



ONLINE TRAINING PROGRAMME ON

'Marketing and Network Linkages for Agri Startups'
National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)
Rajendranagar, Hyderabad-500030, Telangana, India
28-30 July 2021



An Online Training Programme on 'Marketing and Network Linkages for Agri Startups' was organized by National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE) during 28-30 July 2021. Dr Sagar Deshmukh and Ms Sharvari Patil, the Course Coordinators for the programme share their insights from the training programme here.

CONTEXT

'Marketing' is one of the most important activities in any business. Agriculture and Agribusiness are no exceptions to that. Nowadays, there are modern trends being set up via Startups through marketing activities. These trends are changing businesses, especially Startups. This online training programme was planned after considering both the needs and opportunities available for improved marketing and stronger network linkages in the field of agriculture. Therefore, to provide updated knowledge and new technologies to the stakeholders involved in agriculture and allied sectors, the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE), Hyderabad, had organized a three-day (28-30 July 2021) virtual training programme on 'Marketing and Network Linkages for Agri Startups'. A heterogeneous group of 51 participants attended. This included senior and middle-level government officials from Central and State Government departments of Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, Sericulture, and Fisheries, along with subject matter specialists from KVKs, faculty members and scientists from Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), State Agricultural Universities (SAUs), Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), students, startups and entrepreneurs from 15 states of India.

MANAGE
Training program
**"Marketing and Network linkages
for Agri Startups"**
July 28-30, 2021

Dr.Sagar Surendra Deshmukh
Course Director

National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)
(An Organization of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, Govt.of India)
<https://www.manage.gov.in/> <http://cia.manage.gov.in>
<http://www.agriclinics.net/>

OBJECTIVES OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

- 1) Sensitize the professionals from agriculture and allied sectors and Agri startups on the importance of 'Marketing' and the means to study it in the digital era.
- 2) Reiterate the importance of Network Linkages and the role played in scaling up of startups.
- 3) Guide participants on implementing Marketing and Network Linkages Strategies for startups.
- 4) Provide exposure to participants with on-ground practitioners/ startups.

