A Report for the New Zealand Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust

Harnessing Social Media in Agriculture

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2013 NZ Nuffield Scholar
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The power of the 21st century is now literally in our hands. We have never before had such a powerful tool to connect with millions of people from the comfort of our own home, and all around the world it is changing the way business is done. Social media has given power to the voice of the everyday man, and whilst that may come with its challenges, the opportunities are there for the taking, especially when it comes to telling the story of New Zealand agriculture.

Social media is now a mainstream form of communication around the world, and continues to grow in popularity with the increase in the number of smartphones, and the ease of use whilst on the go. There are now 1.5 billion users of social networking platforms in the world and other industries have embraced these platforms in business and consumer engagement, however it has not been widely accepted in agriculture. Limited research available shows that there are increasing trends in farmer and agribusiness uptake in social media as the popularity of smartphones increase.

The purpose of this report was to assess the value social media could have for the New Zealand agricultural industry to propel us into the 21st century. By meeting a wide range of farmers, agribusinesses and professionals around the world, particularly in the UK & USA, I discovered four main themes of value for the industry.

The value of social media for the agricultural industry lies in the value of social capital. It brings the farmer, industry and consumer closer together so that there is more transparency, engagement, trust and authenticity in the supply chain. Financial returns are often an indirect result of improved social capital, however this is difficult to measure.

The four key areas of value are:

1. **Networking (Farmer-Farmer)** via social media platforms (such as Twitter) can:
   - Reduce social isolation for farmers
   - Enable farmers & agribusinesses to meet and network with other farmers, agribusinesses and consumers domestically and globally
   - Enable interaction directly with people of influence
   - Provide you with a wealth of knowledge and ideas from a range of sources
   - The AgChat model (Twitter online discussion group), which is widely used in USA, UK, Australia & Ireland, is a great concept for facilitating discussions of industry issues between farmers and agribusinesses.
2. **Industry Knowledge, Extension & Marketing (Farmer – Agricultural Industry)**
   - Marketing using social platforms can enable agribusinesses to connect with a growing farming demographic online by providing content that is of value.
   - Lobbying on social media brings together a collective voice to bring about action and change by interacting with people of influence and power directly. Facilitating large groups of people and discussion around an issue of importance is made easier using these platforms. Examples of this are:
     - UK #sosdairy campaign in which Twitter was used to coordinate protest efforts and spread the message to the public about what farmers were actually getting paid
     - In Australia, the ban on live export brought about a growing number of farmers engaging in social media to lobby to politicians & #supportliveex
   - Extension and knowledge transfer of agricultural practices may reach a wider audience by using social media tools

3. **Consumer Engagement (Farmer/Industry – Consumer)**
   - Connecting and engaging with consumers is becoming more important as our consumers increasingly are using social platforms to make purchasing decisions. Opportunity for producers of food and fibre to use social media as a tool as part of their marketing toolbox.
   - Social Media enables farmers to be part of the conversation surrounding controversial and emotional issues to do with farming practices E.g. animal welfare, genetic modification and environmental issues. People will be talking about our industry whether we are involved or not.
   - Allows farmers and the agricultural industry to better understand our consumers needs and viewpoints
   - Helps build trust by being transparent and authentic

4. **Crisis communication**
   - Communication strategies for the agricultural industry should include social media by using two-way communication with authentic, efficient and transparent voices.
   - Learning’s from the Fonterra botulism case in 2013 highlight the need for effective communication on social media in the agricultural industry.

In all respects it has been acknowledged that social media is not a silver bullet for every communication challenge that the industry has in respects to crisis communication, marketing, lobbying and networking, however it does add a lot of value in conjunction with traditional methods.
My recommendations for getting the best value from social media and the above findings:

- More industry training for farmers and agribusinesses is required so that farmers and agribusinesses understand the capabilities of the tools better.
- Formation of AgChatNZ Twitter discussion forum (currently in the process of this with other industry members).
- Farmers should be utilised more in social media marketing for our produce internationally as they are the human face in the supply chain, which provides authenticity and trust.
- Updated market research is required

We have the opportunity to bring the world to our farm gate and connect to our consumers with authenticity and transparency. We have the responsibility to tell our story to protect our industry, and now we have the power to as well.

“It is not the strongest that survive, nor the most intelligent; but the ones that are most responsive to change”

Charles Darwin
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Sophie Stanley
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This journey has pushed, pulled, stretched and launched me in all different directions and because of it I have continued to grow and develop into the person I am confident of. It is experiences like these that really test your character. But it’s not just what happens, it’s what we decide to do next. This is only the beginning…

Figure 1: 2013 NZ Nuffield Scholars in Ontario, Canada
FOREWORD

My lifetime passion for the New Zealand agricultural industry began from a very early age. I grew up on my parent’s sheep and beef farm in Rangitaiki, 45km south east of Taupo and have been hooked ever since. My grandparents used to call me the “Pied Piper”, often being found out in the front paddock with my pet lambs and calves trailing behind me everywhere I would go (which over time grew to be quite a big flock). After getting my high school education at Tauhara College in Taupo, I went on to Massey University and studied a Bachelor of Science (Agricultural Science) and a Bachelor of Business Studies (Economics). My career then led me to ANZ Bank where I worked as an Agri Manager in Morrinsville with a portfolio 60 dairy farmers. Throughout that time I was involved with Young Farmers as an active member of the Hamilton City Club.

I am someone who has always been hungry for knowledge so I also completed the Kelloggs Rural Leadership course at Lincoln University in 2012 in which I completed a small research project on the value of Brand NZ in our value added primary products in China. Whilst visiting China as part of that study:

- I noticed that more and more people were interacting on their mobile phones, and social media was becoming an extremely popular way of sharing information about brands and products (through word of mouth).
- I noticed the marketing environment was shifting dramatically from push to pull.
- I realised that sometimes we get too focused internally with our industry and forget about the big picture of where our products end up and what our consumers want.
- I noticed that social media could be a key area in which our agricultural industry could better connect to our final consumers to tell our story and understand their needs; particularly since food safety and sustainability are important to many markets.
- I also started to notice the change in the way young people are communicating here in NZ, and like trends around the world, the uptake of smartphones was continuing to increase especially with the younger generation.
- A lot of other industries in NZ and around the world were successfully integrating social media use into their business model, and I questioned why it wasn’t being utilised as...
effectively in the agricultural industry. I wondered if it was even relevant at all? After looking online what was happening in other countries across the world, particularly in the USA and UK, I realised there was also a huge opportunity for farmers to benefit from using social media tools.

I am immensely proud of New Zealand’s agriculture industry and I want to be a part of telling that story to the world. I have always strived to grow as a leader and help inspire others towards the future, and as crazy as it sounds I wanted to help change the world in a positive way. Steve Jobs once said “The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones that actually do”. And that has always stuck with me.

Nuffield has taught me to live permanently outside my comfort zone to challenge you to grow and change. Claudia Batten, one of New Zealand’s great entrepreneurs calls it “living on the squiggly line”. I truly believe that leadership in our industry needs to live in this space to drive New Zealand’s agriculture industry forward. Engaging a mixture of young, fresh minds with experienced heads will allow us to seek the answers to our industry’s most challenging problems. We need to create a culture that continues to push the boundaries and prove to the world that NZ agriculture is a force to be reckoned with. With the world’s population continuing to grow and demanding food, I am confident our industry has a bright future if we continue to stay true to our values, but driving forward towards further innovation and out of the box thinking.

I applied for a Nuffield Farming Scholarship to study something that is slightly left field to most farmers’ minds, to challenge thinking. It is a topic that has had many mixed views when I initially proposed it but something I believe can help prepare our industry for what’s ahead.

I hope you enjoy, and join me on the exciting path towards the future.

Sophie Stanley
28 January 2014
Follow on Twitter to continue the discussion: @sestanley1
“It is not the strongest that survive, nor the most intelligent; but the ones that are most responsive to change”

Charles Darwin
Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

It is staggering to believe that in little as two short decades, the evolution of the Internet and social media has taken place right before our very eyes. It was only in 1991 that the World Wide Web became public, only 15 years since Google was created and only nine years since Facebook was invented in a small Harvard dorm room. We now live in a world where wondering about the unknown is often followed by the phrase "Google it" and people feel as though they have lost their right arm if they don't have their cell phone at the other end of it. The majority of teenagers would find it hard to believe that when I was at high school, Facebook simply didn't exist (and I'm only 27 years old). There are now 1.5 billion users of social technologies in the world, and that number continues to grow (Chui, et al., 2012). In fact social media has been the fastest adopted media technology in history.

But how is this relevant for agriculture?

The way the world communicates now has changed dramatically therefore every industry has had to battle with how it now impacts their business. There are huge opportunities and risks to engaging in these new avenues of communication, all of which must be explored to adapt appropriately in the new world that we live in. 56% of people now use social media when they are finding new food products, and 39% are on social media whilst they are eating (Nelson, 2013).

Word of mouth is now the marketer’s best friend, with opportunities to connect directly to people who others trust. But it doesn't stop here, if communication has changed this much in 20 years, what does the next 20
years hold for us? If we don't adapt and change to the current environment, how will we cope in the future? What is the value of utilising social media in the agricultural industry? If there is value, where do we begin, and how do we get started?

These are all questions I challenged myself with addressing over the course of my six month journey across the world.

**Aims & Objectives**

Social Media use in the New Zealand agricultural industry is still in its infancy compared to other nations around the world. With agriculture being New Zealand's largest export earner, we need to ensure that we continue to attract talented, innovative young people to the industry, and with the rural/urban gap is continuously being challenged, it is important to connect with our consumers so that we can create a positive food story. After all with the world set to increase population to 9 billion people, we need food.

**Goals of Project**

To understand the value of social media to help our industry

- Increase awareness of New Zealand agricultural produce and increasing the value of Brand NZ through social media use (Telling our story more effectively).

- Reduce the rural/urban divide both domestically and internationally, engaging with consumers and engaging young people to enter the industry.

- Improve knowledge sharing between farmers as well as between farmers and industry professionals through the use of social media tools.

