

## **How to reach your target group – social media marketing for start-ups**

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**ABSTRACT:** *New media and new platforms – especially online – offer a variety of possibilities of connecting advertisers with their target group. However, due to the large number of different options, it is often difficult to determine which methods or approaches should be used in order to address exactly those people who one actually seeks to reach. Aim of this study was to evaluate target-specific ways of reaching a defined target group together with the start-up company Fitmeal GmbH. Fitmeal GmbH has been selling healthy instant meals in a subscription format to its customers in Vienna since the beginning of 2016. By use of exploratory qualitative research methods, data was collected from a sample, evaluated and suggestions were formulated. Prior to the qualitative study, quantitative data collection in form of user-diaries was conducted to declare which types of media are used significantly by the target group and on which topics one should focus their attention during the interviews..*

**KEYWORDS:** content analysis, Fitmeal, online marketing, social media marketing, start-up

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

This paper addresses theoretical topics on the basis of an existing company and shows how a start-up can benefit from social media activities. Fitmeal GmbH was founded in 2015. The aim of this start-up is to implement a concept in Austria which in many parts of the world is successful already. Essentially, Fitmeal is an online distribution company of healthy fresh ready meals delivered on a weekly basis which is aimed primarily at people who on the one hand want to eat healthy and on the other hand want to invest little time in preparing food. The idea for the project was born in August 2015 among three partners. The basic idea of the project came from the main shareholder and CEO of the company who had lived in the United States for a few years, where he was able to follow the economic success of some companies with similar concepts.

The Fitmeal GmbH describes itself as a sales organization with a high level of logistical challenges as the ready meals are prepared by external companies and delivered by external partners via bicycle and car within Vienna and parcel logistic partners within all of Austria.

Fitmeal GmbH offers an online platform and no other distribution channels. The online presence of Fitmeal GmbH is reachable via [www.fitmeal.at](http://www.fitmeal.at).

The sales organization shall be primarily based on online sales for now; whether other distribution channels such as retail are to be used at a later stage in time has not been defined yet. The focus of the advancement of the company lies on developing and implementing a functioning online business.

In principle, the founders currently focus on two main channels for customer acquisition. On the one hand, as with many online companies, an essential part of branding is carried out on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. On the other hand, the founders see great chances in entering provisioned co-operations with gyms and fitness trainers. Fitmeal's target group is divided into two groups. One part of the target group are people who are active in sports and who hold a gym membership. These are usually in contact with fitness trainers and the sports community, which creates the possibility to address prospects through distributors who earn commissions on success.

However, in this work the researcher focuses mainly on the second part of the target group, namely those persons with a high interest in nutritional subjects, especially for the purpose of a health-conscious diet or the control of body weight, but with less interest in sportive activities.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The founders believe to know ways of addressing one sub-target group, namely the ones with a passion for sports and fitness who are mainly addressable in fitness centers and similar institutes, such as cross-fit centers.

For the other part, namely people with the subjects of diet, fitness nutrition and certain dietary habits like a low carb diet, a suitable marketing strategy has not been developed. It is common sense that an online start-up is promoting its products online, especially in the world of social media, but with a massive amount of opportunities in this sector, Fitmeal intends to have a short list with the best social media channels for their campaigns. The research question therefore is as follows:

How can the target group, consisting of persons with a high interest in nutritional subjects, especially for the purpose of a health-conscious diet or the control of body weight but with less interest in sporting activities, be approached successfully and with little capital expenditure through social media activities?

### 2. Empirical research

This chapter addresses the empirical research and data collection. The first part is supposed to provide an overview about the experimental design. The subsequent section describes the target group of the study as well as the demographical evaluations from Google Analytics followed by pre-evaluation of the sample using user diaries to gain insights for the structured interviews with the sample.