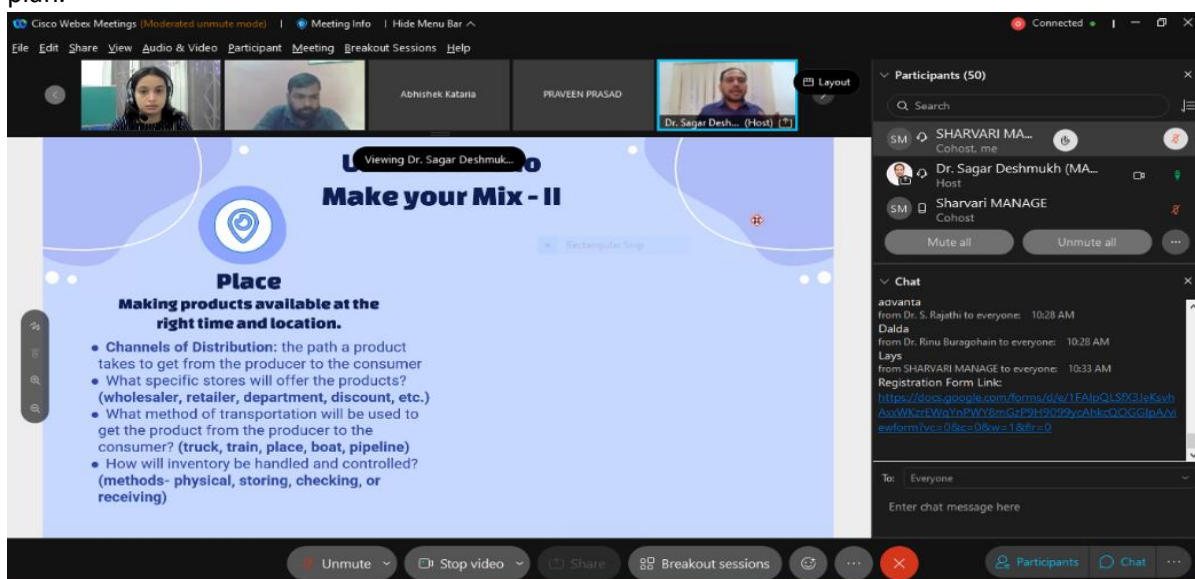
DESIGN OF VIRTUAL TRAINING

The three-day training programme was divided into two sessions, i.e., Knowledge Sharing and Experience Sharing sessions. Experts from the field of Agricultural Marketing and successful Agri Startups conducted the sessions. Knowledge sharing sessions provided contexts to the subjects, as well as theoretical concepts and recent trends pertinent to that subject. Authentic personnel from startups shared their experiences in sessions with real time information about actual challenges faced by startups (see Boxes 1, 2 and 3). The brainstorming sessions helped participants to get a deeper understanding of the topics. On the last day of the training programme, a quiz was held for the trainees on the training sessions to test them on what they had actually learned. Their feedback was collected for better training programme delivery in future.

KEY EXCERPTS FROM THE SESSIONS

Importance of Marketing and Network Linkages for Startups

Many new startups have failed after a few months for many reasons. These reasons include: getting out of competition, selecting a weak team, running out of cash, pricing issues, ignoring customers, lack of a business model, and most importantly weak marketing and networking strategies. The marketing environment is closely connected to the company's capabilities and customer needs. Before planning the marketing process, startups should focus on the following: Where are they? Where do they want to go? How do they get there? The five critical points in marketing are – Uniqueness of their product, Target buyer, Competitor, Product positioning, and Sales strategy. Based on these points they can plan the marketing strategies of their business. The success of marketing can be realized only when the designed strategies are aligned with the broader categories in the marketing plan.

A screenshot of a Cisco Webex meeting. The main content is a presentation slide titled "Make your Mix - II" with a sub-section "Place" that reads "Making products available at the right time and location." Below this, there are bullet points: "Channels of Distribution: the path a product takes to get from the producer to the consumer", "What specific stores will offer the products? (wholesaler, retailer, department, discount, etc.)", "What method of transportation will be used to get the product from the producer to the consumer? (truck, train, place, boat, pipeline)", and "How will inventory be handled and controlled? (methods- physical, storing, checking, or receiving)". The meeting interface shows several participants in a grid at the top, a "Participants (50)" list on the right, and a "Chat" window at the bottom right with messages from "advanta", "Dada", "Lays", and "SHARVARI MANAGE". The bottom control bar includes buttons for "Unmute", "Stop video", "Share", "Breakout sessions", and "Participants/Chat".

Dr Sagar Deshmukh, Assistant Professor (Agribusiness Management) at MANAGE shared his views during the training programme.

The *Marketing Plan* should be based on facts and valid assumptions, it should be short and simple, and 'What if' scenarios should be built in. It should provide a strategy for fulfilling common goals, provide continuity year on year, as well as specify performance criteria that will be monitored/measured. Startups must combine the best in the marketing mix (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) to reach the target market. SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) marketing goals must be to Increase sales revenue by 20%, Improve customer loyalty and retention by 10%, Acquire 10,000 new monthly subscribers, and Gain 5% market share. Strategic marketing tactics can help to retain existing customers for a long time, for example, either by running banner ads monthly on the XYZ website or by sending 10,000 direct mail pieces to existing customers in a month. Networking linkages play a crucial role in the growth of startups. It helps them to focus on learning and identifying common interests; it helps any business to think broadly about what they can give, whether it be knowledge, gratitude, or recognition. Meetings, exhibitions, volunteer work, social media groups, finding/starting a meetup, web courses/webinars, conferences, cold emailing are the important means of networking and marketing for startups. *Networking* connects any business with other businesses, with well-established owners who can serve as mentors/guides and offer moral support during the startup process. Networking is a great way to find prospective customers, partners, and investors. Access to referrals helps in solving issues. Box 1 discusses the experience of a startup – Natura Crop Care – and provides insights about the marketing strategy they adopted in their business model.

