

In pursuit of effective digital marketing actions in the agri-food sector : case FarmX

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Master Thesis

In pursuit of effective digital marketing actions in the agri-food sector : case FarmX

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Abstract

Purpose – Digitization has increased the importance and use of online marketing. This thesis aims to identify digital and social media channels that contribute to increasing the brand awareness of a b2b agri-food company. The thesis also aims to identify the digital marketing approaches a company can undertake in order to attract more customers strategically.

Design/Methodology: An exploratory qualitative case study approach is used in this research. Surveys, face-to-face and video interviews with case company representatives, case company customers and marketing professionals have been considered to answer the research questions and formulate the final marketing plan for the company.

Findings: The findings of this study suggest LinkedIn, website, newsletters and email to be the most useful channels. The study reveals that the companies must thoroughly understand their customers preferences and formulate a strategy accordingly. This includes channel adoption and selection of appropriate marketing actions to attract more customers. Posting compelling content regularly mainly on the subjects that prove the company's expertise and knowledge in their respective fields, and content that help the company position themselves as industry thought leaders are identified as a vital marketing action for increasing brand visibility.

Research limitations – This research focuses on the case study of a single b2b company. The data samples used in this study are limited. The evaluation of the marketing plan is by a single expert. Finally, the model is not generalizable to all companies in other contexts.

Originality/value – This study advances the knowledge of digital media, digital strategies and b2b marketing literature, by relating the strategies and marketing actions to generation of brand awareness. In terms of managerial implications, this research provides an explanation for the implementation of various digital marketing channels and marketing actions that will help strengthen brand image and increase customer acquisition.

Keywords - B2B, Agri-food, Social media marketing, Digital marketing, Brand awareness, Customer acquisition, Content, Email, LinkedIn, website

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1. Introduction

This chapter sheds light on the focus of the thesis. Section 1.1 describes the background, section 1.2 describes the research motivation and scope, section 1.3 describes the research problem, objectives and questions and section 1.4 describes the outline of the thesis.

1.1 Background

The advent of digital media has brought about a shift in marketing from traditional to digital in recent years (Vieira et al., 2019). This digitization has changed the way businesses market today, remolding the marketing processes like communication, consumption, collaboration and creation processes (Drummond et al., 2020). The traditional methods of marketing where the marketing processes were designed predominantly to apply the skills, resources and knowledge of the brand according to the businesses' market-related requirements or needs is being challenged with the introduction and advancements in technology, with businesses having to learn, understand and manage the new technologies (Drummond et al., 2020). However, this understanding and utilization of the digital platforms is necessary as more and more people today resort to digital media for a variety of reasons ranging from consumption of brand content to making product and service purchase decisions with respect to that content.

Digital platforms help brands reach millions and millions of people in a short span of time, communicate the brand message and content with the customers (Michaelidou et al., 2011, Bernard 2016, Cawsey and Rowley, 2016), help initiate dialogues between the brand and customers and thus initiate relationships (Drummond et al., 2020) and others. The potential benefits of digital media mostly lies in their ability to generate value from these networks and relationships. In addition, the implementation requires very few resources, is easy to implement and the ease of use also adds to their increased use in business to business companies (Drummond et al., 2020). Digital marketing development has highlighted the role of business marketing objectives that are related to the creation of brand awareness and customer acquisition such as building brand image, brand reputation, customer engagement, customer loyalty, trust, lead generation and others. Digital channels have also influenced the way in which B2B customers perceive the brand and have also helped them in the sales process (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

Previous research has identified the use of digital and social media in the b2b sector (Michaelidou et al., 2011, Jarvinen et al., 2013), the use of digital media in creating customer

relationships (Heinonen and Michelsson, 2010), social media influence on sales in the b2b context (Rodriguez et al., 2012), social media use in brand building (brennan and Croft, 2012), digital and social media marketing strategies for brand building and customer engagement (Vieira et al., 2009, Cawsey and Rowley, 2016, Drummond et al., 2020), social media to gain various business value (Culnan et al., 2010) and the use of content marketing to achieve marketing goals like brand awareness, customer acquisition and retention, traffic generation, customer engagement and others (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016, Sundstrom and Alm, 2020, Yaghtin et. al., 2020). Although various studies have emerged in the b2b marketing space, our understanding of how digital and social media could help in increasing brand awareness and customer acquisition in b2b is limited and hence this study aims to provide an understanding of the same.

The research questions discussed in section 1.3 are answered in the context of a case study dealing with a particular company. The case company that assigned the problem for this thesis is a B2B firm located in the Netherlands. Due to privacy reasons the actual name of the company is not used in this report and the company has been referred to with an alternate name 'FarmX' throughout the report. FarmX is a Dutch company that delivers cloud-based management solutions and advisory systems for the livestock farming industry, research facilities and agricultural advisors, such as the compound-feed and pharmaceutical industry. The company originated in 2011 and pioneers in fact-based farm management where the on-farm data of other companies and households is gathered and aggregated into their management solutions and advisory systems. One of the main intents of any business, regardless of its sector, is to build a strong brand awareness among its target customers and customer acquisition. This remains a challenge for most b2b companies mostly due to their limited or smaller target groups, complex offers and structured purchasing processes (Sundstrom and Alm, 2020). These conditions are also applicable to the case company which has smaller target groups: Integrators, feed companies, genetic companies and pharmaceutical companies, and complex purchasing processes in comparison to regular online purchases or regular retail. Hence through this research, the company is interested in making the effective and efficient use of their digital channels to reach out and promote their products to their target customers. The aim of the thesis is to first understand the current digital marketing activities of the case company to establish company positioning in the context of digital marketing. This is followed by understanding the digital marketing expectations of the target groups and the recommendations from the marketing professionals to finally discover how the company can utilize digital and

social media to reach out to its current and target customers. The data collected is used to form a marketing plan for the company to generate brand awareness and paves way for customer acquisition. The company could use this research to identify the marketing action(s) from the marketing plan that works the best for them in achieving their marketing goals.

1.2 Research motivation and scope

FarmX originated in 2011, is a Dutch b2b company, an Information Technology & Service provider and pioneers in fact-based farm management. The company delivers cloud-based management solutions and advisory systems for the livestock farming industry, research facilities and agricultural advisors, such as the compound-feed and pharmaceutical industry. The company offers products that collect and aggregate the real-time farm data and supply chain data of its customers, and their main goal is to help customers create value out of the collected data such that their customers are able to make decisions with respect to their businesses, optimizing their on-field performance. Their solutions are designed for integrations and just as useful for individuals, and their end users are : individual farmers, pharmaceutical companies, data integrators, feed companies and genetic companies.

FarmX has been using digital and social media for their digital initiatives for a couple of years now. The company, however, thinks that their digital marketing channels and activities are not as effective as they should be, particularly in today's data-centric world, where even the b2b customers make digital media an important part of their decision making processes. The company has been using a few digital channels for a couple of years, however, has not utilized those digital channels to their maximum potential. In addition to this, there has been no particular digital strategy associated with the channels. However, the firm wants to expand its reach among its customers and increase the rate of its customer acquisition in the near future. The company realizes the need to up its digital game in order to survive and succeed in the market and to achieve its digital marketing goals.

For this, the company wants to review their current digital marketing practices to understand what practices to keep, what to remove and what new practices to add, such that they are valuable to the company's digital initiatives. Thus, the company wants to learn of the most effective channels and marketing actions for their product promotion and that would help increase their brand awareness and help in customer acquisition.

1.3 Research problem, research objective and research questions

Research problem

The case company wants to improve its digital marketing game in order to achieve its marketing and business goals. However, the case company is uncertain of the digital channels and social media channels and the marketing actions on those channels that would help the company achieve its business goals and hence would like to discover the same.

Research Objective

The aim of this study is to develop and propose a digital marketing plan for the case company, FarmX. For this the digital channels and the marketing actions from the literature that are likely to increase brand awareness are studied. The final marketing plan that will be handed over to the company will have a set of digital channels and a set of digital actions that the company can use to build its presence and create a strong brand image. Scientifically, this research identifies the marketing actions which similar b2b companies can use in their context.

Research Questions

This leads to the central research question *“How can b2b agri-food companies utilize digital media to achieve higher brand reach?”* A few set of sub-questions that would help in attaining answer to the central research question are:

RQ1. What digital channels can help in achieving b2b brand awareness and customer acquisition ?

RQ2. What digital media actions help in generating brand awareness and customer acquisition?

RQ3. How to create a marketing plan that matches the set of digital channels and the set of actions such that FarmX can use it in their context?

RQ4. Is the marketing plan useful and usable?

1.4 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 1 is the introduction chapter that contains background information, research motivation and scope, research problem and objectives. Chapter 2 contains the literature search and the literature review, which utilizes the literature in the b2b space. Chapter 3 is the case company situation analysis which includes context

analysis that explains the firm's context, company analysis that explains the firm's digital marketing activities, competitor analysis to get an understanding of the firm's competitors digital marketing practices, collaborator analysis which includes case company aggregator details and finally the SWOT analysis. Chapter 4 is the research methodology chapter which includes research design, research approach, data collection, data sample and data analysis. Chapter 5 is the results followed by chapter 6 which includes the proposed marketing plan and evaluation of the plan by marketing professionals. The final chapter 7 is the conclusion and recommendations chapter, which includes answers to the research questions, discussion, limitations of the research, recommendations to the case company and recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Overview

This chapter presents the review of the relevant literature and literature search method, which was done as preparation for the project and forms the authors Research Topic paper. The literature review forms the theoretical foundation on which the project is built and the literature search method explains the keywords and the databases used in finding relevant literature for the research. The author analyzed four types of literature in the review.

Section 2.1 presents literature search methodology, section 2.2 presents the literature overview of digital and social media use in b2b, section 2.3. presents the digital channels used in b2b for brand awareness and customer acquisition, section 2.4 presents the digital marketing strategies and marketing actions and section 2.5 presents chapter conclusion.

2.1 Literature search methodology

The literature on digital media and business-to-business is retrieved from the following databases: Scopus and ResearchGate. The search for identifying articles relevant to the study were based on the following keywords : “b2b”, “marketing”, “digital media”, “social media”, “customer acquisition”, “brand awareness” and “LinkedIn”. The use of online databases for conducting systematic literature review emerged as a culture used by various information systems research studies (Gupta et al., 2019). The search resulted in 296 articles on Scopus search. By scanning through the content of the papers, 11 articles were chosen from the Scopus database. 3 additional articles were chosen from the Researchgate scientific community. So a total of 14 relevant articles were chosen for the study. This research contributes to digital media marketing in the B2B context. Table 1 shows the keyword search on Scopus and table 2 shows the list of the study topics and the papers that cover them.

Figure 1. Literature search process

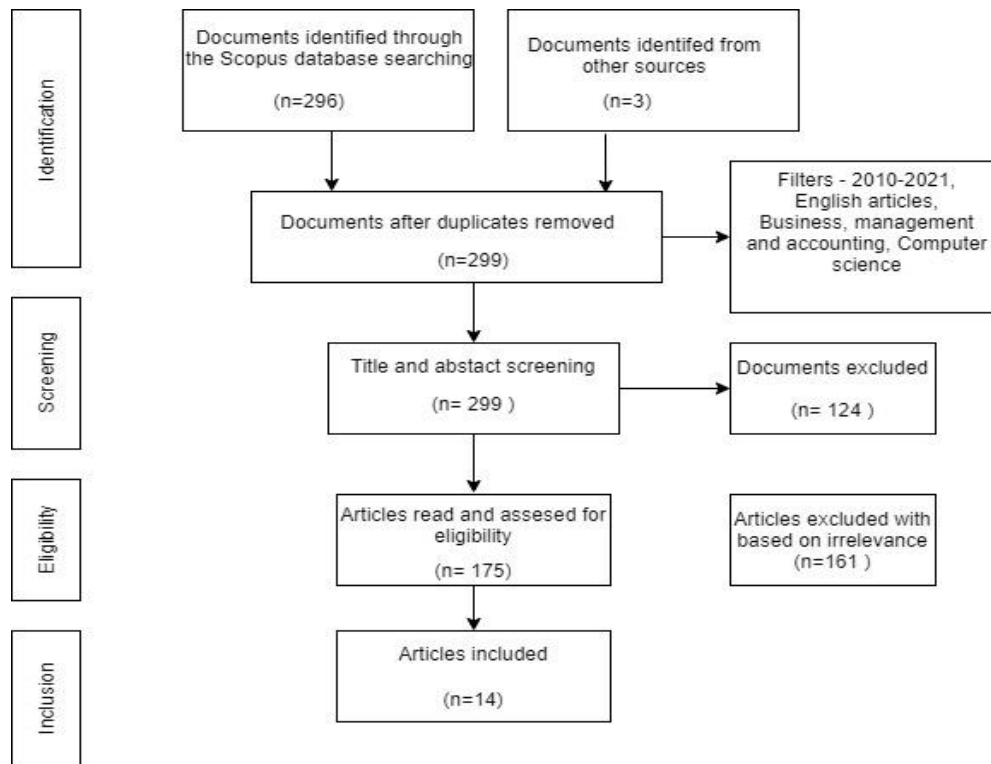


Table 1. Scopus search

Search query	No of results on Scopus	Articles used
"B2B" AND "Digital marketing"	112	2
"B2B" AND "customer acquisition"	55	1
"B2B" AND "brand awareness"	39	1
"social media" AND "B2B"	69	6
"LinkedIn" AND "B2B"	21	1

Table 2. Study topics and related articles

Channels	Jarvinen et al.(2013) , Michaelidou et al.(2011) , Heinonen and Michelsson (2010), Cawsey and Rowley (2016), Rodriguez et al.(2012), Vieira et al.(2019), Brennan and Croft (2012)
Strategies and actions	Lashgari et al.(2018), Yaghtin et al.(2020), Cawsey and Rowley(2016), Culnan et al.(2010), Michaelidou et al.(2011)
Compelling content selection	Sundstrom and Alm (2020), Cawsey and Rowley (2016), Järvinen and Taiminen (2016), Lashgari et al.(2018)
Stimulating E-Word of mouth (EWOM)	Michaelidou et al.(2011), Cawsey and Rowley (2016), Swani et al.(2013)
Increasing brand presence through touch points	Brennan and Croft (2012), Cawsey and Rowley (2016)
Monitoring and Listening	Cawsey and Rowley (2016), Culnan et al.(2010), Järainen and Taiminen (2016)
Customer communication and feedback	Drummond et al.(2020), Lashgari et al. (2018), Cawsey and Rowley (2016), Järvinen and Taiminen (2016)
Special actions	Cawsey and Rowley (2016), Vieira et al. (2019)
Community building	Swani et al. (2013), Culnan et al. (2010)
LinkedIn	Sundstrom and Alm (2020)

2.2 Digital and social media in B2B

Initial approaches to digital marketing, defined it as the marketing of products or services using the internet to reach consumers with the key objective of promoting brands through various forms of digital media. Firms usually use digital marketing to accomplish their business goals. Which according to the literature are branding of products and services, creation and enhancement of brand awareness, industry thought leadership, customer acquisition, brand communication, enhancement of brand reputation, cultivation of customer-brand relationships, customer engagement and networking (Michaelidou et al., 2011, Jarvinen et al., 2013, Heinonnen and Michelsson, 2010, Cawsey and Rowley, 2016, brennan and Croft, 2012).

Despite the increasing use of digital media, some studies show the prevalent use of traditional offline methods or show b2b marketers' uncertainty of the digital media's ability to achieve the online marketing goals (Lashgari et al., 2018). Traditional marketing approaches like face-to-face marketing and phone calls are still in greater use in some b2b companies (Sundstrom and Alm, 2020, Lashgari et al., 2018). A major reason identified from the literature behind the use of traditional offline mediums for marketing in the b2b sector is the belief that trust between the business and its customers can be created only when they meet in person (Sundstrom and Alm, 2020). However, some studies show that b2b companies have gradually increased their investments in digital media and have no plans of reducing the investments in the near future (Michaelidou et al., 2011). Since the use of social media use has increased in b2b, it is looked at from different perspectives:

- a. as a soft marketing vehicle for relationship and brand development (Brennan and Croft, 2012)
- b. as a communication tool (Swani et al., 2013) which enables different activities or resources like lead generation, customer engagement, customer service, customer communication and others (Drummond et al., 2020)
- c. as a set of channels and platforms using which businesses can deliver and share content (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). Social media helps influence customer beliefs and their attitudes toward a brand or its products and services (Lashgari et al., 2018).