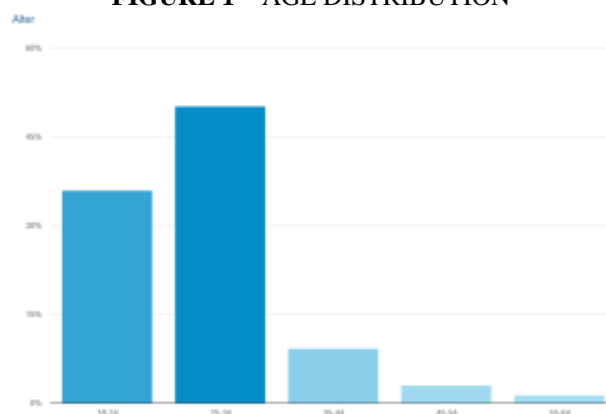
#### i. Experimental design

To answer the explorative research question, six semi-structured interviews have been chosen among the Fitmeal “beta testers” which were carefully chosen according to the research question "strong interest in nutrition issues less interest in sports activities". The Fitmeal project has started up with "beta testers" with a limited number of customers (about 10-20 people). This group of people is ideally suited to identify the first participants for the sample of the research. The selected test persons have one week's time to track their media behavior with user diaries. They had to track their activities regarding the use of social media, newspapers and other information sources. This this is supposed to deliver the basis of certain priorities in the personal interviews. The aim of the interview is to filter possible homogeneous characteristics of this target group among others. Above all, it is important to find out how to reach the sub-target group in the best and most efficient ways.

### 3. The sample

To define the target audience Google Analytics data is used. This displays the behavior of visitors on Fitmeal's website and therefore paints a genuine picture of the potential clientele. Since launch in autumn 2015, the website has had a number of visitors in the four-digit range, which makes the generated visitor data more reliable. Visitors are divided further into two categories, those visiting from interest in the company's offer, and those who use it to complete the ordering process for their subscription, in short: existing customers. The first figure describes the age groups of prospective buyers. This clearly shows the statistics of the age segments visiting [www.fitmeal.at](http://www.fitmeal.at). The majority of the visitors, that is approximately 86% of all, are aged 18-34, the proportion of 25-34 aged lies about 14 percentage points higher than the 18-24 yearolds. As the age grows, the number of visitors decreases. The proportion of 35 - 44 yearolds is 10%, the remaining 4% are 45 - 64 year old visitors.

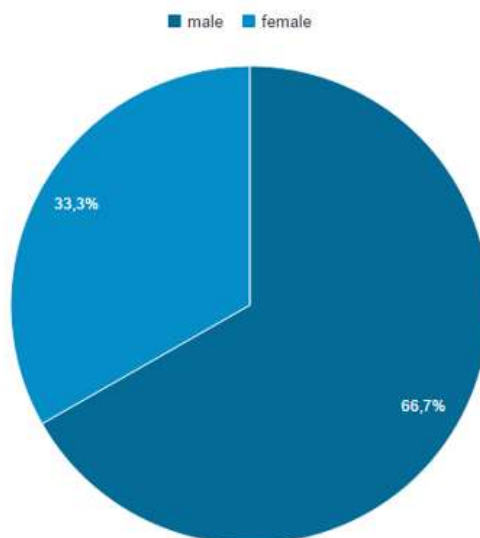
FIGURE 1 – AGE DISTRIBUTION



Source: Google Analytics, [www.fitmeal.at](http://www.fitmeal.at)

Another demographic characteristic that must be considered is that of the gender of users. In the gender breakdown, a crucial difference has been revealed: Approximately two-thirds of all users are male, female visitors are 33.3%. This is an important finding for gender-specific approaches to gain customers.

**FIGURE 2 – GENDER DISTRIBUTION**



Source: Google Analytics, [www.fitmeal.at](http://www.fitmeal.at)

Nevertheless, the author and Fitmeal divided the sample in two same size samples. Into male and female subjects, since these two groups usually have different buying behavior and different behavior of media usage. It may also be necessary to address these groups differently. The subjects have met the following criteria and characteristics for the experimental group to be admitted:

- Interest in the topic of healthy food and lifestyle. However, not in the sense of organic or sustainability issues, but in terms of the composition of the ingredients.
- The time factor should play a role for the subjects. For example, through a demanding profession or hobbies the subjects should gain more leisure time by buying ready meals.
- The third criterium was that sufficient income should be available in order for the "Fitmeal" products to be considered affordable.

The sample for the explorative setup includes six subjects between 19 and 27 years. All live in Vienna and its surroundings. Three of them are female and three are male.