**Purpose**

The report is aimed at farmers and agribusiness people who want to learn more about the power of social media in the agricultural industry and its application in the New Zealand environment.

**Methodology**

Initially, a literature review and Internet search was completed to get an understanding of the current use of social media in the agricultural industry in New Zealand and around the world. A search of Twitter, Facebook and Google searches led to finding initial contacts for meetings in the USA, most of which were contacted via social media fields themselves.
As part of my Nuffield travels it was decided that the main part of study would take place in the USA & UK as these countries were identified in my initial literature review as leaders in social networking sphere in most of industries, including agriculture. These countries also use English as their main language, which enabled a lot of the platforms to be analysed.

My travels also included visits to Australia, India, Qatar, France, Ukraine, Turkey & USA as part of the Global Focus Programme of the Nuffield Scholarship. In these countries I was exposed to a wide range of agricultural industries in which communication was a key area of discussion.

I also visited Ireland (similar level of social media use as NZ), Hong Kong (to understand more impacts of Fonterra crisis on NZ agriculture, and how effective communication played a part into how the crisis was handled). Vietnam & Laos were travelled to on the way back to New Zealand.

Interviews & discussions took place with farmers, agribusinesses and other industries, as well as attending a conference on social media in New York City.
Chapter 2
BACKGROUND

What is Social Media?

Social media refers to the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, consume and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. Kaplan & Haenlein (2009) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the ‘creation and exchange of user-generated content.’"

The power of social media is in that it is not a product, but a feature, which allows it to be applied to a whole range of applications that involve interactions between people (Chui, et al., 2012). It also has removed the limitations of geographical distance from users, which enables a platform that shares knowledge and culture, and can play a part in the economic and political power. It also allows businesses and organisations direct access to consumers and their genuine thoughts, giving up to date and relevant information on trends and preferences (Chui, et al., 2012). Social media has become so popular because it taps into one of humans most basic natural needs – forming groups and sharing information, providing entertainment and communicating. In a sense, it goes back to the days of storytelling, where everyone in a group has the opportunity to add to the story or share another point of view, except now you can do that globally.

There are now 1.5 billion users of social technologies in the world, and that number continues to grow (Chui, et al., 2012). This equates to 80% of the world’s online population are interacting on social networks. In fact social media has been the fastest adopted media technology in history and as these applications transfer to smartphones there is no doubt that the number of users will continue to multiply (Chui, et al., 2012). Smartphone sales to first time users in countries such as China and India are also increasing at record pace.

Figure 2 highlights the speed of which social media has been adopted, with...
Twitter only taking 9 months to attract 50 million users compared to 3 years for the Internet and 13 years for the television. Perhaps the rationale for its quick uptake is explained in the fact that it does not require to be purchased, as radio’s televisions and iPods are, but still this speed is staggering.

And it’s no wonder why. Everyday people can now create their own content and share their thoughts directly without relying on intermediary agencies, which enable more opportunities for future success. This has been immensely popular particularly in the music and creative industries but is now moving into mainstream industries where normal everyday people are being heard by expressing their voices on blogs, Twitter and other social media sites. Whether we like it or not, these people are our consumers which we can look at as a huge opportunity or risk.

Social media can even have massive impact on financial markets. Figure 6 shows an example of the impact a hoax tweet sent from the White House Twitter account on the Wall Street financial markets. The tweet said there had been an explosion and President Obama was injured. Almost instantly the markets crashed, later to be stabilised after it was confirmed the tweet was a hoax.

The evolution of social networking has occurred so quickly that it’s difficult to foresee what the social platforms of the future will look like. Fashions and fads come and go and new social platforms may come to the forefront. However, I believe the concept of social networking online is here to stay despite the type of platform used.

“Social media isn’t a fad, it’s a culture changer”
Michele Payn-Knoper
Types of Social Media

**Twitter**

Twitter is an online social media site and micro blogging service, which limits the messages you send to only 140 characters long. Messages or “tweets” give users the power to share and create ideas quickly and efficiently across the world. There are now over 500 million users of Twitter around the world. Given western social networking sites in China are blocked, Sina Weibo is one of China’s versions of Twitter and has 550 million users and growing.

Given it is short, sharp messages it enables users to receive steady stream of content that can include opinions, links to articles and resources that normally you may not have come across yourself. Below is an example of a “tweet” in which I have provided a link to a YouTube video.

![Twitter Example](image)

Personally, I find Twitter the most useful and enjoyable tool for following agricultural interests, networking with other farmers and agribusiness people as well as interacting with entrepreneurs and other inspiring people within and outside of agriculture. If farmers want to join up to social media, I would recommend this be their first place to go.

The rationale behind this is:

- Information comes to your news feed and is quick and easy to look through to find what’s valuable to you.
- Connect with people outside your current circle of contacts, including people of influence

If you are new to Twitter, please see the Appendix for more information on how to use Twitter and what hashtags (#) are used for.

**Facebook**

Facebook is one of the most commonly used and known social media platforms in the western world. It is most commonly used for individuals to connect with their family and friends online and share personal information such as photos, updates and more with your select group of friends.
Privacy settings allow your personal pages to be only accessed by whomever you choose. Facebook is also now widely used for businesses and interest groups to build a fan base and also connect and interact directly with their consumers and clients. There are now approximately 1.4 billion users of Facebook worldwide.

In context of this report I find Facebook to be useful for farmers and industry to connect with consumers. It is also a useful place for more in depth discussions as there is no limit on the number of characters that can be used. Photos and other content can also be shared easily.

**YouTube**

YouTube is a video streaming service which allows users to create and upload videos to the website which then can be shared to anyone worldwide. There are approximately 1 billion unique visitors to the YouTube website each month and 100 hours of video footage is uploaded to YouTube every minute.

Videos are often more appealing to a lot of people as more of their senses are exposed to the content including sound and visuals.

There are countless other social media platforms in existence such as LinkedIn (professional social networking), Instagram (photo sharing platform), Pinterest (Pin board platform for collating ideas), Vine (6 second video clip platform), Blogging (User generated content on subjects of interest) and many, many more. However for the purpose of this report, I will focus mainly on the main three platforms; Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and occasionally blogging.

At the time of publishing this report, these platforms are the most widely used social networks. Over the course of time, this may change, however the common themes of this report should still be relevant.

**Current Research**

Given this social phenomenon is a constantly evolving phenomenon; there is only limited data and research available regarding the current usage of social media in the agricultural industry in New Zealand. However internationally there have been a number of surveys completed to gauge current digital use in the agricultural environment. A snapshot of these are included.

**Canada**

From a survey group of 439 farmers & agribusiness people in Ontario agriculture in 2012:
• 79% stated that they use both the Internet and farming publications as their main source of gathering information related to the industry
• 62% expect their Internet use to increase over the next year.
• 69% of farmers use a smartphone (50% of +55 year olds).
• 84% of farmers have used social media, with 74% stating it was important
• 47% of users believed Twitter was the most valuable agricultural purposed tool
• 68% of respondents believe sharing and capturing knowledge was the most important reason for using social media, with networking and marketing being 49% & 38% respectively.

United Kingdom
A survey of 1000 farmers
• 53% of farmers used Social Media, of which 87% of them described it as effective.
• Top reason for usage in the UK seemed to be more aligned with flagging up farming related issues to the public and government officials
Source: (The Telegraph, 2011)

New Zealand
In 2012, only 32% of New Zealanders had a smartphone. Within a year, that figure had doubled to 60% according to a recent TNS survey in 2013 indicating the massive growth potential of the mobile market (Pullar-Strecker, 2013).
In the rural industry, Waikato based agency King St completed some research in 2012 after surveying 759 farmers (approximately half dairy and half drystock farmers).
• 92% of the farmers surveyed had Internet access
• 55% belonged to an online social community
• 45% of those surveyed owned a smartphone, which is not much below the national numbers.
Source: Fahy (2013)

Sara Russell-Muti (personal communication) estimated through her Kelloggs Rural Leadership research that there are approximately 465 NZ farmers active on Twitter. This was a manual process of searching based on their profile description.
Limitations of this research

As demonstrated in the introduction, changes in technology move rapidly, therefore data that is over a year old may no longer be the most relevant data. The data shown however is the most up to date that could be found at the time of publishing. Also results may depend on geographical location and ability to access rural broadband and mobile services. Full results detailing exact locations and limitations of research were not available.

Value and Social Capital

The most common objection that farmers and agribusinesses mention when discussing social media in the agricultural industry is that they don’t see the value in using it. If we are spending our time with this new technology, we need to ensure that we are using it productively and getting something of value in return. The key question is how do we extract value from digital mediums and use it efficiently with our time instead of becoming a tool for procrastination & duplication of information (Haley, 2013).

In business, often the concept of value can get reduced purely to a financial measurement, or results orientated gain to the business. When talking about social media and its purpose, the concept of value seems to be often misunderstood. Whilst it is generally free to use social networking, there is an opportunity cost of time. For the purpose of the agricultural industry, and most other industries, I believe the value lies in social capital. Social capital is defined as trust, engagement and community involvement (The World Bank, 2011).

It has widely been recognised that access to Internet and mobile services in rural areas is not as commonplace as that of our urban counterparts. While more rural households have access to Internet with the availability of satellite technology, this comes at a lot higher cost and still isn’t available in all areas. Statistics NZ (2013) have found that rural broadband access increased from 55% in 2009 to 68% in 2012. Obviously access to Internet technology via computers or mobile technology is a limitation for the discussion posed in this paper.

It is largely agreed that it is extremely difficult to quantify success in social media however level of engagement levels between users is good initial indicator. Building relationships, builds trust. For businesses and individuals alike, these relationships can then lead to other opportunities and can indirectly lead to financial returns. These online relationships can work well to a point, but it is important then to nurture those relationships in the physical world as well for maximum benefit.
It had been identified over the course of my travels that there were four common themes to the importance of social media in the agricultural industry. Everywhere I travelled in some shape or form, one of these themes continuously came up as a value proposition for the agricultural industry.