Box 1. Experience of a Startup - Natura Crop Care

Natura Crop Care is a unique startup having an invaluable understanding of microbial plant interactions in nature. Natura is validating the current scenario of increasing sustainable agri-horticulture produce across the world. It has developed biological and botanical products to meet the demand for residue-free produce. These products are serving farmers across the globe in plant-soil health management and plant nutrition management. Natura products help farmers around the globe to control diseases and pests, improve plant immunity giving healthier yields, and simultaneously reducing risks of resistance development in pests. All these products have been tested in various field trials under different agro-climatic conditions in reputed agricultural universities, and continuously re-validated. Bio pesticides are registered with Central Insecticide Board (CIB) and Bio fertilizers under Fertilizer Control Order (FCO). All products are suitable for organic farming. (<http://naturacropcare.com/about-us/>). The vision of Natura Crop Care is to work towards a healthier planet by bridging the gaps between research and extension through safe and sustainable farming inputs, developing precise farming practices for healthy crops and healthy yields. Their mission is to work towards a healthier planet by bridging the gaps between research and extension through safe and sustainable farming inputs, developing precise farming practices for healthy crops and healthy yields.

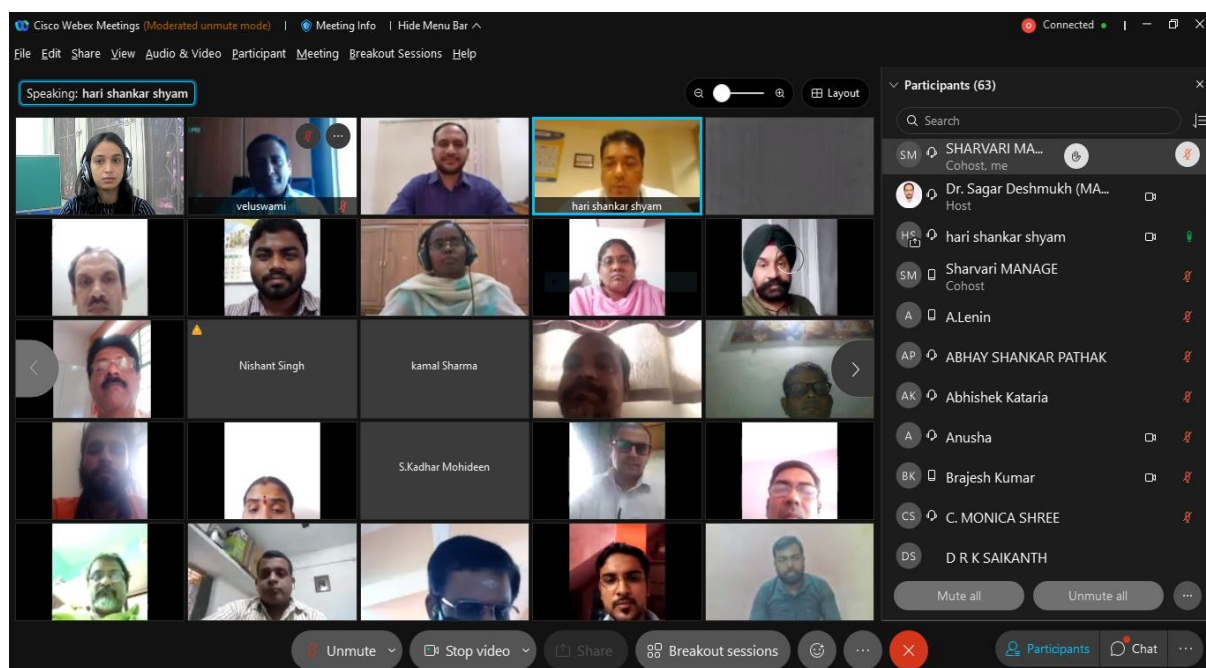
Natura Crop Care's product strategy is to offer different ranges and innovative products to the farmers and the results of their products earn them strong farmer loyalty. Providing crop schedules to the farmers create value in their services. Natura Crop Care has collaborated with IFFCO, which was one of the best promotional strategies they have used. The business model of Natura Crop Care for marketing purpose is made up of village-level entrepreneurs and FPOs. The village-level entrepreneur gives a demonstration in village and in neighbouring areas. If farmers face any problem related to their farms, then the entrepreneurs give solutions using Natura Crop Care products. The company gives products to the entrepreneur on a credit basis because once the farmer uses the product and sees the positive effects in their field then they become their regular customers. This is also one of the important pricing strategies of the company.