2.3 Digital channels for brand awareness and customer acquisition

Digital channels

Different literature identify different digital and social media channels to help b2b companies in generating brand awareness and customer acquisition. While some studies suggest e-mail marketing to be the most effective channel, some others suggest professional social media like LinkedIn to have the most impact. Hence, all digital and social media channels that are either shown or said to have the most impact in generating brand awareness or customer acquisition are included in this section of the literature review. The most used channels in the b2b sector as identified in the literature are email marketing, websites (Michaelidou et al., 2011, Heinonen and Michelsson, 2010, Rodriguez et al., 2012, Viera et al., 2019), professional social media like LinkedIn (Jarvinen et al., 2013, Cawsey and Rowley, 2016), generic social media like Facebook,

Twitter, Instagram and blogs (Rodriguez et al., 2012, Vieira et al., 2019) and newsletters (Michaelidou et al., 2011).

2.4 Digital marketing strategies and marketing actions in B2B

Digital marketing strategies represent the overall approach to guide the marketing activities (Drummond et al., 2020). These strategies represent a framework that a firm can use to set their marketing goals and achieve the intended result. Marketing actions are approaches used on a day to day basis that help businesses achieve their market goals (Drummond et al., 2020). In this section we will derive the most effective B2B marketing actions for brand awareness from the extant literature and validate them using the marketing professionals' opinions. However, for a marketing action to be implemented successfully, it has to be associated with a marketing strategy. Hence we first derive the key elements of a marketing strategy from the literature and then talk about the marketing actions that the companies use in combination with the strategy. The following are the important elements of a strategy as identified in the literature :

- **Defining the marketing goals:** Digital media marketing achievements are dependent on the objectives set by the adopting firm and hence goal defining is a significantly important part of strategy making. Businesses need to have clear and well-defined digital media goals when trying to gain some business value from those platforms (Lashgari et al., 2018, Yaghtin et al., 2020).
- **Choosing the target audience:** Target groups play a crucial role in any kind of marketing. In the B2B sector, these are the individuals who play different roles and influence businesses acting as decision makers, business users, end-users, market analysts, journalists, technical engineers, influencers, government officials and other stakeholders. While using digital media, it is important that the firms decide on who their target audience is or the type of audiences they would want to cater to (Lashgari et al., 2018, Cawsey and Rowley, 2016).
- **Choosing the digital channel(s):** The choice of the platform has a significant impact on the marketing inputs and desired outcomes (Lashgari et al., 2018, Cawsey and Rowley, 2016). The choice and the adaptability of the chosen platform is dependent on the industry type (Michaelidou et al., 2011) and the target audience (Lashgari et al., 2018,

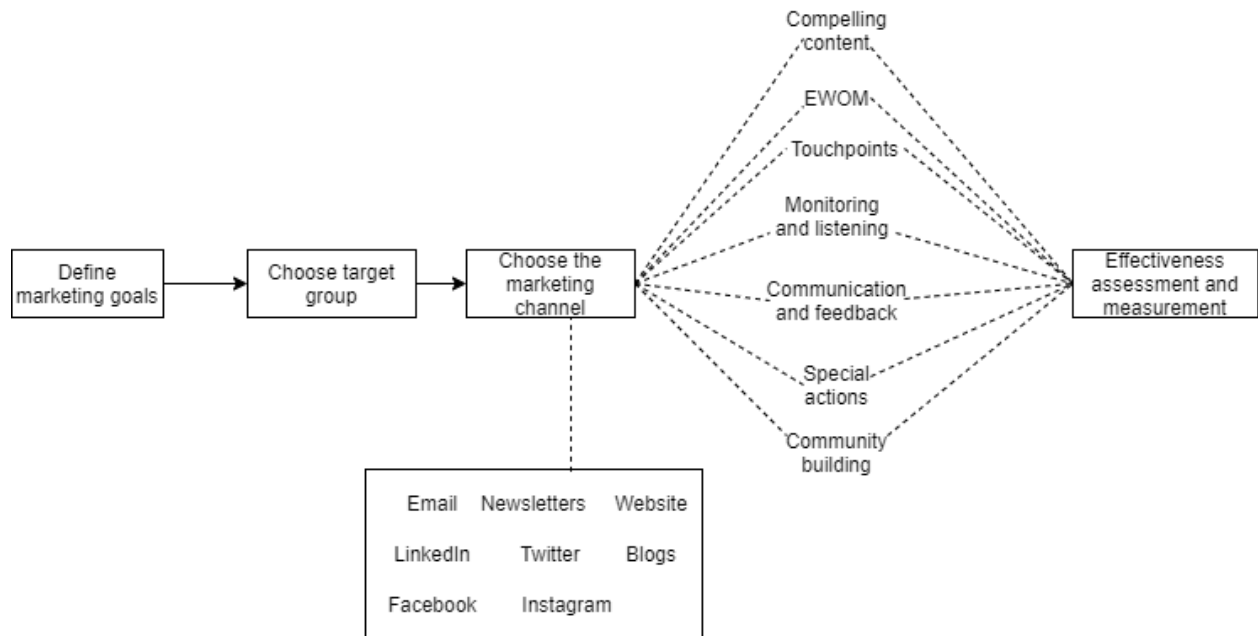
Cawsey and Rowley, 2016, Culnan et al., 2016). When adopting a platform, firms must make mindful decisions relating to the adoption, such as alignment of the platform with the business objectives, the organization culture and the brand in general(Lashgari et al., 2018, Culnan et al., 2010).

- **Choosing the marketing approach:** Value comes not only from the chosen platform but also from how the platform is used for the marketing purpose (Culnan et al., 2010). Hence it is important to choose the right type of marketing actions on the chosen platform. The important marketing actions that help a company in achieving brand awareness as identified in the literature are listed under the topic 'Marketing actions for brand awareness' below.
- **Effectiveness evaluation and measurement:** Just like with offline marketing, digital and social media marketing actions also need to be evaluated to see their effectiveness in achieving the desired business goals. Hence, it is important that the businesses are familiar with the right kind of metrics to assess the realization and value of the marketing objectives (Michaelidou et al., 2011). The measures must be a reflection of the objectives associated with the chosen platform (Culnan et al., 2010). While some outcomes can be measured and evaluated using metrics that are already in use by the organization (Culnan et al., 2010) some require the use of free or paid measurement tools to measure the effectiveness (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016).

The most commonly used metrics used according to literature are increase in the number of followers, number of joining groups, number of comments on brand posts , number of positive comments and negative comments, number of customers attracted, number of friend requests, number of blog visits, number of referrers to blogs or websites, number of likes on posts, time spent on blogs and websites, and video views ((Michaelidou et al., 2011, Cawsey and Rowley, 2016). The commonly used tools to measure effectiveness are Google Analytics, LinkedIn Analytics, Facebook Insights, Hootsuite, Tweetreach, Tweetdeck, Klout, Tweetcounter, internal tools, Radian and others(Cawsey and Rowley, 2016, Culnan et al., 2010)

Marketing actions for brand awareness

Figure 2. Model with marketing actions for brand awareness



2.4.1 Compelling content selection

Business to business customers are content driven (Vieira et al., 2019) and by providing relevant content businesses can build an awareness about the brands and acquire new customers (Yaghtin et al., 2020, Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). The online attraction of the target audience towards the brand in owned media marketing, organic searches and others are all based on the quality and relevance of the content (Sundstrom and Alm, 2020). Posting the right and compelling content helps brands get a personal ‘face’ among its audiences (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016).

A firm’s content is mostly found on the firm’s website, while other channels like search engines, social media platforms, e-mail and others are primarily used to direct the target audience to the company website (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). Content can be promotional, advertisements, technical, market research, product release or service information (Lashgari et al., 2018), and can be in the video, picture, white paper, blog, e-books, customer guides, webinars, infographics and social media posts formats (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016). Authentic content is more likely to get maximum impressions from the audience.(Sundstrom and Alm, 2020).

2.4.2 Stimulating E-Word of Mouth (EWOM)

Usually brands have their pre-existing business networks on social networking sites. Using these connections to achieve word of mouth can have help in amplifying and accentuating the brand's reach and thus have a positive impact on brand awareness, sales, customer acquisition and return on investment (Michaelidou et al., 2011, Cawsey and Rowley, 2016). E-word of mouth is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet" (Swani et al., 2013). This action is used by firms with the intention that their message is seen from a positive perspective by their audience and they transmit it across their social circle (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016). E-word of mouth from a social source like an acquaintance, friend, family or any source the customer believes in, is seen to be more impactful in changing customer perceptions and opinions of the brand and triggers customer purchase decisions. This marketing action also is influential in turning audiences into loyal customers of any company. Hence, more the number of customers gathered through the company website, more is their influence on other potential customers. This action not only makes the brand more familiar within the audience and helps in customer acquisition but also is itself influenced by the new customers (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016). The two important methods that are seen to help in increasing this EWOM are:

- Posts that include the names of the corporate brand and have emotional content are more likely to be effective in spreading the word of mouth on digital media (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016).
- Likes on social media are seen to be analogous to spreading online word of mouth. When a person likes a digital media post, the notification is likely to pop up on their friends' feed. Thus the audience unknowingly become brand promoters, encouraging a certain level of user engagement among others (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016).

2.4.3 Increasing brand presence through touch points

Explicit steps by a firm such as easy access and promotions of the firm's main webpage by cross-linking and tagging it across all their marketing channels can help attract more audience and broaden their reach. Additionally, it increases the firm's visibility and presence across all the social platforms (Brennan and Croft, 2012). This multi-channel action is seen to help with improving the firm's organic search results and increasing the web traffic of the firm's webpage (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016).

2.4.4 Monitoring and listening

Monitoring and listening to the audience actions on various platforms provides businesses a chance to win business. Using social media from a problem-solving perspective, helps with increasing brand awareness and referrals from others (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016). This action can be useful in recognizing and acquiring new knowledge (Culnan et al., 2010) and insights (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016) which the firms can further use to their own advantage (Culnan et al., 2010) to make the right decisions (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016). Listening action also helps firms identify the informational needs of their target groups and post content accordingly (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

2.4.5 Customer communication and feedback

With the development of customer relations, the communication becomes more strategic and can begin a dialogue between the b2b firms and their customers on various topics (Drummond et al., 2020). Hence explicitly collecting user feedback on brand products and services can help businesses in reinforcing their marketing strategies and sales process thus helping in business development (Lashgari et al., 2018). This communication is very well supported by social media (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016). Brands can use a relationship-building approach with customers by creating forms that help understand their interests (Järvinen and Taiminen, 2016).

2.4.6 Special actions

Literature showed that digital marketing actions such as Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and organic searches using keywords in combination with social media platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook can enhance the web presence by help increase the number of touch points and thus generate web traffic (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016, Vieira et al., 2019).

2.4.7 Community building

Merely having an online presence on various platforms does not confirm customer attraction to the firm's digital page. Relationships with customers are the foundation of a successful online presence and hence brands must consider various ways in which they can form such relations (Culnan et al., 2010). Communicating brand values with the audience (Swani et al., 2013), engaging the audience (Culnan et al., 2010) for community building on social media can help brands foster the brand-customer relationship which are likely to increase brand awareness and brand loyalty among the audience making them feel like company insiders (Swani et al., 2013, Culnan et al., 2010).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the results from the literature review and contains answers to the first two research questions. The main focus of the Research Topic phase was to explore the digital and social media channels and the marketing actions that are used in the b2b sector for achieving goals that are related to brand awareness and customer acquisition, and to explore how these channels have been used in combination with the actions to achieve the same. To understand this, relevant literature was identified in the literature review process. However, the process has two important limitations:

- Only one database was looked into for relevant articles. However, the researcher firmly believes that there could be more articles on different informational platforms with relevant literature that would have provided more insights to this study. This search limitation is also related to the fact that the researcher had a time constraint to conduct the study.
- The second limitation of this study is that the articles identified as relevant are based on b2b space in general, and not specifically for agri-food industries. However, the identification of digital channels and actions particularly those that suit the agri-food sector starts from the next chapter of the report.

This paragraph summarises the main findings and hence the main theoretical conclusions identified from the literature review process. B2B companies are extremely content driven. Hence it is important that the companies focus mainly on providing authentic content to their audience through their different channels. This is particularly true if the main marketing objective of a company is to expand its reach among the audience. The main channels identified as important for b2b marketing are emails, websites, newsletters, professional social networking sites like LinkedIn and generic social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and blogs. More authentic and relevant the content is on these channels, the more likely it is to get the maximum impressions. Another method identified as useful in expanding a company's reach among new groups is the company's ability to generate value from their digital and social networks. This could be through persuading the current customers or the current audience to spread a word of mouth for the company digitally, or influencing the current audience in a way such that they do it voluntarily. It is also identified in the literature that multi-channel visibility and the cross linking of these channels to be helpful. Social listening and monitoring of the

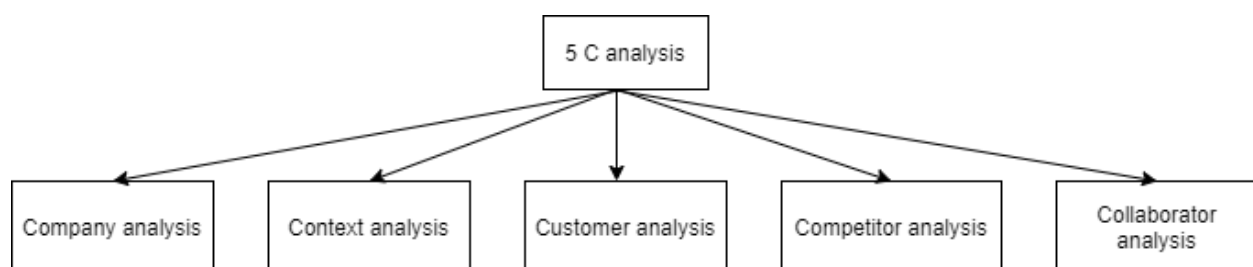
audience's actions on different channels such that the company is able to understand the audience's expectations or impressions of the company is identified as relevant. Dialogue between the company and its customers through forms, to understand their feedback and opinions on the company products are another marketing method identified as helpful. Finally a strong organic or paid online presence through techniques like keyword optimization, search engine optimization, search engine marketing is shown to help companies in understanding their customers and in building a strong brand image in the target group's eyes.

3. Situation analysis of the case company

Understanding the internal and external marketing environments is crucial for formulating effective marketing strategies (Steenburgh et al., 2010) and hence situation analysis was chosen in this study. The analysis helped the researcher better understand the overview of the environment in which the company operated in and the collected data was used in developing the final marketing plan for the case company. However, the analysis had limitations which are discussed in the situation analysis conclusion section of the chapter. This situation analysis helps the researcher partially answer questions *RQ1*, *RQ2* and *RQ3*.

Steenburgh identifies 5 C's analysis and SWOT analysis to be two ways to conduct a situation analysis. The 5C's analysis shown in figure 3 method includes company analysis which provides the company overview, context analysis which includes the backdrop in which the company operates, customer analysis which includes current and target customer definition, competitor analysis which includes an overview of the digital marketing initiatives of the competitor companies' that operate in the same industry as the focal company, and finally the collaborators analysis identifying the parties that work in collaboration with the case company. In addition to the 5C's analysis, SWOT analysis is another method used for conducting the situational analysis of the case company. SWOT analysis helps the researcher in developing a complete awareness of all digital marketing related factors of the company and the digital marketing initiatives of its competitors, thus identifying the company strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats with respect to its competitors. Both the 5C analysis and the SWOT analysis of the case company helped the researcher to better understand the case company and helped in the formulation of the final plan.

