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E-Commerce Entrepreneurship of Farmers

Ahmet Yesevi KOÇYİĞİT [1*] , Kürşat DEMİRYÜREK [2]

[1]Ondokuz Mayıs University, Agricultural Economics Department, Samsun
[2]Ondokuz Mayıs University, Agricultural Economics Department, Samsun

[1]https://orcid.org/ 0000-0002-7177-9985
[2]https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6193-9957

* Corresponding author: ahmetyesevi.kocyigit@omu.edu.tr
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ABSTRACT

Internet can be used in many areas in the agricultural sector. One of the opportunities provided by the Internet to the agricultural sector is e-commerce. Agricultural producers can set up a business on the internet by showing an example of entrepreneurship and sell their products to a wider audience with less cost after they are ready for sale. The main purpose of this study is to define the e-commerce entrepreneurship of farmers and to determine the types of e-commerce that can be applied in the agricultural sector. E-commerce in the agricultural sector was analyzed by examining the studies conducted in the literature. When e-commerce is considered in terms of the agricultural sector, it is necessary to use e-commerce as a tool to increase price competition in the agricultural sector, shorten the agricultural value chain and increase the income of farmers. There are many reasons for farmers to become e-commerce entrepreneurs. Conducting trade activities electronically can provide efficiency for the farmer in many ways. This efficiency can increase the farmer's income and enable them to develop new products, depending on their productivity. In order to identify the barriers that keep farmers away from e-commerce and to overcome these barriers, it is recommended to plan applied agricultural extension activities on internet and e-commerce for farmers.

INTRODUCTION

The internet helps farmers in many areas, from agricultural production to marketing agricultural products. One of the opportunities the internet provides to the agricultural sector is e-commerce. E-commerce is the realization of commercial activities through communication networks, sharing business information, and maintaining business relations on the internet (Chan & Chung, 2002). E-commerce can also be applied in the agricultural sector. The sale of agricultural products and tools used in the agricultural sector can also occur on the internet. By showing an example of entrepreneurship, agricultural producers can establish a business on the internet and sell their products to larger audiences with less expense after making them ready for sale.

When e-commerce is considered in the agricultural sector, it is necessary to use e-commerce as a tool to increase price competition in the agricultural sector, shorten the agricultural value chain, and increase the farmer's income.

The main purpose of this research is to examine the e-commerce entrepreneurship of farmers based on the literature and to discuss which or which of the e-commerce methods can be applied in the agricultural sector.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In this study, the scope of e-commerce entrepreneurship of farmers in Turkey and in the world has been revealed through a literature review, the e-commerce method suitable for implementation in the agricultural sector has been determined, and the advantages and disadvantages of e-commerce in the agricultural sector have been discussed. The study offers recommendations to improve farmers' e-commerce.

THE CONCEPT OF E-COMMERCE AND E-COMMERCE IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR

The concept of e-commerce has been defined many times in the literature, and most of the definitions in the literature have the same theme. In general, e-commerce is defined as the realization of many services that can be realized in the physical environment in the internet environment (Bulut, 2009; Huseynov, 2016; İnci, 2014; Kalakota & Whinston, 1997; Vladimir, 1996). The World Trade Organization (WTO) defines *e-commerce* as a collection of methods designed to receive or place orders and to shop for goods and services in a computer environment (WTO, 2013). Similarly, e-commerce emerged as a new way of doing business with the globalization of the economy; It is expressed as the exchange, exchange, or transfer of goods, services, and information transactions over the computer (Turban et al., 2018). To summarize the concept of e-commerce in general, it is the buying and selling of all kinds of goods or services and the realization of exchange and returns electronic transactions.

All types of e-commerce have the same logic, but there are differences in the working process and parties (Telli Yamamoto, 2013). There are types according to the way e-commerce is done. Suppose a business carries out e-commerce with another business. In that case, it is defined as business-to-business electronic commerce (B2B). If a business's customer segment is consumers, it is defined as electronic commerce between businesses and consumers (B2C). Consumers can also do e-commerce among themselves. This type of e-commerce is defined as electronic commerce between consumers (C2C). The remaining two types of e-commerce are electronic commerce between businesses and government (B2G) and electronic commerce between consumers and government (C2G). This relationship is illustrated in Figure 1.

