02-07-2019	Phone	35 minutes
High-growth platform	Transporeon	19-07-2019	Phone	105 minutes
Less fast-growing platform	Platform N*	04-07-2019	Face to face	60 minutes
Less fast-growing platform	YoungOnes	22-07-2019	Phone	45 minutes
Expert	Expert 1*	02-07-2019	Phone	40 minutes
Expert	Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship	15-07-2019	Face to face	35 minutes

*For anonymity reasons, the names of those organisations are pseudonymised.

**The interviewees knew that the maximum duration of the interview could be minimised to one hour, but Transporeon agreed to a longer duration.

10.4 Informed Consent Form

Title of the research: ‘How can platforms innovate their business model to grow fast?’

Responsible researcher: Anouk ten Dam

To be signed by the participant and the researcher:

I declare to be informed about the nature, method, target and load of the research in an understandable way.

I was offered the possibility to receive the interview questions before the interview and I know that I can refuse to answer certain questions. Besides, I am aware that the researcher will take written notes during the interview and that I can receive the (worked-out) written notes by e-mail afterwards and that I have the right to make rectifications.

I know that the data collected during this research can be accessed by the study team, which consists of Anouk ten Dam, the responsible researcher, and her supervisors, Ir. Björn Kijl and Dr. Rainer Harms. I know that the raw data will not be anonymised or pseudonymised, so the researcher and her supervisors can link back the raw data to the company name.

I am aware that the final version of the thesis will be published and stored in the UT repository on <https://essay.utwente.nl/> and will therefore be publicly available. Herewith, I declare that (please tick the appropriate box):

- ☐ The company name cannot be mentioned in the research
- ☐ The company name has to be pseudonymised and can thereafter be mentioned in the research, which means that specific data can be linked back to the pseudonymised company name
- ☐ The company name can only be mentioned in the section ‘Acknowledgements’
- ☐ The company name can be mentioned in the research, which means that specific data can be linked back to the company name.

I know that I will receive the draft version of the thesis before it will be published, which allows me to review it and ask for adjustments if necessary.

My participation in this research is voluntary. I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason and without negative consequences. In case of withdrawal, I will notify the researcher by sending an e-mail to [...]. I understand that I will not receive a reward or payment for my participation.

I was offered the possibility and have been able to answer questions and the questions that I had were answered satisfactorily. I am aware that I can contact Anouk ten Dam at any moment about questions that I might have in the future.

Name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

I have made sure that the participant has read this informed consent form, to the best of my ability, ensured that the participant understands to what he/she is freely consenting.

Name of researcher

Signature of researcher

Date

Contact information

Responsible researcher: Anouk ten Dam

E-mail:

Tel.:

10.5 Extensive Company-specific Results

In this appendix, the detailed information based on which it was assumed whether a particular growth strategy was, is or will be used by the case companies can be found. Therefore, this appendix is the explanation for tables 2 to 5. Sometimes it will also be explained why the company uses a particular strategy or why it decided not to use a particular one. Moreover, information from a company's website or from news articles in which the company was mentioned is sometimes used as an additional source. If this is the case, a reference to the company's website or specific news article will be added, which means that all statements without a reference originate from the interviews. Additionally, the insights provided by the experts will also be presented.

10.5.1 Platform growth strategies

10.5.1.1 Distinctive positioning

As has been described in section 3.4.2.2, a company's distinctive position is largely based on the differentiating features of its offering. That is why this section will only include information about how the platforms distinctively position themselves in ways that are not related to having a differentiated offering, as this information will be presented in section 10.5.2.1 about the strategy of having a differentiated offering. In that section, it will become clear that all platforms did, do or will use this strategy and are thus also using the strategy of distinctive positioning.

From the interview, it can be concluded that 12Build only distinctively positions itself through a differentiated offering and not in another way. For example, it focuses on all main contractors and construction specialists, thus not targeting niche markets.

Daan is market leader and operates in a market with a lot of competitors. It focuses on the public sector, which is a niche market. This focus causes the firm to be distinctively positioned.

Transporeon is market leader in Europe and has the ambition to become the single logistics platform (WTA). Even though the literature indicates that distinctive positioning is usually applied by the platforms that are not focused on becoming market leader, Transporeon uses the strategy of distinctive positioning as a means to become market leader. Besides distinctively positioning itself through having a differentiated offering, Transporeon distinctively positions itself by being a fully closed platform, which means that it has contracts with all carriers, while its competitors are often more open, thus working more according to the auction principle. Moreover, Transporeon only targets carriers that are actually companies, while its competitors also target individuals that possess a truck and execute transports.

Platform N is active in a market where there are both competing platforms and other types of competitors. The firm tries to distinguish itself from the competition by positioning itself as a trusted partner. Furthermore, Platform N purely focuses on matching supply and demand, while the competition purchases the products itself and then re-sells it. Therefore, the process of the competition includes some additional steps.

YoungOnes aims to become market leader and uses, amongst other strategies, distinctive positioning to achieve this. It distinctively positions itself by focusing on ad-hoc day jobs in logistics, promotion, food service industry and event industry. Its non-platform competitors are namely focusing on structural jobs and its major platform competitor is mainly focusing on the food service industry, thus targeting a smaller audience.

Expert 1 did not provide information about how platforms can achieve distinctive positioning in other ways than via having a differentiated offering.

The business representative of ECE indicated that high-growth startups distinguish themselves from non-high-growth startups by already contacting clients early on. Furthermore, they dare to fail, to act quickly and to change when necessary. Moreover, they have a mindset of 'just do it' and are very flexible. Finally, high-growth platforms distinctively position themselves by stressing that they are the experts in their field.

Based on the interview data, it can be concluded that the strategy of distinctive positioning was, is and will be used by all case companies. Furthermore, both experts indicated that high-growth platforms or high-growth startups use this strategy.

10.5.1.2 Availability of complements

12Build does offer several complementary products and services. First of all, 'Evaluator', the platform's evaluating system, can be seen as a complement to 'Matchmaker'. Moreover, users can get additional insights based on data for free. Furthermore, users can make use of training programmes, which is a paid service. Additionally, 12Build has interfaces with several IT-suppliers in the construction industry, whose products and services can be seen to be complementary to those of 12Build. Regarding the future, it wants to establish more of those interfaces. Finally, the excellent customer support that is offered by 12Build can be seen as a complementary service.

Besides its great customer service, Daan does not offer that many complementary products and services. Although it does offer online trainings for its professionals, this is not seen as a complementary service. Since Daan's core service is to help professionals with finding a job and providing them with career guidance, the online trainings are considered to be part of its core service.

Transporeon offers a lot of different modules that can be said to be complement. Clients can choose by themselves which modules they want to use and therefore compile a tool that is most useful for them. Furthermore, Transporeon can be integrated with clients' ERP systems, SAP and Oracle transportation management software (Transporeon GmbH, 2019b). Recently, Transporeon took over Tim Consult and is therefore able to provide its clients with more insights and market intelligence. Besides, Transporeon's excellent customer service can be seen as a complementary service. Based on information provided by shippers about their demands, Transporeon can develop new modules and add those to its overall solution. In this way, the company grows along with the clients' demands, both now and in the future.

Besides its excellent customer service, Platform N does not offer any complementary products or services. It did offer some complementary services via external parties in the past. The users were satisfied with those complements, but the number of users that actually used the complementary services was too low. Therefore, it was no longer profitable for Platform N to offer those services and the company therefore decided to focus on its core business. However, the company is open to offering complementary services.

YoungOnes itself does not offer a lot of complementary goods or services, although it does offer the service that it performs the invoicing for freelancers. Furthermore, the company collaborates with parties that offer insurances for freelancers and with firms that offer business accounts for freelancers. With respect to insurances, YoungOnes has, together with intermediary No Risk, created an insurance specifically tailored towards freelancers, which has been compiled by Reaal (YoungOnes, 2019, April 29). Those insurances and business accounts are thus not offered by YoungOnes, but by external parties the firm collaborates with. Finally, the company has excellent customer service.

Although Expert 1 was not directly asked to provide information about whether fast-growing platforms offer complements, it was indicated that more and more platforms are embracing the physical world again, for example by opening a physical store, which is an example of a complementary service. In general, this is beneficial for their growth.

Although the representative of ECE could not indicate whether fast-growing platforms specifically offer complements, the representative did mention that startups try to expand their offerings by offering complementary products or services in later growth phases.

As can be seen in table 2, the availability of complements differs per company. 12Build and YoungOnes offer complementary products and the use of this strategy in the past or the future has not been discussed during the interviews. The latter also applies to Daan, but this company does not offer complements currently. Transporeon did and does offer complements and will continue to do this in the future. Platform N offered complementary products in the past, but due to low usage, this strategy is not pursued anymore. However, the company is open to the strategy. Expert 1 indicated that some platforms are opening up physical stores, thus having complements available. ECE's representative mentioned that high-growth startups often do not offer complements in the early phases, but that the strategy is applied in later phases.

10.5.1.3 Platform envelopment

The business representatives were not directly asked questions about this strategy. However, all representatives were asked to provide information on the products and services that are offered by their companies and based on this information, presumptions can be made about whether a company used, uses or will use this strategy.

Transporeon has used platform envelopment in the past and still uses this strategy. Sometimes, startups or competitors come up with a certain idea that Transporeon considers to be valuable. Then, Transporeon will incorporate this solution in its platform as well, either by starting a company (Sixfold) or by adding a new module. In this way, Transporeon is able to offer an overall solution and can continually grow with clients' demands.

The information that was provided about the products and services that are offered by the platforms leads to the presumption that 12Build, Daan, Platform N and YoungOnes did and do not pursue this strategy.

Due to the fact that both Expert 1 and ECE are no platform companies themselves and thus have no detailed company specific information, the experts were not asked to provide information about whether the strategy of platform envelopment is used by high-growth platforms or fast-growing startups.

It can be concluded that Transporeon uses platform envelopment. For the other platforms, it is presumed that this strategy was and is not used based on the information they provided about their offerings.

10.5.1.4 Advertising

In the beginning, 12Build tried to stay a bit under the radar. Besides several media, the company does not make use of other forms of advertising. However, direct marketing and trade fairs are used to increase the brand awareness of the platform. Furthermore, 12Build becomes known via its own community: main contractors use the platform and refer construction specialists to it.