Natura Crop Care has won awards from various national and international institutions in recognition of their work.

Mr Manoj Kumar Rupa, Managing Partner of Natura Crop Care presented this interactive session and he concluded with a quote from Michael LeBeouf, "A satisfied customer is the best business strategy of all".

Trends in Digital Marketing and Networking

New startups are generally more focused on product innovation, but today there is a need to not only focus on product innovation but also on making it commercially accepted. Traditionally, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets were used for marketing, now the trend is changing, and digital marketing is taking over from traditional marketing. Here, marketing is done through social media, websites, etc., which is helpful in connecting to the right audience, to find new markets and trade globally. It also lowers the cost of marketing and improves conversion rates. Digital marketing includes the use of social media marketing, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Search Engine Marketing/Pay per Click (SEM/PPC), affiliate, influencer marketing, video marketing, and email marketing to expand the business. The social media platforms could be Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram. *Search Engine Optimization (SEO)* is the process of improving the visibility of the website when people search for any product and service, which is used to grab the attention of customers and thus increase sales. *Affiliate marketing* is a type of marketing where individuals (affiliates) promote any business and advertise the product or services of any business in exchange for a commission. Affiliates can promote the business by using the website, blogs, links as well as discount codes. *Influencer marketing* is a type of social media marketing where businesses use experts or influences related to their products to advertise them, which then creates a big impact on the minds of customers. Customers start to take interest in products or services and automatically sales figures go up.



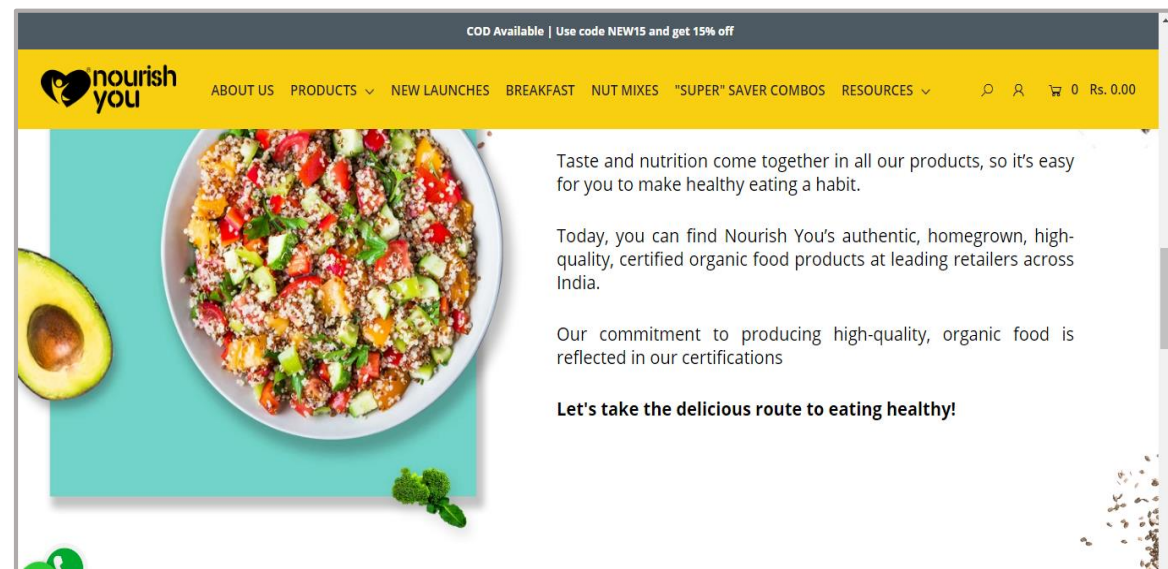
Dr Hari Shankar Shyam, Corporate Trainer & HOD, Sharda University, delivered a session on 'Trends in Digital Marketing and Networking'.