The four themes I will concentrate on for the purpose of this study are:

1. **Networking (Farmer – Farmer)**
2. **Industry Knowledge, Extension & Marketing (Farmer – Ag Industry)**
3. **Consumer Engagement (Farmer & Ag Industry – Consumer)**
4. **Crisis Communication**

Payn Knoper (2013) discusses that much of the social media landscape has to do with mindset, not age. Opportunities for learning and networks are available if we open our minds to change and opportunity. Already, a lot of farmers in New Zealand and around the world have joined the new digital revolution and are using it in many effective ways. Typical stereotyping of farmers would have us believe they are not as technologically savvy, however farmers use technology regularly in their farming operations and are recognised as being extremely innovative around the world.

I hope the following chapters challenge the reader’s current mindset on social media platforms and give the reader a different perspective of what value can look like.
Chapter 3: Discussion
1. Networking (Farmer – Farmer)

The formation of social media was initially created to create networking opportunities between people, which allowed for communication over larger distances, and in much quicker timeframes. Therefore it is understandable that one of the first facets of social media investigated was its networking abilities for the rural industry.

It is commonly noted by farmers around the world that farming can be a relatively lonely occupation, which may have you only communicating with your dogs, cows and occasionally your partner on the ordinary day. People find relationships a good source of satisfaction and is one of the reasons social networks have value in farming because it can reduce social isolation.

Networking has widely been recognised as an important part of business and innovation. Holmlund & Fulton (1999) described networks as “associations of individuals or organisations who communicate with each other for mutual benefit”. The presence of networks therefore allows for the access and creation of new knowledge. The potential for increased future value of social media as a networking tool is only as powerful as the users that are engaged in the technology.

Haley (2013) discussed the concept of Metcalfes Law and Reed’s Law, in that the value of a telecommunications network is proportional to the square of the number of users in the system. The more people in the network with similar or common interests, the more appealing it is for more people to join the network.

Advantages
One of the key advantages of social media as a tool in farming is the ability to connect with farmers and agribusiness people from around the world over large geographical distances. The benefits of this can be as large or as small as we choose, depending on how much time we wish to spend on it. Collecting ideas on various farming technique globally and reaching out for opinions were one way farmers are currently using Twitter.
When I returned back to New Zealand from my travels overseas, I was back on the family farm and quickly checked my Twitter feed while I was waiting to head out to do a few farm duties. I saw a tweet from New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE) live tweeting from the Better by Design conference they were having in Auckland. One of the guest speakers was Ken Hong, the General Manager on Sina Weibo, China’s largest social media platform. NZTE were asking if any of their followers had questions that they wanted asked to Ken during question time if there was an opportunity to do so. Since I didn’t have the opportunity to get meet someone of Ken’s authority on my travels, I took the opportunity to engage directly from our farm gate to a conference that was happening many miles away. A short while later, video from the conference was uploaded to YouTube where I had the opportunity to hear a few hours worth of content on the topic of social media and Sina Weibo, all from the comfort of my own home. While my question not directly answered it was covered in his content. It just shows you that we now have direct access to some very innovative and entrepreneurial people, as well as having access to content from a range of conferences that we may not have time (or even the relevant invite) to attend. Another example of this is having the ability to watch speakers from the Oxford Farming Conference in the UK via the Internet. I had never heard of the Oxford Farming Conference before, however Twitter was alight with comments and quotes from all of the speakers at the conference. I was then able to click the links in the tweets, which directed me to the full presentation videos on YouTube.

Social media platforms such as Twitter allows for sharing knowledge and articles of interest in a quick easy format. Knowledge is an input into the farming business, but unlike other agricultural inputs such as 27feed and fuel, knowledge can be used and re-used over and over again by a large number of people at the same time, transformed with new ideas added to it, so that the output is in a stronger form than when it first arrived (Holmlund & Fulton, 1999). The power of
social media is that it is open to be shared universally so that knowledge is not hidden in one person’s email inbox or at a conference with only select attendees.

Disadvantages
Overuse of social networks can lead to procrastination and a tendency to waste time and become addicted to constantly being updated on what is happening around the world. Because the advantages of using the tool have no direct, immediate and easily recognised financial returns, there is an opportunity cost of time that must be acknowledged. Whilst this paper is not going to focus on methods to reduce procrastination on such tools, it is recommended readers are aware of their social media usage and impacts that has on their relationships in real life.

There is also a risk of becoming too reliant on social networks and removing yourself from contact in the physical world. As with any online tool, use of it in moderation is obviously the ideal outcome as face-to-face communication ultimately is a great source of networking and communication. In no way should social media be a replacement for social networks and connections in the physical world, however social media can be a tool used to facilitate those social interactions (E.g. see Case Study 3 on Club Hectare).

Given that anyone can create content and share information, social media platforms are largely unregulated which can account for the spreading of false information and rumours (Haley, 2013). However this more than ever is the reason why agriculture needs to represent itself on these platforms so that if any misinformation is spread about the industry online, these untruths can be corrected.
Case Study 1: The AgChat Model\(^1\)

#Agchat\(^2\) discussion forums are weekly moderated Twitter discussions that were initially founded in the United States by Michele Payn-Knoper in April 2009 along with the complementary discussion, #foodchat. The rationale in starting these discussions was part of Michele’s work to create stronger connections between the farm gate and the consumer plate. As the popularity of the forum grew, discussion forums were held weekly at a certain time slot (E.g. Thursday 8-10pm) and weekly topics that were discussed covered a wide range of topics including sustainability, water issues, public perception of farming, animal welfare, GMO’s and more. The goal of these chats is therefore to provide an open forum to all stakeholders involved in the farming and food to discuss issues that are important. AgChat USA is now run by a group of volunteers under the AgChat Foundation and has nearly 40,000 followers on Twitter. Agchat is now run in several countries around the world including USA, UK, Australia, Ireland, The Netherlands and very soon New Zealand.

The way AgChat works is that a group of moderators who run the discussions post a question every ten or so minutes including the hashtag #agchat or #agrichatUK (depending on what country you are in). Anyone following on the discussion can therefore search all of the answers by others members to the questions by following the above hashtags. Individuals can also respond to the questions using the hashtag. It may sound very complicated on paper (and is very difficult to explain), however the best way to understand is to watch a discussion take place. I have included links to Agchat, AgrichatUK and AgChatOZ in the Appendix for you to find more information.

\(^1\) Based on discussions with Michele Payn-Knoper, John Blue, Emily & Tim Zweber from AgChat USA, and Simon Haley from Agrichat UK.
\(^2\) Please see Appendix 1 for explanation on how Twitter works, what the # hashtag symbol means and further information on how Agchat discussions operate.
Success in Agchat discussions is measured by the level of engagement by the audience and the reach of the tweets that are submitted. People will often retweet answers that they believe are good thoughts or ideas which extends the reach of the message further.

**Case Study 2: Tim & Emily Zweber**

*Organic Farmers, Elko, Minnesota, USA.*

*Emily is also the Executive Director of AgChat Foundation USA & Tim is a director*

Twitter: @zweberfarms & @ezweber

Tim & Emily’s farm which is based just out of the city of Minneapolis, has been in the family since 1906. Now run in partnership with Tim’s parents, they operate an organic milking herd of 100 cows (pasture grazed when possible) as well as finishing steers, hogs and chickens for direct sell to the local market.

I was lucky enough to meet Tim & Emily at their home farm just south of Minneapolis-St Paul in Minnesota USA in mid April 2013. There was still snow on the ground, and certainly made me appreciate the relatively mild winters we have here in New Zealand. I actually met Tim & Emily over Twitter, and organised to meet them through the social media medium.

The Zwebers integrated social media into the farm’s risk management strategy in 2009. “In business you never know when you will need your community for support about an issue”.

They also produce a farm blog, which is updated usually three times a week – with a recipe, info about the farm and education tools for Ag in the Classroom.

I asked Tim why he as a farmer uses Twitter:

1. Time – can get and send information in short/sweet messages. Time efficient (doesn’t have time to sit down and read every newspaper he gets).

2. Enjoyment – likes interacting with people. Farming can be lonely.

3. Strategic – building connections so there is support on issues if required in the future
4. Connections – friends from all over the world.

5. Opinions – seeing different points of views on issues that may normally be covered in mainstream media one sided.

6. Can talk about and promote farm products. Sell most of products direct to consumers, social media makes this possible.

7. Risk Management Strategy – In business you know there will be community to support you.

As I write this report, the Midwest is going through one of the biggest polar freezes of recent history. Minnesota, where Tim & Emily farm, is expected to reach lows of -35 degrees Celsius. The observation I have made from Twitter is there is a real sense of community from farmers around the world sending their support for these farmers through the challenging times.

**Case Study 3: Club Hectare**

Jono Dixon – Arable Farmer, England, United Kingdom

Twitter: @sunkfarmer

*Bringing the social online world into the physical world*

The idea of #clubhectare was originally formed by UK arable farmer Jono Dixon (56) and farm manager Chris Hewis. When they initially realised there was quite a number of arable farmers on Twitter discussing arable farming related issues, they decided it would be good to get out of the online world and meet these people face to face. The #clubhectare hashtag was soon formed and their first meeting started with a get together at the pub where 14 friends in the online world, got to meet in the physical world. The group now has 342 members and is growing globally.

![Jono Dixon @sunkfarmer](image)

Figure 11: Example tweet of how #clubhectare events are organised

The purpose of the club was to provide a forum for like-minded farmers to socially catch up and discuss issues related to their farm and share information, domestically and globally. #clubhectare members chat during the day on Twitter and get together at various times during the year in person. Membership comes by way of the purchase of one of the #clubhectare famous green and
gold polo shirts which a lot of members have their twitter handle also printed on it. Co-founder Jono Dixon described the ability to connect globally was a huge factor, and Twitter is a bit like an “information highway”. Being visual and recognised when members are out and about by wearing their #clubhectare shirts spreads the message and also connects people that may not have otherwise recognised each other.

The common misconception would be that this group was started by a group of young farmers, however Jono at 56 years old believes getting involved in this group changed his life and he has learnt so much more information about his farming practices than he had before forming the group. He wouldn’t describe himself as a “natural techie” but says it is pretty simple to pick up once you give it a go.

1.1 Networking Summary

People find relationships a good source of satisfaction and this is one of the reasons social networks have value.