Daan uses various ways of advertising to reach its job candidates, for example by using social media and online campaigns. Other channels that are used to increase its platform brand awareness are job boards, fairs and universities.

Transporeon does use an advertising channel like social media, but it mainly uses other ways to increase its brand awareness. First of all, the company tries to be present on many leading events in the logistics sector. In the past, they often only had a stand at those events, but nowadays, they also give a presentation in 95% of the cases to share their knowledge about digitalisation within logistics.

Moreover, Transporeon tries to build a large network, for example by collaborating with universities and logistics organisations. Additionally, the company's website and mailings contribute to its brand awareness. Besides, the company has placed keywords on all pages of its new website. Those keywords are being important to the company and are searched for by (potential) users in Google. In this way, the company stands up in Google's search results, thereby improving its findability. Finally, Transporeon's community also contributes to its brand awareness through word of mouth.

Platform N uses many types of advertising to increase its brand awareness. The company uses Facebook, Google, radio commercials and TV commercials. Besides, online marketing is used.

Although YoungOnes does use social media, it mainly uses other channels to increase its brand awareness. Besides (online) marketing, YoungOnes leverages the network and database of YoungCapital and becomes more widely known via vacancies and mailings of YoungCapital.

Expert 1 stated that platforms mainly express themselves digitally, but that some companies also open up physical stores to increase the brand awareness of their platform.

The expert of ECE indicated that fast-growing startups excel in content marketing, which means that they can clearly explain why they are the experts in their field, for example via blogs and videos.

Overall, all platforms are currently using some type of advertising. Whether the companies will continue to pursue to strategy in the future has not been asked during the interviews, although it can be assumed to be likely. Besides, whether Daan, Platform N and YoungOnes applied this strategy in the past has also not been covered. 12Build deliberately decided not to use advertising in the beginning, while Transporeon did use it in the past.

10.5.1.5 Managing expectations

Although becoming market leader has never been a goal on itself, it was logical and required for 12Build to become successful. When 12Build was founded, it was the only tendering platform for the construction industry, causing the construction industry to expect 12Build to become market leader. Therefore, managing the expectations of users was never really necessary.

Daan is market leader and this ambition was and is really embedded in the company's culture. For Daan, it was more about striving to become market leader and making strategic choices that have to be made to achieve this. For example, the company would never select highly educated employees for production work. Therefore, it can be concluded that Daan did manage the expectations of its users by making the right strategic choices, as this probably made the users to expect that the company would become successful.

Transporeon always had a clear vision and also expressed that the goal was to have all transactions flowing through one single platform, as this allows the platform to reach its full potential. The company is market leader in Europe and wants to become market leader worldwide. The company is still growing in Europe and is also gaining market share in America. This is all passed on to its (potential) clients, which is demonstrated by the fact that many carriers and shippers know the firm.

Platform N is market leader as well. Although it was not discussed whether the company tried to manage its users' expectations in the past, it was indicated that Platform N currently tries to stimulate its buyers to be as friendly as possible to the sellers and emphasises that both Platform N and the buyers are responsible for their (joint) reputation. In this way, they can jointly create positive expectations for the sellers.

YoungOnes does try to do this by getting as many appealing day jobs as possible on their platform and they also let their users know that they are busy getting bigger and that they expect to add more branches and regions to their portfolio. Furthermore, YoungOnes is one of the first platforms

in this area and thereby, they are also expressing their ambition to become market leader and that they want to make everything as easy as possible for their users.

It was indicated by Expert 1 that platforms promise their (potential) customers a lot, which might be an indication of platforms trying to manage their users' expectations.

As can be concluded from table 2, the adoption of this strategy differs between the platforms. First of all, the potential future use of this strategy was not touched upon in the interviews. 12Build did and does not manage customers' expectations, while the reverse holds for Transporeon. Daan managed expectations in the past, but is not using this strategy currently. Next, both Platform N and YoungOnes use this strategy, but information about its use in the past has not been provided. Expert 1 stated that platform companies do promise their users a lot and ECE's representative was not asked about this growth strategy.

10.5.1.6 Building trust

The construction industry is constantly changing and needs trust (12Build, 2017), which can be created through transparency. 12Build makes both the market and the collaboration transparent, for which open communication is important.

Trust is important for Daan, as the company wants to retain customers instead of having one-time customers. The company is successful in this, as customer do actually stay. This customer focus is already present since day one. Daan tries to build trust via its organisation's appearance and the first conversation with the candidate or client. Furthermore, it is important to prove your abilities by doing for which achieving the right result is also of importance.

Transporeon creates trust in multiple ways. It listens to clients, offers good customer service, has a high uptime and grows along with tomorrow's demand. By devoting a lot of time to clients in order to build and maintain relationships, trust can be generated. Furthermore, there is a customer success team that monitors the clients to constantly track whether everything is going smoothly and to proactively determine what can be improved. Moreover, Transporeon has an ISO 27001 certification, which shows that data security is highly important.

Due to the fact that Platform N operates in an emotional trade, building trust is very important. During the interview, it was indicated that this is even the most important strategy for Platform N to grow fast. Trust can be created by not only saying that your company can be trusted, but by actually being trustworthy. Aspects that are important in creating trust are independence, human contact, transparency (buyers can see each other's bids) and creating understanding. The reviews that sellers are asked to write and the several radio and TV commercials also contribute to the creation of trust. During the relatively short contact moment that Platform N has with the sellers, it tries to establish trust. On the buyer's side, trust is created by maintaining relationships.

The business representative of YoungOnes mentioned that the company creates trust by having a lot of contact with its clients and by helping them. Besides, transparency (e.g. about how everything works, including its revenue model) is an important factor in building trust.

Expert 1 indicated that platforms try to establish trust by being very present and by extensively using reviews. Furthermore, transparency is a good way to build trust.

The business representative of ECE mentioned that human contact mainly takes place in the early phases. Later on, the contact between platforms and their clients is often automated. Those platforms try to create trust by having clear processes and by relying on the community for ratings and feedback.

Building trust seems to be very important, as all platforms currently apply this strategy. Although no statements about 12Build's adoption of this strategy in the past can be made, the other platforms

indicated that they also pursued this strategy in the past. Furthermore, the future use of this strategy was only covered during the interview with Platform N, in which it was mentioned that the company will continue to apply this strategy in the future. Expert 1 indicated that fast-growing platforms do use this strategy and ECE's representative mentioned the importance of creating trust during all phases.

10.5.1.7 Acquisitions

In 2018, 12Build took over the Belgian company Dpas. Nevertheless, acquiring other companies or business units is not a direct strategy of the company as (a) there are hardly any companies or business units that are suitable to take over and (b) because 12Build thinks that it is better to invest in new salespeople. Nevertheless, if a suitable acquisition candidate passes by, it will be considered by 12Build.

Daan has not acquired other businesses or business units in the past and has therefore grown organically. Although the company's focus is not on acquisitions, it is open to this strategy provided that the acquisition candidates are small enough, as this will prevent them from having impact on Daan's culture.

In 2018, Transporeon took over the company Tim Consult. Because of this, the portfolio has been broadened and it enables more analysis and incorporates more market intelligence into the system. However, Transporeon is quite selective. Its platform is very stable and acquiring other companies or business units should not have any impact on its stability and uptime. Currently, the company does not know yet whether other acquisitions will take place, but there is a chance that this will happen. The company is thus open to this strategy, but it really depends on how the market evolves.

Platform N has investigated some acquisition opportunities in the past, but decided to discontinue. The potentially attractive acquisition candidates were so small that it was easier to scale up the company itself. Moreover, merging two companies and their systems takes a lot of time, which was something that Platform N was not really looking forward to. However, Platform N is open to the strategy.

Due to the fact that YoungOnes is a very young company, it did and does not use this strategy and also does not know whether it will be pursued in the future. They first want to develop their current offering and grow with that.

Expert 1 indicated that he presumes that acquisitions will only take place if a platform has already grown and reached a certain size, because a platform will then have the possibility to do so. If platforms are smaller, they are more likely to be an acquisition candidate themselves.

ECE's representative indicated that in the early growth phases, it is too early for most startups to be able to devote attention to this strategy. It very much depends on the (growth)phase a company is in and on whether there are attractive acquisition possibilities at a specific moment.

Except for YoungOnes, all platforms indicated that they are open to the strategy of acquisitions. Besides, 12Build and Transporeon have both acquired a firm in the past, while this does not hold for Daan and Platform N. Finally, both experts indicated that platforms and fast-growing startups do not take over other businesses in the early phases, but that those companies are open to the strategy later on, as it then becomes a possibility.

10.5.1.8 Exclusive contracting

At 12Build, customers are free to use the products and services of its competitors as well. 12Build cannot make use of exclusive contracting and thinks that this is not a good strategy.

The question concerning exclusive contracting has not been asked during the interview with the representative of Daan.

Transporeon's clients are free to make use of the services of competing platforms as well and there are also clients that do this. Although clients are free to go wherever they want to, there are barely any clients that leave Transporeon, mainly due to its stability, innovation and customer service.

Users of Platform N are free to transact via competing platforms as well. Some customers actually do this, while others only use Platform N. Platform N thinks that you should not want to prohibit your customers from using the services of the competition. However, it was stated that the company tries to bind its customers by offering high quality. If a customer then still uses a competitor's services, the company tries to find out why a customer does this and tries to learn from it.

The users of YoungOnes are free to use competitors' services as well and this also happens a lot. YoungOnes thinks that this is actually good and does not perceive it to be a problem.

The question concerning exclusive contracting was not asked to Expert 1 due to time constraints and not asked to the business representative of ECE due to the fact that it is a platform growth strategy, while ECE does not have knowledge about platforms specifically.

In short, this strategy has not been covered during the interviews with Daan and the two experts, but all other platforms indicated that they do not use the strategy and that their users are free to use the products and services of competitors as well. Regarding the future, no statements were made.

10.5.1.9 Strategic alliances

12Build has strategic alliances with several IT-suppliers in the construction industry in order to create value for its clients and to serve them better. Furthermore, the partners in the alliance can benefit from each other's network. Although not explicitly mentioned in the interview, an example of this would be that 12Build is referred to by its partner, for example on its website, which could lead to clients of the partner considering whether using 12Build would be valuable as well. Besides, 12Build will establish strategic alliances with more IT-suppliers in the construction industry in the future. To attract the remaining Dutch clients and to quickly attract new customers in Europe, creating links with those IT-suppliers is highly important.