Figure 3. 5 C analysis



Chapter 3.1 presents the context analysis giving the overview of the case company, chapter 3.2 presents the company analysis in the context of the digital marketing initiatives at the case

company, chapter 3.3 presents the customer analysis, chapter 3.4 presents the competitor analysis, chapter 3.5 presents collaborator analysis and chapter 3.6 the SWOT analysis.

3.1 Context analysis

FarmX originated in 2011, is a Dutch b2b company, an Information Technology & Service provider and pioneers in fact-based farm management. The company has around 10 employees and the revenue of the company lies between 500-1000K Euros. The company delivers cloud-based management solutions and advisory systems for the livestock farming industry, research facilities and agricultural advisors, such as the compound-feed and pharmaceutical industry. The company collects and aggregates the real-time farm data and supply chain data. The company pioneers in a fact-based farm management approach, such that the on-farm data of other companies and households is gathered and aggregated into their management solutions and advisory systems.

The main goal of the solutions provided by the company is to help its customers create value out of the data for the customers to make decisions with respect to their businesses, which also helps them in optimizing their on-field performance. Their solutions are designed for integrations and just as useful for individuals and the end users mainly are individual farmers, pharmaceutical companies, data integrators, feed companies and genetic companies. The main values of the company are to :

- inspire innovation
- challenge the standard of healthy and profitable food solutions and
- fact-based farm management.

The company believes that it is essential to change the current approach, in order to solve the problem in the food industry due to the environmental and demographic challenges that are causing an inevitable transformation. The company fully supports the increasing demands of meat consumers for safer and higher quality food, animal welfare, transparent supply chains and sustainability in the food industry. This way the company contributes in its own way in sustaining the planet.

On the offline marketing front, international trade fairs and trade shows are one of the main ways through which the company tries to establish its presence among its audience. These fairs and shows are important platforms because they help companies meet and make contact with

new people from the industry, some of which are also their target audience. Trust is an important factor when forming business relationships particularly in b2b due to the smaller size of the markets. Hence, as specified in section 2.1, these trade fairs and trade shows help companies build that trust with people, through which they also gain new customers.

On the digital marketing front, the case company has its own website where the information about the company, information about the services the company provides and other research and market is shared with the audience. In addition to this, the company has a linkedin page through which relevant information is shared to the audience. These are the only two platforms utilized by the company currently, however, the case company wishes to use digital marketing such that they are able to achieve their marketing and business goals. They plan to do it by utilizing and establishing their presence on other digital and social media platforms. For this, the company wishes to change or extend its current digital marketing activities in order to effectively utilize the opportunities provided by digital media. This way the company plans on achieving its digital marketing objectives: brand awareness and customer acquisition, and thus their business goals.

3.2 Company analysis

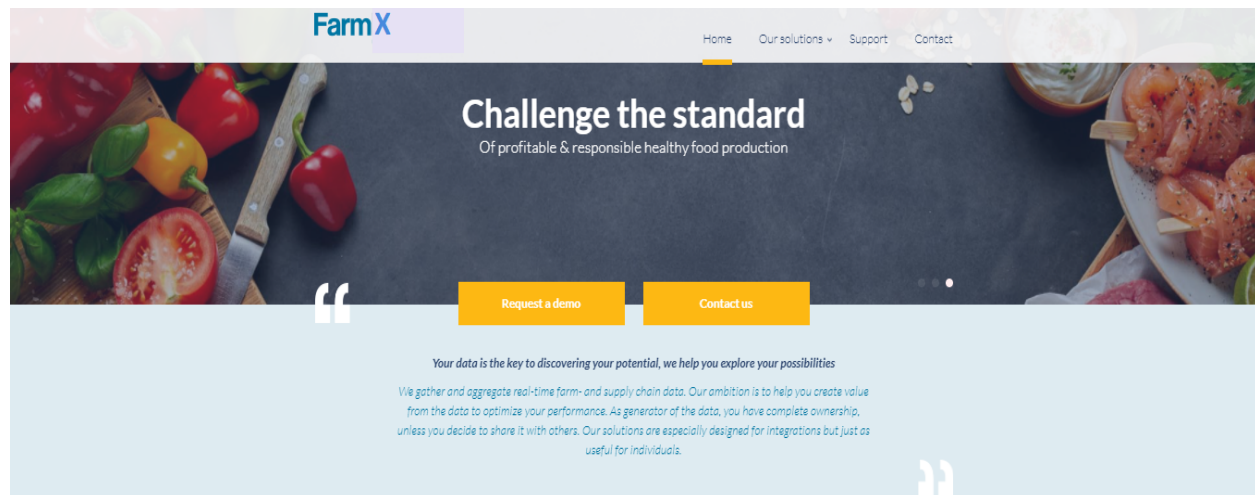
This section provides an overview of the current digital marketing at FarmX.

Online channels used:

1. Websites:

The company currently owns its own website. The company website has four important pages. The 'Home' page gives an overview of the company to its audience. The 'About FarmX' page on the website tells its audience about the company's vision, the ways in which it is contributing to solve the disruption in the food sector, their approach for the purpose and the bigger picture they aim at. The 'Our solutions' page communicates the solutions they provide to poultry, pigs and research, all using IoT. The 'Support' page is the page through which the company collects customer comments and feedback. In addition to this, the 'Support' page also provides a brief description and the link to the company's own application: 'PoultryResult' App. The 'News' page provides company insights to the audience and keeps them updated about the company. The home page of the company website is shown in figure 4.

Figure 4. Home page of the case company FarmX

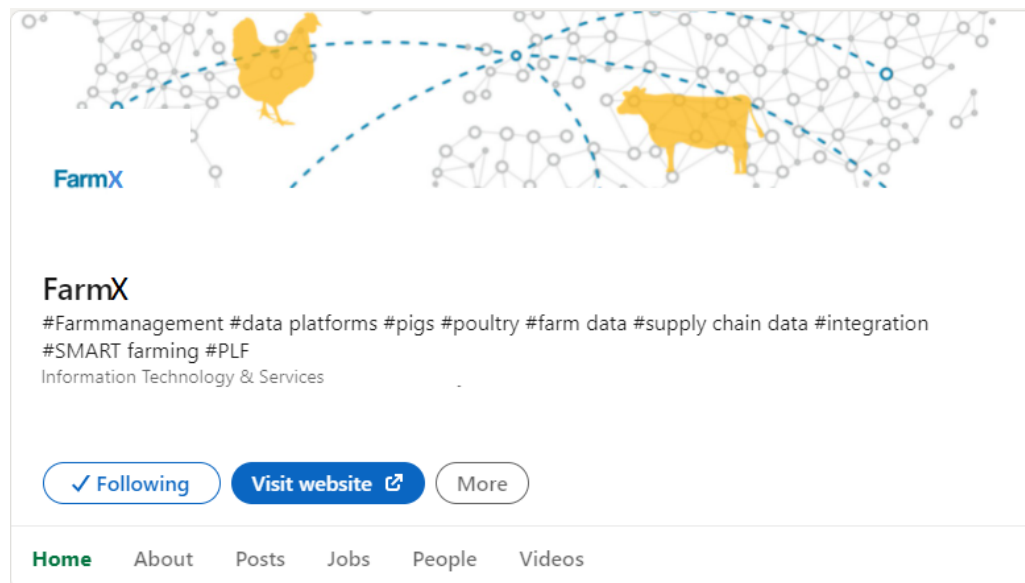


2. LinkedIn:

Among the social networking sites, LinkedIn is the channel used by the case company owing to its professional nature. It is also seen as relevant to the industry in which the company operates by the company representatives. The case company had 174 followers during the start of the project dated 1st May, 2021. The company provides an overview of the company on the 'home' page and the 'about' page of its LinkedIn. Content is posted in the form of images and videos.. However, content is posted on an average of 4 to 5 times a year, which is exceptionally low in comparison to the competitors' content post average which is shown in the competitor analysis below.

In addition to this, both website and LinkedIn are linked to each other via a link also known as a touch point. This has helped the company increase the number of page visitors both to its LinkedIn page and the website, and has also contributed to the increase in the number of LinkedIn followers, thus enabling community building. News articles or authentic posts of the company are posted simultaneously on both the channels with the purpose of getting maximum views on the article. Figure 5 shows the LinkedIn page of the company.

Figure 5. LinkedIn page of FarmX

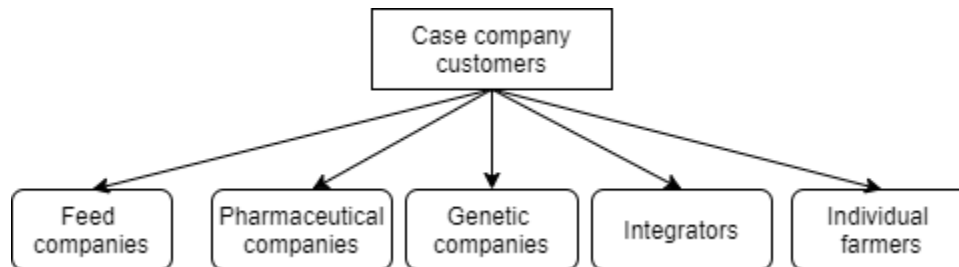


Digital strategy: The company representative for this project states that the company never really had an explicit digital strategy or a plan for achieving their digital marketing objectives. However, the company representatives have known the way in which they would like their customers to see them and have tried to paint the same picture in their customers' eyes through their news articles. On their road to creating a favourable image in the customer's eyes, the company used tools such as search engine marketing using keywords and digital ads. However, the company representatives believe that the tools did not fetch them the desired results due to the lack of a digital strategy.

3.3 Customer analysis

The target customers of the case company include customers from 5 different categories: integrators, feed companies, pharmaceutical companies, genetic companies and individual farmers. These target customers are spread across Africa, Middle East, North America, Asia, Europe, South America, Oceania and Central America. The current customers, however, are of 4 categories only: integrators, feed companies, pharmaceutical companies and genetic companies. Individual farmers currently do not form the customers of the company. However, the case company wants to acquire them as customers in the future by boosting their digital marketing activities.

Figure 6. Case company target groups



The current customers of the case company include 9 major companies that provide a major portion of the company revenue. LinkedIn, Youtube and Websites are the digital and social media channels used by the majority of the current customer companies for their digital marketing activities. Twitter and Facebook form the next most used channels. Other channels used by current customers are newsletters, whitepapers, instagram, pinterest, WeChat and Flickr.

The case company provides solutions to the agricultural and food sector. Owing to this, the case company finds customer acquisition in their industry to be difficult due to two reasons: limited number of their companies or individual customers in the agricultural and food sector, and buying the software solution involves a thorough set of decision-making processes from the customer's side. Therefore, it is important to consider current customer and potential customer preferences when developing the digital marketing plan. These preferences of the current and potential customers are collected in the form of a survey. The survey is formed in such a way that it aids in understanding the customer's overall digital expectations from the case company. The data collected from the surveys is then analyzed to review the case company's current digital practices and see what practices to keep and what to add, such that they are valuable and helpful in achieving the case company's digital marketing initiatives.

3.4 Competitor analysis

The case company considers PX and MZ to be their top competitors in the industry that provide similar solutions to the target customers. The names PX and MZ are not the actual names of the competitor companies and these substitute names have been used owing to privacy reasons.

Since the case company considers PX and MZ to be their competitors, they are chosen for reviewing the competitors profile of the situation analysis. This analysis helps companies to analyze and understand the competitive dynamics of the industry in which they compete (Steenburgh et al., 2010) which is in the context of digital marketing in this case. For this analysis, only the data that is available online about the competitors is used, hence the understanding of their online marketing activities is limited.

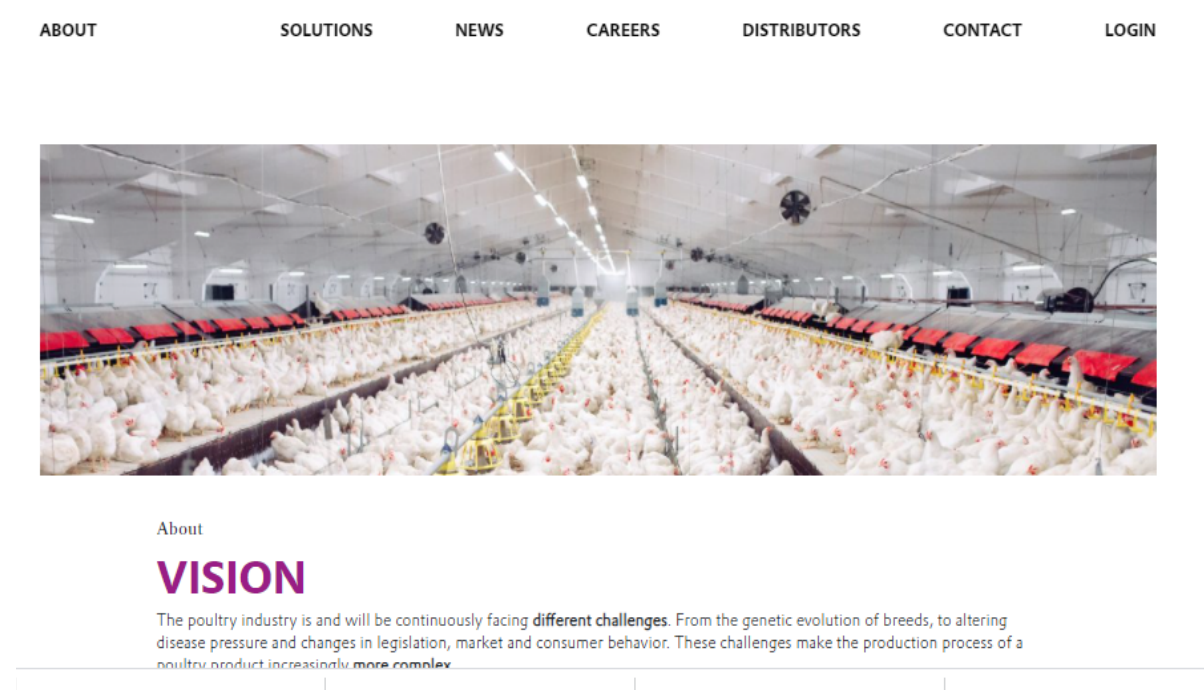
Competitor 1: PX

PX is located in Belgium and was founded in 2013. The company became a spinoff company of one of the leading companies in animal nutrition in 2018. PX provides cloud-based scientifically justified solutions to their customers in the poultry industry using IoT, cloud and big data analytics technologies.

Website: PX has its own website which entails all the details about the company, the solutions they provide, the news, careers, distributors and contact information. The 'Home' page of the company gives a company overview by displaying information that helps them stand out in their customers' eyes. A small section on the home page 'Keep an eye on your poultry section' communicates as equal to many pages combined. More than mere description of their products and services, this section also educates the audience on topics such as farm, feed, health, hatchery, processing and logistics, also indicating that their products help with making the above listed fields more efficient. In addition to this another section gives a glimpse into how their products could help the customers earn profits. The 'Home' page also includes information on how the company is considerate and beneficial to all its other stakeholders such as R&D managers, farm and production managers, veterinarians, hatchery managers, processing managers, consumers and others. The 'About Porphyrio' page includes the company vision, mission, expertise, history and values such as creativity, excellence, respect for the animals, environment, global focus with local service to name a few. The 'Solutions' page includes detailed information of all their products and services. This page has a section 'A modular system' which contains the list of all the solutions they provide to best suit their customers' businesses. The 'News' page includes all the company news in the form of articles. The 'Careers' page has all the information about the company's job offerings from time to time. The 'Distributors' page has a list of all their distributors or target groups worldwide. The 'Contact' has a link to the contact form through which the audience can connect with the company and a

newsletter sign up section for the audience to subscribe to their newsletters. The bottom of the website has a link to their LinkedIn Page. Figure 7 shows the website of PX.