- Reduce social isolation for farmers
- Enable farmers & agribusinesses to meet and network with other farmers, agribusinesses and consumers domestically and globally
- Enable interaction directly with people of influence
- Provide you with a wealth of knowledge and ideas from a range of sources
- The AgChat model (Twitter online discussion group), which is widely used in USA, UK, Australia & Ireland, is a great concept for networking and facilitating discussions of industry issues between farmers and agribusinesses.

“Networking is not about just connecting people. It’s about connecting people with people, people with ideas, and people with opportunities.”

— Michele Jennae
2. Industry Knowledge, Extension & Marketing (Farmer ↔ Ag Industry)

2.1 Social Media Marketing for Agribusiness

What we can learn from other industries?

With this new communication medium becoming a more popular way for interacting between individuals and organisations, rural business are starting to ask the questions:

- Should we be using Social Media in the rural industry?
- Are farmers even using Social Media?
- If so, how do we get started, and what should we be looking at first?

It is crucial in any aspect of farming to also acknowledge that it is a business like any other. Even though there are some fundamental differences in the way the business operates, the same needs still apply in some basic forms. Communication is key to ensure that businesses understand their stakeholder’s needs. Social media is another medium that is quick and efficient that should be considered especially as the number of users grows.

Smartphone sales in New Zealand doubled from 32% in 2012 to 60% in 2013, and will no doubt increase even further into the year 2014. With the increased uptake of smartphones, the ability to communicate via social media becomes that much easier, therefore should be something on every rural businesses agenda.

Even though social media has only been mainstream over the last 5 or so years, other businesses have been strong on its uptake and rely on it as a crucial part of their business model.

The New Zealand brand Whittaker’s Chocolate is a very good example of a successful connection between the general public and their business, giving consumers a direct way to connect and also promote their brand through use of photos and comments. The word of mouth effect of this has put Whittaker’s into a strong business position and was awarded New Zealand’s most trusted brand in 2013, which social media had a large part to play in that. They currently have over 307,000 likes on their Facebook page and 14,600 Twitter followers. Their fans are engaged brand advocates and they are often found interacting in two way communication regularly with their customers on Twitter and Facebook.
Air New Zealand is another successful New Zealand business that excels in their social media strategy. They almost have 200,000 followers on Twitter, a number of Facebook pages for their different markets and the “AirNZFairy” which grants wishes to their many supporters (and has 40,000 followers on Twitter). They often post photos that their fans have tweeted in from their flights, which help in their marketing efforts.

![Image of Air New Zealand's Twitter post]

Figure 12: Example Tweet from AirNZ flights, which help in their marketing efforts.

**Can rural businesses achieve the same success?**

Perhaps not to the same extent numbers wise in NZ if the business’s target markets are farmers given a smaller demographic of the audience, however rural businesses must look to use different strategies to engage their audience as different things are of interest to them.

One of the initial reasons for approaching the topic of social media in agriculture for my Nuffield research was because I had noticed a larger uptake in the younger generation using these platforms. As social media continues to grow in popularity with the younger generations, and with the older generations as well, there is definitely a space for marketing to fit.

Ed Steining Senior Manager of Digital Strategy & Multichannel marketing from Zoetis Animal Health (based in New York City) discussed the initial need of understanding your audience and being customer centric. If we initially focus on Twitter and Facebook as examples, talking only about your business all of the time reduces people’s interest in what you are talking about as it sounds more like a sales plug. The whole purpose of social media is allowing people to be social and ultimately feel involved in the conversation. It comes back to the idea of authenticity.

Ed also discussed the need for content on social media to be varied. “40% of posts should be social which can connect to emotions, 40% should be category or interest related posts which could be tips and tricks that would be of value and helpful to the customer and finally 20% should be about your product or service”. Using this strategy enables brands to be more authentic and also gives value to the consumer.
Zoetis (formerly Pfizer Animal Health) recently had great success with the implementation of their social strategy with the equine side of their business. With a transition in their branding from Pfizer to Zoetis they wanted to connect more with their customers. Their connection with customers traditionally had been indirect through veterinarians, however they wanted to build a more direct relationship. This lead to the formation of their EQStable Facebook page. The driver was to create a passionate community, which gave horse owners and trainers a place to connect, share information and learn more about animal health solutions. Ensuring content was relevant for the audience and aligned with the goals of the business was extremely important and lead to just over 100,000 likes within the first month of its launch on Facebook. They also reported 29% engagement levels with over 35,000 posts, comments and interactions with their brand.

Rick Stoner, Social Media Strategist for Bader Rutter in Wisconsin USA deals with a number of large Agricultural related firms in their social media strategy. He discussed the fact that video’s and photos often get 12 times more views and shares than normal so should be a key part of any social media strategy.

For agricultural businesses marketing their food, domestically and internationally, there is opportunity too. A study completed by The Hartman Group as discussed by Nelson (2013) suggests that social media has created a new landscape for community in which people share ideas and stories about food. It is well recognised now that consumers are more and more hungry for food with a story behind it, most commonly sustainability. This study showed 52% of Facebook users have liked a food brand while 43% regularly use social media when it comes to planning meals. Facebook and Pinterest are commonly used due to the ability to post photos and recipes for different types of meals. Food blogging has also become incredibly popular worldwide and can have influence over large demographics. One of the more common blogging demographics are the “Mommy Bloggers” which are mothers with one child or more, who contribute to a blog at least monthly. Over 14% of all American mothers identify themselves as “Mommy bloggers” however there is only around 500 that are considered influential (Laird, 2012).

The first important steps for any business looking to expand into the social media field are to:
1. Understand the audience
2. Define your business’s purpose of engagement
3. Choose the appropriate social networking platform
4. Plan your content strategy
5. Listen, and engage

**Case Study 4: The Hideaways Experience – Caroline & Ross Millar**

*Diversified farm business, Scotland, United Kingdom.*

*Website:* http://www.thehideawayexperience.co.uk  
*Facebook:* https://www.facebook.com/thehideawayexperience

Caroline and Ross own a mixed arable farm producing beef, lamb, wheat, oil seed rape and malting barley on 650 acres near Dundee in Scotland and decided to diversify the farm business in 2005 to include a luxury romantic accommodation retreat for couples called The Hideaway Experience. The three cottages take up less than 0.6 of an acre so make no impact on the farm business but provide income that nearly matches that of the farm income. With consumers more readily demanding authentic experiences, a connection to the countryside and locally grown produce, agritourism is becoming more and more popular. People always talk about their experiences from holidays and breaks away to family and friends in person and on social media, therefore utilising social media has become an integral part of Caroline & Ross’s business. Not only that, the consumers are further educated about what happens daily on a farm business which they may then share with friends and family. They run a Facebook page, which has just over 2,500 fans and also a Twitter account, which Caroline shares more of her personal voice. Caroline believes 5% of sales would come directly from social media platforms however if you broke it down to indirect sales that percentage would be a lot higher.
Tripadvisor is one of the most important social media platforms for their tourism business as guests in the accommodation can post reviews of their stay and make recommendations to others. This is a great way of increasing business as people are more likely to trust the word of mouth of others (even if they don’t know them personally), especially when the business has over 97% positive rating score like The Hideaway Experience does (with a high number of reviews as well). From a customer service perspective responding quickly to any problems or issues on the social media platform is key to the reputation of the business. It would be recommended that any farm businesses that is diversifying into tourism or direct selling of their produce have some presence on social media platforms.

2.2 Lobbying

With the Internet now a huge factor in people’s lives, the power of the collective voice now enables powerful change and has reduced the power of authority and money (Haley, 2013). To be able to influence issues in the political or business arena from the power of collective voice has advantages for industries such as agriculture. Politically social media use has been causing collective gatherings the world over. Currently the Ukraine is going through civil uprisings against the government, which have been helped by the use of social media.

Case Study 5: #SOSdairy Campaign, United Kingdom

_Campaigning & lobbying for the greater good of the industry_

With the event of further cuts in milk prices by the majority of dairy processors in the UK, dairy farmers had the prospect of facing terrible losses on their bottom line for the 2012 season. Farmers were set to receive 25p/litre vs. an average cost of production in the UK of approximately 30p/litre. Rationale behind the cuts to farm gate prices was supposedly due to processors undercutting each other to supply retailers at the low prices. Whilst this was achievable when cream prices were high, the collapse of cream prices left milk processors with a problem. To reduce losses, the farm gate price was the first place to be cut, much to the distaste of farmers across the UK.

Within a few weeks approximately 3000 farmers made their way to London to protest the souring turn of events in the industry. Whilst they fought their battle in person by way of peaceful protests, the real power of the campaign was driven in the online world, particularly through the use of Social Media.
Social Media proved in this case, that it provides a faster, easier and quicker way of spreading messages “word of mouth”.

A group of farmers coordinated the movement, and through widespread use of the hashtag #sosdairy, thousands of UK farmers were informed of the events which led to more engagement at the protests. A viral video was also produced which has got as many as 29,000 views during the campaign.

The result of the campaign saw supermarkets and processors gradually back down on prices, some may say there is still room for movement however.

Social Media campaign brought about:

- Awareness to farmers of event activities through widespread use of #sosdairy
- Awareness to consumers of the actual price farmers received for the milk
- Action
- A cohesive voice
- Speed of message transfer
- Created camaraderie and morale between farmers.

Social Media in this case has “enabled people to coordinate and engage in collective action at a scale not previously possible and to create a unified, powerful voice which has disrupted existing power structures” (Chui, et al., 2012).

2.3 Extension

With the number of different communication channels now available, and different demographics using each, there is an opportunity for knowledge transfer to take place in many different fields.

Farm Management Canada utilise a number methods to connect with their farmers to extend information. This group commonly uses multimedia including social media, webinars, group discussions and normal channels such as papers. Heather Watson from Farm Management
Canada said that there is not a silver bullet for everyone therefore utilising different methods satisfies a larger audience.

Farm Management Canada have benefited from engaging in social media increasing their interactivity with their farmers and connecting with unknown stakeholders who aren’t often part of usual extension groups. They believe they get more mileage out of information and resources they produce this way and get interaction from not only a domestic audience but also internationally.