Daan has not entered into a strategic alliance and it is also not a priority.

Transporeon has a strategic alliance with Sixfold in 2019. They started this company by themselves, it is completely interfaced with the solutions of the Transporeon Group and fall within the same private equity firm as the Transporeon Group, but it does not belong to the Transporeon Group and is therefore financially independent. This choice has been made deliberately, as it for example allows clients of competing platforms to use Sixfold's services as well. When Transporeon has to decide whether they will develop something by themselves or whether they will establish a strategic alliance, they always look whether something falls within their core proposition or not. Transporeon has a large development team, but they do assess whether they should develop things within the company or whether they should choose for an interface or a strategic alliance.

Platform N is not part of a strategic alliance. In the past, it has worked together with external companies that provided complementary services, but due to the small number of users, this collaboration was ended. However, Platform N is open to become part of a strategic alliance in the future.

YoungOnes has not established a strategic alliance.

According to Expert 1, it depends on the type of platform whether it is part of a strategic alliance or not.

For startups, it can be useful and very attractive to become part of a strategic alliance according to the business representative of ECE. However, a potential partner will only perceive a strategic alliance interesting if a startup already grows fast.

The use of this strategy largely varies between the platforms. 12Build is part of a strategic alliance and will continue to use this strategy in the future by collaborating with even more IT-suppliers. Daan and YoungOnes have not entered a strategic alliance and no statements regarding the future are made. Transporeon is in a strategic alliance with Sixfold that will continue in the future and is open to more strategic alliances in the future. Although Platform N was part of a strategic alliance in the past, it has no strategic alliance at the moment. Nevertheless, it is open to the strategy. Expert 1 indicated that being part of a strategic alliance differs per platform and ECE's representative stated that fast-growing startups are often open to this strategy.

10.5.1.10 Pricing

Main contractors have to pay 12Build a few euros per quote requested and they purchase a bundle for this. The price per quote requested was higher in the past, due to the fact that using the platform could save its users a lot of money on paperwork back then. As those savings on paperwork are no longer there, the price per quote requested was decreased to stimulate the adoption of the platform. Furthermore, construction specialists can pay for the 'Promoter' solution in order to stand out more in the search results. Besides, sometimes a choice can be made between a free or a premium version.

Within Daan's pricing strategy, the company receives a compensation per hour for the candidates that are employed. This revenue model has already been used from the beginning.

The business representatives of Transporeon indicated that the company's revenue model is and has always been based on transaction fees. Carriers have to pay a low transaction fee for each accepted transport that flows through the platform. The transaction fees are transparent and the same for all carriers. Besides, Transporeon receives a one-time project fee from new shippers, as its tool has to be adapted to the demands and process of the shipper. If there is a lot of customisation, the shipper might also have to pay a small maintenance fee. However, Transporeon generates most of its revenues through the transaction fees that carriers have to pay.

Platform N receives a success-fee from the buyer for each successful deal. In the past, the company also tried to let the sellers pay for their services, but the company quickly switched to another revenue model. If you let sellers pay, expectations are created, also relating to the price that they expect to receive for their product.

YoungOnes uses one revenue model. Its clients, so the companies offering day jobs, have to pay €3,50 for each hour of work that is arranged via the platform. This revenue model is very open and transparent and prices are the same for everyone.

According to Expert 1, platforms use different pricing strategies. Some platforms work with margins, but a lot of platforms work with a fee-model in which the platform receives a fee for each transaction. The representative indicated that there is more and more discussion about the pricing strategies of platforms, because a lot of margin flows away to the platforms. Sometimes, there is misalignment between the fee that a platform charges and the value it actually creates for its clients and this creates tension between margin and supply. An example of this is that more and more hotels advertise and offer incentives to book directly at their hotel instead of via a platform for booking travel accommodations. Furthermore, in the restaurant industry, restaurants themselves have started a counter-movement due to the high fees that have to be paid.

Although no questions about pricing were asked to the representative of ECE, the business representative indicated that it is important for startups to test different revenue models in the early phases.

It can be concluded that all platforms use the strategy of pricing. Concerning price structure, all platforms make use of transaction fees. Daan, Platform N and YoungOnes use transaction fees only and those fees are also the main revenue source for Transporeon. However, 12Build and Transporeon

also use fixed fees: construction specialists can pay to use 'Promoter' and shippers have to pay a one-time project fee (and sometimes a maintenance fee) to get a connection with Transporeon. Furthermore, Daan, Platform N and YoungOnes charge only one side, while both sides are charged by 12Build and Transporeon. Platform N has charged both sides in the past as well, but quickly decided that it should only charge one side. The aspect of price level was not directly covered during the interviews, but 12Build indicated that lowering its transaction fee was required to facilitate the adoption of the platform and Transporeon and YoungOnes stated that their transaction fees are open, transparent and on the same level for all users. Although the platforms did not indicate to make use of a subsidisation strategy, the fact that Daan, Platform N and YoungOnes charge only one side shows that those platforms are subsidising the side that is not charged. Expert 1 confirms that many platforms use transaction fees, although he indicated that some use margins as well. ECE's business representative pointed attention towards the importance of testing different revenue models in the beginning.

10.5.2 High-growth strategies

10.5.2.1 Differentiated offering

In section 10.5.1.1 about distinctive positioning, it has already been described how the platforms distinctively position themselves in other ways than through having a differentiated offering. In this section, it will be described whether the platforms have a differentiated offering, which thus also contributes to their distinctive positioning.

12Build is market leader and there are no competing platforms in the Netherlands. However, there are some other competing SaaS-solutions that optimise and facilitate the tendering process, but those solutions do not have a database that includes construction specialists. In this respect, 12Build thus has a differentiated offering. Besides, 12Build's offering consists of a bundle of solutions, thus providing an overall solution. Furthermore, the company distinguishes itself by offering excellent customer support.

Daan's internal workforce is what distinguishes the company from its competitors. The company makes sure that the internal workforce is happy and treated well, as this will have a positive influence on the service offered to and therefore the value perceived by its customers.

Transporeon is active in a market with multiple competing platforms and other types of competitors. There are multiple aspects that differentiate Transporeon from its competitors. First of all, the company strongly focuses on getting connections with many carriers worldwide. In the beginning of 2019, 70,000 carriers were connected and in only seven months, this has already increased to 90,000. This large number of connected carriers can be attractive for shippers. Furthermore, the platform is very stable and has a very high (> 99%) uptime compared to competitors who are more struggling with this. Additionally, both the system and the customer service are available in 24 languages, thereby allowing shippers and carriers to both operate and contact the customer service in their own language. Moreover, Transporeon is a SaaS-solution and the system is being updated every six weeks. Therefore, users always work with the newest system that addresses recent developments. Besides, additional functionalities or modules are added if this is demanded, which means that the company offers an overall solution that meets both today's and tomorrow's demand. Next, Transporeon is highly customisable and it offers its clients many opportunities to tailor the system to their demands and processes. Finally, Transporeon is ISO 27001 certified, which illustrates that data security is highly important.

Platform N differentiates its offering through being a trusted partner. In section 10.5.1.6 on building trust, information about how the company accomplishes this can be found.

YoungOnes differentiates itself by facilitating the matchmaking between offerors of ad-hoc day jobs and freelancers via an online solution. Moreover, the clients of YoungOnes have to upload jobs and select freelancers by themselves, while traditional employment agencies perform those tasks for them.

According to Expert 1, platforms can differentiate themselves from other platforms in different ways. Many fast-growing platforms are strongly customer focused and strive for extreme customer satisfaction. On the other hand, there are also platforms that are not characterised by this at all, but which are almost fully automated. Those platforms distinctively position themselves by offering great processes. High-growth platforms often distinguish themselves from non-platform competitors by offering an incredible user experience, providing visibility and insights, and by being very accessible, as their services are literally under a button.

ECE's representative indicated that to be able to grow fast, startups have to make sure that they optimise their product or service to ensure that users have a positive user experience all the time.

From table 4, it can be concluded that all platforms have a differentiated offering. In fact, four of the five platforms see this as a very important strategy, as they indicated that added value for the customer is one of the most important factors for both their success up till now and for the future. Additionally, this was confirmed by both experts.

10.5.2.2 Customer knowledge and customer loyalty

First of all, it is important to state that all case companies use data in order to gain customer knowledge. However, this is described in more detail in the next section on the strategy of acquiring data and will thus be excluded hereunder.

If customers of 12Build have a suggestion for how the platform's solutions or services can be improved, they are encouraged to share this and the idea will be put on a wish list (12Build, 2017). If customers share their ideas and feedback, this provides 12Build with information about what they demand and need. Furthermore, the founder of the company had knowledge about the construction industry. Besides, 12Build intentionally focused on the main contractors first, because it knew that the platform could provide most added value for this category. 12Build devotes a lot of attention towards building and maintaining customer relationships. They need to have insight into the customer's process, as their SaaS-solutions are focused on process optimisation. The goal is to speak to every customer at least once a year and the company also has a proactive relationship management system. Besides, the company is known for its excellent support and that it really listens to the clients (12Build, 2017). Furthermore, their clients' opinions are very valuable and their feedback is being used to develop the company (12Build, 2017). Finally, 12Builds main contractors often refer construction specialists to the platform.

When matching a candidate to a job, Daan makes sure that there is a good fit. For example, they know that you should not let a highly educated candidate perform production work. Moreover, the company's founder had knowledge about and experience with the industry and platform companies. Daan's customers are very loyal. The company has also strongly focused on this since day one, as it does not want one-time customers. It tries to accomplish this by its appearance, during the first conversation and by proving its abilities by doing. Moreover, customers can be served at any moment and can therefore have their questions answered immediately.

Transporeon has known from the beginning what its customers demand and need. Before the platform was established, its four founders visited companies to find out what they were missing in their logistical operation. In this way, they discovered that transport assignment was cumbersome and that it contained errors sometimes. To resolve these problems and to improve the communication flow, they decided to establish Transporeon. Besides, the company offers a lot of modules that can be customised and combined based on customers' demand and needs. Furthermore, the company becomes instantly aware of new demands, since shippers share those with the firm. The customers of Transporeon are loyal, as barely any users leave the firm, even though they are free to do so. Transporeon tries to make its customers loyal by keeping them satisfied and ensuring that they know how the solutions work. Furthermore, its stability and innovation are also important aspects in this respect. Loyal customers are important, as they will also stimulate potential users to connect to the platform.