Figure 7. The website of PX



LinkedIn: The company has a LinkedIn page in the group of social networking sites. However, the LinkedIn page of PX is the same as the LinkedIn page of its parent company. The 'Home' section and the 'Overview' section provide only the information of the parent company. The 'events' section has information about the company's upcoming events with an option for the audience to witness the event and share it with others. The 'Videos' section contains educational videos on topics like animal health, nutrition, farming, environment and others. From the 'Videos' section it is seen that the company posts 1-3 videos in a month, which 12-36 videos in a year. The company posts educational content with images around 3-14 times in a month, that is 36- 52 times in a year. In addition to this, the newsletters sent to those subscribed, are also posted on the company LinkedIn page under the 'Documents' section of 'posts'. However, all the posts include content that is mainly about the parent company.

Newsletters: The company also uses newsletters as a channel to update its customers and subscribers about the insights on lay, broiler, turkeys and ducks. In addition to the general newsletters, the company also sends technical newsletters to the subscribers on the topics of their expertise in animal nutrition such as aquaculture, meat, poultry, probiotics to mention a few. Figure 6 shows the newsletter sign up section on their website.

Figure 8. Newsletter sign-up section of PX

Newsletter Sign up

Get updates on Lay-Insight, Broiler-Insight, Turkey-Insight and Duck-Insight right in your inbox.

Email address*:

First Name*

Last Name*

Company*

Country

☐ *I have read the **privacy policy**. I agree to a temporary electronic storage and processing of my entered data to answer my request. I can withdraw the consent to use my personal data by sending an email to [The](#) personal data will not be passed on to third parties.

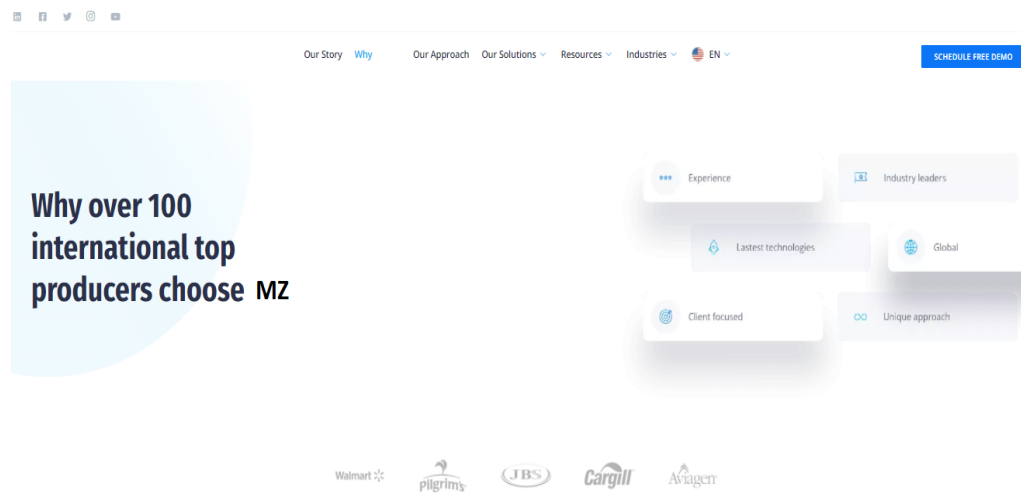
SUBSCRIBE

Competitor 2 : MZ

MZ, a company that was founded in 1994, works towards helping food producers increase their yield, animal welfare and achieve sustainability with their applications that involve technologies like IoT, artificial intelligence, business intelligence and others. Their customers are spread across six continents.

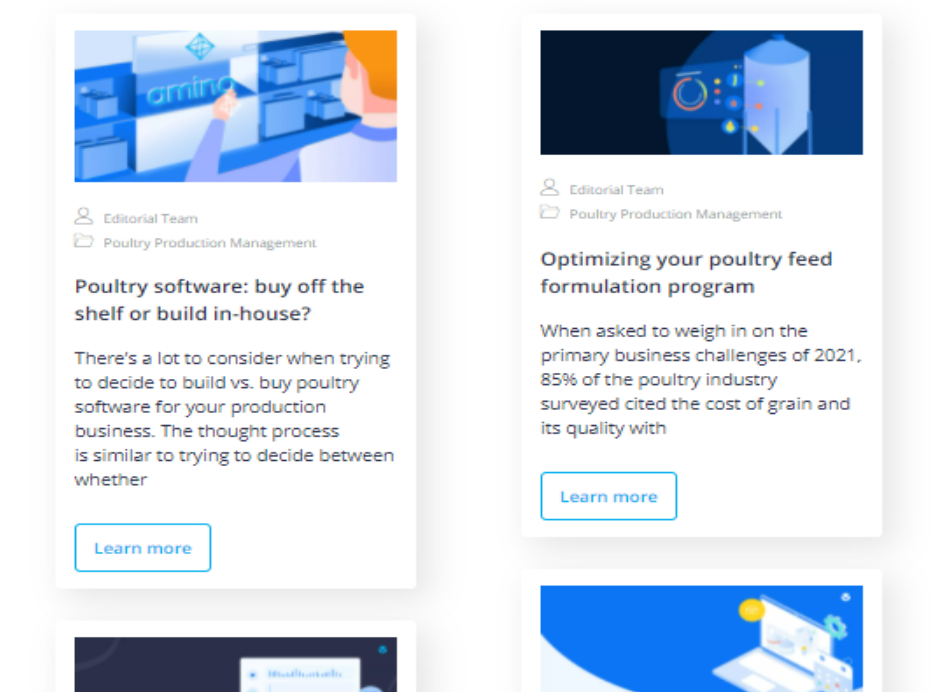
Website: MZ has an appealing website showcasing various pages that speak to the audience about the company, their solutions, their approach, their resources, the industries they work in and links to their social networking sites. The 'Home' page displays the logos of their customers. The page also includes a description of their software, 'Amino', and how it is individually useful to various divisions in poultry like breeders, broilers, hatcheries, feed mills and others. The 'Home' page provides a clear value proposition to the customers and has reviews from their current customers. The 'Our story' page describes their mission, their core values and the ways in which the company supports innovation by highlighting industry challenges, the company's solutions to those challenges and other opportunities associated with their solutions. The page entails a section for the audience to sign up to the company guide. The website has a 'Why' page that again highlights the benefits and opportunities associated with their software solutions. The 'Our Approach' page includes a clear roadmap to audiences that are new to the use of technologies in poultry and how MZ could help them. The page also has a description of their software solution 'Sonar' and its use in the infinity loop. The page urges all the relevant audiences to take up their solutions using facts from the industry under the section 'If not now...when?' and has an audience communication form through which they can contact the company consultants. The 'Our solutions' page clearly describes all their solutions. The 'Resources' webpage contains blogs, podcasts, shows- which are the company's events on youtube and their revolutionary stories, through which they increase the touch points of all their other digital marketing channels. The 'Industries' section has a detailed description of their solutions for the poultry and swine industries. All the webpages have a common newsletter sign up section. Figure 9 shows the company website.

Figure 9. The website of MZ



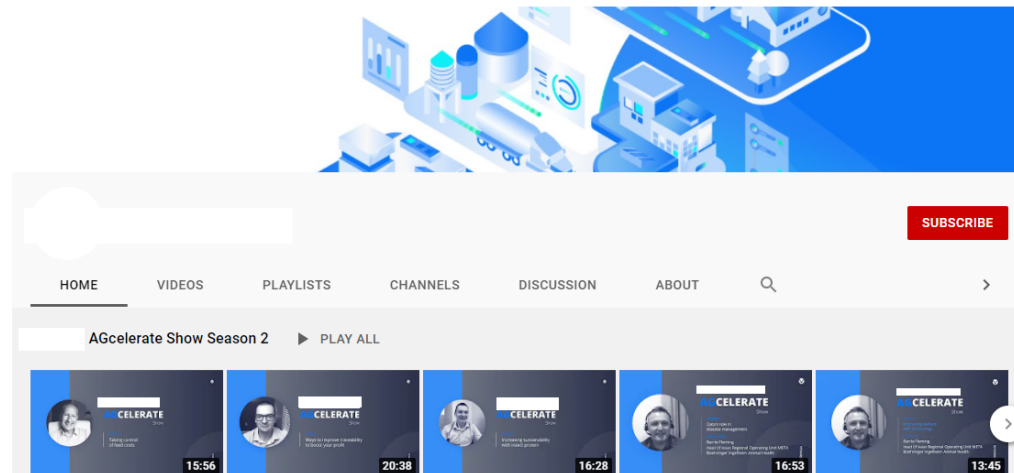
Blogs: The company has a blog page through which they communicate with the audience on various industry topics related to poultry and others. Figure 10 shows the company blog.

Figure 10. MZ blog page



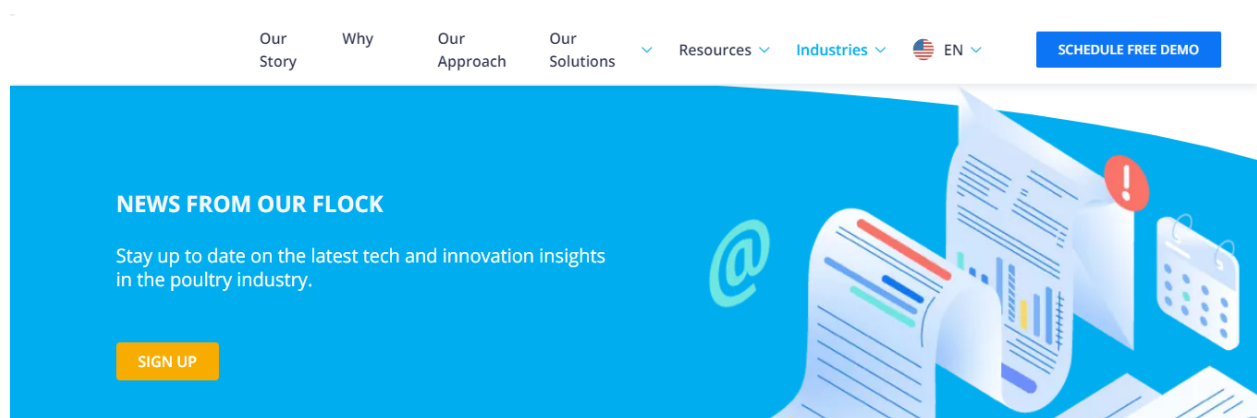
Podcasts: The company also sees podcasts as an effective way to reach out to the relevant audiences. Through the podcasts the topics relevant to the poultry and swine industry are shared. The company posts at least one podcast a month, starting January 2021, which is 12 podcasts in a year. Figure 11 below shows the company podcast page.

Figure 11. Podcast page of MZ



Newsletters: Through newsletters insights on latest technologies and innovations in the poultry industry is shared. Figure 12 shows the newsletter signup section

Figure 12. Newsletter sign-up section of MZ



LinkedIn: The 'Home' and 'About' sections have the company overview, contact details and website link. The company has an active LinkedIn page with at least 1-10 in a month,

approximately 10-120 posts in a year. The posts are in the form of images, videos and documents with content relevant to the industry and some generic posts.

Twitter: Twitter is another social media used by the company to maximize their reach. Their Twitter posts are blog articles and linkedin with links and short descriptions to the posts. Relevant hashtags that could most likely increase their reach are used in combination with Twitter posts. Figure 13 shows the company Twitter page.

Figure 13. Twitter page of MZ



Instagram: The company's Instagram page mostly has images and videos of various company events. A few posts are company niche related like those on LinkedIn.

Youtube: MZ uses youtube to broadcast videos such as interviews with industry experts, industry relevant educational videos, videos of their youtube series-MZ's AGaccelerated show and descriptive videos of their software solutions.

3.5 Collaborator analysis

The company works in collaboration with two external companies for hosting where the first company provides internet connection and virtual machines and the second company ensures

proper working of those virtual machines and company databases. The reason for these collaborations is the specific data security and uptime requirements of the case company. All the services offered by the collaborators are certified and hence the data of the customers is secure. The company also works in collaboration with other software company personnel for developing new modules and setting up development streets for their products. The company works with agencies that help in improving the user interface of their products. In addition to this, the company works in close collaborations with some of the prestigious Dutch universities for research. Finally Apple and Google platforms help in the distribution of the company applications.

3.6 SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis is a tool used for strategic planning in organizations and helps in building effective competitive strategies. SWOT analysis considers the interactions of the organizations with its environments both internal and external. The analysis gives a complete picture of the organizational capabilities and deficiencies in terms of its resources, the external or market opportunities that the organization has, and the threats to those opportunities. Hence, SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Sammut-Bonnici and Galea, 2015). Table 3 shows the SWOT matrix of the case company.

Table 3. SWOT matrix

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Considered as a trustworthy brand by current customers ➤ Higher focus on product quality ➤ Use website and LinkedIn for brand awareness and customer acquisition ➤ A decent website ➤ Use LinkedIn for marketing and have a decent following ➤ Intends to use more digital in the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Limited resources like manpower for handling digital marketing and other tasks ➤ Limited number of products ➤ No strategy associated with digital and social media channels ➤ Website has limited features ➤ Not much activity on LinkedIn for the users to engage in ➤ Limited digital channels used currently

<p>future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Post relevant content on LinkedIn and websites ➤ Products are designed in a way such that they promote sustainable environment through sustainable farming and food production ➤ Channels are connected through touch points ➤ Contact forms are a part of the website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Post very little content ➤ There is no digital strategy associated with the channels such that the sustainability message reaches maximum audience ➤ Channels have low visibility ➤ No customer feedbacks and opinions collected
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Use of other digital channels as per customer opinions ➤ Website with more features like reviews from current customers, firm related stories, newsletter sign up and others ➤ Variety of digital channels and tools available ➤ Increasing customer needs for market related content ➤ Increasing market opportunities ➤ Use of digital platforms for international trade fairs 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Limited use of digital and social media channels in the market ➤ Bigger competitors have more appealing websites with more features ➤ Target groups might not use them ➤ Smaller market size and higher competition in the market ➤ Limited resources like manpower and marketing budget ➤ Higher expenses associated with certain tools like digital trade fairs ➤ Offline channels like International Trade fairs and shows are still prominent methods of marketing

3.7 Situation analysis conclusion

The chapter describes the main 5 C's of the case company. However, this analysis has certain limitations: a. Only two competitors are considered b. Only the competitor's digital marketing data that is available on the internet is only taken into account. One of the main findings from this chapter is that although the use of digital media for marketing is increasing in the agri-food sector, traditional offline marketing channels such as international trade shows and trade fairs still remain a prominent method of networking and marketing in the industry. In addition to this, the case company supports various good causes that are industry related, on issues such as sustainability and industry innovation. However, very little content is posted by the case company on its digital and social media channels on such relevant topics.

This analysis helped the researcher in partially framing the final marketing plan for the case company. Compelling content selection is identified as one of the important marketing actions from the literature review. The content types that were identified as important based on the competitor analysis, that could help the case company increase its reach were educational topics such as animal nutrition, probiotics, farm management and hatchery, technical topics such as software or technology based content, and general topics such as customers and stakeholders benefits from the products, insights on lay and others. From the customer analysis it was found that LinkedIn, websites and youtube were the most popular channels used by the customers, followed by Twitter and Facebook.

4. Methodology

This chapter presents the research purpose, research design, the data analysis method, the data collection method and finally the results of the research. For each category, various methods and approaches are discussed and why a particular choice is made for this research is explained. In this chapter section 4.1 explains the research design, followed by research approach in section 4.2, followed by data collection in section 4.3, data sample in section 4.4, data analysis in section 4.5 and finally research validity, reliability and generalizability in section 4.6.