#### **4. User diaries and insights**

Tracking consumer behavior directly and over a longer period of time can be difficult and time consuming. Also, the fact of being watched is very likely to have an impact on what people do and how they behave. User diary studies are based on a group of people keeping a diary, meaning tracking what they do, how often they do it and so on - in short, any activity that is valuable for the research should be noted. After one week of taking notes the diaries were analyzed to check usage patterns and similarities. Even with a minimal amount of subjects, analyzing diaries can be a reliable source of feedback.

For this paper, the research method of structured user diaries was applied. In practice, this means that the subjects received a prefabricated form that they filled out at multiple points in time. The researcher thereby gains a clear picture of the situation. The comparison between participants is facilitated and the analysis of the data amount is also well prepared in structured user diaries. Furthermore, it can be ensured that the areas of interest of the researcher actually occur in the diaries.

The user diaries should serve a first impression of the behavior of the subjects in using certain media. It shows who uses which platforms to learn or entertain themselves and how intensely they do so. All six subjects from the user diary evaluation have also been the subjects for the interviews.

**TABLE 1 – USER DIARIES, MEDIA USAGE**

Media	User in % in the Sampe	Total usage	Daily average usage
Facebook	100,00%	2095,50	49,89
YouTube	100,00%	1515,00	36,07
Newspaper offline	66,67%	80,00	1,90
Magazine offline	50,00%	85,00	2,02
Newspaper online	50,00%	213,00	5,07
Magazine online	33,33%	100,00	2,38
Instagram	16,67%	10,00	0,24
Google+	16,67%	110,00	2,62
Pinterest	16,67%	135,00	3,21
Twitter	0,00%	0,00	0,00
XING	0,00%	0,00	0,00
LinkedIn	0,00%	0,00	0,00
Tumblr	0,00%	0,00	0,00
Others	0,00%	0,00	0,00
Blog	0,00%	0,00	0,00
Internetforum	0,00%	0,00	0,00

Source: Research results

It becomes visible that 100% of the subjects are Facebook users. Another medium that is used by all subjects is YouTube. All other listed media is only used by a smaller percentage of the group. Instagram, Google+ and Pinterest are used by about 17% of the subjects.

Also in the daily average usage Facebook is leading, on average, users spend 50 minutes per day on this social network, again followed by YouTube, where participants spend an average of 36 minutes a day.

The questions on newspaper and print were additionally to the main research topic just in case this would be option in the future.

Since the quantitative analysis showed the online platforms Youtube and Facebook are being used in most cases, the focus of the interview is also set to these two media.

### 5. Qualitative evaluation: guided interviews

An extremely insightful method of qualitative evaluation is the guided interview. It is one of the most popular and most commonly used methods of qualitative research.

The main feature of structured or guided interviews is that the inquiring person has an elaborate list of questions or points the interviewer can work through during the course of the interview. This guide serves only as a reference point and does not require rigorous execution.

By always formulating new, specific questions new impulses can be set. The answers given by the subjects are open and the researcher only leads the interview into a certain direction.

This allows a very open, free and authentic expression of the subjects, which brings an abundance of useful information with it. The researcher chose this type of survey to respond spontaneously and to focus on interesting aspects.

Prerequisite for the guided interview is often a rather narrowly defined field of research. However, the questions should not give too much space for brief answers, because this would resemble quantitative research too much. As an introduction to the survey, a question should be chosen which can be answered very openly. Subsequent to this relatively open impulse, precise questions can follow in order to develop and specify details and arguments.

The guided interview has characteristics of an everyday conversation. Role separation between questioning and respondent must be maintained.

The user diaries have identified the essential media and platforms for the subjects. Therefore, it is relevant in the next step to specifically address these issues and to learn more about user behavior.

The interviews have been about the behavior of the usage and the perception of content, in particular advertising or product-specific pages and accounts. It was to find out where and how it would make sense to address subjects. All those topics that may be useful for this project, were subject of the interview. The aim was to get an idea about the behavior of the subjects and how they react to social media ads.

For the qualitative analysis, the content analysis is used in this work. It focuses on the qualitative content analysis of Philipp Mayring. It was developed in the early 20th century by communication scientists to analyze a variety of media, such as newspaper articles. Initially, the content analysis was carried out mainly quantitative. For example, texts were analyzed according to the frequency of certain words, or the context in which these words have been mentioned. By converting text to numbers there may be problems like the

significant loss of information, which is why in the 20th century Mayring has increasingly improved qualitative methods of content analysis. From a methodological point of view, a qualitative analysis is better suited to the format text as a quantitative approach.