Platform N is an authority in its field and knows that building trust is essential. From the start, the company has focused on building and maintaining relationships and this is an important factor in the firm's growth process. Additionally, one of the founders already had knowledge about and experience in the industry and therefore knew what he was talking about. Furthermore, the company's employees have to possess customer knowledge, both on the buying and the selling side. By being and positioning itself as a trusted partner and by offering high quality, Platform N tries to create loyal

customers. Some of its users make use of competitors' services as well, while others only rely on Platform N. If a customer also uses a competitor's services, Platform N tries to find out why and aims to learn from this. Furthermore, they devote a lot of attention to building and maintaining relationships with sellers and buyers, which is an important factor in their growth path. This has been the case from the start, but the company has become more aware of its importance. Due to the importance of building and maintaining those relationships, the company prefers to work with fulltime salespeople.

The founders of YoungOnes are very experienced in the industry and therefore know what their customers want. Besides, the company collects feedback from its users to become aware of their demands. Moreover, the company was established to respond to two current trends, namely today's increase in short-term jobs and demand for only hiring talent when needed on the one hand and young people's preference for flexibility on the other hand. Although the representative mentioned that a lot of effort is put into attracting new users, no statements were made about customer loyalty besides the fact that its users are free to and do actually use the services of competitors as well.

Expert 1 indicated that high-growth platforms distinguish themselves by offering a great user experience. This often results in clients that will actively promote the platform through word of mouth. This process can be seen as the flywheel for platforms. Furthermore, they devote a lot of attention to building and maintaining relationships, which is essential during all growth phases.

According to the representative of ECE, high-growth startups quickly contact their (potential) clients in the early stages to check whether their own assumptions are right. This step is often not taken by other startups. Moreover, if a startup's offerings are targeted towards their own target group, they already have a lot of knowledge about the market and its customers. However, this can also cause them to rely too much on their own experience and assumptions. Additionally, it is important for digital startups to create loyal customers, as this contributes to fast growth. Therefore, it is important that the product/service is optimised in such a way that customers constantly have a positive user experience, which causes them to keep coming back.

All platforms have a lot of customer knowledge, which can originate from their founders' pre-knowledge and/or from actively gathering it. To be more precise, all platforms had this knowledge from the start. Those findings are in line with the statements of both experts. Moreover, Transporeon, Platform N, YoungOnes and Expert 1 all emphasised relationships with customers and thereby customer knowledge to be one of the three most important factors for future growth. Except for YoungOnes, as the topic of customer loyalty was not touched upon during that interview, all platforms are focusing on getting loyal customers and Daan and Transporeon explicitly stated to have loyal customers. Expert 1 indicated that this strategy is used during all phases and that fast-growing platforms do have loyal customers. ECE's expert stated that high-growth startups do have customer knowledge from the beginning. Furthermore, he mentioned that it is important to create loyal customers, but did not indicate whether fast-growing startups actually pursue this strategy.

10.5.2.3 Possessing human capital

The founder of 12Build had always been interested in computers and the like, but had no knowledge about or experience with platforms. The founder did have knowledge about and feeling with the construction industry, since his father owned a construction firm. Besides, the founder of 12Build ran his own company in building websites before he started 12Build. Human capital has always been very important within 12Build and this will not change in the future. Rationally seen, human capital is even more important than technology when you talk about the key to success. Humans are the source of creativity, which is important within 12Build: everything is allowed, as long as they have the right idea. 12Build has both part-time and fulltime employees. If employees want to work less, this is no problem because it often makes them happier and therefore also more productive.

Daan's founder did have knowledge about and experience with platforms and the industry it operates in, but entrepreneurship was a new field for him. For Daan, human capital is extremely important and the company distinguishes itself from competitors because of its team. Actually, human capital has always been and will also be a key success factor for Daan in the future. In general, the company is looking for smart people that strengthen the firm. Advisors have to meet three criteria to be suitable for the job: they have to be nice, socially intelligent and passionate. Daan mainly employs fulltime employees. It is not only important that the employees see each other every day, but it is also important that the client can be served at any time. If Daan's advisors are present every day, the customer can be served at any time and this will not be possible if you have part-time employees.

Transporeon's founders had no knowledge or experience about platforms, the logistics sector or entrepreneurship, as they directly started the platform after their studies. For the company, human capital is very important, as it is necessary to secure the platform's growth. Motivated employees are necessary and if you have more employees with particular skills, you come into contact with more companies, which causes the firm to grow. Besides, Transporeon is still sold through its salespeople, again emphasising the importance of human capital. To ensure future growth, it is very important to attract and retain enough capable IT-developers and software engineers. However, this is quite challenging nowadays. Although the skills and knowledge needed depends on the specific job, it is important that all employees master the English language to be able to communicate with the company's headquarters. Employees can either work part-time or fulltime and Transporeon is flexible in finding the right work-life balance.

The founders of Platform N had no knowledge about platforms, because there were no platform examples when they started their company. Therefore, they had to invent the wheel by themselves and really learned by doing. One of the founders had knowledge about and experience with the sector. This is very important, as you have to know what you are talking about if you want to be treated seriously in this industry. Besides, he already knew potential buyers, which made it easier to connect them to the platform. Furthermore, one of the founders had experience with entrepreneurship. For Platform N, human capital is very important and maybe even the most important factor in its growth process, especially in the beginning. The company needs people that understand both sellers and buyers. For Platform N, it is important that there is a good and smooth fit between domain knowledge, product knowledge and IT-knowledge. Furthermore, sales qualities are important. Platform N prefers to work with fulltime employees, especially for the sales department. It is impossible to build a relationship with buyers if your salespeople are not there all the time.

YoungOnes is founded by the founders of YoungCapital. Therefore, the founders had a lot of knowledge about and experience with the sector and entrepreneurship. Although YoungCapital is also very active online, the platform business model was completely new to them, so they hired experts for that. For YoungOnes, human capital is extremely important. They search for people that like working at a startup, enjoy being engaged in the thinking process and are open to continuously implement improvements. In this respect, they are searching for people that have a real growth mindset. The representative indicated that human capital will also be very important for the company's future growth.

According to Expert 1, it is crucial to have knowledge about and experience with platforms nowadays. Without this, it is simply impossible to become active in the platform economy. However, at the time when platforms started to rise, this knowledge and experience was often not there. Back in those days, it was more about learning by doing, but those days are over. Human capital is crucial and a fundamental asset for a platform during all growth phases. This is what makes the difference and it will only become more important in the future. Humans are the only source of creativity and creativity is the basis for innovation. For platforms, it is important that the employees have the right mindset and that they want to perform better every day.

The business representative of ECE indicated that human capital is extremely important during all growth phases. Startups need the right team at the right moment in their growth process and the team at the start differs from the team when the startup grows. Aspects that are especially important are being able to keep an overview and having the right mindset.

Overall, all companies value human capital to be highly important and they are all pursuing this strategy. All platforms indicated that they will continue to apply this strategy in the future. Actually, three of the five platforms and both experts indicated that this factor will be one of the most important ones towards the future. Furthermore, four of the five platforms stated that human capital was one of the most important factors that determined its success up till now. Finally, the experts also mentioned the importance of human capital during all growth phases.

10.5.2.4 Availability of financial capital

12Build's representative indicated that having enough money is important to grow in Europe, although it will not be the most important factor. Being able to attract enough and good employees will be the most important factor.

Having enough financial capital is very important for Daan. In their industry, they have to pre-finance, because they have to pay the salaries before they receive money from their clients. If the company would not have enough financial resources, this would hinder its growth. In the early phases, Daan was financed with money of its founder and the bank.

For Transporeon, the availability of financial capital was extremely important in the beginning and was attracted from investors. Currently, the majority of the shares is owned by a private equity firm which invests a lot of money into the firm in order to be able to grow.

Platform N has been able to grow organically in the first years. After a few years, 'growth money' was used. However, this did not really benefit the company. The representative indicated that as long as you have good margins, you can retract enough money from your own turnover. In fact, it is actually good if you start with only little money (bootstrapping), as this makes your company very lean, requires you to look critically and urges you to only do what is really necessary.

The business representative of YoungOnes indicated that it is quite crucial that there is sufficient financial capital available. Money needs to be invested into development and increasing brand awareness. In this regard, YoungOnes is lucky, as its founders are willing to invest a lot in this.

According to Expert 1, there are two kinds of platforms in this respect. For one group, acquiring financial capital from outside sources is extremely important for their survival. The other group focuses more on organic growth, which means that the company's turnovers are reinvested in order to grow. If a company grows faster, it becomes easier to attract financial capital. In the early phases, platforms often use crowdfunding and campaigns to get enough money.

If a startup already generates enough turnover, it is not necessary to attract financial capital, but otherwise this is important to grow fast. The dream of every startup is to find an investor. Although this can be helpful, a startup then also gives up a large part of its company in a quite early stage, which makes the company stuck in what has been sold. Other ways to attract financial capital are subsidies, pitch competitions and accelerator programmes.

As can be seen in table 4, all platforms acknowledge the importance of financial capital for their growth process. Some of them started with the founders' money only, others used external capital and some used a combination of both. This was also confirmed by both experts, who indicated that some high-growth platforms and startups grow organically, while others grow by attracting financial capital from outside.

10.5.2.5 Possessing intellectual property and intangible assets

Focusing on innovation is important for 12Build. However, it would be better to say that the company is focused on its clients, as they are the reason that the company wants to innovate. The company's innovation efforts are mainly related to its SaaS-solutions and it could be improved on the media side. The representative indicated that he thinks that 12Build possesses a lot of intellectual property. The company does not have any patents, but the company's name (both the word and the logo) is protected at European level.

Although Daan lets other parties develop many things, it does not possess intellectual property. However, the company is clearly focused on innovation and is constantly looking for improvements. Employees are stimulated to become part of the thinking process via a digital suggestion box. Innovation at Daan is mainly related to the company's processes. Examples are smarter systems that can reduce the amount of manual work and services that can be used as a marketing tool.

Transporeon's big data is their intellectual property and it is priceless. Transporeon is approached by many firms that want to buy their data, but Transporeon does not sell its data. The company uses this data itself and helps its own clients with it. Besides, Transporeon is strongly focused on innovation, which is a top priority. Amongst others, it regularly updates its SaaS-solution and also adds new functionalities based on its clients' demand.