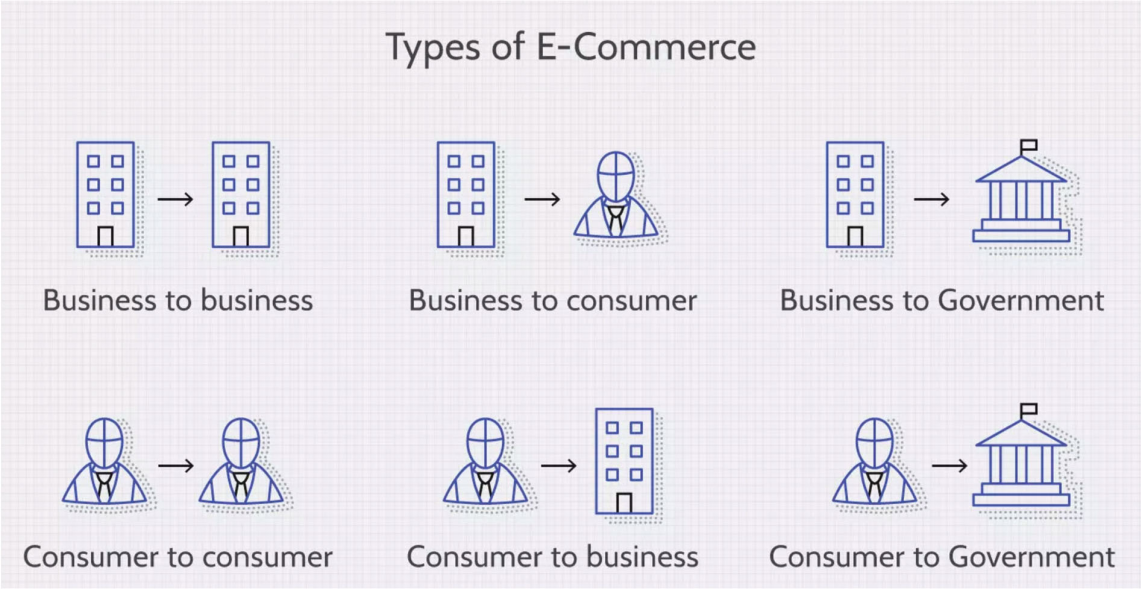

Figure.1 Types of E-Commerce (investopedia.com)

E-commerce has been applied to many sectors and has provided many benefits in the sectors where it is applied. One of these sectors is the agricultural sector. Business-to-business, business-to-consumer, business to government e-commerce types can be applied in the agricultural sector. The application of e-commerce in the agricultural sector provides new resources in terms of information and location in the agricultural sector (Özgür, 1999). The application of e-commerce in the agricultural sector has brought many benefits. E-commerce in agriculture has created new supply chains for agricultural products, developed the transportation sector in agriculture, and made disseminating agricultural information easy and inexpensive (Farinnia, 2011). The benefits of implementing e-commerce in the agricultural sector are apparent. E-commerce creates new market opportunities for businesses (Özdemir, 2015), creates a price advantage in the sector in which the business is active (Nisar & Prabhakar, 2017) gain a competitive advantage over its competitors (Elibol & Kesici, 2004) and provides many other benefits. Farmers should be interested in e-commerce entrepreneurship to protect and develop their place in the agricultural market, adapt to competition conditions, apply information technologies to the agricultural sector on time, and gain many other benefits. By selling their products via e-commerce, the farmer can create a big brand, increase the volume of the customer segment, and create new income models by selling processed products and primary production. However, e-commerce also comes with some disadvantages. One of the most obvious disadvantages of e-commerce is the problem of trust. (Lawrence & Tar, 2010). This problem is more pronounced in the agricultural sector. Since agricultural products are perishable food products, their trade needs to be more sensitive than any other product. This makes e-commerce of agricultural products difficult. However, since e-commerce competition for agricultural products is not strong in the market, farmers who engage in e-commerce will be able to increase their income volume with a competitive advantage.