4.1 Research design

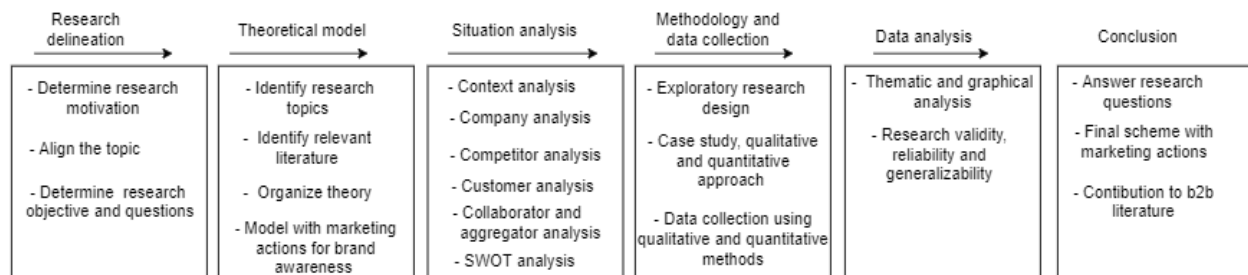
The main goal of research is to achieve understanding, and then develop models that approximate 'truth' and 'reality' (Techo, 2016). A research design is the 'procedures for collecting, analyzing, interpreting and reporting data in research studies'. It is the comprehensive plan that connects the conceptual research problems with the pertinent research (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007, p.58). This section of the thesis helps the research find answers to the research questions *RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3*.

There are three types of research design: exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. A descriptive research design or formulator research design is a type of statistical research that shows how various elements in a phenomena are related to each other as they exist. This form of research design is used to obtain information on certain characteristics of the issue like an event. This research design does not explain why a certain event has occurred or why an event is suitable for a fairly new or an unexplored research area (Punch, 2005, Akhtar, 2016). Exploratory research design is used to understand and achieve insights on the research problem (Saunders et al., 2007). This type of research is used to gain information when there are very few to no informational sources on the topic of study (Akhtar, 2016). Explanatory research design explains the descriptive information of an area that has not been studied earlier. This form of research is mostly concerned with the 'why' factor and the main purpose is to gain familiarity of the unknown areas (Akhtar, 2016).

The aim of this study is to understand and find insights on the different marketing channels and the marketing actions associated with those channels that help in generating brand awareness and customer acquisition. Hence, exploratory research design is believed to be suitable to this

study research by the author. Another reason for the use of this method is that there is no previous research on digital marketing activities particularly for companies that provide software solutions to the agricultural and food sector. Hence the insights gained from this research will be used in developing a marketing plan for the case company which can also be used for future research (Akhtar, 2016). Figure 14 shows the research process model.

Figure 14. Research process model



4.2 Research approach

A case study method is used in this research. This approach is seen as robust when a holistic and in-depth investigation is needed. The case study method helps closely study the data in a particular context (Zainal, 2007). This approach helps the researcher in studying the contextual conditions that are relevant to the phenomenon under study (Baxter and Jack, 2010). A single case design is adopted when there is no other case for replication (Zainal, 2007). A case study research approach uses multiple data sources which also augments the data credibility. These data sources may include but are not restricted to: interviews and surveys. Data from a couple of assets are converged to analyze the findings of the research. The convergence of these data sources strengthens the findings and collectively they contribute to the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon of the topic under study (Baxter and Jack, 2010). In the case of this research, the company that assigned the research problem is a b2b that has limited background in the digital marketing arena. Since every company has its own unique characteristics, the final digital marketing plan is designed keeping the case company in mind. This also means that the final plan with marketing actions, might not be generalized for all the other companies in the sector (Zainal, 2007).

There are three approaches while conducting a case study research: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. The basic motivation in qualitative research in contrast to quantitative research is that qualitative research is subjective (Noordin and Masrek, 2016). This form of

research involves an in-depth understanding of the research topic being studied and helps the researcher obtain an in-depth scenario of the topic. The primary goal of this approach is to investigate a certain phenomena through understanding the data from the subjective perspectives of participants and obtain an understanding of the insiders' views. These methods are useful in cases when a researcher wishes to gather a general idea from the subjects, with the goal being to explore, interpret and describe a situation (Techo, 2016). This form of research is associated with profoundness of the information that is gained in order to reason with one's experiences and actions (Noordin and Masrek, 2016). In qualitative research data is mostly collected through interviews, documents and observations. Data gathering in qualitative research is subjective in nature and the respondent strength can be small due to which data collection can be tedious (Noordin and Masrek, 2016)

While qualitative research emphasizes on the descriptive procedures or words and analysis of the collected data, quantitative research emphasizes on numbers or quantification (Techo, 2016). This form of research has numerical and precise findings and are designed in such a way that the results are objectifiable, generalizable and reliable. Quantitative research employs experimental methods and data is collected through surveys, questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, telephonic interviews and online surveys. However, a limitation of this form of research is that it doesn't take into account the unique characteristics of an individual case (Noordin and Masrek, 2016).

A mixed method combines qualitative and quantitative research methods in the same study in order to get a profound understanding of the topic of study. The main assumption is that either the combination of both methods provides better findings than the use of a single method or the use of a single method alone cannot solve the research problem. This form of research should be used when the results of the research would be helpful to the organization (Techo, 2016). The data are accumulated simultaneously or sequentially. In different words, the method facilitates the researcher to answer questions that can not be answered using only qualitative or qualitative strategies alone.

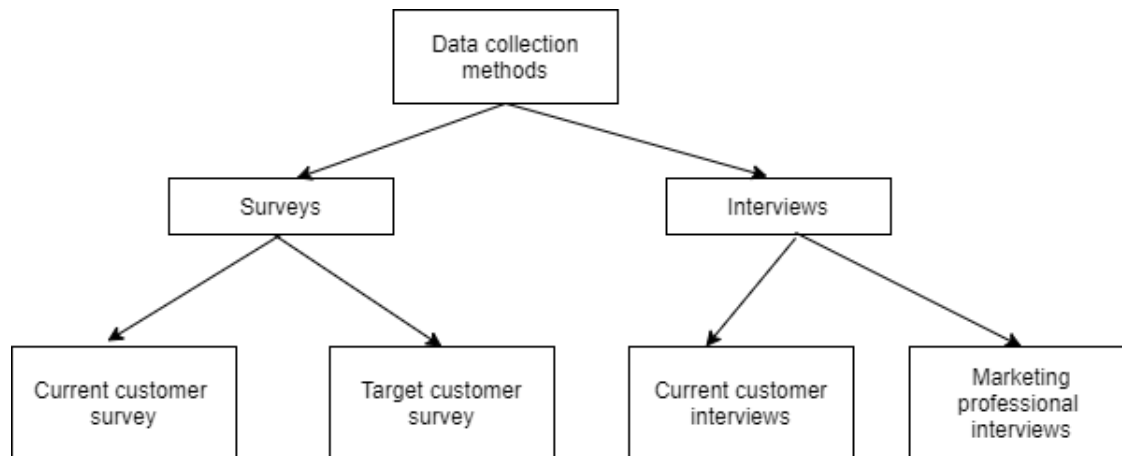
Mixed approach is chosen for this study because of the belief that the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods would help in attaining better findings from the research. For this the researcher plans to use the qualitative approach, by placing more emphasis on the information

from customer and marketing professional interviews and quantitative approach by using surveys to understand the customers overall preferences in terms of numbers.

4.3 Data collection

In this research it is both the quantitative and qualitative data that helps in getting better insights on the topic of research. For the research, data was gathered from several sources: the case company, through situation analysis of the case company, through customer and marketing professional surveys and interviews. Data was collected in the form of images, audios, videos, and notes. Figure 15 shows the detailed version of the data collection techniques.

Figure 15. Data collection techniques



4.3.1 Surveys

Surveys are used to establish prevalence of a particular condition or topic (Mathers et al., 2000). Surveys can help in obtaining information needed for a research from a large scale sample of population. This data collection method helps in gaining information about the attitudes of the respondents which can otherwise be difficult to measure using other methods (Glasgow, 2005). Survey aids in making deductions about a population by examining a representative sample that belongs to the population. The population is the group of objects in which the researcher is interested in. Findings and conclusions drawn from the survey conducted on the sample, is generalized for the wider population (Young, 2015). Surveys provide only an estimate and not the accurate measurements of the true population (Glasgow, 2005). Other advantages of survey

include cost efficiency, ethical advantages, flexibility and efficiency in knowing the opinions of geographically spread samples (Mathers et al., 2009)

Quantitative and qualitative questionnaire for current and target customers

Surveys are one of the main data collection techniques used in this research. Through surveys the researcher tried to explore the usage of digital media in the agri-food sector and to gather data required to answer the research questions. These surveys had mostly quantitative and a very few qualitative questions that were sent to the technical directors of the current and target companies. The questions for the survey were organized beforehand depending on the findings from the literature. The surveys were divided into 7 parts for the current customers and 6 parts for the target customers. The one additional part in the survey for the current customers contained questions related to the case company of which the target customers were not aware of. These surveys helped the researcher answer questions *RQ1* and *RQ2*.

4.3.2 Interviews

An interview is a data collection technique which involves verbal communication between the subject and the researcher. They are most commonly used in exploratory research (Mathers et al., 2000). They are a technique aid in collecting the respondents ideas, perceptions and thoughts. Interviews allow the respondents to express their viewpoint without any framework being imposed on them (Bolderston, 2012). Interviews were used as one of the mediums to gather data for this research. Through interviews the opinions of the case company staff that handle digital marketing, the digital media expectations of the technical directors of current customer companies and the opinions of marketing professionals on the b2b trends in digital marketing were collected.

Interviews can be structured, semi-structured and unstructured. In a structured interview the responses of the subject are constrained to answers to direct questions or in other words the questions are closed ended. In an unstructured interview the subject is allowed to talk freely and very few topics are discussed with the respondent but in great detail. In this study, the third type of interviews, semi-structured interviews, which are a mix of structured and unstructured interviews were used. The interview questions were planned beforehand with open and closed ended questions, and allowed the interviewer and the respondent to discuss the topic in great detail. This type of interviews are useful for collecting the attitudinal information of the

respondents. The responses were either written down by the interviewer or are tape recorded (Mathers et al., 2000).

Case company interview

The semi-structured interview with the case company representative of this project had open-ended questions in 6 parts where the researcher intended to learn more about the case company's digital marketing initiatives. The questions were structured based on the researcher's understanding of the research problem and on the findings from the literature review.

Current and target customer company interviews

The semi-structured interview with the current customer company technical directors was an extension to the surveys. The interviews were conducted to derive additional information on the customer digital media expectations from the case company.

Marketing professionals' interview

As mentioned in section 4.3.1 the original plan of the researcher was to gain marketing professionals' insights on the topic of study through interviews. The interview questions were open-ended and were conducted to gain insights on two topics:

- a. information on the marketing channels and the marketing channels for brand awareness and customer acquisition in b2b to answer questions *RQ1* and *RQ2*.
- b. to validate the researcher's findings from the literature review and see if the marketing actions identified in the literature review actually helped b2b companies in expanding their reach among their audience and thus to answer the research questions *RQ3* and *RQ4*.

4.4 Data Sample

To answer the research questions data was collected from different sources in which case there was a sample. Sample is a part of a bigger population. In some cases researchers do not have sufficient time and resources in which case they use a sample of the population to lessen the number of cases (Taherdoost 2016). Sampling is of two types : Probability sampling and non-probability sampling. In probability sampling each item of the population has an equal chance of being selected in the sample. The sampling technique that is often associated with

case studies is non-probability sampling. In relation to non-probability sampling techniques, case studies usually tend to concentrate on smaller samples and examine real life situations and the main goal is not to make statistical inferences from the wider population. However, while using non-probability sampling techniques in case studies there needs to be a clear reasoning for including only some individuals and not all others (Taherdoost 2016).

The sample selection method used for this research is non-probability sampling, reason being not all technical directors in target companies were known. This research has three sample groups: case company representative, current customer company technical directors, target customer company technical directors and marketing professionals. For the current and target customer survey the technical directors and those in positions of decision making like the data integration managers, operations manager, CEOs, business development managers, managing directors, product managers, business process supervision directors, commercial managers and product owners were chosen. The survey was sent to 11 current customer companies of which 5 responses were received and was sent to 19 target customer companies of which 6 responses were received. For the interviews there was one case company representative interview, 11 current customer companies were approached of which 1 responded and 19 target customer companies were approached of which none responded.

Table 4. List of interviewees

Code	Type	Job title	Industry
CCR1	Case company representative	Marketing	Agri-food industry
C1	Customer	Current	Agri-food industry
M1	Marketing professional	Digital Marketing specialist	Agri-food industry
M2	Marketing professional	Digital and content marketing specialist	Marketing agency

4.5 Data analysis

The raw data collected during the data collection stage was processed and analyzed. The analysis of the qualitative data gathered through interviews done using thematic analysis, and the quantitative data gathered through surveys was analyzed using graphs and charts.

The analysis of the qualitative data that was gathered through interviews was based on the researcher's interpretations of the topics. More attention was paid to the context, 'spoken words' and contradiction of views, the frequency of comments, the intensity of comments and the emerging themes (The open university). The data analysis technique used was thematic network analysis technique (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The technique takes into consideration all available data which is coded into themes. The findings from this analysis are included in chapter 5 of the report.

In quantitative research, statistics are used to summarise the quantitative data by using graphs as a method to visualize the raw data (The open university). The quantitative data analysis is applied to the categorical statistical data questions in the survey of the current and target customers. The data that was summarized and the patterns of the data were described using graphical representations like bar charts and pie charts. This was done mainly to show the percentages of the total for each quantitative question in the survey. Converting the data into graphical forms helped the researcher understand the participant responses better, make comparisons between the data and also understand the trends in the responses. The graphical representations of the responses are included in the chapter 5 of this report.

4.6 Research Validity, Reliability and Generalizability

Research validity, reliability and generalizability are three important concepts in a research and play an important role in ensuring research quality. Validity is related to the research credibility. According to Taherdoost (2016), validity is associated with how well the data gathered actually covers the topic of study. In other words, it explains if the researcher has measured what he intended to measure. Reliability is concerned with the consistency and repeatability of the findings, i.e if the study would yield the same results on repeated trials. Generalizability concerns equal applicability of the findings for larger populations or other similar settings (Taherdoost, 2016, Parveen and Showkat, 2017).

To carry out research validity, the researcher first tried to understand the research problem and the expectations of the company that assigned the problem from this study. These expectations were considered while forming the research objectives and goals. Based on the research goals, the theoretical framework was developed by performing a literature review on the topics relevant to this study. In order to further understand the internal and the external environment of the case company, a situation analysis of the company was performed. This was followed by data collection which was carried out using data collection techniques like surveys and interviews. The survey questionnaires for current and target customers were approved by the case company, and the questions for both customers and marketing professionals were formulated based on the literature review and research questions. Finally the formulated marketing plan was evaluated by the marketing professional at the case company.

As stated above, research reliability deals with research consistency of the results in other settings. In other words if similar findings are reached on repeated trials (Taherdoost, 2016, Parveen and Showkat, 2017). Since qualitative data is included in this study, where the emphasis is mainly placed on the 'spoken words', it is possible that the conclusions might not be the same every time, particularly when the same study is carried out by other researchers. This is because the situation when the data was collected in the first trial was different and might change with time. In addition to this, the responses to the surveys and the interviews include the subjective nature of the respondents, which means different researchers carrying out the same study might interpret the answers differently from the current researcher.

Generalizability is related to the applicability of the findings for larger samples or similar settings. Since this research is based on a case study, it is difficult to say that the findings are generalizable to all b2b companies. The data sample that was chosen for the study, was chosen keeping the case company in mind. Every company in the b2b sector operates in a different way, has different characteristics and a different audience. Hence the researcher thinks that the findings of this research is not generalizable to companies in other settings.

5. Results

This chapter presents the findings from the study such that they help in answering the research questions. Section 5.1 of the chapter explains the findings on the level of use of digital and social media in the b2b agri-food sector, section 5.2 explains the findings on the digital channels and social media channels in the sector and section 5.3 presents the collective gathered from surveys and interviews, on the marketing actions identified as important for extending the brand reach from the literature review.