Innovation is highly valued within Platform N. They try to listen to their staff, buyers and sellers when it comes to new ideas that can improve their platform. Nevertheless, it is important to find a good balance when it comes to testing the many good and new ideas, as it could also lead to disturbances within the organisation. Therefore, they learned to filter the ideas first. Platform N does possess some, but not that much intellectual property, for example its domain name and trademarks.

According to the representative of YoungOnes, the company does not possess any intellectual property. However, the company is focused on innovation, as it offers an innovative solution in the employment sector.

Although Expert 1 has not been asked about whether fast-growing platforms often possess intellectual property and intangible assets, it has been asked whether fast-growing platforms have a strong focus on innovation. Expert 1 indicated that innovation can be seen as the foundation of platforms and therefore, they have an enormous urge to innovate. Innovation is needed for platforms to survive and not to be eaten. In the past, platforms have challenged other companies and now that they have acquired a certain position, they have to keep innovating in order to prevent the companies they have challenged in the past from catching up.

According to the ECE representative, it is difficult to acquire intellectual property when for IT and therefore it is mainly acquired for a company's brand and content. Some startups do make use of R&D, while others do not.

Some platforms (12Build, Transporeon and Platform N) do possess IP, while others (Daan and YoungOnes) do not. Nevertheless, they all have a strong focus on innovation, which was also mentioned by the experts. Expert 1 indicated that innovation is important during all phases in order to stay ahead of competitors and ECE's representative said that if startups possess intellectual property, this is mainly for the brand and content and not for IT as this is difficult to acquire.

10.5.2.6 Acquiring data

Data has been one of the key success factors for 12Build. The company devotes a lot of attention to acquiring and processing data. It ensures better matchmaking, helps to predict transactions and provides the company with insights that enable a more efficient and effective way of working. Furthermore, data about customer satisfaction is acquired by using Starred and the satisfaction of

employees is measured by using IKSO and 360° feedback. All feedback is continuously and proactively converted into added value for the users (12Build, 2017).

By using data, Daan tries to find out where its candidates are. If a candidate is active on a particular social media platform, the company knows that it wants to approach people with a similar profile. Moreover, data about the candidates is collected for future matchmaking. Finally, the company measures the satisfaction and happiness of its internal team in order to learn from it.

Data is very important for Transporeon and because of the acquisition of Tim Consult, it has become a key feature. The more data that flows through Transporeon, the more the world can benefit from. Transporeon actually wants to become the Google within the logistics sector. By having all data within one system, they can make predictions (e.g. where are the empty trucks?) and offer more transparency. Transporeon tries to offer its clients insights and market intelligence, which allows them to make better decisions. Transporeon has always pointed attention towards the importance of data, but it has and will become more active in this area over time. Furthermore, Transporeon is trying to get more data into its own system. In the past, it collaborated with Capgemini and now they took over Tim Consult, as they already have all the data themselves. At Transporeon, they think that data is crucial and that it will probably help them in becoming the worldwide market leader in the future.

Acquiring and processing data is very important for Platform N. Within the company, multiple dashboards with operational data, such as the number of successful matches and number of offered products on a day, can be found. Furthermore, the company uses additional data sources to enrich the products that are offered with additional data.

YoungOnes works a lot with data. Within their platform, everything is online and this requires technology, which explains the importance of data. Almost everything is measured and this happens more and more. The data is being used to implement improvements.

Expert 1 emphasised the importance of data. High-growth platforms use a lot of data and it is the foundation of their company and crucial for survival. Acquiring and processing data is a daily process, whereby data can be seen as the new oil. It is important to use data from the start and high-growth platforms also do this. However, the use of data intensifies as a platform grows. By measuring everything, platforms know exactly what does or does not work, can measure effects and finetune particular things. However, platforms might not use the data from negative reviews to their full extent, as those reviews are often neglected, while providing the customer with feedback could be beneficial.

According to ECE's business representative, data is very important for digital startups. It enables a startup to find out where the customers are, how they can be reached and how they can be served. Data becomes more and more important as a startup grows. Due to the fact that you can sell anonymised data nowadays, startups sometimes use their data as a second business model.

It can be concluded that all platforms are applying this strategy and perceive it to be highly important. Moreover, 12Build and Transporeon stated that they already acquire data from the beginning and Transporeon, and YoungOnes emphasised that they will even acquire and process more and more data in the future. The experts confirmed the use and importance of data by both fast-growing platforms and fast-growing (digital) startups and both indicated that its use intensifies as a company grows.

10.5.2.7 Clear strategy and prospective, external, growth-based and international orientation

12Build has a clear strategy that is split up into annual and quarterly targets. When the company checked whether their strategy is easy to articulate, it turned out that this is the case. The measurable part of 12Build's mission (let 30% of the construction turnover in Europe flow through its platform) illustrates a strong focus on growth. Furthermore, 12Build uses data insights keep their customers satisfied and to work more efficiently and effectively. Currently, 12Build is operating in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Austria and it wants to become active in whole Europe. Some

countries lack behind in terms of adopting the internet and market transparency, so their willingness to use the platform is lower. Therefore, the goal is to first grow organically in Central-Europe. A platform is very suitable to scale up. 12Build has a good product and therefore it is logical to expand the market. Moreover, expanding into Europe is seen as a chance to make the European construction industry more transparent and to improve the collaboration in the industry.

The representative of Daan indicated that the company has a clear strategy. The desire to become and stay market leader is really embedded in the company's culture. By using data, the company tries to find out where their candidates are, to attract new candidates and to improve future matchmaking. Daan only operates in the Netherlands, because there is sufficient demand. However, if demand in the Netherlands shrinks, the company will consider becoming active abroad as well.

Transporeon has a clear strategy and wants to become market leader worldwide. Its strategy has been clear from the beginning, as it was known already that the platform can only reach its full potential if there is only one real market leader. At Transporeon, they are constantly focusing on tomorrow's demand, busy with making projections and thinking about where the future will take them. Furthermore, their main priority is growth. Additionally, Transporeon has a strong international orientation, which is inherent to their goal of becoming the world's market leader. Currently, the company operates in more than 100 countries and has headquarters in Ulm, Berlin, Kempten, Paris, Krakow, Moscow, Singapore and Philadelphia. Furthermore, employees are working home office in other countries as well. The company is internationally orientated due to the fact that logistics and transport are not local activities. Goods are transported between the different continents and many clients are multinationals. That is also why Transporeon keeps adding new countries to its portfolio. The countries in which Transporeon does not operate currently, are often lacking behind in terms of working digitally.

Platform N has a clear strategy that is easy to articulate. Platform N operates in the Netherlands and some other European countries. In the past, Platform N was more active abroad, but this was at the expense of its focus. This in combination with large cultural differences caused the company to scale back. Looking back, the company got ahead of itself. In the future, Platform N wants to become more active in Europe again, but in a different way than in the past. The company will then proceed more slowly, automate more processes from the start and focus more on expanding abroad, especially with regard to culture.

The business representative of YoungOnes mentioned that the firm has a clear strategy. They know what they want to achieve, what their goals are and how those will be realised. However, due to the fact that the company is very young and growing really fast, deviating from and adjusting the strategy is sometimes necessary. The company uses data to spot and implement opportunities for improvement. Besides, the company is aware that they have to deal with a weekly fluctuating balance between offerors and freelancers. Additionally, the company is strongly focused on growth, as they want to become market leader. Finally, YoungOnes is not internationally oriented and only operates in the Netherlands. The company only exists for a year now, which explains why it wants to focus on growing and becoming big in the Netherlands first. YoungOnes also does not have future plans yet for internationalisation. In case they want to expand abroad, this will pose some challenges. Foreign countries have another legislation, with huge differences with respect to freelancing.

According to Expert 1, fast-growing platforms often have a clear and fixed main strategy. High-growth platforms make extensive use of data, which is the foundation of those companies. It allows them to monitor what does or does not work, to measure the effects of different factors and to finetune particular things. There is strong will to conquer the world and high-growth platforms are characterised by this. Expanding internationally is a good way to create fast growth, because it allows platforms to repeat what they have done in their own country throughout the world.

The business representative of ECE indicated that high-growth startups often have a clear mission and vision from the start. Digital startups use a lot of data to find out who their clients are, how they can be reached and how they can sell their product/service to them. For digital platforms and startups, it is necessary to be internationally oriented, as they need a huge user base. With digital startups, it is often the case that they are already international by accident due to the fact that their product is digital.

12Build, Transporeon and Platform N all fully pursue this strategy and will continue to do this in the future. In fact, they all want to grow and become more internationally oriented, thus indicating that their growth-based and international orientation will increase. Daan and YoungOnes also use this strategy, with the exception that they are not internationally oriented. Although YoungOnes could not indicate whether it will go abroad in the future, Daan indicated that it is open to the strategy if demand in the Netherlands shrinks in the future. Expert 1 mentioned that fast-growing platforms do have a clear strategy and a prospective, external, growth-based and international orientation. ECE's representative stated that fast-growing startups do have a clear strategy and a prospective, external and growth-based orientation. However, it depends on the kind of startup whether they are and have to be internationally oriented, as it is a requirement for digital startups, but not for non-digital ones.

10.5.2.8 Focus on the core

According to the business representative of 12Build, the company sets clear priorities and works with long-term, annual and quarterly goals. However, it was mentioned that the different departments are too focused on their own targets and the aim is to bring those goals more together again. 12Build outsources non-essential matters like user experience design, graphic design, writing texts, legal, annual accounts, marketing for campaigns and hosting. However, the company outsources less non-essential matters than in the past. Due to the fact that 12Build has grown a lot, it has been noticed that it is good to get some aspects on board again, for example HRM.

At Daan, clear goals are determined, both qualitative and quantitative. Furthermore, the company focuses on a specific niche market, namely the public sector. The company does not make use of outsourcing. Sometimes, the company purchases knowledge, but the goal is to incorporate this knowledge in the organisation itself. Therefore, Daan might call an external party for help if the company itself does not possess enough knowledge in a particular field, but this external party is then not used for outsourcing, but to acquire the knowledge that is lacking.