Internet usage is increasing daily and can provide economic benefits to users. Especially in agricultural marketing, alternative ways are needed, leading farmers to e-commerce using the internet. Besides traditional sales methods, online sales are economically advantageous for the farmer as they remove many intermediaries from the agricultural product value chain.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021 has changed many things around the world. One of them is the e-commerce sector. The growth of the e-commerce sector has gained significant momentum with the COVID-19 pandemic (PAKSOY, 2021). This growth in the e-commerce sector was not reflected in the e-commerce in the agricultural sector and kept the e-commerce of the farmers the same. A study conducted across Turkey shows that COVID-19 does not change the situation of farmers selling agricultural products over the internet (Demiryürek et al., 2021). Similarly, in a study conducted in Samsun, Turkey, farmers' e-commerce status has not changed contrary to expectations (Koçyiğit & Demiryürek, 2022). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalization and innovation were not prioritized. The difficult conditions of the pandemic have changed this situation and pushed the whole world to digitalization and innovation. (Amiri, 2022). It is thought that a factor that forces people to use the internet and do business over the internet, such as COVID-19, is why farmers cannot start e-commerce due to insufficient infrastructure and insufficient agricultural publications specific to e-commerce for farmers.

Farmers need to prepare some documents to start e-commerce entrepreneurship. These documents are required for the Republic of Turkey to open a business and work license, capacity report or expertise report, trade registry newspaper containing up-to-date information of the food business operator, work certificate obtained from the professional chamber, or notarized contract. In addition to these documents, farmers' companies must also be present. With these documents, farmers who apply to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the ministry of agriculture of the Republic of Turkey, will be ready to sell products over the internet and will be able to continue their e-commerce initiatives.

Agricultural e-commerce can be done in various ways. Farmers can set up e-commerce sites and market their products to individuals or companies. In addition, farmers can realize their e-commerce entrepreneurship on e-marketplace sites and social media sites. All these methods have advantages or disadvantages over each other.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF E-COMMERCE IN AGRICULTURE

With e-commerce done online, the communication between the e-commerce entrepreneur, the farmer, and the consumer is increasing. Performing national and international trade activities in an electronic environment increases the efficiency of factors such as time, labor, and capital. Depending on the increased productivity and efficiency, there are advantages such as increasing the income volume of the e-commerce entrepreneur farmer. The advantages of e-commerce can be summarized as follows:

a) Consumers are browsing the stores online from where they are, instead of visiting the stores separately and physically.
b) E-commerce systems can be managed with mobile communication devices wherever there is the internet.
c) Unlike physical stores, the website where e-commerce is carried out allows 24/7 shopping.
d) The farmer will increase customer capacity by creating a wide market area with e-commerce.
e) Farmers, who deliver their products to consumers through various trade channels, will be able to eliminate many intermediaries when they do this with e-commerce and manage the sales process by communicating with the consumer personally.
f) Since the costs of e-shops are lower than those of physical stores, the prices may be more affordable for the consumer.

E-commerce has many advantages as well as disadvantages. For example, Some of these obstacles are the lack of storage life of agricultural products, their short shelf life, the early loss of freshness of agricultural products, and the inability to market them at any time of the year. However, it is thought that these obstacles can be overcome with e-commerce (Kızılaslan & Ünal, 2015). The disadvantages of e-commerce can be summarized as follows:

a) One advantage of products sold on the Internet is that they can be easily compared with each other. However, this is not possible in the case of agricultural products. Comparisons in the digital environment will not mean anything, as features such as the unique appearance, smell, and shape of agricultural products can change from situation to situation. However, if the farmer keeps the photos and images up to date, keeps customer satisfaction high, and conveys this satisfaction to his website, social media, or shop comments in the e-marketplace, he will be able to prevent this disadvantage.
b) Agricultural products are perishable products by nature. This requires faster and more precise handling. However, performing these processes faster and more sensitively will create costs.
c) It is seen that the number of people who buy agricultural products via the e-commerce method is low (Erdal & Kablan). It is thought that the reason for this is that agricultural products are foodstuffs, perishable, and people want to by choosing and seeing them. This is not possible in e-commerce.

d) The farmer's internet infrastructure should be sufficient, and if it is not sufficient, he should invest in it. This creates additional costs for the farmer. However, this internet investment cost should not be seen as a big problem, as these costs are much higher when a physical store is opened.
e) There is a lack of internet knowledge among farmers and, accordingly, e-commerce. This is the biggest disadvantage. To prevent this disadvantage, agricultural extension activities on e-commerce should be organized.