In addition, there are different free digital marketing tools that can be used to market product and services. Some of the digital marketing tools are: Google Trends, Ubersuggest, Google Analytics, Fanpage Karma, Hunter, and LinkedIn. *Google Trends* is used by marketers to better understand what audiences are interested in and curious about, in real-time. By using this tool, one can virtually showcase the trends in the companies like Apple, Samsung, Xiaomi, etc. (<https://trends.google.com/trends/?geo=IN>). *Ubersuggest* provides insights into the strategies that are working for others in the market, so then other people can adopt them, improve on them, and gain an edge (<https://app.neilpatel.com/en/ubersuggest/>). *Google Analytics* provides statistical data of any activity, e.g., how many people visited the website? What do they search for? And many more,

which can be helpful to any business person to identify a gap on which he/she needs to work for the growth of the business (<https://analytics.google.com/analytics/web/provision/#/provision>). *Fanpagekarma* helps in four aspects: Analytics, Engage, Publish, and Discovery. It helps to analyse social media interactions and those of the competitors in real-time, it communicates with fans and customers quickly and efficiently on all channels. It helps in composing, planning, and publishing posts (<https://www.fanpagekarma.com/>). *Hunter* is a digital marketing and online optimization agency – it helps in Paid Search, Social Media Advertising, and Conversion Optimization and delivers data-driven insights, bringing out client’s metrics that make the biggest difference in their success. (<https://hunterdigitalmarketing.com/about/>). *LinkedIn* is the world's largest professional network on the internet. It can be used to find the right job or internship, connect and strengthen professional relationships, and learn the skills needed to succeed in a career (https://www.linkedin.com/feed/?trk=IN-SEM_google-adwords_Jordan-brand-sign-up).

Box 2. Experience of a Startup - Kilaru Naturals & Nourish You

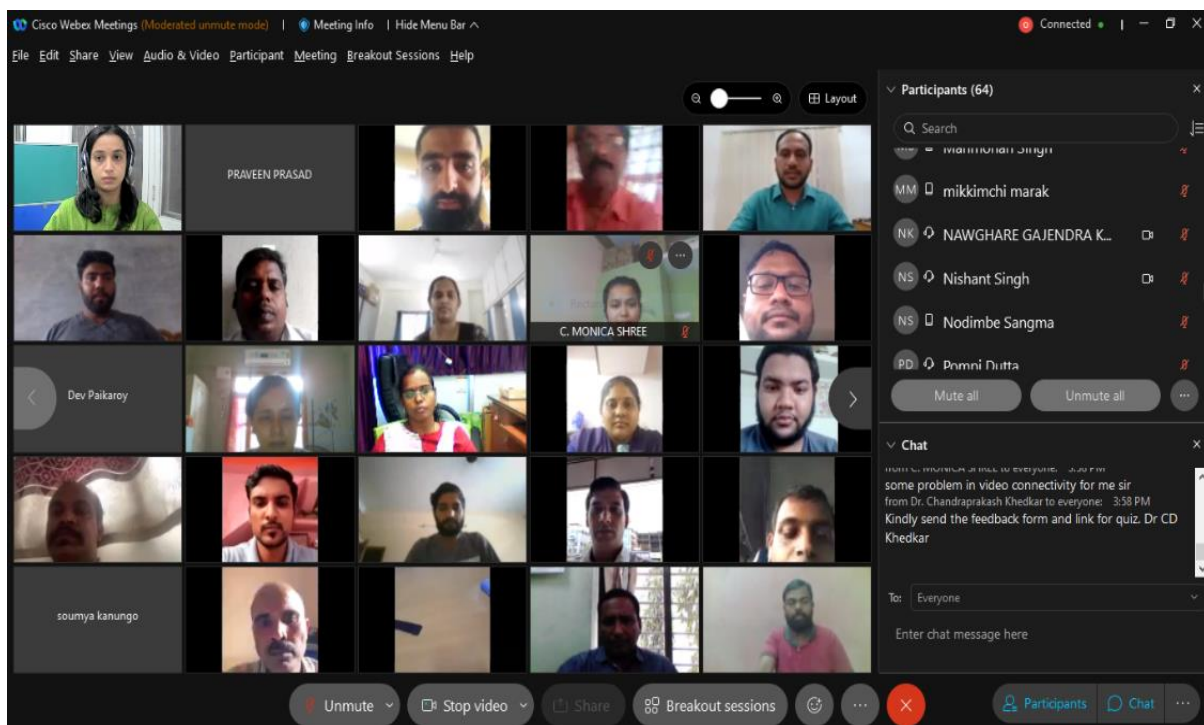
Kilaru Naturals was founded in 2014 with a mission of discovering and cultivating nutrient-dense crops with a special focus on the promotion of organic superfoods. As global markets are witnessing demand for protein-rich superfoods, Kilaru Naturals has been a reliable supply source of Quinoa, Chia, Teff, Amaranth, Flax and Millets from India. (<https://www.kilarunaturals.com/about/>, <https://nourishyou.in/>). Initially, the team faced problems in the planning of marketing strategies. As the trend of marketing changed, they shifted from traditional marketing to digital marketing. The company has its own interactive website which has helped them to attract customers, establish interaction between users. The content on the website such as real photos and videos hold customers’ attention, so it improves conversion rates. Currently Kilaru Naturals & Nourish You has a wide range of products – quinoa, chia seeds, amaranth, flax seeds. Their website has blogs, videos, and the recipes provided add great value to their services. Kilaru Naturals is HAACP, FSSAI, BRC, HALAL, and Organic Certified. Mr Rakesh Kilaru, co-founder, Kilaru Naturals & Nourish You, shared his startup experience emphasising the importance of digital technologies in marketing the products of startups.