In the qualitative research, the content analysis is used primarily for analyzing interview transcripts. It is suitable for semi-structured interviews in particular. This type of interview is applicable when it comes to researching topics in an exploratory way.

To describe the subject matter sufficiently, in this type of research a variety of material has to be collected, transcribed and analyzed. For this purpose, the content analysis is highly appropriate, because the goal of this analysis is to reveal the materials structure through a systematic reduction of the text.

The basic concept of content analysis by Mayring is the analysis of texts based on category systems that are derived from the material and to continually develop these categories. These categories reflect the meaning in the material. This is the basis for the subsequent interpretation of the material and is the core of the analysis.

In the case of this scientific work, the deductive approach of structuring is applied; the thematic categories, the individual social media channels, were formed in advance and adopted during the analyzing process:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- Youtube
- Newspapers/Magazines online
- Newspapers/Magazines offline
- New ideas

However, this article will set the focus on the social media related categories.

### **III. DISCUSSION& FINDINGS**

This sub-section deals with the findings of each category. A total of seven categories was identified. For each category, it has to be decided if this medium or this channel is suitable for addressing the specific target group and in a further step, the form in which this can be useful. There has also been a category called "new ideas" that is not intended to address a specific channel, but to find alternative approaches to reach the target audience.

#### **Instagram as an advertising platform for the target group**

Instagram is a program specially developed for mobile use (smart phone, tablet) to share photo and video content with one's community. It is one of the most popular and fastest growing social media channels with millions of users worldwide.

It is also possible to switch target-oriented advertising through sponsored photos and videos. But another very popular option is the indirect advertising by certain bloggers and influencers.

Despite the seemingly large spread of Instagram within the population, only one subject uses the program but not very frequently. The subject hardly recognizes any advertising on Instagram or gives it no attention. Very good advertising is perceived by so-called bloggers and influencers responsible for the dissemination of ideas, products and brands.

The subject recommends agreements with bloggers. Possible arrangements could be that a blogger will receive free samples or committing to a monthly challenge with Fitmeal and documents the experiences.

#### **Facebook as an advertising platform for the target group**

Facebook is currently the largest social media platform with hundreds of millions of users worldwide. It is primarily a platform which allows to digitize a private person and to connect it with other digital profiles. This serves to keep in touch with people all over the globe and exchange news and information about life events. Facebook is becoming increasingly interesting for companies and a large area of online marketing, in particular, target group-specific online marketing has moved into this area.

Facebook collects essential information about its users, on the one hand demographic data such as age, place of residence and gender which makes Facebook a particularly attractive place for advertisers. It is usually very difficult to address marketing messages precisely to a defined target group. The scattering losses are very low compared to classic above-the-line instruments, such as TV commercials.

Facebook is one of the two categories used by all interview participants. It is used very intensively and several times a day. The participants use Facebook very passively, which means they often see other people's

opinions, but do not participate very actively in the community. Some of the interviewees also use Facebook as a news platform, which is an alternative to online newspapers and print media.

Almost all interviewees follow various blogs and fitness pages on Facebook and are inspired by these pages in their everyday life. Only one participant has no interest in blog pages.

As a rule, Facebook users also perceive articles and products recommended by friends as very positive. If a user is impressed by a product, restaurant or service in the list of friends, this also has a positive impact on one's own attitude.

Advertising on Facebook is perceived by the subjects in two ways. On the one hand, over sponsored, paid advertisement for certain posts listed in their newsfeed. On the other hand, some of the interviewees also perceive certain blog contributions as advertising. Surprisingly, however, this is only seen by about half of the respondents.

Although paid, sponsored advertising on Facebook is not seen as annoying or unpleasant. Alternative advertising methods such as bloggers or competitions could be more in focus.

As mentioned above, as many of the respondents are influenced and inspired by blog pages, it may have to be considered to set up cooperative ventures with certain bloggers. These agreements could include, for example, free samples in exchange for blog posts.

Another important finding in the daily dealing with Facebook was the design of posts or advertised posts. The majority of the respondents said that in such a post the visual should be in the foreground, the motive should be motivating or entertaining. However, two of the respondents thought that the information of the content was in the most important.