According to the business representatives of Transporeon, the company has a clear focus and staying focused, also in the future, is their key to success. This clear focus has been present from the beginning. The company's main priority is growth and clear sub-priorities are being set in order to accomplish this. Some examples of sub-priorities are availability (i.e. high uptime), excellent customer service, satisfied customers and innovation. The company does not outsource non-essential matters. In this respect, the company is quite German and tries to perform everything in-house. This has also been crucial for the firm's success. Even the software development is performed inhouse, whereby development staff works in teams and at one location as much as possible in order to be able to act quickly. This choice was made on purpose, because Transporeon wants to offer customised solutions and aims to continuously innovate its tools.

Currently, Platform N has a clear focus and clear priorities are being set, but this has not always been the case. In the past, the company consisted of quite some layers, while it is much flatter now. Furthermore, the company did not always set clear priorities in the past. In order to get a clear focus again, the company decided to become less active abroad and to discontinue the collaboration with external parties that offered complementary services. Platform N outsourced quite some non-essential

matters in the past, but they do everything in-house currently. This decision has been made because it enables the company to stay on top of things and to exert more influence.

YoungOnes sets clear priorities and every week, it is determined whether they have to focus more on sales or on attracting new freelancers, as the balance between clients and freelancers changes constantly. Besides, there is a strong focus on sales, increasing brand awareness and improving online presence and findability currently. YoungOnes works together with 10 outsourced IT-people. It was important for them to start with a viable product, so they work together with Freshheads for this. However, the company has close contact with the IT-people to make sure that everything runs smoothly. The company plans to hire some IT-people by itself in the future. Finally, (online) marketing is partly outsourced as they do not have the right people for this in-house yet.

Expert 1 indicated that high-growth platforms often have a clear focus due to the fact that they have an explicit and pre-determined strategy. Most high-growth platforms are clearly focused on their customers and on expanding internationally. Operationally, high-growth platforms have ensured some flexibility to be able to act upon opportunities and go in different directions. In the case of relatively young platform companies, it is especially not uncommon that they quickly switch from one direction to another.

ECE's representative stated that it is important for startups to have a clear focus in all growth phases. Especially in the beginning, it is important that a startup has a clear vision and knows the kind of impact it wants to make. Oftentimes, high-growth startups do have a clear mission and vision from the start. In the beginning, startups try to have a broad orientation, but to grow fast, it is important that they sharpen their focus or expand their offering. Although it differs per startup, it is important to perform everything that falls within your core proposition in-house and that all other things are outsourced.

All business representatives indicated that their companies have a clear focus, including clear priorities and goals. While 12Build and YoungOnes do outsource some non-essential matters, the other companies do not. Furthermore, YoungOnes can be said to outsource an essential matter as well, namely IT-development. Additionally, Platform N indicated that it did not have a clear focus in the past and that it outsourced non-essential matters in the past. Expert 1 mentioned that fast-growing platforms are not completely focused from the beginning, but that they become more focused over time. Moreover, ECE's expert indicated that fast-growing startups have a clear focus during all phases.

10.5.2.9 HRM practices

12Build devotes a lot of attention to training and education activities and employees also dare to ask for it. A company can only continue to grow if their employees grow as well (12Build, 2017). That is why a lot of attention is devoted to personal development. If employees lack knowledge or want to deepen or broaden their knowledge, they can follow courses, trainings and workshops and this is also encouraged by the organisation (12Build, 2017). Furthermore, everyone in the organisation is allowed to make changes, as long as it results in a better, nicer, faster or more efficient way of working (12Build, 2017). Besides, 12Build thinks that intrinsic motivation is very important. Although the company is facing a challenge in attracting enough and good employees, it does not offer potential employees a higher salary to get them on board. This would namely be at the expense of the company's culture, due to the fact that employees would then be motivated by money instead of by the mission of the company and what it stands for.

Due to the fact that binding employees and treating them well has been the most important factor that contributed to Daan's growth, it can be stated that this growth strategy is crucial within Daan. In order to attract and retain employees, Daan tries to offer good secondary employment conditions, which are extra things that have added value in their lives. Furthermore, the culture of the

company, which is energetic and characterised by happy people that are in the right place, is of importance in attracting new employees. Furthermore, the company's marketing channel is effective in reaching new talent. Moreover, Daan collaborates with the online training platform GoodHabitZ, which contributes to employees' personal development.

Transporeon devotes attention to attracting and retaining employees. The company attracts employees in various ways. First of all, the company's offices are located strategically. In Ulm and Kempten for example, there are highly regarded universities that offer IT-courses. Transporeon tries to get into contact with those students, for example through offering internships. Furthermore, employees receive an incentive if they find somebody to fill in a vacancy. Besides, LinkedIn and head-hunters are used to attract new talent. Transporeon tries to retain employees by offering a lot of trainings. In this way, they can develop themselves both professionally and personally. Moreover, employees can pursue career opportunities within the firm, both vertically and horizontally. Finally, personal development plans are used.

Platform N offers a good and nice working environment with an open atmosphere and focuses on the soft side to attract and retain employees. The company has moved multiple times and it was always the goal that the new building would make things better for everyone. Employees really love the company and also express this. Within Platform N, knowledge is constantly shared and attention is given to individual coaching. Moreover, the company offers training and education activities. For example, the salespeople listen to each other's conversations now and then and indicate what went well and what can be improved. Thereby, they can learn from each other.

Due to time constraints, not all questions about this strategy were asked. However, the representative of YoungOnes mentioned that they offer several trainings on sales, managing and customer management.

The question about HRM practices has not been asked to Expert 1 and the business representative of ECE due to time constraints.

As all platforms perceive their employees to be important for their growth process, they are all applying the strategy of HRM practices. The five platforms put a lot of effort into creating a good working environment and offering training and education activities.

10.5.2.10 Group management style with clearly assigned roles

12Build can be described as a self-learning and self-guiding organisation. The ideal manager ensures that he can be missed and is also involved as a cooperating foreman. 12Build believes that freedom and responsibility are important to make the work enjoyable (12Build, 2017). The organisation is flat and colleagues can give each other feedback (12Build, 2017). Within 12Build, decisions are made in teams. It is not always clear who bears liability, responsibility and/or authority due to the fact that 12Build is an organisation where everybody helps each other. This brings in a risk of not making decisions at all.

The management style within Daan is open, fair, motivating and passionate. Important decisions are made by individuals, because making a decision is impossible if you have to consult with many people. However, if necessary, input is collected from within the company. The responsibility lies low in the organisation. Every individual, team or department is responsible for his/their own responsibilities.

Everybody within Transporeon, also its founders and board members, are relatively open and you can immediately come into contact with everybody. There is a certain hierarchy and structure, whereby the board members take responsibility for their own departments and teams. Managers are focused on enabling their employees to achieve their goals by coaching them. It is clear who takes the final decisions, but the company is not authoritarian and employees are stimulated to share their ideas.

Due to the fact that many employees work home office, which requires a sense of discipline, there is a lot of trust. Important decisions are made by teams and everyone takes his or her responsibility, but it is clear who bears final responsibility.

Platform N is a flat and open organisation. Targets are being set for the sales department, but they have quite some freedom in deciding how they will reach those targets. It depends on the kind of decision whether it is taken by an individual or a team, but mostly they are made by teams. However, every team has someone who bears the final responsibility.

Within YoungOnes, there are no hierarchical layers and the responsibilities are borne by different departments. Important decisions are made by teams. Every individual can bring in his or her own ideas and opinion, but important decisions are taken by the management team as a whole.

Expert 1 indicated that fast-growing platforms are often flat organisations. There will always be a layer that determines the course of action, but where the primary process takes place, the organisation is fairly flat and free. Often, decisions are made by teams, especially when a platform becomes larger. However, there are of course layers in decision-making.

The representative of ECE mentioned that there is often no management style in the early phases. Later on, fast-growing startups often become flat and agile organisations. It differs per startup whether decisions are made by individuals or teams.

Overall, it can be stated that all platforms have a group management style, as most decisions are dealt with by teams. However, within Daan, the decision itself is taken by one person after having collected the input from others. Within the platforms, except for 12Build, it is clear who bears responsibility and who takes the final decision. The experts did not make statements about whether roles are clearly assigned within fast-growing platforms or startups. Expert 1 did indicate that high-growth platforms have a group management style, while ECE's representative mentioned that there is often no management style in the beginning and that it differs per start-up whether a group management style is applied later on.

10.5.2.11 Automating business processes

Many business processes within 12Build are automated. The company uses a lot of systems, because this makes the company scalable and agile.

Within Daan, more and more processes become automated. The recruiters and account managers should only have to focus on one thing, which is building relationships with clients. Everything around it should be digitalised and automated as much as possible, for which the company is developing smarter systems that can reduce the amount of manual work even further.

Many processes within Transporeon are automated, but they are working on automating even more processes.

The business representative of Platform N indicated that many processes are automated and that they try to automate even more processes. However, due to the emotional trade in which Platform N is involved, not all processes can be automated.

Many of the processes within YoungOnes are automated and the platform itself works almost completely automated. However, YoungOnes is a real startup, which means that many more processes can be automated as quite some activities are performed manually at the moment. A year ago, all invoices were made by hand, but nowadays, the invoices are automatically produced.

According to Expert 1, many processes of high-growth platforms are automated. Automating business processes is the beating heart of their services and in fact the backbone of their value creation.

ECE's representative said that in the early phases, there is mainly still a lot of human contact, but when a startup starts to grow, more and more processes will be automated.

In table 4 it can be seen that all platforms have many of their processes automated. All platforms, except 12Build whose representative did not refer to the future use of this strategy, indicated that they want to have more and more processes automated in the future. The representative of YoungOnes indicated that they had many automated processes from the start, but that also quite some work is still performed manually. Furthermore, both experts indicated that fast-growing platforms and fast-growing startups automate their business processes, but ECE's representative indicated that the early phases still contain a lot of human contact.

10.5.2.12 Determining a meeting rhythm

At 12Build, there is a pre-determined meeting rhythm. Currently, the company mainly uses monthly meetings, but the goal is to use weekly meetings, daily huddles and strategy days more frequently, where a daily huddle is a short daily meeting with all employees to discuss tactical matters and to catch up with each other.

There is a fixed meeting rhythm at Daan as well to make it clear for everybody when they will sit down with each other. However, Daan tries to minimise the number of meetings.

Within Transporeon, there is a pre-determined meeting rhythm. There is one weekly, one monthly and one quarterly meeting.

Due to the fact that Platform N has become much flatter, it is not necessary to have a pre-determined meeting rhythm as knowledge is shared throughout the whole day.