Agribusiness Marketing – Opportunities and Challenges

There is a need for agricultural location and product-specific marketing. In India, different agri products are grown in a particular location only, for example, onion in Maharashtra, and contributes almost 50% of the Indian onion production, but the transport cost is high. Noting the high cost of transportation, the Government of India introduced the 'Kisan Ratha Scheme'. The *Kisan Rath* mobile app facilitates farmers, FPOs, and traders across India to search and contact the transport service

providers for transporting the agriculture and horticulture produce. It connects them with the transport service providers, offering a wide range of trucks and tractor trolleys, and allows posting the requirements of part-load as well as full-load (<https://kisanrath.nic.in/>). In India, with regard to warehouse and storing capacity, there are limitations on the quantity of food grain that can be stored at any given point of time as per the 'Essential Commodity Act 1955', but to encourage the investment of private companies in warehousing and logistics the government has removed the higher limit. The *electronic spot exchanges*, *National Commodity & Derivatives Exchange Limited (NCDEX)* (<https://www.ncdex.com/>) and *Multi Commodity Exchange of India Limited (MCX)* (<https://www.mcxindia.com/>) need to be explored and utilized effectively. Maintaining flexible organic standards and certification processes, keeping up sustainability in the global economy, sensitizing consumers on organic products are some of the major problems in marketing and export of Indian organic products.



Prof. TN Venkata Reddy, shared his knowledge at the training programme.

Power of Branding

Branding has the power to improve the marketing opportunities for agri-products. The use of *Geographical Indications* is a better way of branding generic products, which will again be helpful in marketing, e.g., Basmati Rice from Punjab, Coffee from Karnataka. Creating a brand is about a combination of definite brand positioning and uniform communication. Different companies and their brands have distinctive brand positioning. Starbucks, for example provides the best consumer experience by writing the name of the customer on the glass before serving the drink, which reflects two-way communication between the company and customers, and customers feel special on seeing their name on the coffee cup. It automatically creates brand awareness among the customers. *Brand creation* should be as strong as that of 'Bisleri'. Many people are not aware that Bisleri is only a brand name. It has reached such a point that people ask for Bisleri when buying any mineral water. Thus, brand name becomes the generic name. Presenting a brand consistently across all platforms can increase revenue by up to 23% (Forbes). Many times a large number of consumers (73%) love a specific brand (Curatti). Brands with poor company branding pay 10% higher salaries (Smart Dreamers).