5.1 Digital and social media use in the b2b agri-food sector

In order to identify the digital marketing channels that suit the agri-food sector the best, the researcher thought that it was first important to understand the magnitude of the digital media use in the sector in general at present. The customers revealed the prevalence of international trade shows and trade fairs as still an important means for networking and marketing in the sector, owing to the complex b2b relationships and the high value of the trust factor. This was also confirmed by the case company representative who stated, “Sometimes you get to know people in an old -fashioned way, like through trade shows and that is when you follow them.” The case company considered getting to know the customers offline first and then following them online to be the right way of marketing in the sector and hence the high prominence of the offline marketing methods in the sector in comparison to online methods. However, the industry has seen a gradual change in the marketing arena, where more and more digital mediums are being used by companies to reach out to their audiences. One main factor that contributed to this was the changes brought in due to covid-19, regarding which one of the marketing professionals with experience in marketing particularly in the agri-food sector stated, “ The last 18 months or so has made a sea change in all of these situations. Because of covid-19, physical meetings and one of the sources of business which used to be trade shows and exhibitions are not even happening anymore”. The professional further added, “In the last 18 months or so, there has been a significant shift in the importance of digital marketing, particularly for smaller businesses as they have realized that their target market, their captive audience and buyers are actually available online”. The same was confirmed by the case company. Overall all the interviewees consider digital media as “very important” in “searching for new contacts”, in getting “background information on technology” and for “doing business virtually” in the agri-food sector.

In order to further gain insights, the researcher asked the current and potential customers' about the magnitude of their digital and social media use for business. The results revealed that the current customers mainly use LinkedIn, newsletters, websites and email, while the potential customers use LinkedIn, websites, newsletters, email and Facebook for business purposes. The survey also revealed the majority current and the potential customers of the company, looked into the digital and social media business profiles of their potential clients, vendors or buyers, while making business or partnership related decisions, indicating the importance of a well-presented digital media profile in the sector.

Figure 16. Current customer used digital and social media

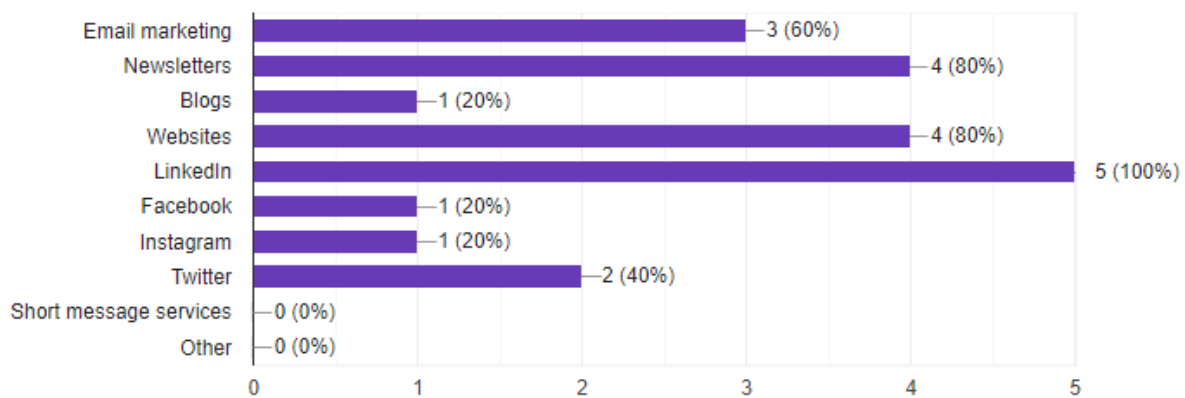
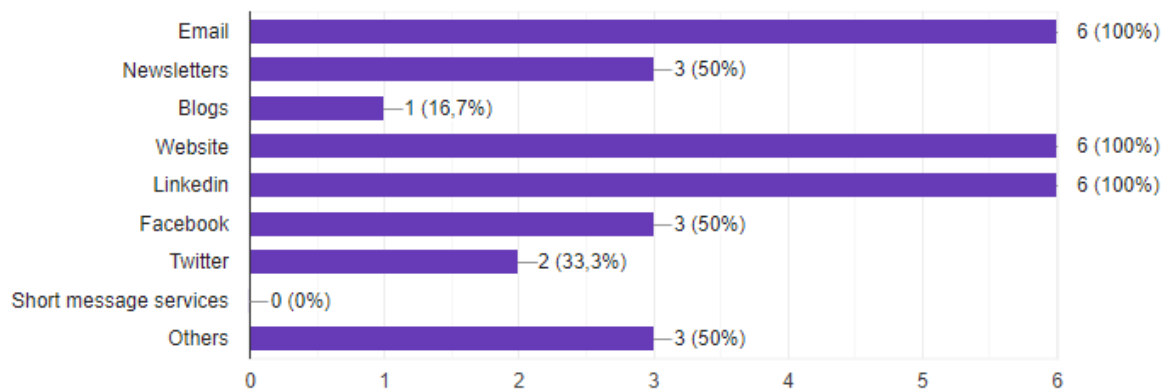


Figure 17. Potential customer used digital and social media



5.2 Digital channels for brand awareness and customer acquisition in b2b agri-food sector

The findings from this section help in answering research questions *RQ1*. From the situation analysis, it was found that the case company uses a website and LinkedIn for marketing currently. While the website is used because of its industry-apt nature, LinkedIn is used because of its professional nature. The apt and the professional natures of website and LinkedIn in the agri-food sector respectively, was also confirmed by the marketing professional interviewees. Marketing professionals considered website to be the the first platform that any b2b company used to expand its visibility and reach, which held true in the agri-food sector. A strong website presence was considered to be one of the requisites for establishing a strong web presence, followed by presence on other platforms like LinkedIn, blogs and other social media. Relating to this, while one interviewee stated the following, “If you want to scale as a brand and reach out more people internationally or across various geographical locations, having a digital presence not only a website, but also a social media presence, having content listed on multiple sites, doing blogging and posting on various groups, all of this becomes very important.”, another interview pointed out the importance of a good looking website by saying “when using a website, the website has to be appealing in terms of its features and the dashboard format”. The interviewee further added, “ Otherwise you get lost and finally you stop visiting the website”.

Although a well organized website was considered to be important for marketing, the interviewees pointed out that not all companies invested in a businesslike website. Many companies invested in a skeletal website as they consider websites to be much of an investment. The lack of a good-looking or an eye-pleasing website was also true for the case company. While the case company had a decent looking website, it lacked in many areas in comparison to its competitors’ websites, in terms of content postings and customer engagement. Hence the researcher considers that it is important for the company to invest more in terms of value given to the company audience through the company digital platforms.

In order to further gain insights, the current and the potential customers were asked about their most preferred digital and social media platforms for business. The results revealed websites, linkedIn, newsletters and email in the following order, to be the most preferred channels. Similar to the findings from the interviews, the surveys also revealed websites as the most preferred medium in the sector. In addition to this around 40% current customers and 83.3% potential

customers agreed that the information presented on the business partner's channels such as websites and social media was always considered while making business decisions. Similar to the findings of section 5.1, the findings in this section also imply that the agri-food companies need to have digital media profiles such that they satisfy the needs of their audience in terms of aesthetics, format, content, engagement and others.

Table 5. Average of the customer preferences

Platform choice	Current customer responses	Potential customer responses	Average
Email	60%	100%	80%
Newsletters	80%	83.3%	80.15%
Blogs	20%	16.7%	18.35%
Website	80%	100%	90%
LinkedIn	60%	100%	80%
Facebook	0%	50%	25%
Instagram	20%	33.3%	26.65%
Twitter	0%	33.3%	16.65%
Short message services	20%	0%	10%
Others	0%	50%	25%

5.3 Digital marketing strategies and marketing actions in B2B

The section discusses the findings of this study on the marketing actions that help increase brand awareness and customer acquisition.

The literature review indicated the importance of having a digital strategy in close association with the marketing actions to achieve the intended marketing result. This strategy represents a framework that a firm uses to set their marketing goals and achieve the desired results. The marketing professionals confirmed the literature review findings and stressed on the importance of a digital strategy for marketing. The professionals were of the opinion that a digital strategy

would help the companies in efficiently reaching their target market, would help the companies know the trends in their market and reach the audience accordingly through match-making. Digital strategy importance was also revealed in conjunction with the b2b sales and marketing cycles. A sales cycle starts with a lead or an inquiry and closes with a customer, and a marketing cycle which starts with an anonymous customer and ends at the starting point of a sales cycle. Hence in order to systematically move the prospects or leads gathered through digital medium through these cycles or funnels, it was important that the companies had a digital marketing strategy. Relating this an interviewee stated, “So absolutely a digital strategy is very important and across each of the channels you need to define your target audience, you need to have certain goals, define which channel makes sense for your business and which channels don't, and make investments accordingly”. This was particularly true for the case company as the case company representative stated the lack of a digital strategy in achieving the marketing goals.

5.3.1 Compelling content selection

The literature review revealed that business to business customers are mostly content driven, and providing relevant content to the customers was important for brand awareness. The case company customer confirmed this to be true and revealed content to guide the customers' interest. More the number of positive impressions on the posted compelling content, more the probability that it created a favorable impression of the company in the customer's eyes. The marketing professionals were also of the same opinion and considered having fresh, new and different content for brand awareness was essential to stand out. In relation to this one of the professionals stated “If you have no content you cannot reach people in our industry, it does not work. So you need the content and that is absolutely essential. Otherwise there are already so many content channels, where there are already a lot of facts and figures”. On the same lines the second marketing professional revealed that the industry audience no longer read limited content and reached out to the companies, and if one company did not provide the content that the audience was looking for, its competitor would fulfill the customers demand of relevant content and bag business. This is crucially important for the case company as the situation analysis revealed the lack of a content strategy and lack of content posts by the case company. However, the company representative was positive about posting more content in the near future. The main obstacles that the case company faced with regards to posting relevant content were lack of manpower, difficulty in finding the right stories, finding trending topics in the industry like veganism, plant protein and others, and associating them with the brand. From the

marketing professionals' perspectives, obstacles such as finding the right trends in the sector could be solved by having a strategy and implementing the digital media with a strong strategy.

The importance of posting compelling content regularly was also confirmed from the customer surveys. Around 60% of the current customers and 66.7% of the potential customers respectively completely agreed on the importance of posting compelling content. Among the different types of content in the industry, market news was the most preferred type of content that the customers liked to engage the most in.

5.3.2 Stimulating E-Word of Mouth (EWOM)

The findings on e-word of mouth revealed ewom to have a huge impact on the sales cycle of a b2b company. However, there were two limitations identified with this marketing action: a. Any brand could only get as many ewoms b. The audience or customers were not ready to be on that line unless they were a cent percent sure. The marketing professionals were of the opinion that an e-word of mouth could give a successful physical touch to any company. However, majorly relying on e-word of mouths for business growth was considered as a good strategy by the professionals. On these lines an interviewee stated, "Digital word of mouth is references and references definitely work. So typically for example, getting references is a little difficult, and if you really want to draw a growth chart for the company, only and only depending on the digital word of mouth is not a good strategy".

In order to further understand the importance of digital word of mouth in the agri-food sector, the current and the potential customers of the company were on their take on the digital word-of-mouth. The results from the survey revealed that although many customer companies did not directly indulge in digital word of mouth or digital recommendations for their business partners, they surely listened to the recommendations from their trusted parties. While 40% of the current customer respondents agreed that they would certainly follow the recommendations from their trusted parties, potential customer companies on the other hand were unsure if they would follow the recommendations from even their trusted parties. However, the companies did not completely disagree on the same, indicating that a strong digital image could still persuade a customer company to pass a word of mouth digitally. 60 % of the current customer respondents indicated that they would sometimes follow the recommendations of their trusted parties. Likewise, 83.3% of the potential customers agreed that they would sometimes consider the

recommendations from their trusted parties and the remaining ones denied following the recommendations.

5.3.3 Increasing brand presence through touch points

Digital touch points with cross-linking and tagging across marketing channels were seen to help brands in attracting more audience and broadening their reach. Hence the researcher asked the opinions of the marketing professionals on the same. Both the marketing professional interviewees seemed unsure of how the digital touch points contributed to brand awareness. However, one of the respondents was of the opinion that irrespective of the channel, all touch points should carry the same brand message. Adding to this, the respondent stated, “So at any point of time people should not feel you know that when they jump from one channel to another channel they have suddenly come to a different company altogether. The color tones, the use, the placement of logos everything should be standardized. If you are using a tagline, then it should be consistent across all of your channels and all of your touch points”.

5.3.4 Monitoring and listening

The literature review showed that monitoring and listening to the audience on digital and social media could help brands win business. When asked about the interviews on their opinion on monitoring and listening, the interviewees had a contrary opinion to what was seen from the literature review. Both the interviewees considered this action to be time consuming and expensive. One of the interviewees considered that the concept of monitoring and listening was relevant from a b2c perspective and not from a b2b perspective, particularly when the business is a small b2b business, to which this could be a challenge as they usually are not equipped with the required manpower to do the task. As one of the marketing professionals had experience marketing in the agri-food sector, the professional had similar views as the other interviewee on the contribution of this marketing action to brand awareness and customer acquisition in the agri-food sector. The professional stated, “I am not sure how you can successfully do it in the agricultural industry”.

5.3.5 Customer communication and feedback

Customer communication and dialogue between brands and their audience on various topics was shown to reinforce brand awareness and help in business development, particularly the sales process from the literature review. From the interview with the case company representative it was revealed that the firm currently doesn't use any such tactic in their

marketing process. However, on the contrary, using such an action could help businesses improve their relationships with customers from the marketing professionals perspective. The marketing professionals considered this to be a way through which the business could communicate to the customers the importance of them to the business. In addition to this, this marketing action could help businesses identify the parameters that have worked well, parameters that did not work well for the business and identify the areas of improvement. On these lines a marketing professional stated, “But if you are doing that on a regular basis it does communicate one thing that the customer is important for the business and they really care about what is going right and what is not going right with what is being delivered to them or what service is actually rendered to them.” In order to further understand the applicability of this marketing action in the agri-food sector, agri-food customers were asked about the likelihood of them giving their feedback and opinions through the survey forms. Majority of the customers, that is around 90% of the current and potential customers collectively agreed that there was a fair chance that they gave their feedback to the companies seeking them. This was seen to be dependent on various factors such as the company seeking their feedback, the situational factors and others.

5.3.6 Special actions

From the interviews, special actions like SEO, SEM were seen to be helpful in increasing the brand reach by both the marketing professionals. In order for the special actions to be successful one of the interviewees mentioned authentic content to be an important factor. The second interview with the marketing professional revealed that organic search should have a clear strategy in itself in terms of the keyword usage and rankings. The interviewee further stated, “When you actually get rankings, you get a significant amount of traffic related to these keywords and more people that come to your website, more the chances that they will eventually convert from your website”.

5.3.7 Community building

Literature review revealed community building to help a b2b company in increasing their reach among the audiences and eventually help in customer acquisition. It was also revealed from the literature review that engaging audiences in various communities and communicating brand values through communities could increase brand-customer relationship and increase customer loyalty towards the brand. Community as described by one of the respondents is something where “people have common interests, people can start working together, exchange

experiences and also help brands in generating business". Along the similar lines the second marketing professional described the essence of a community as a place where "people have a common liking or some common taste, and the subject of the community was something that kept the members tuned in together, irrespective of their differences". However, both the respondents had contrary views on community building in b2b for brand awareness. While one of the marketing professional respondents had a positive outlook towards community building and stated, "community is very important because you look for a page where you associate yourself with one another", the second interviewee stated, "I think from a b2b perspective community building is a little difficult to enter first and manage it on a marketing level as well".

In order to understand the applicability of community building in the agri-food sector, the researcher had questions to the survey respondents on their engagement on various communities including social media platforms. The results revealed that the respondents engaged in online conversations on communities, implying that the case company had a chance to increase its reach among its customers in case it started a community of its own, to communicate the brand.