According to the business representative of YoungOnes, the company does not really have a pre-determined meeting rhythm. Every two weeks, an operational meeting is scheduled, but the other meetings are not fixed.

The question concerning a pre-determined meeting rhythm was not asked to Expert 1 due to time constraints.

According to ECE's representative, it differs per startup whether there is a fixed meeting rhythm in place or not.

12Build, Daan and Transporeon have a pre-determined meeting rhythm, while Platform N and YoungOnes do not. There are differences in the meeting rhythms of the companies that have one differs, as 12Build wants to have meetings more frequently while Daan tries to minimise it.

10.5.2.13 Building relationships

Since this high-growth strategy is very similar to the platform growth strategy of 'strategic alliances', results for this strategy can be found in section 10.5.1.9. However, building relationships is not only about strategic alliances, but also about other interorganisational relationships. Therefore, the results relating to those interorganisational relationships that cannot be classified as strategic alliances will be presented in here.

As the relationships mentioned by the representative of 12Build are strategic alliances, the information concerning this strategy can be found in section 10.5.1.9.

Daan collaborates with other companies. An example of this is the collaboration with online training platform GoodHabitx. Furthermore, Daan can sometimes be a supplier or client of a competing firm.

Transporeon devotes a lot of attention towards building relationships with other companies. They collaborate with logistics organisations, universities and Gartner for example. Moreover, together with other companies, Transporeon collaborates with PTV, which is a company that has techniques for optimising transport routes.

Platform N purchases some services from other companies to expand its knowledge, but does not really use the strategy of building relationships.

According to the business representative of YoungOnes, the company collaborates with multiple companies. First of all, it works together with the Netherlands Chamber of Commerce, as they create many new freelancers. Furthermore, they collaborate with parties that offer insurances and business accounts and they also have a lot of contact with the Dutch Tax and Customs Administration. Finally, they work closely together with Freshheads. This company employs the IT-people that have developed the platform and who are working on its technology. Although YoungOnes will probably hire some IT-people by itself in the future, it will continue to collaborate with Freshheads for the time being.

As with strategic alliances, it depends on the platform whether it build relationships. However, several platforms are relying on it or make use of it. An example of this would be Bol.com, which has established collaborations with many users. Platforms decide to become part of strategic alliances in order to expand their offering and to generate revenue via the long tail.

Besides being open to strategic alliances, ECE's representative indicated that fast-growing startups often have a lot of contact with product providers.

It can be concluded that 12Build, Daan, Transporeon and YoungOnes pay attention to building relationships. 12Build's representative stated that they will focus even more on this in the future and Platform N will be open to the strategy. Although Platform N had some relationships in the past, it no longer focuses on this strategy. Expert 1 said that it differs per platform whether relationships are built and ECE's representative stated that high-growth startups are open to this strategy.

10.6 Comparison between high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms

In this appendix, differences and similarities between high-growth platforms and platforms that are growing less fast will be described and analysed.

10.6.1 Platform growth strategies

10.6.1.1 Distinctive positioning

It can be concluded that both high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms were, are and will be using the strategy of distinctive positioning. Furthermore, both groups use their differentiated offering for this. Another similarity is achieving a distinctive position by targeting niche markets.

There are differences in the other ways that are used to arrive at a distinctive position. One high-growth platform is more closed than its competitors and one of the less fast-growing platforms positions itself as a trusted partner and has a pure focus on matching supply and demand instead of buying products to resell them. However, this appears to be a difference between platforms in general and not between high-growth platforms on the one hand and less fast-growing platforms on the other.

10.6.1.2 Availability of complements

The use of this strategy differs between the two groups. For high-growth platforms, its use (is assumed to) differ(s) per platform, with some platforms offering complementary goods and services, while others do not. Presumably, having complements available can be a useful growth strategy. However, it is no precondition for growth. Apparently, platforms can also grow fast if they have a sufficiently valuable and differentiated core offering. Less fast-growing platforms used this strategy in the past, are open to it or do use it currently and are assumed to be open to it in the future. This leads to the assumption that those platforms perceive this strategy to be useful, but not required, which is in line with the assumption that has been made for high-growth platforms.

However, high-growth platforms seem to offer more extensive complements than less fast-growing platforms. Besides offering complements via third parties, the complements offered by the first group are complete solutions or modules that they offer and have often developed themselves, while those of the second group are mainly additional services, often provided by external parties. This leads to the conclusion that both groups offer complements, but that they implement the strategy in different ways: besides offering complements via external parties, high-growth platforms mainly offer extensive complements (that they have often developed) themselves, while less fast-growing platforms mainly offer additional complementary services via third parties.

10.6.1.3 Platform envelopment

One of the high-growth platforms used and uses this strategy, while none of the less fast-growing platforms did. However, the presumption that high-growth platforms thus do use this strategy more often in comparison to their less fast-growing counterparts has to be made with caution as it is based on only one single case. Furthermore, that this high-growth platform uses platform envelopment might be explained by the fact that it is probably the only case company that has the manpower available to apply this strategy and to manage the required cross-unit coordination (Eisenmann et al., 2011). This would mean that the use of platform envelopment is company-specific and not group-specific. Nevertheless, the strategy of platform envelopment is important for the particular platform to meet customers' and tomorrow's demands, which in turn contributes to their growth. Therefore, it can be concluded that this strategy can be very useful in realising high growth, but that it is not necessary in achieving this.

10.6.1.4 Advertising

This strategy is used to attract and retain users. Based on information provided by both groups, it can be stated that it depends on the situation whether this strategy is used. Platforms are likely to use advertising (a) if they face competition and have to increase brand awareness to get or stay ahead of this competition and (b) if they want to expand into countries where they are not known yet. Platforms are less likely to use this strategy if they do not face a lot of competition and want to focus on other things, for example improving their offering, first. Both groups mainly use social media as their advertising channel.

Besides it stands out that both groups mainly use other ways to create brand awareness. Channels used by both groups include mailings and marketing. A clear difference between the groups is that high-growth platforms appear to use trade fairs and/or events, the community's word-of-mouth, universities, physical stores and content marketing specifically to increase brand awareness, while less fast-growing platforms do not use those strategies (or are implementing them less well). This leads to the presumption that especially those strategies can be a distinguishing factor between the two groups and are thus likely to be helpful in achieving high growth via the creation of brand awareness. There were more differences between the platforms, but those have to deal with strategies that were only mentioned by one of the platforms, thereby being likely to be company specific.

10.6.1.5 Managing expectations

Based on the use of this strategy by both groups, it can be concluded that the strategy is likely to be used in all three phases if a platform wants to become market leader and there is a need to convince (potential) users that it will become market leader. This need is present when (a) a platform is facing competition that it needs to get or stay ahead of and (b) if a platform wants to win a WTA battle. A platform is less likely to use this strategy if it (a) does not want to become market leader, (b) if it is market leader already or (c) if the market already expects a platform to become market leader due to contextual factors (e.g. no competition).

A surprising finding is that both a high-growth and a less fast-growing platform are still managing their users' expectations, even though they have already secured the position of market leader. This leads to the presumption that managing expectations is not only helpful in becoming market leader, but also in securing this position. However, due to the fact that two other fast-growing platforms are being market leader without using this strategy, it cannot be stated that there is a need to manage expectations if you have already secured your position as market leader; it can only be concluded that it can still prove to be a useful strategy in that situation.

10.6.1.6 Building trust

This strategy was, is and will be used by both platform groups and perceived to be important in attracting and retaining users. High-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms both use the following ways to build trust: building and maintaining customer relationships (e.g. customer service and human contact), proving by doing and being transparent. Differences in how the platforms create trust also exist, but those are more likely to be platform and not group specific.

10.6.1.7 Acquisitions

In general, high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms are open to the strategy of acquisitions. Only one of the less fast-growing platforms is not open to it, which can be explained by its very young age. With one exception, all other platforms were open to this strategy in the past and regarding the current and future situation, all other platforms are open to acquisitions. Acquisitions are not a priority for any of them, as there are not always suitable acquisition candidates and since

acquiring a company takes time that might be better invested elsewhere. However, they will consider this strategy if the right candidate passes by at the right time.

Although both high-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms are open to this strategy, it stands out that high-growth platforms are more likely to actually pursue this strategy. Two of the high-growth platforms have acquired a company in the past, while the less fast-growing platform that is open to the strategy did not do this after it had investigated some acquisition opportunities.

10.6.1.8 Exclusive contracting

It has become clear that this strategy was, is and will not be used by both platform groups. They think that you should not prohibit your customers from using the offerings of competitors as well and that users should be free to make their own decisions. Due to the fact that this strategy is not used by the high-growth platforms, it is apparently not a necessary strategy in achieving high growth.

10.6.1.9 Strategic alliances

Based on the interviews, it is assumed that high-growth platforms are more often part of a strategic alliance than less fast-growing platforms. It is assumed that two of the high-growth platforms were, are and will be part of a strategic alliance. However, for the less fast-growing platforms, only one of them used the strategy in the past, one of them is open to it currently and both will be open for it in the future. This illustrates that, even though less fast-growing platforms might be open to this strategy, high-growth platforms are more likely to also actually pursue the strategy. Therefore, being part of a strategic alliance could be a factor in explaining the growth differences between the two groups.

However, as one of the high-growth platforms is not part of a strategic alliance, it is also no precondition for growth. Apparently, other factors were more important in determining the growth of this specific platform. This finding can be supported by the fact that one of the experts mentioned that it depends on the type of platform whether strategic alliances are used.

Finally, both groups use this strategy to create value for their customers through offering complements via external parties. Except one high-growth platform, none of the platforms explicitly mentioned that it uses strategic alliances to benefit from the network of a partner. This is quite surprising, as benefiting from a strategic partner's network is often one of the reasons to establish such an alliance in the first place.

10.6.1.10 Pricing

In short, all platforms did, do and will focus on this strategy. They are all commercial companies that want to generate cash with their business model. As this requires a revenue model that includes pricing considerations, the widespread use of this strategy makes sense.