In India, mobile extension is becoming an effective way of transferring knowledge to farmers spread over wide distances. Over 50% of the Indian labour force (around 270 million people) are engaged in the agricultural industry, and only $60m is spent by the government on extension programmes (Cole & Fernando, 2012). The increase in mobile phone ownership is only estimated to be 36% of rural population, which translates to approximately 97 million farmers nationwide. Due to geographic limitations of traditional extension programmes, this is considered a valid option for increasing knowledge transfer within the industry and mobile phones have enabled farmers to use this extension service to access information and ask questions of scientists and experts (Cole & Fernando, 2012). Whilst this does not directly relate to social media use, it is interesting that mobile technology is gaining speed in developing countries such as India. Smartphone ownership in India is expected to surpass the US in 2014 with the current number of smartphones expected to increase from 194 million to 364 million, with a lot of those sales going to first time users (Arthur, 2014). While this may not be representative of rural populations use currently, the future of smartphones in the rural industry may follow along with this trend and social type platforms may evolve.

Opportunities exist for industry organisations such as DairyNZ and Beef & Lamb NZ to use tools such as Twitter to help in the knowledge sharing process. A few Beef & Lamb NZ Extension Managers are already using Twitter very successfully. Further use of the tool could include updates from Focus Farm’s and information about current conditions in the area which are of interest to the farmers (E.g. pasture growth rates etc). Training may be required for staff and farmers to ensure that this is successful however.
2.3 Summary
The agricultural industry in general can benefit from using social media in their businesses in a number of ways. Key points include:

Marketing
- The use of social media as a marketing tool has proved successful in many other industries
- Providing valuable content and using an authentic and transparent voice can connect to farmers. Available research shows that there are farmer demographics using social media, particularly Twitter.
- The younger farmers are using smartphone technology and social media at higher rates therefore gives organisations an ability to connect with different audiences.

Lobbying
- Social Media can bring together a collective voice and can provide power and authority on issues that once were difficult to get to higher political powers. E.g. #sosdairy

Extension
- Utilising different knowledge transfer techniques and social platforms can help disseminate information to a wider audience.
- Twitter is an effective place for different farming techniques to be discussed
- Opportunities for industry organisations to use Twitter more for extension purposes
3. Consumer Engagement
(Farmer & Ag Industry ↔ Consumer)

The most powerful thing I witnessed whilst travelling the world on my Nuffield travels was from observing human nature and how people interact in the year 2013. In New Zealand we are somewhat sheltered from the goings on around the world and I found it extremely valuable getting out and delving into all the world has to offer me.

Sitting on subways in New York City, the suburbs of England, the slums of India, the heat of Doha, Qatar everywhere I went in some shape or form people were talking, interacting or listening to their phone. The smartphone has become, whether we like it or not, a tool that every generation is starting to eat up in droves. In some countries such as Africa and India, they are skipping the stage of the home computer and laptop and entering the mobile age with the rest of the world. If we use it productively, it can therefore become quite powerful.

The second basic observation was that these people are eating the food we produce.

- These people are the reason why New Zealand farmers are in business.
- These are the people that ensure we can enjoy the lifestyle we do in this amazing country.
- We export 95% of our dairy products, 82% beef, 92% lamb as well as a large proportion of horticultural produce such as kiwifruit.
- Our consumers are international therefore our vision for communication should be global as well.

Third observation is that these people are consuming social media in droves. They don’t trust big business and traditional marketing as they once did and marketers have to become more strategic around how they connect. It’s not only our consumers internationally but also the urban population in New Zealand who have a lot to say about the way farming operates here, and how that impacts on how and what we produce.

Authenticity is the power of social media in the farming to consumer food conversation because humans can relate to humans. Often science, figures and research can fall on deaf ears until we can connect with them through emotion and feeling (Payn-Knoper, 2013). If we dump a whole lot of data often people’s defense’s go up and the conversation automatically falls flat.
It all comes back to psychology really. Humans trust humans, not billboards. Humans understand emotion better than facts. Humans have a way now to connect to people all over the world in a click of a button, and say exactly what they think. Word of mouth has always been the most powerful marketing tool, but with the presence of social media, it has become the most powerful tool in a marketer's toolbox. It’s quick, easy, and global, and people trust it.

Connect the dots.

We might not see the direct need for social media at a farm gate level here in New Zealand for a number of reasons.

- Firstly we might believe that the New Zealand population has a relatively good understanding of farming due to our large reliance on it for our economy, and the fact that most people know someone in the farming industry.
- We might not see the need since we don't have GMO’s currently or significant animal welfare issues like some countries to warrant our voice being heard.
- We might believe that it’s our produce exporter’s responsibility to do that job for us, which they will naturally play a large part in this.

However, farmers are the only human face in the whole of the food chain and our customers are mostly international rather than domestic. An understanding of global trends in social media is therefore very important. It’s also our urban counterparts who will increasingly have a larger voice into how farms operate in New Zealand and we are already seeing this in the environmental space at present, which could develop further into other issues in the future.

We have a responsibility to tell our story and engage in conversation.

Payn-Knoper (2013) discussed that if farmers wait to engage in conversation until there is a problem, it’s already too late. I will discuss examples of this further on in this section, but one of these includes the Australian Live Export industry.

“Most people don’t change because they see the light; rather they feel the heat”

Anon
3.1 Power of Storytelling

Storytelling is absolutely key to ensuring that there is a positive connection between farming, the general public and our consumers. Bierman (2012) discusses how the role of storytelling is fundamental in engaging, nourishing, motivating, persuading and gaining cooperation. People are surrounded by stories from their childhood days and are embedded in our culture and life. In fact they help us create emotional connections to things, which make people feel as though they are a part of the story. When consumers can locate themselves inside your story, the will be more likely to believe in the narrative (Bierman, 2012). Stories therefore have to represent the values of what you are trying to sell. Stories can fit well into the social media medium because they are passed through people they trust via word of mouth. They also integrate appealing content such as videos, pictures which can connect to emotions a lot better.

In the case of the New Zealand agricultural industry, storytelling is one of our greatest opportunities. After travelling around the world on my Nuffield travels and returning back to New Zealand you recognise how much we could leverage on our story’s value. The true identity of our agricultural produce that we export has a lot of qualities that are emotive and visual to the end consumer.

“People don’t buy products; they buy the stories of what these products represent”

J Bierman

3.2 Consumer Engagement in USA

The United States is a huge country with only a very small percentage of the population being directly involved in farming. 98.5% of Americans do not live on farms, and 72% of Americans know absolutely nothing about farming (Payn-Knoper, 2013). It is therefore understandable that the American consumer relies heavily on the information that they read or hear in general media and social media to make informed decisions about their food choices. A lot of consumers have not experienced what happens on farms and therefore are subject to a lot of information and misinformation being spread about on farm practices.

The Center of Food Integrity completed a study about consumer’s perception of food supply in the United States. Only 20% believes today’s food supply is safer than when they were growing up
and only 25% strongly believe animals are being treated humanely. 40% of Americans don’t believe the US has a responsibility to provide food for the rest of the world (Payn-Knoper, 2013).

It is these types of statistics that have caused farmers to really get involved in social media “agvocacy” in the States. Michele Payn-Knoper who is a farmer, public speaker, author and agvocate in the US for connecting the farm gate to the consumer’s plate discussed with me that social media isn’t the answer to every communications problem, but is a great way to immediately extend the reach of the minority of the farming population.

The issue of genetic modification, animal welfare and factory farming are hot topic for consumers and farmers alike in the United States and discussion forums such as #agchat and #foodchat aim to better discuss peoples concerns about these issues.

Case Study 6: Chipotle

YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lUtnas5ScSE

An advertising video called “The Scarecrow” from the large fast food chain Chipotle in the US recently played on the negative imagery of factory farming and promoted the more harmonious values of the company by using more free-range agricultural produce in their restaurants. The ad has now received close to 12 million views on YouTube and continues to spread like wildfire as a viral video. With the tagline “Cultivate a better world” the Mexican fast food restaurant chain has used extremely emotive imagery such as a cow trapped in box being milked with sad painful eyes poking out. The values that they are trying to represent in this video include agricultural sustainability and good animal welfare practices however only characterise the good feelings of vegetarianism in their products even though they a large users of meat themselves and offer no alternatives to what positive livestock raising looks like. An article in The New Yorker by Elizabeth Wiess poses the question “Does this video showcase Chipotle’s genuine commitment to sustainability or is it a cynical attempt to turn consumer fears about certain agricultural methods into sales?” My answer to that would be it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter because this powerful video has been seen by millions of consumers and they will make their own minds up based on their feelings and emotions driven from such a powerful video. In simple terms you could say, it worked very well. The video is a finely crafted piece of work, and the power of social media allowed for this to be viewed by millions of people quickly. Given most consumers in America live far away

3 “Agvocacy” is a word that has been created and widely used to represent Advocacy in the Agricultural industry.
from the farm gate, viral videos like this can be their only source of information to what farming looks like. With all the talk of factory farming in today’s media, most people believe that factory farms are commonplace, however 95% of farms in America are family owned (Center for Food Integrity).

Michele Payn Knoper discussed with me that science, no matter how factual, has a hard time trumping emotion therefore when engaging in conversation it is important to not get defensive. Heartfelt messages always win. After the video was released on YouTube, there were a number of agricultural bloggers who discussed the issue online with their viewpoints. One such blogger, Diana Pritchard, contacted Chipotle’s corporate spokesperson Chris Arnold. In the email conversation he discussed the fact that the one time they played their previous ad video “Back to the Start” on television, it sparked an expansive social media conversation. In other words, people were talking about the company whether they liked the message it or not. He said that was the whole point of the ad. Social media in conjunction with traditional marketing therefore allows companies to have their name discussed in a public forum, which will hopefully then result being front of mind.

