

# A comparative study into the impact of social media in the equine and agriculture industries



*Martlew, C. F. and Kahn, A.*



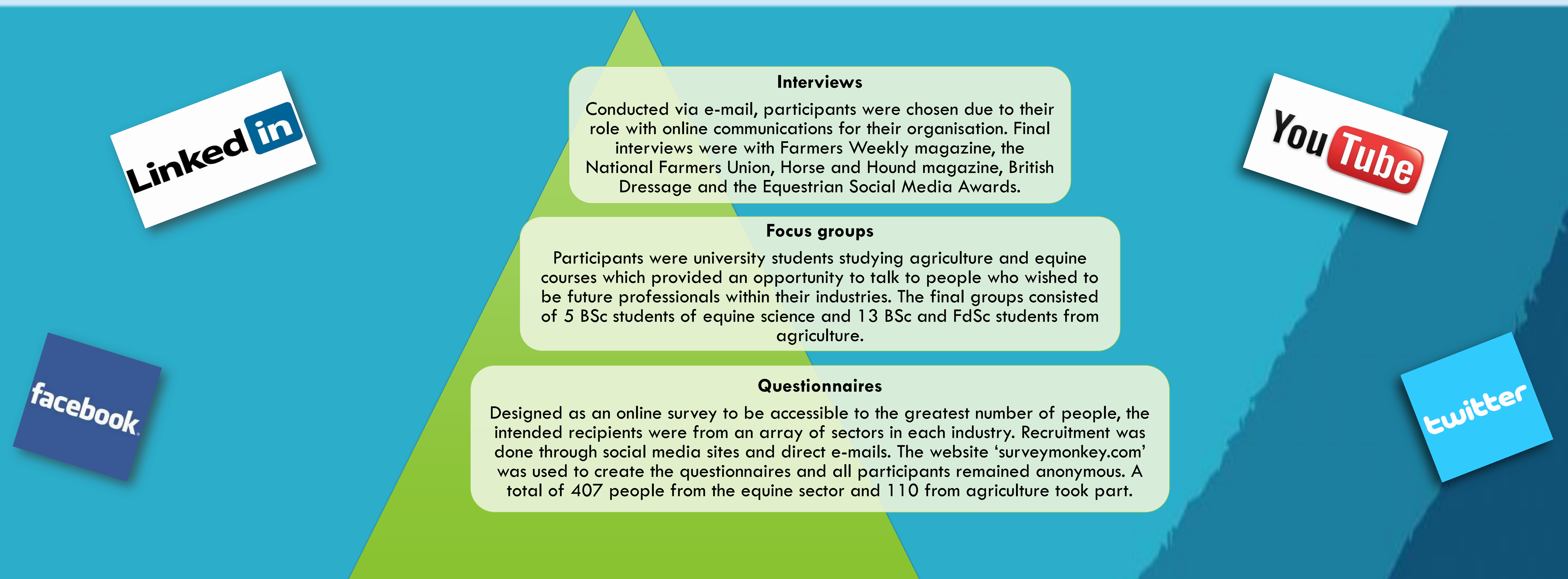
## INTRODUCTION

Social media provides an online platform for free and, relatively, un-mediated file and information sharing between users. Its popularity has made it one of the fastest growing forms of communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This research aimed to answer the question:

***How do participants in equine and agriculture industries use and perceive social media as personal and professional tools for their industry?***

## METHODOLOGY

Questionnaires, interviews and focus groups were utilized to obtain a combination of quantitative and qualitative data which could then be triangulated to provide greater accuracy and insight. Numerical data were subjected to statistical analyses with such tests as Chi squared, Kruskal Wallis and Mann Whitney. P values of 0.05 or less were considered significant.



## RESULTS

### EQUINE

Saw social media as positive for sharing news on events and as a form of marketing for equestrian businesses. They saw negative usage by those who misinformed or made negative comments toward fellow industry participants.

### Interviews

Saw social media as positive for sharing information on disease threats, political actions as well as reducing isolation for farmers and connecting with consumers. Main issues were with antagonists campaigning against industry practices.

### AGRICULTURE

### Focus Groups

Viewed social media as a source of communication between friends and family and less as a professional or industry specific tool. Saw poor online behaviour from equestrians and agreed this would be off-putting to industry outsiders.

Generally familiar only with Facebook and saw older generations of farmers as unlikely to get involved with social media. They also reported on receiving abuse from industry outsiders through such sites.

### Questionnaires

For personal use, equine participants were highly significantly more likely to use Facebook, YouTube and Pinterest; in business use they, again, preferred Facebook. They ranked social media as the second most useful source of industry news and information after websites.

For personal use agriculture participants were highly significantly more likely to use no social media sites and forums; in business use they viewed Twitter as the most popular site. They ranked social media as the third most useful source of industry news and information after websites and magazines.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Equestrians appear to have a stronger social online presence with a steady growth in professional and business use.
- In agriculture, though participants are slower to embrace social media, they seem to have a stronger professional presence and closer community networks.
- Both industries appear to be encouraging more usage in the future though could ensure this happens by focusing on the younger industry members who are beginning their careers.
- In agriculture participants are attempting to address negativity from outsiders by promoting a positive industry image, meanwhile the equine industry must target its own members in reducing the negative use of social media.
- This study would have benefited from a more equal sample size of responses to the online questionnaire and focus groups, as well as more detailed interviews.
- In the future it would be interesting to record how the uses and perceptions of social media develops as the phenomenon continues to grow and technological advancements allow increased participation. Particular attention could be paid to younger generations and whether or not they are truly lacking in awareness of the professional side to social media use by surveying a larger representation.

***Social media is continually growing and shaping people's lives and, as technology advances, the ease of access to such online resources will only increase. The significance of this means the potential for improvements in communication is considerable and cannot be ignored, particularly by industries that are diverse, geographically spread out and sometimes misunderstood by outsiders.***