### **YouTube as an advertising platform for the target group**

YouTube is a video sharing platform for computers and mobile devices. YouTube users have a platform where they can share videos with the world or as a passive user to consume videos in a variety of different areas. YouTube also offers the possibility to create an account and follow certain channels.

YouTube is regularly used by each participant in the group of participants. However, the user behavior is very different. Half of the participants use YouTube only to listen to music. Some interviewees use YouTube to watch tutorials on specific topics, such as styling, cooking, and baking.

It was also shown that none of the participants uses a YouTube account, which means that none of the respondents subscribed to a particular channel or blogger.

All participants agreed that advertising on YouTube is disturbing and not useful. All users are annoyed about paid advertising on YouTube, which appears in the form of spots before the beginning of the video or in the middle of the video. These spots are usually not viewed and skipped at the first possibility.

A possible advantage could be advertising by product placement in a video. It is, for example, conceivable to advertise products of Fitmeal GmbH in a low-carb cooking video.

Some users also like to watch videos with high information content, so it would also be conceivable to create original video clips and generate frequency and awareness with useful info videos.

In general, however, the subjects tend to not use this channel for advertising activities. It was considered to be of little use by all subjects.

### **Pinterest as an advertising platform for the target group**

Pinterest as a social network allows users to pin pictures with descriptions to their virtual pin boards. Other users then have the opportunity to share the pinned picture, or to comment on it. The name Pinterest is composed of the English word pin and the word interest. Pinterest currently has about 100 million users worldwide.

The surveyed users of this medium have the feeling that it is not really exposed to advertising. Also, the amount of the Pinterest users seems to be relatively small compared to the sample. Only two of the interviewees regularly use this app.

The respondents agree that advertising in this medium is only done by bloggers at the moment, since no commercial advertising is implemented on this platform.

The interviewees believe that Pinterest is not suitable as an advertising platform for Fitmeal GmbH as a very regional company.

## **IV. CONCLUSION**

In this article, a very specific question for the start-up Fitmeal GmbH was answered using qualitative exploratory research and quantitative research in the form of user diaries that led to question set up for the guided interviews. The results of this study were collected and analyzed in close cooperation with the founders.

Since the number of persons examined is not representative regarding the whole target group, the recommendations in this chapter are by no means to be seen as a generalizable.



Particular attention was paid to answering the questions in the area of online marketing. As the company is one who exclusively uses online distribution channels, this is the logical focus.

With a focus on online media and social networks, the following fields of action have emerged from the content analysis and the user diaries:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- YouTube

Facebook, as expected, the most promising way to create awareness for the brand in a target group with specific characteristics. All subjects use this medium. Recommended key approaches and measures are the following:

- Product placement and co-operation with food blogs. Since many of the interviewees receive their information and inspiration for their diet from food bloggers, this topic has to be defined as a field of action following the insights of the guided interviews.
- Appeal of Facebook competitions. It has emerged from the interviews that this is a good way to achieve high interaction and attention in the target group at a low cost.
- Facebook posts with motivational or entertaining pictures. Regular posts with motivating or entertaining pictures are a relevant task according to the respondents to build the brand. Partially, these posts can also be advertised to increase the range.

Despite the supposedly large distribution of Instagram, the use within the test group is almost nonexistent.

According to the experience in the interviews, it is therefore not recommended to prioritize the subject Instagram.

Similar to Facebook, however, it is possible to consider cooperating with food blogs to advertise Fitmeal's products through the right influencers. Possible agreements could be that a blogger receives free samples for posting about Fitmeal.

Although Pinterest is used by the interviewees, one agrees here that Pinterest is not suitable as an advertising platform for Fitmeal GmbH - a thoroughly regional company.

No interesting and effective strategies could be identified here, which is why this platform is not taken into the action plan.

YouTube is used by all subjects, but advertising on this platform is generally perceived as very disturbing. From the interviews, however, there have nevertheless been valuable references to the possible placement of advertising:

- Content marketing via informative videos, including the creation of a dedicated channel. These content videos can, for example, show the preparation of healthy dishes for cooking.
- Product placement with existing channel owners. Similar to the blogs on Facebook and Instagram, suitable channel operators can be targeted here, and cooperative arrangements regarding product placement can be agreed upon.
- Paid advertising in the form of banners for video connections. Advertising in the form of videos before clips is not recommended but the circuit of advertising banners in selected videos can be quite useful.

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