Anti agriculture activist groups have grown their social media presence 150-fold in 4 years in the US (Payn-Knoper, 2013). The most well known group is PETA, with a Facebook presence of 2,064,500 likes and counting. A lot of the imagery and videos on their Facebook page show horrific cruelty to farm animals, and understandably the audience believe this is representative of all farming practices across America, and the world. Illinois Farm Families study found that people respect farmers but do not trust their practices (Payn-Knoper, 2013). Obviously with these organisations showing the worst of farming, the agricultural industry needs to represent the other side of the story, and how well animals are cared for because often only the bad cases are publicised. I do not support the cruel treatment for animals, and the large majority of farmers treat their animals with kindness and respect which is not what the general public get to see. Social media therefore has enabled the farming population in the States to share their stories of what happens on their farms to get a better represented view of farming in the US. Community is not about an individual, but about individual contributions to a collective cause that’s much bigger than one person (Payn Knoper, 2013). Social media can therefore provide a medium for that community to build. After all, farming practices in the future may more likely be influenced by the general public rather than those within the industry who gauge whether new technology is safe or not.

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4 Diana Pritchard’s blog can be found at www.righteousbacon.com
The Center of Food Integrity in the US have researched that building trust by recognising shared values is 3-5 times more important in building trust than demonstrating competence. This is particularly important when discussing emotional subjects such as food production methods and animal welfare. Instead of getting on the defensive, I believe it is incredibly important to listen and understand consumer concerns as they may have relevant points of discussion that perhaps the industry needs to address better.

The United States is one of New Zealand’s mature markets in terms of exports of our agricultural produce. However it still remains our largest market for beef exports with close to 180,000 tonnes being exported in 2012-2013 (Beef & Lamb NZ, 2013). Whilst not all of that produce is branded NZ product, these consumers will question the products as much as they question their local produce. Due to a lot of premium qualities of NZ produce such as meat being pasture fed, GMO free and free range, it is an attractive feature for the consumers in the States.

“Seek first to understand, then be understood”
Stephen Covey
Building Trust in the Brand of American Agriculture

The US Farmers & Ranchers Alliance is an organisation that is made up of approximately 80 farmer led organisations and agribusinesses with the purpose of engaging in conversations with consumers about how their food is produced. The need for the organisation’s formation came from a realisation that the farmer’s voice was lacking in conversations that were happening about the production of food and often there was misrepresentation in what was being said.

They undertook a large piece of research, which analysed the way the agricultural industry needed to communicate their message. Abby Rinne, Affiliate & Industry Relations Manager discussed that “It’s not what you say, it’s what they hear”.

Overall in terms of food, consumers are concerned with long-term health and anything that is not deemed natural. They realised that providing scientific evidence for safety and quality of food still wasn’t substantial enough to provide a clear message to consumers.
Research found that the following were more productive ways to communicate the message:

- Transparency
- Healthy choices for everyone
- Continuous improvement

Social Media has played a huge part in the conversations and the transparency that they were looking for and allows there to be a dialogue, not just a one-way message.

Since the start up of the organisation in 2011 only 48% of consumers believed food production in America was heading in the right direction. After the launch of the US Farmers & Ranchers Alliance, a year later consumers were 5% more confident in the direction of food production in America.

The “Face’s of Farming” campaign enlisted real farmers to participate in the conversation more by producing blogs, videos and tweetchats and representing the farmer’s voice. Hearing directly from farmers themselves was considered to be trustworthy since other than the point of purchase, the farmer is the only other human face in the food chain.

They also run Food Dialogue events around the US which get together experts from both sides of opinion on topical issues such as genetic modification, antibiotic use and factory farming so that consumers can get a more balanced view hearing both sides of the story. These events are live tweeted and then are then uploaded to YouTube, which are viewable to audiences around the world.

As of December 2013 the organisation had:
Facebook: 303,165 likes (increased from 206,000 likes in April 2013).
Twitter: 13,124 followers
You Tube: 481,482 views
All of the above making 32 million impressions worldwide.

Social Media presence therefore:
- Allowed all sides of the discussion to be involved in open dialogue about food production issues
- A voice that represented farmers views and leading the conversation
- Unity between all farming groups in America
- Long term movement, not just focusing on one campaign
Case Study 8: The Peterson Brothers, Kansas, USA
YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/ThePetersonFarmBros
Facebook: www.facebook.com/PetersonFarmBros

The Peterson Brothers are three young farming brothers from Kansas USA who shot to stardom after creating a viral parody video called “I'm Farming and I grow it” on YouTube singing to the original tune of pop song “I'm sexy and I know it” by LMFAO. Following on from that they produced a video called “Farmer Style” to the tune of infamous “Gangnam Style”. The rationale behind creating entertaining and funny videos was to educate the public further about what actually happens on a family farm in the United States. Making the video entertaining has drawn the audiences in, but they have some serious messages about agriculture as well. They now produce “Life of a Farmer” documentaries on their YouTube channel to their nearly 64,000 subscribers.

They have had a total of 28,895,000 views of their videos and counting and they continue to promote agriculture advocacy via various speaking platforms and engagements as well. Discussions about modern agricultural practices and consumers concerns can often be found on their Facebook page, which has over 113,000 people engaging on it. Overall their videos have led to more positive discussions about farming, in a fun and entertaining way that all ages can appreciate. They have also made farming appeal more to a younger generation by tying in pop culture with the farming lifestyle.
3.3 Consumer Engagement in China

China is now one of our largest export markets for our agricultural produce therefore it is important to understand how social media operates in a Chinese environment and how the consumers interact with these platforms.

The western-based platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are not accessible within China however Chinese are some of the largest consumers of social media in the world. How? They have their own platforms, which are similar in many ways to their western counterparts. One of those such platforms is Sina Weibo, and is the largest in China with around 536 million users (up from 300 million in 2012). Ken Hong General Manager of Sina Weibo discussed that 40% of Sina Weibo users live in the Top Tier Cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou) and it is estimated that Sina Weibo users have 54% of the consumption power in China. 75% of traffic to the social media platform is now through mobile which is generally consistent with the western world. 10 million users interact with brands monthly and 325 million users follow brands on the social media platform. China has the largest number of smartphone users in the world with an estimated 283 million smartphones sold to new users in the coming year. With a population becoming more mobile, social media on the go is becoming one of the largest ways for consumers to interact with brands.

A study by Beijing University found that 85% of consumers actively discuss new products and brands with others on Sina Weibo. With food safety being a hot topic in the Chinese market, there is no doubt that social media is a platform in which consumers are discussing their preferences for food preferences as well. (For further discussion on this see the following section on Crisis Communication).

However it needs to be managed correctly by people who understand the Chinese environment. Direct translation of messages may not always translate to have the same meaning therefore experienced personal in the Chinese market must be considered.

So how does this relate to New Zealand farmers and our product?
The everyday New Zealand farmer won’t be able to tell their story directly on Sina Weibo (unless they have a full comprehension of the Chinese language) however there may be opportunity for our exporting organisations to utilise the farmers voice through a team of Chinese communication experts. Bringing authenticity into the communication channels by using the human face

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5 Data and statistics that follow are from Ken Hong’s presentation at NZTE Conference which can be found on YouTube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OERi4gBMwjw
(particularly the farmers) can add to the emotional experience with consumer’s interaction with the brand.

3.4 Consumer Engagement in UK

Consumer engagement is also a huge issue in the UK, particularly with the small percentage of the population involved in farming. Discerning consumers are more concerned about how their food is produced, the environmental sustainability and where their food comes from.

DEFRA (Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) in the UK have recently had a lot of heat from the general public over a move to run a pilot programme to cull badgers to reduce the spread of bovine TB in the United Kingdom. This culling programme has received a lot of backlash from concerned residents about the animal welfare of their beloved badger population. When the pilots first began there was uproar on social media platforms from a variety of groups and individuals. DEFRA were very active on Twitter and responding to comments that were not directly sent to them in form of commentary. The hashtag #badgercull has become a huge movement from animal rights groups and other concerned citizens. DEFRA ensured they utilised social media monitoring systems to act as an early warning system for emerging issues as well as a tool to prevent panic in situations of emergency (Wheeler, 2013) however given the emotive nature of the topic, it has been a difficult job to get their message across effectively. It has been crucial however that they have been active on social media especially since their opposition groups are extremely active of this medium. Farmers have also joined in on Twitter to get their point of view across on the subject from both sides of the argument. Being involved in the discussion has allowed for a greater understanding from all sides of the issue.

Case Study 9: Jake Freestone, Arable Farmer, United Kingdom

Blog: www.farmerjakef.blogspot.co.uk

YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/user/No1FarmerJake

Twitter: @No1FarmerJake

Jake is the Farm Manager for Overbury Farms in Tewkesbury in the United Kingdom. The estate farm is 1560ha and grows mainly arable crops including milling wheat, malting barley, oilseed rape and beans, as well as irrigated land let for vegetable production and lamb production. The farm is now a LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) Demonstration farm and hosts Open Farm.

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6 Bovine tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium bovis*. It is one of the world’s most serious animal health problems (particularly in cattle & deer) and, in many parts of the developing world, still a major killer. Source: www.tbfree.org.nz

Sophie Stanley
Sundays which invites families and children to come to the countryside to experience farm life and get a better understanding of where their food comes from.

I met Jake as a fellow 2013 Nuffield Scholar at our Nuffield conference at the beginning of 2013 and got to spend more time with him at the estate farm he manages later on in the year as part of my individual travels. Jake is one of the most passionate farmers I have met when it comes to sharing positive messages about farming and agriculture through social media. He began blogging in 2006 on his blog, followed by joining Twitter in 2010 and YouTube in 2011 and is a true advocate for farming in the United Kingdom.

On YouTube, Jake has uploaded 254 videos, which have had approximately 35,760 views since its beginning two years ago. A lot of the content he uploads includes harvest updates, various farm practices and recently, visions of agriculture around the world as he travels for Nuffield. Utilising YouTube is not only for education of non-farmers to on farm practices, but also to share learning’s and practices with other farmers in the UK and around the world. Visual content is often a lot easier to digest and more popular with farmers as they can see how other farmer’s crops are growing, or how harvest is coming along in different areas.

Jake believes that his social media presence helps builds relationships with the public and creates an element of trust and confidence in farmers in the UK. Often we don’t know when the next crisis is going to take place therefore being a farmer that is already respected and well known means his voice will be heard and respected during a crisis.