Concerning the pricing structure, both groups make use of transaction fees on one side, which represents the main revenue stream for most of them. However, two high-growth platforms also charge fixed fees to the other side. Those fixed fees have to be paid for premium versions of the solutions or because the tool has to be adapted to the demands and processes. It can thus be concluded that high-growth platforms are more likely to charge the other side with fixed fees, which can probably be explained by the fact that those platforms offer the possibility of upgrades and adapted versions, while the less fast-growing platforms do not seem to offer this. Furthermore, both groups seem to subsidise one side of their platforms. The less fast-growing platforms and one high-growth platform charge only one side and this also holds for another high-growth platform in case the side that could pay for going premium decides to use the free versions only. Finally, one of the less fast-growing firms tried to charge both sides in the past but switched to its current pricing strategy which charges only one side. This has not been the case for high-growth platforms who have always

had the same pricing structure. Therefore, it might be the case that high-growth platforms have the appropriate pricing structure right from the beginning, helping them to get a head start, while less fast-growing firms might struggle a bit with this in the early phases. However, this presumption has to be made with caution, as it is based on only one less fast-growing platform case.

The price levels differ per platform and can be said to be company specific. No differences or similarities worth mentioning exist in this respect.

10.6.2 High-growth strategies

10.6.2.1 Differentiated offering

High-growth platforms and less fast-growing platforms did, do and will have a differentiated offering. Although the specific implementation of this strategy is company and market specific, it stands out that two of the high-growth platforms distinguish themselves from the competition by offering an overall solution. As one high-growth platform did not explicitly mention that it offers an overall solution, it cannot be concluded that an overall solution is a precondition for high growth. However, it does lead to the presumption that it can be very useful in realising high growth, especially because none of the less fast-growing platforms explicitly indicated that they offer an overall solution. Thus, differentiating your platform's offering through offering an overall solution might be one of the factors explaining the difference in growth rate between the two groups.

10.6.2.2 Customer knowledge and customer loyalty

Both high-growth and less fast-growing platforms did, do and will focus on having sufficient customer knowledge and creating loyal customers. The founders of all platforms either already possessed or acquired knowledge about the industry and customer needs before starting their companies. Besides, except for one less fast-growing platform, they all acquire customer knowledge by collecting their users' feedback. Concerning customer loyalty, except for one less fast-growing platform who did not make any statements related to customer loyalty, building trust is important in creating customer loyalty.

Nevertheless, the fast-growing platforms seem to put more emphasis on actively encouraging their users to share both their ideas and feedback. Two high-growth platforms explicitly mentioned that they encourage users to do this, while the less fast-growing platforms only indicated that they collect their ideas and feedback, thus not emphasising their encouragement to do so.

Moreover, it stands out that, based on the statements made during the interviews, all fast-growing platforms can be concluded to have loyal customers. However, this conclusion cannot be drawn for the less fast-growing platforms, as they did not mention anything about whether their customers are loyal or not. However, it would make sense that they would have been proud and would have emphasised it during the interviews if they indeed managed to create loyal customers, as retaining customers is quite a problem for many firms (Ng & Liu, 2000). Therefore, it is presumed that although both groups devote attention towards customer loyalty, fast-growing platforms are better in actually realising this.

What probably also plays a role here, is the extent to which the users' processes are integrated with the platform. 12Build and Transporeon both facilitate an important internal process of their customers. As soon as they are integrated and use to working with the platform, users are not that likely to abandon the platform due to switching costs (Klemperer, 1995; Shapiro & Varian, 1999). On the other hand, for platforms such as Platform N and YoungOnes, whose customers' processes are not that integrated, the connection is not that strong, thereby making their customers more likely to leave the platform. However, as Daan has managed to create loyal customers while facing the latter situation, it appears that there are ways to successfully respond to this.

Finally, it seems that the high-growth platforms are more aware of the fact that loyal customers can be of help in attracting new users than the less fast-growing platforms are. Two high-growth platforms explicitly mentioned that loyal customers refer potential users to their platform and that this is of great help in increasing their installed base. Thus, being aware of the full potential of customer loyalty might partly explain the difference in growth rate between the two groups.

10.6.2.3 Possessing human capital

For both groups, possessing human capital was, is and will remain to be important. All platforms emphasise the importance of their workforce for their growth and success. Additionally, both groups stated that their employees should have the right knowledge, skills and mindset.

In general, the founders of all platforms had knowledge about and experience with the industry and entrepreneurship. Only one high-growth platform had knowledge about platforms. As has been explained before, an expert indicated that platform knowledge was not needed at the time that platforms started to rise, but that it is necessary nowadays. This probably also explains why the relatively young platform hired platform expertise.

Furthermore, one high-growth platform and both less fast-growing platforms already knew potential clients or already had relationships with them. Nevertheless, this is apparently no precondition for high growth, as two of the high-growth platforms did not possess this kind of human capital.

10.6.2.4 Availability of financial capital

The platforms of both groups indicated that having enough financial capital available is important to grow. One of the less fast-growing platforms indicated that it was in bootstrapping situation when it founded the company, but did not perceive this to be a disadvantage. All other platforms had sufficient financial capital available when they started. Although it differs per platform if and what kind of financial capital is used, all of them reinvest their turnover to grow. Besides, attracting investors is used by some platforms of each group. Overall, there are no real differences between the two groups concerning this strategy.

10.6.2.5 Possessing IP and intangible assets

All platforms have a strong focus in innovation, but it can be concluded that high-growth platforms are more likely to possess IP and intellectual assets than less fast-growing platforms. However, as it was not indicated whether their IP has also helped them in growing, it cannot be concluded whether possessing IP and intangible assets contributes to high growth or whether being a high-growth platform leads to the possession of IP and intangible assets.

10.6.2.6 Acquiring data

Both platform groups did, do and will use this strategy, with data becoming even more important in the future. Both groups use it to measure their operations and to discover opportunities for improvement.

10.6.2.7 Clear strategy and prospective, external, growth-based and international orientation

Both platform groups had a clear strategy and prospective, external and growth-based orientation from the beginning and are using data to monitor their environment. Whether a platform is internationally oriented from the beginning is company specific and depends on its ambition and contextual factors.

Currently, two high-growth and one less fast-growing platform are having an international orientation. Therefore, it can be stated that both groups are not only focusing on existing markets but are looking for other opportunities as well. It depends on the platform if it is and has to be internationally oriented or not. One of the high-growth platforms is not internationally oriented, due to the fact that there is enough demand in the Netherlands. Besides, the company is not a typical digital platform in that its solution is not fully digital and automated, which leads to the assumption that its solution is less scalable than those of the typical platforms, which makes it more difficult to

become active abroad. Therefore, if only taking the typical (e.g. platforms offering a digital and automated solution) platforms into account, it can be stated that operating internationally seems to be a necessary precondition for high growth, as this is also stressed by both experts. Nevertheless, one less fast-growing platform is also internationally oriented, indicating that having an international orientation is not what distinguishes high-growth platforms from their less fast-growing counterparts.

Something that stands out is that both internationally oriented high-growth platforms are first expanding to countries that are used to working digitally and that have a good infrastructure before becoming active in countries that are lacking behind in this respect. This leads to the presumption that if a platform wants to expand internationally, it is advisable to first focus on countries that have a good infrastructure and that are used to working digitally and to focus on the countries that are lacking behind later on.

Towards the future, both groups will remain to implement this strategy as they currently do, although all platforms that operate abroad will become even more active internationally.

10.6.2.8 Focus on the core

All high-growth platforms and one less fast-growing platform indicated that they had a clear focus and set clear priorities in the past, while this was not the case for one of the less fast-growing platforms. Currently, all platforms have a clear focus with clear priorities. This leads to the presumption that although all platforms appear to be focused, high-growth platforms are more likely to have a stronger focus right from the start and that this helps them in growing fast.

In the past, it was company specific whether non-essential matters were outsourced and currently, all platforms, except for the really young one, are performing most things, including non-essential matters, in-house. For the future, both platforms that currently use outsourcing plan to perform more things in-house. Thus, no clear differences between the two groups regarding outsourcing exist. The only difference that exists is the fact that one less fast-growing platform also outsources essential matter. However, this can be explained by its very young age, thus illustrating a company specific and not a group specific difference.

Nevertheless, the fact that both groups are performing most activities including non-essential matters in-house conflicts with the literature, according to which outsourcing non-essential matters facilitates a fast growth process. However, as has already been explained before, performing everything in-house would also make sense and could actually be useful in a growth process, especially when facing tough competition. Doing everything in-house would namely enable platforms to have full control over their whole business (Ketler & Walstrom, 1993; Rochester & Rochester, 1995) and thus to quickly react to actions of their competitors. Besides, this also explains why one of the high-growth platforms did outsource non-essential matters in the beginning. This platform namely faced no real competition and it was therefore not necessary to have full control in order to respond to competitor's actions.

10.6.2.9 HRM practices

Both groups have HRM practices such as training- and education activities in place. Furthermore, they stress the importance of a good working environment and help employees to develop themselves professionally and personally. The platforms have more HRM practices, but those are company specific. This strategy is assumed to be used in the past and future as well, due to the fact that all platforms highly value their human capital.

10.6.2.10 Group management style with clearly assigned roles

The platforms of both groups have a group management style, since important decisions are dealt with by a group of people, either by jointly making a decision or by gathering multiple people's input after which one person decides.

In general, it is oftentimes clear within all platforms who bears liability, responsibility and authority, although those terms are not explicitly used. In fact, all business representatives used the term responsibility for all three roles. However, it can be presumed that as long as it is clear how those roles allocated, explicitly using the three before-mentioned terms is unnecessary. Furthermore, as both groups have a group management style with clearly assigned roles, this strategy seems not to distinguish them in terms of their growth rate.

10.6.2.11 Automating business processes

From the start, both groups have focused on automating their business processes and for all of them, the use of this strategy increases over time. There are no real differences between both groups in their use of this strategy.

10.6.2.12 Determining a meeting rhythm

As all high-growth platforms have a pre-determined meeting rhythm, while none of the less fast-growing platforms does, this leads to the presumption that this is a strategy that distinguishes the two groups. Nevertheless, it cannot be stated whether there is a causal relationship between having a meeting rhythm and high growth, as the high-growth platforms did not explicitly mention that this strategy contributed to their fast growth. However, the presumption can be made that a pre-determined meeting rhythm can be very useful during a growth process.

10.6.2.13 Building relationships

Whereas all high-growth platforms are applying this strategy currently, only one of the less fast-growing platforms does. However, in the past, all platforms used this strategy. Although the motives for building relationships differ per company, both groups build relationships to improve its offering, for example by offering complements via third parties.