Box 3. Experience of a Startup - Functional Buddha

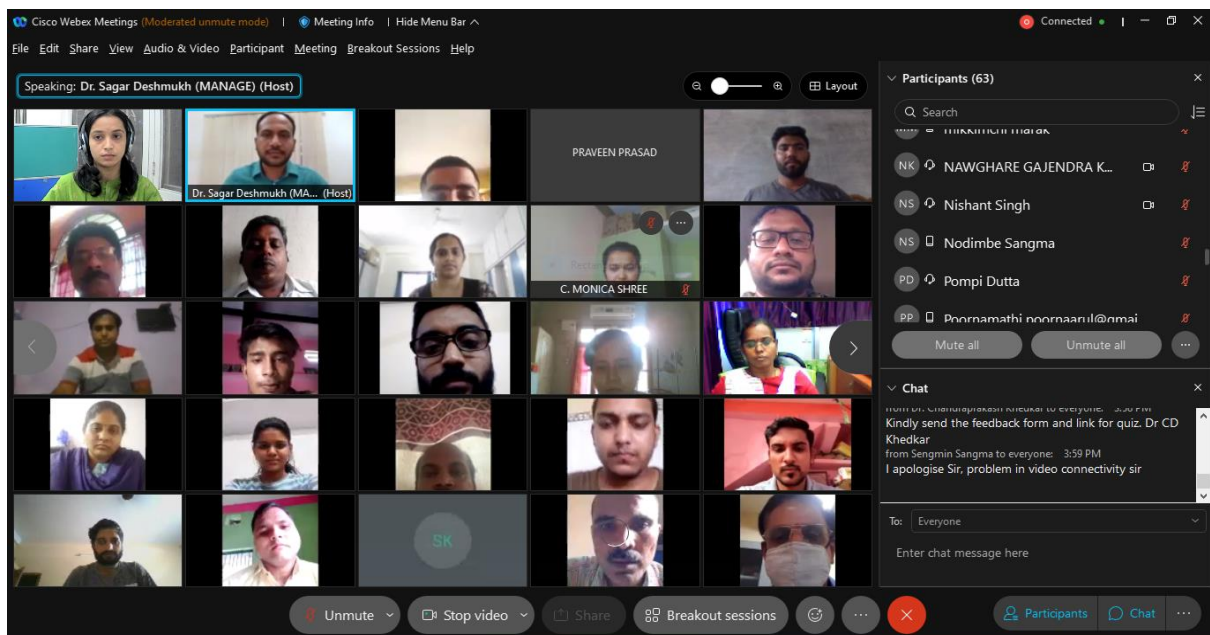
Mr Simharaju Pandu, Founder, Functional Buddha, and CEO of Meher Beverages Pvt. Ltd. shares his startup experience and highlights the importance of branding in good marketing for their produce. Meher Beverages Pvt Ltd, incorporated in India, started its R&D in 2015, to create innovative and functional (nutraceutical) food and beverages. The purpose was to bring the nutraceutical market into the mainstream segment. Meher Beverages is one of the first companies to work towards creating nutraceutical food and beverages that can be Interceptive Medicine. Their aim was to enrich the health of global consumers by offering a wide variety of functional beverages and food choices for both present and future generations. They connect with customers across the globe to help them create healthier habits, reduce their risk of chronic health problems, reverse disease, and foster healthier relationships with themselves in the process. Their approach was not to replace conventional food but to scientifically optimize its nutritional benefits through a self-monitoring system (<https://www.functionalbuddha.com/about>). During the inception period, Mr Simharaju and the team faced several problems. However, after two years of failure they were able to turn the idea of functional products into a reality. Again, they faced problems while acquiring the license. After two years of difficulties, they got the license and started marketing the products. Mr Simharaju advised all the entrepreneurial aspirants, “Before jumping into the market directly you should have large market data, then do a pilot test. First get feedback from the market and then you will know the real facts with which you have to work.”