Utilising Twitter gives Jake the ability to network with farmers all over the world also has its advantages. An example Jake shared was a conversation around a slug problem they were having in one of their crops on Twitter. As it turned out, there were farmers in four different countries around the world that were having similar issues. Discussing the issue enabled them to look for solutions and with the conversation being visible online, other farmers who may have not been online at the time had the opportunity to view the conversation at a later date. Jake now has over 3,900 followers on Twitter ranging from farmers to agribusinesses to consumers.
3.5 Public Engagement & Lobbying in Australia

Case Study 10: Australian Live Export Industry

In May 2011, a documentary was played Australian’s primetime television “Four Corners” which showed footage of animal cruelty of Australian animals that had been live exported to Indonesia. These animals were not on Australian soil, and they had in fact been sold to Indonesian’s in a well cared for and healthy state. However the Australian public found the imagery and knowledge of these practices in Indonesia too much to take, and made a huge public outcry particularly on social media. The animals rights group Animals Australia was at the ready and extremely well prepared in terms of their social media strategy and organisation of rallies to “Ban Live Export”. The Prime Minister of Australia received 100,000 emails and letters regarding the ban of live export and soon after live export was suspended leaving the Northern territory producers and the agricultural industry wondering what was happening with no real voice to contribute cohesively to the discussion. Farmers, like the general public, in no way advocate animal cruelty, and the subsequent implementation of ESCAS (Exporter Supply Chain Assurance Scheme) has enabled significant improvements to animal welfare right up until the point of slaughter in facilities that Australian livestock are exported to. This however has had flow on effects for farmers and its implementation is causing a lot of farmers to further be put under financial pressure. Still however, calls for bans to live export continue despite Australia’s presence in the live export market improving animal welfare standards worldwide.

A lot of farmers in Australia probably didn’t see the need to engage in social media prior to this event happening, but given the lack of voice in the industry once the issue was released (and the powerful voice of groups such as Animals Australia) they realised that it was important for their voice to be heard to give context to such issues.

Michael Trant – Sheep farmer from Western Australia

Blog: www.farmerswayoflife.blogspot.com
Twitter: @farmersway

Michael Trant runs a sheep farm with his wife Gemma and her parent’s 200kms east of Geraldton in Western Australia. The flow on impact of the live export crisis and the implementation of the new ESCAS system has put their business under significant pressure with limited options for where they can sell their stock. In 2011, shortly after the initial footage of cattle in Indonesia was aired, he met fellow farmers on the “Save Live Export” Facebook page and from that branched into
blogging and Twitter to voice his opinions. He explains in his first blog post that he used to associate these types of things with people who had too much time on their hands, which is a common assumption. However his perspective on this changed quickly once the industry he and his family had worked so hard for was being threatened by people who didn’t understand what happens on his farm. When further stories came to light regarding slaughter of sheep in Pakistan in 2012, Michael said the agricultural industry were much better prepared and were comfortable defending their livelihoods in the public domain. He believes social media has played a huge part in educating the public however is not a silver bullet. In terms of lobbying and influencing change with politicians, it takes commitment and presence as they are often up against thousands of opposition.

Kylie Stretton – 7th generation cattle producer, North Queensland

Twitter: @KylieStretton
Facebook: www.facebook.com/askaussiefarmer
Twitter: @AAAFarmer

Kylie and her husband Shane have a small cattle operation selling to live export as well as starting their own livestock agency just prior to the ban in May 2011. This caused their income to drop 90+% which was difficult for their business in the initial stages of business. Kylie decided to join the social media revolution to bridge the divide between the largely metropolitan population of Australia and the farming community. Kylie believes we have to meet these people half way to help them understand farming, therefore she and several other farmers set up a Facebook page called “Ask
an Aussie Farmer” after the Indonesian live export crisis was first aired so the general public could directly connect to farmers. Kylie believes the agricultural industry needs to get farmers to be more involved as they are deemed more trustworthy that large organisations and industry bodies. Industry bodies should supply the tools and resources that allow farmers to become advocates for the industry. Not only that, Kylie has met some incredible people along the way.

An article from ABC Rural published in May 2013 (Brann, 2013) two years after the initial documentary aired, discussed how social media has increased in the rural industry. Jo Bloomfield a cattle producer from the Northern Territory mentions in this article that she felt powerless and isolated prior to joining social media however now she has found a strong community of farmers that were also dealing with the same circumstances. The platforms enable farmers to bust myths, but also remind people that farmers are concerned about animal welfare and want to see the industry improve. The direct access to politicians also enabled the industry to talk directly to the people making the decisions.

As part of the Global Focus Programme for the Nuffield Scholarship, I was lucky enough to visit Qatar and meet with Meat and Livestock Australia in Doha. We got to visit their ESCAS approved slaughter facilities and I was extremely impressed with the standard of animal welfare that was in place in these facilities.

3.5 Consumer Engagement in New Zealand

As I have discussed in the previous sections, there are a wide number of issues that can affect our agricultural industry. Is the New Zealand Agricultural industry prepared to for big issues in ours? We may not have GM crops or serious animal welfare issues now however we are facing increasing pressure around environmental issues, especially in the dairy industry. We may face other issues that we haven’t even contemplated yet, and are we prepared? With technology increasing in the farming industry under more scrutiny recently I believe that our industry needs to be proactive rather than reactive around our communication. A good example of this was opinion piece that farmer Roz Mackenzie (Mackenzie, 2014) responded to in the daily newspapers recently surrounding the image of farming in NZ. Social media can help extend these messages to an even larger audience.

“I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do” – Helen Keller
3.6 Summary

Consumer engagement with food is becoming more important all around the world with consumers having more influence in determining farming practices. It is now more important than ever for farmers and our agricultural industries to connect with our consumers and be a part of the conversation for the future of food production. Social Media allows us to connect to a wide and diverse audience quickly and directly, with a transparent and authentic voice. It’s not only that however, using social media as a listening device to understand our consumers needs and wants can be extremely powerful.

Key Messages

- People will be talking about agriculture or farming practices whether we are involved or not.
- Social Media allows our industry to be part of the conversation with consumers so that there is a balanced view on issues
- Understanding and listening to our consumers needs so that we can better deliver a product they desire
- Building trust between farmers and consumers by having a transparent and authentic voice so they have a resource they can use in times of confusion
- Social media provides a platform for stories to be shared. Stories create emotional connections and can help in marketing our products.
- Social listening to understand consumers concerns about farming practices – some points of view may be relevant and we should listen and not automatically go on the defensive.
- Using conversation to create a better food production system.
- Social media is not a silver bullet however used in moderation with traditional communication methods it has a lot of value.
4. Crisis Communication

Crisis communication has always been an important part of business planning to ensure messages are articulated well if crisis was ever to strike. With the new mediums of social media gaining in popularity with consumers, it’s only natural that a social media strategy is brought into any business model. Given social media is a direct and two way conversation stream it provides a lot of opportunities for businesses (and individuals) in the event of a crisis. The ability to send a message quickly, efficiently and directly to your consumers without your message first being filtered through media outlets, is powerful. The instant nature of social media also allows you to respond directly to any questions concerned consumers may have about your products and allows an element of humanity and compassion to be shown through your own voice. It does come with risks also however due to the fact that social media can highlight negative comments about yourself or business, however if managed quickly and with empathy, it can help realign trust with a brand.

Case Study 11: Fonterra

The importance of crisis communication was brought into the spotlight this year in the New Zealand agricultural industry with the botulism7 scare in Fonterra’s whey protein concentrate which is found in infant formulas and sports drinks produced for export markets.

When the crisis broke in early August 2013, Fonterra advised the public, their affected customers and the Ministry of Primary Industries that there was a quality issue with three batches of whey protein concentrate produced at their Hautapu manufacturing site which likely contained the bacterium clostridium botulism. Following the announcement China decided to temporarily suspend the importation of the whey powder and dairy based powder produced by Fonterra. Throughout all of this, media coverage within New Zealand and globally, particularly China was constant further adding pressure to the confidence issue surrounding New Zealand dairy products. It was only until late August that further testing revealed that there had been a false alarm, and that the bacterium found was not that of clostridium botulism, but another strain clostridium sporogenes, which was harmless therefore deeming the product to be safe. Unfortunately, consumers were already scared and worried that infant formula products from NZ were no longer a safe product (even though the products to be recalled weren’t affecting Fonterra branded infant formulas exported to China).

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7 Botulism is a rare but serious illness caused by a bacterium, which occurs in the soil. Foodborne botulism comes from eating foods contaminated with the toxin (Source: www.foodsafety.gov)
Given the turn of events, and how communication was deemed to be lacking in the first few days of the scare, Fonterra completed a thorough internal review of their processes as well as an independent review taking place. A number of findings and recommendations were suggested including identifying the fact that external communications were not well executed and that a “best practice digital and social media strategy” was required for each key market.

For the purpose of this report, I will focus on how the external communication on social media was handled during the crisis and what we can learn from this specific case so that our agricultural industry can be better prepared in the future. After all, food safety is so important for our consumers, therefore we need to be able to accurately communicate with them in the event of a potential crisis.

The Independent review\(^8\) commissioned by Fonterra suggested Fonterra had not given social media any priority that was warranted in the current wave of communication of the 21\(^{st}\) century given its huge global footprint. It has been suggested since Fonterra has been developing more into a Business to Consumer (B2C) business from Business to Business (B2B) they have not kept up with their own evolution and thus the need to communicate directly with their consumers.

On the 5\(^{th}\) August the communications team advised that they were manually monitoring social media posts however advised since that there was no direct messages to Fonterra they did not believe it necessary to engage in Twitter conversations.

At the time of the crisis, I was travelling in the United Kingdom on my Nuffield travels. The scare didn’t get huge media coverage in the UK as it did in NZ; therefore I turned to social media to get information about what was happening back in New Zealand. My first observation was that Fonterra had not engaged on Twitter or other social media forums in the first few days of the crisis other than a few media release posts. As somebody who was trying to get information direct from the source I found this extremely concerning. The purpose of social media as discussed earlier in this paper is to be “social” or engage in two way conversation. Utilising social media as a one way communication stream defeats the purpose of using the medium as that information can be found in mainstream media. The general commentary on Twitter was from the general public was huge. Fonterra did not have a Facebook page that could be found at that time.