6. Proposed marketing plan and evaluation

This chapter talks about the plan that is proposed to the case company. The plan is developed based on the findings from the interview with the case company representative, case company current customers, surveys with case company current and potential customers, and interviews with marketing professionals. Section 6.1 entails the proposed plan followed by the evaluation of the plan by marketing professionals in section 6.2

6.1 Proposed marketing plan

The proposed plan is formulated based on the findings from various sources such as the competitor analysis, surveys and interviews with case company customers and the qualitative interviews with marketing professionals. Key findings from all the sources have been listed in the marketing plan shown in table 6.

Table 6. Marketing plan

Define marketing goals	Define goals that are achievable and measurable. Some of the goals identified for increasing brand awareness and customer acquisition are: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Higher brand reputation• Strong brand image• Increased traffic on digital and social media• Lead generation• Market expansion
Choose target groups	Identify the target market profiles. Some profiles in positions of taking business related decisions in the agri-food sector are listed below: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Business owners• Chief executive officers• Business development managers• Managing directors• Business process supervision directors

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data integration managers • Product owners • Commercial managers
Choose marketing channels	<p>Choose the marketing channels based on marketing goals and target groups. Digital channels that are likely to work in the agri-food sector are listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LinkedIn • Website • Newsletters • Email • Other social media like twitter, youtube, facebook, podcasts, instagram
Choose marketing actions	<p>Choose marketing actions based on the strategy. The 7 marketing actions and their related information are listed below.</p>
Compelling content	<p>Post content that helps build a strong brand image/identity, content that establishes a sense of trust in the audience and content that imparts value to the audience. Some of the topics identified in the research that work the best for the agri-food companies are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry best practices • Technology content and how it adds value to customers • Scientific research content • Test farm content • Innovational content together with best practice background • Content based on audiences' questions • Industry trending topics

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other industry relevant content
EWOM	Gather as many references for the brand from the industry audience
Communication and feedback	<p>Communicate with the audience and establish a sense of trust in them by communicating their importance to business. Gather feedback on products and services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through surveys • Through communication forms • Through polls • Through webinars
Special actions	<p>Identify and use special actions depending on strategy and marketing budget.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising product profiles with regards to sustainability • Targeted advertisements • Keyword optimization • Improved rankings
Community building	<p>Build online communities that strengthen the brand-audience relationship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion groups on the topic of your niche • Communities on industry relevant topics

Effectiveness measurement and assessment	<p>Carry out the strategy effectiveness measurement using KPI's and re-adjust the plan based on observed outcomes. Some important points related to this are listed below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An initial zero measurement • Measure quality of discussion • Measure the type of audience • Measure performance metrics like users, page views, sessions, bounce rate for websites, keywords and rankings for SEO, impressions like likes shares and comments for social media, open rate, response rate
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6.2 Evaluation

This section presents the evaluation of the proposed marketing plan. The evaluation process is essential to identify the areas of modification or improvement such that some performance aspects of the plan are increased. This evaluation process also helps in knowing if the proposed plan is usable and is capable of achieving the desired marketing objectives which in this case are brand awareness and customer acquisition. The plan is evaluated using a UTAUT model questionnaire.

6.2.1 Evaluation plan

A questionnaire with qualitative and quantitative questions is used to evaluate the model. The plan is used to evaluate the perceived usefulness of the model, perceived ease of use and intentions to use by professionals. The questionnaire is based on the unified theory of acceptance and use of technology (UTAUT) model. The questionnaire aims to determine the usefulness and impact of the marketing plan on generating brand awareness and customer acquisition particularly in the agri-food sector.

There are a number of theoretical models that are projected to facilitate the understanding of how various parameters impact the acceptance of knowledge technologies (Venkatesh &

Davis, 2000, Chau, 1996). Among these models, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is the one in the foremost that explains Information technology or information systems adoption behavior. The model forms a basis for locating the impact of external variables on internal beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. TAM assumes that beliefs concerning utility and simple use are forever the first determinants of information technologies adoption in organizations. While TAM is mostly applied on an individual level, the UTAUT model is applied when the technology is to be evaluated at an organizational level. Hence the questionnaire is based on the UTAUT model.

6.2.2 Expert panel

Only one expert agreed to evaluate the marketing plan addressed as expert A in the report.

Expert A has had the previous professional experiences of a marketing consultant and the manager of agribusiness, with experience of more than 10 years. The expert is currently the owner of a company that operates in the agri-food sector for 11 years now. Together with owning the company, the expert is also involved in the marketing related tasks of the company. In addition to this, the person also is responsible for discussing the business related problems with company stakeholders and is involved in helping the clients overcome problems related to the use of technology offered by the company.

6.2.3 Evaluation Outcomes

The marketing plan is evaluated based on three factors: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and intentions to use. The three factors had qualitative questionnaires where the professional had to rate a certain topic under the factor on a scale of one to five, where one stood for a low score and five stood for a high score. In addition to the quantitative questions, a few qualitative questions were included to gain further information on the reason for the score and to identify the areas of improvement. The results are presented below where the red color indicates a low impact, yellow indicates a medium impact and green indicates a high impact.

Perceived usefulness

The marketing expert completely agreed that the marketing plan was useful and could help companies generate brand awareness and customer acquisition. However, some of the marketing actions in the plan were considered to be of more use than the others in the marketing plan. Marketing actions that received the highest rating were EWOM, Special actions and community building, followed by compelling content selection and touch points. The other

actions such as communication and feedback were considered to be less useful, as it is always difficult to encourage website visitors, other b2b market profiles or relations in general to participate. The overall average grade was high.

Perceived ease of use

The expert completely agreed that the proposed plan was clear and easy to understand but the implementation of the model could take some extra effort. The implementation of specific actions such as community building was considered to require high work particularly for the maintenance of the communities. Overall, when the expert was asked about what additional aspects were to be added such that the model was easy to use, the expert was of the opinion that there was nothing much to add. The average of the grades was medium.

Intentions to use

The expert indicated to use the model and recommended the model to others in the sector. However, there were a few other suggestions by the expert. For example, the compelling content selection section in the marketing plan is formulated based on the findings from the situation analysis, surveys and interviews. The expert was of the opinion that in addition to the topics suggested in the plan, it would be useful if a company posted content that is related to the stories from within the company or in relation to the company such as customer success stories, company participated research and so on. The overall grade was medium.

6.2.4 Reflection

As a part of the evaluation process, a reflection was made using the SWOT analysis to review the designed plan. The evaluation will help review the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the proposed plan.

Strengths

The evaluation of the marketing plan by a marketing professional from the agri-food sector revealed that the plan has useful marketing actions that can help a company in generating brand awareness and customer acquisition. In addition to this, another strength associated with the plan is that it is supported by theory and is based on the practical case of a company that works in the agri-food sector.

Weaknesses

Although the evaluation by the marketing professional revealed that the plan has useful marketing actions, it was also found that not all actions were found to be useful. As per the evaluation, marketing actions like community building required additional implementation and maintenance efforts. In addition to this, the evaluation revealed that the plan has important topics on which an agri-food company could base their content on, however, the marketing professional pointed that it would also be likely to have content that is based on customer success stories and the research undertaken by a company.

Opportunities

The evaluation revealed that the model could be used in an agri-food company. The model is more likely to be beneficial to small companies with limited digital marketing activities at the time of use of the plan.

Threats

There are no threats as there was no information regarding threats in the evaluation process.

6.2.5 Evaluation limitations

The evaluated marketing plan was found to be useful, however, the evaluation has two main limitations.

- Firstly, the evaluation includes only one expert. It would have been desirable if the plan was evaluated by more marketing professionals. This would have helped the researcher to gain a more deeper understanding of the usefulness of each of the marketing actions, and hence in framing a more in-depth reflection of the marketing plan for companies.
- Although the findings are indicative that the plan has elements that are useful, there is room for formulating a more polished plan either by adding more marketing actions to the existing plan on professionals' advice or by evaluating the existing plan with more follow-up experts. This point is mentioned from a future perspective.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter contains answers to the research questions followed by discussion, limitations of the study, recommendations to the case company and recommendations for future research.

7.1 Conclusion

The main goal of this research was to identify the important marketing actions and channels that help a b2b company operating in the agri-food sector to achieve their marketing goals: generating brand awareness and customer acquisition, and put them together in the form of a marketing plan. In order to formulate the final marketing plan, the case company target audience and the marketing professionals were used as data samples, who were surveyed and interviewed. The main findings from the study includes the following points:

- International trade shows and trade fairs are an established means of marketing, mainly a means of establishing new business contacts in b2b agri-food. The industry considers trade shows and trade fairs as the most traditional and accepted means of expanding business networks.
- Changes in the business environments in the agri-food sector due to covid-19 and even otherwise, has led to an increase in the use of digital mediums for marketing in the sector. Hence in order for the agri-food companies to gain more customers it is essential that they have a well-presented and engaging digital and social media platforms.
- The study revealed the importance of a businesslike website for brands, such that they satisfy customer needs in terms of content posts, website format and others. This holds true for the case company.
- Having a digital strategy helps companies in efficiently reaching their target market, knowing the market trends and reaching the audience accordingly. Digital strategy is important in converting prospects or leads gathered through digital media into permanent customers. In addition to this, a well laid out digital strategy helps businesses overcome obstacles related to the difficulty of finding the right content, difficulty establishing online visibility, gathering online traffic and others.
- Companies that do not post compelling content are more likely to lose industry audiences and eventually customers. Hence it is important that companies need to have fresh, new and different content to stand out.

- E-Word of mouth has a positive impact on the sales cycle of an agri-food company. However, the study did not reveal the ways in which a business can gather digital word of mouth from various parties.

7.2 Answers to research questions

The first research question of this study was “*What digital channels can help in achieving b2b brand awareness and customer acquisition?*”. In order to understand this, the author first tried to understand the magnitude of the overall use of digital and social media channels in the sector. The study revealed that the use of digital and social media channels in the agri-food sector was increasing post covid-19, however, offline international trade fairs and trade shows still seemed to be important for establishing new contacts. The channels that seemed to work the most in the agri-food sector from the research were LinkedIn, website, newsletters and email. Apart from these channels the other channels that were used in the industry were blogs, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

The second research question was “*What digital media actions help in generating brand awareness and customer acquisition?*”. From the literature review, it was seen that actions such as posting compelling content, digital word of mouth, special actions, customer communication and feedback, monitoring and listening, community building and touchpoints to help a b2b business in achieving so. In order to understand the applicability and get an idea of the success rate of these actions in the agri-food sector, the survey respondents and interviewees were asked questions on the same. The study revealed posting compelling content on topics such as industry news, technology, industry best practices, innovative content, scientific research and similar other content to help businesses in attracting new customers. In addition to this, having strong digital word of mouth from industry people was considered to have an impact on reducing the sales cycle period. The study revealed that communicating with the audience through forms and surveys to show that they are important to the business was also helpful in establishing a strong brand loyalty. Special actions such as SEO, SEM and others, and community building were considered to increase brand visibility and strengthen brand identity.

The third research question was “*How to create a marketing plan that matches the set of digital channels and the set of actions such that FarmX can use it in their context?*” In order to understand what would possibly work for the agri-food companies and what would not, the

researcher conducted a situation analysis to analyze the current digital marketing initiatives of the case company, followed by surveys and interviews with customers and marketing professionals. The interviews helped the researcher understand that having a digital strategy was substantially important for achieving any marketing objective. Clarity on the marketing goals, target audience definition, channel selection, a strategy for every channel, strategy assessment or measurement and re-defining or modifying the strategy based on the outcomes were identified as the important aspects of the overall digital strategy.

The fourth research question "*Is the marketing plan useful and usable?*". The answer to this question is provided in chapter 6 with the proposed marketing plan and the evaluation of the plan by a marketing professional. In order to evaluate the plan a UTAUT model questionnaire was used. The main goal of the evaluation was to determine the perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and intentions to use by marketing professionals. The results of the evaluation process indicate that the model could be used to improve brand awareness and customer acquisition in the agri-food sector with most marketing actions from the model. In addition to this the evaluation determines that the model is clear and understandable and is easy to use. However, the evaluation indicates that the evaluation would require a lot of effort.

7.3 Discussion

The results from the study shows that although b2b agri-food companies today realize the potential of digital media for achieving their business objectives, they have not completely discovered the methods through which they can effectively use them in their marketing activities. The research reveals the continuing prevalence of offline traditional methods like trade shows and trade fairs due to the complex nature of relationships in b2b including the technological companies that operate in the agri-food sector. This is due to the belief that trust can only be gained through interpersonal face to face communications. This represents a possible rationale for the limited use of digital and social media in the sector until recently, when certain changes in the business environment due to covid-19 caused businesses to rethink their marketing approaches.

Another major reason why the b2b companies are hesitant to use digital and social media for marketing is due to their unclarity of their audience being present online on digital and social

media. However, the research showed that the audience, particularly of the sector in which the case company operates, are available online and hence companies should put in more effort in reaching out effectively and efficiently to their audience through digital media. However, the research also shows that the companies should first clearly understand their audience, the geographical location, their preferences and others, and make investments accordingly such that they are able to achieve their goals and are able to spend their human and monetary resources efficiently. Hence a preliminary research before establishing an online presence on any channel is essential. Together with a prior research of their audiences' profile, it is also important that the companies look into the cases of other similar-sized companies belonging to different sectors in b2b. Looking into the marketing of other similar sized companies with efficient marketing practices, can help the smaller companies attain an idea of achieving successful results with their limited resources.

The first half of the report shows the digital marketing channels and actions that are helpful in generating brand awareness and customer acquisition from the literature review, while the second half of the report shows the marketing channels and actions that work particularly well for the companies operating in the agri-food sector. Section 6.1 shows the marketing plan for the case company with best practices and suggestions gathered from various sources. These sources include the marketing practices or styles of the companies that are industry leaders, the professionals some of which mainly work as marketers in the same sector and most importantly the industry audience. The plan is framed mainly keeping the agri-food audience in mind and hence the researcher feels that a glimpse of the plan would give companies an understanding of their audience and the other parameters related to them that would help them in formulating their marketing strategies accordingly.

7.4 Limitations

Although there are some valuable results acquired from the research, there also are some limitations associated with this study that must be taken into account when analysing the results and answers to research questions. Firstly, the literature review was done taking into account only one scientific database with limited keyword search and hence limited articles have been used in the literature review of the study. The researcher believes that there must be other literature relevant to this research on other databases and platforms, which have not been taken into account owing to time constraints. This also implies that only a limited set of marketing

actions for brand awareness and customer acquisition have been considered. The researcher believes in the availability of other actions that would help b2b companies in reaching out to more people, increasing their visibility and helping them in customer acquisition. The marketing strategies, channels and actions are put together in the form of a marketing model based on the researcher's understanding of the research topic. Hence, the researcher believes that there is a chance that a different person carrying the same literature review could put together the model in a different way.

The research is mainly focused on increasing the visibility and acquisition of new customers. However, the research uses the collective combination of current and potential customers as the main data sample which forms another limitation of the study. Another limitation that is linked to this limitation is the limited data samples used in the study. For gathering the research data around 11 current customer companies were contacted on which 5 responded and 19 potential customers were contacted of which 6 responded. The number of responses is relatively low considering the overall customer companies in the sector. However, 5 out of 11 forms 45 percent of the current customer respondents and 6 of 19 forms 30 percent of the potential respondents. Considering the small size of the sector the researcher considers 45 and 30 percent respectively to be decent response rates.

The conclusions of this study and the recommendations are purely based on the findings for the case company that assigned the research topic. Hence the marketing channels and the marketing actions recommended to the case company for brand awareness and customer acquisition might not be best suited for other b2b companies, or the marketing actions considered to be ill-suited for the case company might be best suited for other companies. Hence the researcher suggests that the companies conduct a prior research of their audience before determining the marketing actions that best suits them. The results for the research are based on online surveys and interviews and hence using a different approach could lead to different insights. Similarly a different person carrying out the same research using the same approach could come up with different findings and hence the study has limitations with regards to reliability and generalizability.