In the case of Functional Buddha, getting recognition for the brand name was the first major problem in marketing the product because at that time the company did not have any brand name for their functional products. After realizing this lacuna, they came up with the brand name of ‘Functional Buddha’. Currently, Functional Buddha has a wide range of useful products such as milk, nuts, honey, and ghee.

Innovative Marketing and Networking Strategies for Agri Startups

Marketing is the soul and heart of any business and proper channels of networking are the key to success. Before starting marketing of a product/service, one should know the targeted customers, based on that prepare a marketing strategy. The use of Chatbots in WhatsApp to link with customers, Ads on Wheels, use of Interactive Websites, Experiential Advertisements – are some of the innovative technologies for marketing. A *WhatsApp chatbot* is an automated conversation partner on WhatsApp with the use of Artificial Intelligence. It acts as a small robot where a machine can answer the questions asked by a human being. Nowadays, *Ads on Wheels* is one of the innovative marketing strategies used by marketers. Marketers can put their ads of products/services on cars, buses, or any vehicles that may be private or public. This helps both marketers and vehicle owners – the marketer gets a new way to market his product or service, and the car owner gets free fuel or money in terms of returns from a marketer. *Experiential Advertisements* are nothing but providing customers with a real-time experience of products or services before they buy, for example, a customer can get a real-time feeling of living in a house by providing a model house before buying one.

The market is divided into three components, i.e., Total Addressable Market (TAM), Serviceable Available Market (SAM), and Serviceable Obtainable Market (SOM). Total Addressable Market (TAM) is the total available market for any startup. Serviceable Available Market (SAM) is a segment of TAM within a particular geographical area one can target his/her customers to reach their products and services. The Serviceable Obtainable Market (SOM) is an estimated portion of SOM within a specific product segment that a company can target to get revenue. According to research, four technologies are going to rule this century – SMAC i.e., Social media, Mobile, Analytics, Cloud technologies, all of which will be helpful for digital marketing. The nine most important pillars of any business model, which startup aspirants should study are: value propositions, customer segmentation, channels, customer relations, key activities, key resources, key partners, revenue structure, and cost structure.



Dr Radhika Meenakshi, Founder, Wise Owl Consultancy, delivered a session on 'Innovative marketing and networking strategies for AgriStartups'.

UNIQUENESS OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

- The training programme sensitized the participants on the topic of Marketing and Network linkages for Agri Start-ups.
- The training programme was designed in such a way that it included knowledge sharing sessions by experts in the domain, experience sharing sessions by actual persons, and interactive sessions of resource persons and participants.
- Through the training programme, startup aspirants got ideas for devising the right marketing and network linkage strategies, which will go on to generate leads for their company.
- Faculties of different organizations got a deeper understanding of the subject, and they found ways to enable aspiring and existing startups from the Marketing and Network linkages discussions.
- The bilateral interactions between resource persons and a heterogeneous group of participants led to mutual knowledge sharing, which again helped all the participants to clarify their doubts on specific subjects.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

- Pre-training exercises can be prepared in advance to identify the basic preparedness of participants.
- Post-training exercises can be prepared to estimate the understanding gained by participants from the training programme.
- Instead of such a training programme, it can be converted into a workshop where exercises that are more practical are covered.
- The duration of the programme can be extended to five days.
- In online mode, the total number of participants can be split into breakout sessions and grouped into separate activities, which will improve their knowledge and interpersonal development. This could improve teamwork, time management, and confidence.
- The programme, if conducted in physical mode, will increase involvement of all participants.

CONCLUSION

The main outcome of the training programme was that it revealed the importance of marketing, marketing strategies and network linkages for agri startups. Participants were exposed to different marketing strategies with national and international examples, which helped them to correlate the learnings. Nowadays, digital tools are making lives easier for not only startups/ businesses but for every individual exploring new opportunities. Exposure to the new digital marketing tools gave significant insights on personal branding too. Networking is the crux of the marketing business. The deeper and stronger the network, chances of scale up and success the higher. In this training programme participants were more inclined towards exploring and learning new digital trends, and several participants indicated immediate use of the tools learned.

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