I do applaud the independent review, as there are some sound recommendations on creating an effective social media strategy for the business. The response has been much improved with the recent E.coli recall with NZ cream which shows that appropriate measures have started to be put

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into place. There is no doubt that food safety is of the utmost importance to Fonterra which should be viewed as a positive. However I believe a few key aspects of the recommendations have not been highlighted enough.

A common theme I have identified throughout this report, especially when it comes to consumer engagement (see previous chapter) is authenticity of the voice. Trust in large organisations is difficult to gain if the voice is corporate and doesn’t have a human feel to it. I believe Fonterra and other corporate agribusinesses could improve their social media strategy by increasing their human voice so that people feel like they can connect. It was mentioned in the independent review that this was required in the Chinese market, however should be noted that it is required across the whole organisations strategy, not just the Chinese market. A lot of organisations struggle with applying an authentic voice on social media due to the extreme compliance and authority that they require to post messages online. Organic conversation cannot take place for the fear that the person posting may not say the perfectly approved message. It is acknowledged that this is a risk, however in the name of authenticity, the person/team employed to handle the social media communications should be trusted sufficiently to complete their job to the highest of standards. Mistakes do happen, and that is a risk to any business, however the way organisations deal with those mistakes can help prove authenticity further.

I have mentioned previously in the report how the farmer is often seen as the only “human face” in the supply chain from the farm to the time of purchase of the product. I see opportunity for Fonterra to utilise its farmers in its social media strategy, particularly in the Chinese market. Obviously due to language barriers they would not be able to do this directly, however with Fonterra’s intention following the independent review to have a team to manage their presence in China, farmer messages could be translated and adapted from western social media streams. This is not only applicable to Fonterra, but our other agricultural exporting industries such as the red meat and horticultural industries.

Farmers should be brand advocates for the industry that they are a part of and in the event of a crisis could help on social media platforms at getting the messages across to a wide range of people.

In Canada, a programme created by Farm & Food Care Ontario provides “Speak Up” training to groups of farmers on how to respond to media and on social media if there is a crisis in the agricultural industry. Whilst corporate businesses will naturally respond to these situations, having a farmer point of view can often support the brand message. These farmers can then be called
upon to respond to crisis to give another perspective on issues and provide support in the online environment. This could be an opportunity for the industry.

4.1 Summary

As discussed, social media has now become an integral part of crisis communication plans in all industries. The speed at which news and messages are now spread on these social platforms requires an equally efficient response from an organisation or industry. The New Zealand agricultural industry has certainly learnt a lot recently from the Fonterra case, and all industries should be continuing to put plans in place on how social media can be managed currently and in the future.

The key message I believe for successful crisis communication is:

- Authenticity
- Efficiency and Speed
- Two way communication
CONCLUSION

Social media is now a mainstream form of communication around the world, and continues to grow in popularity with the increase in the number of smartphones, and the ease of use whilst on the go. Other industries have embraced these platforms in business and consumer engagement, however it has not been widely accepted in New Zealand’s agricultural industry. Communication is not a new concept; however changing platforms for communication can seem foreign to some people. Perception of social media as a valuable tool rather than time wasting application is important to change to extend to the value to more people.

The value of social media for the agricultural industry lies in the value of social capital. It brings the farmer, industry and consumer closer together so that there is more transparency, engagement, trust and authenticity in the supply chain.

1. Networking via social media platforms (such as Twitter) can:
   - Reduce social isolation for farmers
   - Enable farmers & agribusinesses to meet and network with other farmers, agribusinesses and consumers domestically and globally
   - Enable interaction directly with people of influence
   - Provide you with a wealth of knowledge and ideas from a range of sources

2. Marketing using social platforms can enable agribusinesses to connect with a growing farming demographic online by providing content that is of value.

3. Lobbying on social media has been popular particularly in the UK as it brings together a collective voice to bring about action and change. E.g. #sosdairy campaign

4. Extension and knowledge transfer of agricultural practices may reach a wider audience by using social media tools

5. Connecting and engaging with consumers is becoming more important as our consumers increasingly are using social platforms to make purchasing decisions
   - Social Media enables farmers to be part of the conversation surrounding controversial and emotional issues to do with farming practices. People will be talking whether we are involved or not.
   - Allows farmers and the agricultural industry to better understand our consumers needs and viewpoints
   - Helps build trust by being transparent and authentic

6. Crisis communication strategies for the agricultural industry should include social media by using two-way communication with authentic, efficient and transparent voices.
My report has highlighted the value that social capital can play in the agricultural industry using some interesting examples from my Nuffield travels. Authenticity and transparency are key themes that will allow the most value to be extracted from these new communication technologies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Industry Organisations provide training tools to help promote engagement with farmers**
   Currently the uptake of social media use in New Zealand agriculture is not at its full potential, however this may be due to lack of understanding and knowledge on how to use the tools. There is an opportunity for industry organisations to help farmers understand how to use social media as part of their business by providing training workshops and resources. Webinars are another tool that could be adopted to help train farmers and agribusinesses to use social media tools. A person with expertise knowledge in the area of social media (such as myself) could be used to train teams and develop a strategy to improve resources in this area. Speak Up training could also be used to give farmers the tools to respond on social media and in the public in the event of a crisis.

2. **Formation of AgChatNZ**
   There are many countries around the world that have adopted the AgChat discussion group model on Twitter that has been very successful in engaging with farmers and industry. Discussions are already underway between myself and a few other NZ farmers and agribusiness people to start this model up this year.

3. **Farmers should be used to help promote our agricultural produce overseas**
   There are opportunities of integrating social media into marketing strategies for our agricultural produce internationally. Given consumers overseas are more concerned with food safety, sustainability and free range (pasture fed), farmers using social media could be used to help promote these brand values of our products. Farmers are the only human face in the whole supply chain from gate to plate therefore have power in creating authenticity and trust between the brand and the consumer.

4. **Agribusinesses should consider developing social media strategy**
   Social media can add value to marketing and crisis communication strategies as communication of our audiences change and adapt. Agribusinesses should be investigating how social media might fit into their business strategy, and how much resources should be used to manage that in comparison to the estimated returns gained.
The same strategy will not be suitable for every business as goals and objectives may differ. Return on investment should not only be measured by financial returns, but by engagement and strength of relationship with customers, which indirectly leads to financial returns.

5. **More up to date market research is required about farmer social media use**

Time and resources were not available for me to complete comprehensive market research in this field. Whilst some studies have been completed, the data may now be out of date since social trends move so fast. More information of farmers habits in this area, particularly understanding what their needs and issues with social media are, may help businesses better align their strategy.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX

Twitter for Farmers: The Field Guide for Beginners

What is Twitter?
Microblogging platform that allows users to communicate using 140 character long messages. Pictures and links to other websites or videos can also be posted.

How do you get started?
1) Go to www.twitter.com and sign up for your free profile
2) Create a username and add profile picture (otherwise you will automatically have an egg as a picture).
3) Write a profile description (this is very important as it will help identify you to other users with similar interests E.g. Farming, fishing, golf!)
4) Start following people or groups that interest you. Here is a quick list of NZ suggestions for first timers to follow if you are interested in the agricultural industry
   - @NZFarmersWeekly – Twitter feed for NZ’s farming publication. Often tweet links to articles and discuss topics of interest in industry.
   - @MorrisonFarming – Will is a NZ Sheep & Beef Farmer from the MangaRa. Follow Will to see a day in the life of a farmer. Often shares great pictures of his farming operation.
   - @NZCows – Colin is a 50/50 Sharemilker near Rotorua. Often discusses industry news, networks and goings on of farm life
   - @AaronJMeikle – Aaron is a Beef & Lamb NZ Extention Manager. Posts great links to interesting info about sheep & beef industry & discussion around industry issues
   - @SteveWilkins10 – 2013 NZ Nuffield Scholar, and arable & mixed livestock farmer.
   - @NuffieldNZ – Our very own Twitter feed to follow travelling scholars & related news

Sophie Stanley
5) Watching and listening might be the best thing to do to start off with. Then start to interact once you feel more confident.

6) And if this doesn’t make sense – find someone who knows how to use this to show you. It’s sometimes easier to watch and learn!

**How do you understand Twitter?**

To the right are some examples of tweets (140 character message) from my Twitter feed.

@ = **Your Twitter name**

@sestanley1 is my Twitter name

You can find & message people by using their Twitter username.

# = **Hashtag.**

Hashtags enable you to search content of a related matter on Twitter easily.

If you search #agchatNZ, you will find all the tweets that have included that hashtag, even if you don’t follow those who posted them.

#nuffield13 is a # we created so that the 2013 Nuffield scholars could search for what their fellow Nuffielders were up to.

You can create your own hashtags.
to align with a topic of conversation. E.g. #nzlamb so consumers could find any related posts about NZ lamb.

**RT = Retweet**
You can choose to “retweet” someone else’s tweet if you would like to share it with your followers. You will see on the previous page several tweets listed as examples have “Retweeted by Sophie Stanley” to indicate the content was not originally mine.

**Favourite**
You can favourite tweets that you like, or want to refer back to later for future reference.
AgChat
Want to know more about AgChat? Want to participate in international AgChat discussions? Check out the following links to see what has been discussed in the past and what it’s all about.

- Agchat USA - Twitter: @agchat
  http://agchat.org/agchat-foodchat
  http://agchat.org/2010/06/archives.html
- AgriChatUK - Twitter: @agrichatuk
  http://www.agrichatuk.org/discussions/
- Archived AgriChatUK discussion particularly on Social Media Use
  http://storify.com/AgriChatUK/agrichatuk-social-media-exploring-its-value-for-ru
- AgChatOZ – Twitter: @AgChatOz
  http://www.agchatoz.org.au
  http://www.agchatoz.org.au/discussion-topics

Social Media: How to Guides
- Michele Payn-Knoper’s website Cause Matters has some great resources
  http://www.causematters.com/ag-social-media/
- The Ohio Farm Bureau put together a great “How to” Guide