7.5 Recommendations the case company

The final proposed marketing plan for the company includes digital and social media channels with marketing actions for brand awareness. The plan also includes information on managing the marketing channels and additional points on each of the marketing actions, that is gained from surveys and interviews with customers and marketing professionals. Hence it is important that the case company puts the channels and marketing actions together in the form of a strategy and identifies what marketing action would work best for what channel. It is also important that the marketing actions are measured and evaluated from time to time based on the business objectives they are used for.

Since it is known from the literature review and situation analysis that traditional offline methods are still prevalent in b2b, which are international trade shows and trade fairs in the case of the case company, it is important that the company first does a test of the plan to identify what marketing actions and channels actually work for them. It is not necessary that the case company invest in expensive tools to do so, but generic testing should be done to understand the channels and marketing actions that actually work for the company. An example of this could be posting various content on social media like market news, industry related videos and others, to see what garners the most engagement, shares, likes, comments and other types of reactions on the same. It is also important that together with establishing a strong digital presence, the case company keeps a track of the digital and social media trends in their industry and modify their digital initiatives accordingly. This can help the case company in being seen by more audiences and might eventually help in customer acquisition.

Currently the case company is not so active on their digital platforms. Hence in the context of the marketing actions, the case company should keep posting compelling content regularly on their different platforms. The different content preferred by the sector audience is listed in the marketing plan in section 6.1. In addition to this the case company if not regularly, at least once in a while should communicate with their audience on various topics like the audience feedback on the company products and services, audiences' take on industry related trends and others and take digital marketing actions accordingly.

Finally in order to implement the plan the case company must first identify the goals that are achievable and measurable. This must be followed by understanding the company positioning in the market which can be carried out using situation analysis. This also includes identifying

market competition. This is followed by identifying the target market and the customer personas. Following this is the identification of the customer needs and market research to understand the market trends. Finally choosing the marketing actions that work the best for the company and the evaluation of the actions in terms of KPI's. Finally tweaking the plan depending on the observed outcomes.

7.6 Recommendations for future research

The research includes marketing channels and marketing actions that are derived from the available literature. Hence this gives immense scope for future research on the topic. Firstly, the author thinks that it is important to also look into other literature for more marketing actions for brand awareness and customer acquisition. In addition to this the author also believes that deeper research on each of the marketing actions is beneficial. For example, compelling content selection is one of the identified marketing actions for brand awareness and customer acquisition. Hence future research on the type of digital content for different sectors of b2b, the procedure that goes behind content selection, the challenges associated with utilizing the content for various marketing objectives and similar related topics could be used for future research. The same is applicable to other marketing actions specified in the model.

In addition to this, limited literature was found on some of the marketing actions. These include literature on marketing actions such as 'Increasing brand presence through touch points' and 'Community building'. Hence a recommendation in terms of immediate future research would be to conduct research on these marketing actions and further understand how they contribute to various b2b marketing objectives. In addition to this, E-WOM was found to have an impact on increasing brand awareness and customer acquisition. However, the study did not reveal the ways in which this could be achieved. Hence it would be desirable to explore the various methods that the business could use to stimulate digital word of mouths from their customers.

Finally the current plan is evaluated by a single marketing professional. For building up on the current plan the researcher first recommends a broader evaluation with more professionals followed by more additions to the plan.

7.7 Recommendations for practice

The research has findings on the marketing actions that are beyond the context of the case company. In other words, the marketing actions that are considered to be useful are considered so, based on the responses from the marketing professionals some of whom were marketers in the agri-food sector and the case company customers. Hence, any company that is similar to the case company is capable of using the marketing plan.

The preliminary elements of the marketing plan such as 'Define marketing goals', 'Choose target groups', 'Choose marketing channels' and others are applicable to all companies. However, the findings that are associated with each of the preliminary elements might not be applicable to all companies unless their technology is in place. Hence the researcher considers the plan is apt particularly for the Dutch agri-food companies. This is because most Dutch companies that work in the agricultural sector have technology similar to the technology of the case company and provide similar services to their audience.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Current customer survey questionnaire

Current customer survey

Digital channels

1. What digital or social media platform(s)/methods would you like to use for business? Choose all that apply.
 - a. Email marketing
 - b. Newsletters
 - c. Blogs
 - d. Websites
 - e. LinkedIn
 - f. Facebook
 - g. Instagram
 - h. Twitter
 - i. Short message services
 - j. Others
2. What platforms would you preferably want your business partners (buyers, sellers, mediators and others) to market on? Choose all that apply.
 - a. Email marketing
 - b. Newsletters
 - c. Blogs
 - d. Websites
 - e. LinkedIn
 - f. Facebook
 - g. Instagram
 - h. Twitter
 - i. Short message services
 - j. Others
3. How often do you consider the social media profiles of your potential vendor/seller/buyer while making partnership decisions?
 - a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
4. How often do you go through the websites of your potential business partners (buyers, sellers and others) when making business decisions?
 - a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
5. Would you subscribe to emails/newsletters from a potential buyer/seller/ client/vendor company?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Maybe
6. If yes, how likely is it that you would read and act upon them?
 - a. Always

- b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
- 7. How likely is it that you act upon the search engine advertisements of your potential vendor/buyer/business partner?
 - a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
- 8. How would you usually look for business partners/clients? Choose all that apply.
 - a. Internet
 - b. Social media
 - c. Trade/fair coordinators
 - d. Others

Content

- 9. What type of content is most likely to draw your attention?
 - a. Market news
 - b. Visual content
 - c. Videos
 - d. Blogs
 - e. Newsletters
 - f. Others
- 10. To what extent do you agree that the selling firm's content on social media creates a more favourable image of them among the audiences?
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
- 11. How likely is it that your decision is influenced by the digital/social media content of a company?
 - a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never

E-Word of mouth

- 12. Suppose you like a digital media post of a company, would you be willing to share it on your social media, like a word of mouth?
 - a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
- 13. Consider a situation where you are looking for a company that provides data management solutions and some you closely know (like a business partner or a friend or family member or an acquaintance) suggests you a potential firm, in that case would you contact or approach the firm based on their recommendation?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Maybe

Community building and acquiring customers

- 14. How likely is it that you engage in business related social media conversations ?

- a. Always
- b. Sometimes
- c. Never

LinkedIn

15. Do you have a LinkedIn for business?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
16. Suppose you are not on LinkedIn, do you intend to have a LinkedIn account in the future?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Maybe
 - d. Doesn't apply
17. Did you discover the company on LinkedIn?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
18. How often do you pay attention to advertisements on linkedin (from those that belong to your industry)?
 - a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
 - d. Depends on the situation

Customer feedback

19. How likely is it that if asked for your feedback on a campaign you would give it? (From a company that probably wants to partner with you)
 - a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
 - d. Depends on the situation/company

General

20. How did you hear about FarmX?
21. What sector does your firm belong to and what operations do you handle?
22. Would you like to offer suggestions for improvement on the current FarmX marketing?
23. Would you mind if we contact you in the future?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Maybe

Appendix 2. Target customer survey questionnaire

Digital channels

1. What digital or social media platform(s)/methods would you like to use for business? Choose all that apply.
 - a. Email marketing
 - b. Newsletters
 - c. Blogs
 - d. Websites
 - e. LinkedIn
 - f. Facebook
 - g. Instagram
 - h. Twitter
 - i. Short message services
 - j. Others
2. What platforms would you preferably want your business partners (buyers, sellers, mediators and others) to market on?
Choose all that apply.
 - a. Email marketing
 - b. Newsletters
 - c. Blogs
 - d. Websites
 - e. LinkedIn
 - f. Facebook
 - g. Instagram
 - h. Twitter
 - i. Short message services
 - j. Others
3. How often do you consider the social media profiles of your potential vendor/seller/buyer while making partnership decisions?
 - a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
4. How often do you go through the websites of your potential business partners (buyers, sellers and others)?
 - a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
5. Would you subscribe to emails/newsletters from a potential buyer/seller/ client/vendor company?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Maybe
6. If yes, how likely is it that you would read and act upon them?
 - a. Always

- b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
- 7. How likely is it that you act upon the search engine advertisements of your potential vendor/buyer/business partner?
 - a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
- 8. How would you usually look for business partners/clients? Choose all that apply.
 - a. Internet
 - b. Social media
 - c. Trade/fair coordinators
 - d. Others

Content

- 9. What type of content is most likely to draw your attention?
 - a. Market news
 - b. Visual content
 - c. Videos
 - d. Blogs
 - e. Newsletters
 - f. Others
- 10. To what extent do you agree that the selling firm's content on social media creates a more favourable image of them among the audiences?
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
- 11. How likely is it that your decision is influenced by the digital/social media content of a company?
 - a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never

E-Word of mouth

- 12. Suppose you like a digital media post of a company, would you be willing to share it on your social media, like a word of mouth?
 - a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
- 13. Consider a situation where you are looking for a company that provides data management solutions and some you closely know (like a business partner or a friend or family member or an acquaintance) suggests you a potential firm, in that case would you contact or approach the firm based on their recommendation?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Maybe

Community building and acquiring customers

14. How likely is it that you engage in business related social media conversations ?
- a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never

LinkedIn

15. Do you have a LinkedIn for business?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
16. Suppose you are not on LinkedIn, do you intend to have a LinkedIn account in the future?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Maybe
 - d. Doesn't apply
17. Did you discover the company on LinkedIn?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
18. How often do you pay attention to advertisements on linkedin (from those that belong to your industry)?
- a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
 - d. Depends on the situation

Customer feedback

19. How likely is it that if asked for your feedback on a campaign you would give it? (From a company that probably wants to partner with you)
- a. Always
 - b. Sometimes
 - c. Never
 - d. Depends on the situation/company

Appendix 3. Marketing professionals questionnaire

1. The B2B sector is small and close knit, with smaller target groups and complex purchasing processes. Hence, trust is a significant factor in b2b, as business partnerships are long-term. However, most b2b companies use traditional methods to build that trust. Considering all this, what role do you think digital media plays in b2b?
2. In your opinion, how does the b2b sector utilize digital media for generating brand awareness among its target groups?
3. What are the main digital marketing trends in b2b nowadays, according to you?
4. Is it important that all b2b companies have a digital marketing strategy? If yes, what are the advantages associated with having a digital strategy? If not, why do you think so?
5. How important is the use of social media in b2b nowadays?
6. From your experience, what digital and social media channels are most important in generating brand awareness and help in customer acquisition in b2b?
7. What would be your advice on managing those channels? OR what marketing actions according to you would be helpful in generating brand awareness and customer acquisition (content, choice of platform, community building, touch points)?
8. How according to you is b2b digital and social media marketing conditioned by concepts like a. Content b. Community building c. Monitoring and listening d. Customer communication and feedback (through forms) e. Digital touch points
9. According to you, how important is digital content in b2b? And what type of content would help a b2b company increase its reach and help in engaging its customers?
10. The findings from the literature study of my research shows e-word of mouth (from vendors/sellers/ buyers/ business partners) to help b2b companies increase their reach. What is your take on the e-word of mouth in b2b?
11. Are there any specific practices associated with the digital channels that can help a company increase its reach among the audience?
12. How important are special actions like SEO/SEM/SEA useful in b2b? What is their impact on brand awareness generation and customer acquisition in b2b?
13. Suppose a company has limited marketing manpower/specialists, how would you suggest they handle their digital and social media marketing?
14. How do you suggest that the marketing actions that you specified above be measured?

Appendix 4. Current and target customer interview questionnaire

1. How important is digital or social media in the industry that you work in?
2. On what platforms would you like to see your vendors on and why?
3. What are the essential features and content that you expect to find at a B2B seller's website?
4. When considering a vendor do you consider their social media profiles?
5. How do you usually look for a vendor when purchasing a product or service that you are in need of?
6. In what ways do you use the internet when finding the vendors?
7. Do you subscribe to emails/newsletters from a company? If yes, do you read and act upon them? And how?
8. In your opinion, how is the selling firm's content on social media able to create a more favourable image of them?
9. Does a B2B company's online performance influence your buying decision? If so, in what way?
10. What do you like about FarmX's products currently and what would you suggest for improvements?
11. As a customer of FarmX, how would you rate their digital marketing initiatives? And what suggestions for improvement do you offer?

Appendix 5. Case company digital marketing initiatives questionnaire

1. Goals:

- a. How do you define your brand? Or (how does your brand stand out from the competition?)
- b. How is your business perceived by your current customers?
- c. Do you think you could formulate the specific marketing objectives that the firm aims to achieve in 3-4 years time? What are those?
- d. What brand awareness objectives does the company plan to achieve?
- e. What kind of external brand image do you want to create? (OR how do you want to communicate your brand message to your audience?)
- f. What are your customer acquisition objectives? (ex: number of new customers, specific customers to be targeted, revenues to be earned from new customers, lead generation or others)

2. Target audience:

- a. How do you describe your digital target customers?
- b. Have you researched how your audience uses digital and social media platforms?

3. Digital channels:

- a. What marketing methods/channels do you currently use? Have you tried any others in the past?
- b. How were the objectives different for each platform?
- c. Is there a specific channel that you definitely intend to use in the future? And why?
- d. What social networking sites do you use for marketing?
- e. How coordinated are the channels?
- f. How do you use the marketing channels? (Ex: Websites)
- g. Of all the marketing channels, which one did you discover works the best for you?

4. Marketing approach:

- a. Did you have a marketing strategy in the past? If yes, what worked and what didn't?
 - b. How different is your approach for marketing on social media?
 - c. Are there any specifics to be kept in mind when developing a digital marketing strategy for your business?
 - d. What other aspects of digital marketing did you consider? (Ex: professional and financial)
- Content strategy:
 - a. How often do you post?
 - b. Do you have a strategy for the content you post on your social media? (Ex: a story around your brand or market information etc)
 - c. What is the type of content you usually post? (Rational, emotional or others?)
 - d. Is the content/message tailored according to the channel?
 - Community building and customer relations:
 - a. How have you enabled social media for community building? (Ex: forming connections on LinkedIn, followers, social media communities etc)
 - b. How have you tried building relationships with your community and potential customers? (Ex: conversations)

- Customer communication and feedback:
 - a. How do you consider the customer feedback when implementing the marketing strategy?
 - b. Do you survey your customers to know suggestions for improvement?
- Monitoring:
 - a. How do you monitor the actions of your audiences and listen to them ?
- Ewom and Special actions:
 - a. Have you tried SEO, SEM SEA or other similar marketing actions? If yes, how did it work for you?
 - b. What tools did you use for search marketing?
 - c. What actions do you take for your customers to spread the word of mouth for you on digital platforms?

6. Platform assessment:

- a. How do you evaluate the channels you currently use?
- b. What type of metrics do you use?

Appendix 6. Marketing professionals' evaluation questionnaire

Construct	Indicator	Description	Measurement 1=completely disagree 5-Completely agree Rate from 1- 5
Perceived usefulness	PU1	I consider some of the marketing actions in the model are useful to me	Please rate from 1-5
	PU2	The model can be used to increase brand awareness and customer acquisition	Please rate from 1-5
	PU3	Which actions do you consider useful? a. Compelling content selection b. EWOM c. Touch points d. Customer communication and feedback e. Monitoring and listening f. Special actions g. Community building	Your feedback
Perceived ease of use	PEU1	The model is clear and understandable	Please rate from 1-5
	PEU2	The model is easy to implement	Please rate from 1-5
	PEU3	In your opinion, what needs to be added to the plan such that it is easier to use?	Your feedback
	PEU4	The model is easy to use in case of generating brand awareness and customer acquisition	Please rate from 1-5
Intentions to use	IU1	I intend to use the model	Please rate from 1-5
	IU2	I intend to recommend the model	Please rate from 1-5
	IU3	What changes would you recommend to the model, in your opinion?	Your feedback