Farmers can be green entrepreneurs as well as e-commerce entrepreneurs. Green entrepreneurs take on more responsibility in green practices and environmental tasks than other entrepreneurs. For this reason, it contributes to human and environmental health by providing environmentally friendly, green products and services (Harini & Meenakshi, 2012). Green entrepreneurial farmers can also differentiate their products from the products in the market by providing *organic* added value to the products they produce (Koçyiğit et al., 2022). In this way, farmers will naturally stand out from them as they will sell products different from those on the market and will be able to increase their income volumes.

E-MARKETPLACE

Farmers can sell their agricultural products in many channels and through e-marketplace sites. E-marketplace has emerged as virtual versions of marketplaces. E-marketplace sites, which unite buyers and sellers on a virtual platform and allow them to shop, generate their income by taking a commission from the sales made. There are many e-marketplaces in the world where agricultural products can be sold. Sites such as amazon.com and alibaba.com attract many potential buyers thanks to their site traffic. This much traffic, the most significant advantage of e-marketplaces, enables the number of customers to increase and the products to find buyers relatively easily.

Some advantages and disadvantages distinguish e-commerce entrepreneurship through e-marketplace from other methods. These are higher customer volume, easy shipping, no need for detailed technical knowledge, and being more economical than other methods. In addition, the risk is less for both buyer and seller. In this method, the seller uploads his agricultural product to the e-marketplace, promotes the product with its images, and starts waiting for its customers. When the buyer decides to buy the product, he buys the product. When the sale is finished, the money is transferred to the farmer's account, and the shopping is completed. E-marketplaces such as Trendyol.com, Hepsiburada.com, and Ciftcideneve.com, where farmers can sell their agricultural products, can be given as examples. An example of these e-marketplaces is the Digital Agricultural Market (DİTAP), developed by the Republic of Turkey and operating within the borders of the Republic of Turkey.

The Digital Agricultural Market (DİTAP) has been designed to bring together every actor in the agricultural production chain, such as farmers, industrialists, traders, and consumers. In this system, the agricultural

value chain from seed to table can be followed, agricultural production can be carried out in a planned manner by the state, and the consumer and producer can increase their profits by removing many actors between them. Small-scale farmers can sell their products via the internet address ditap.gov.tr and find buyers before producing their products (Pakdemirli, 2020). Consumers and producers can meet over DİTAP to create demands and offers and directly perform the sales process. The e-marketplace module of the system works as follows: The buyer creates a demand, and the manufacturer quickly sees this demand and makes an offer. The buyer chooses what he sees fit from the incoming offers, and the contract phase begins. Product, product type, quantity, and transportation are determined at this stage. Contracts can be signed with an electronic signature by the nature of the e-commerce system.

WEBSITE

Agricultural producers can sell from their e-commerce sites. E-commerce with this method is more costly for the farmer. Because in addition to buying a domain name and hosting provider so that the farmer can open his e-commerce site, search engine optimization (SEO), web design, and virtual pos, It needs elements such as e-accounting and cargo agreements. In addition to all these, considering the technical dimension of website management, this method will be less preferred in rural areas. These disadvantages of this method bring along a significant advantage. Farmers who choose this method can turn a large part of their turnover into profit, as they will not pay any commission to intermediaries. However, when the studies in the literature are examined, the farmers.

The opportunity to market products on the internet provides the opportunity to market without requiring significant investments or establishing stores. As people's participation in communication networks and the rate of internet usage increase, companies can reach their customers faster, cheaper, easier, and more effectively. At the same time, the decrease in producer costs is reflected in prices, and consumers can also share this advantage (Sayılı & Büyükköroğlu, 2013).

Farmers who use e-commerce using their websites have some disadvantages. Most of them are at the beginning of their entrepreneurial journey. One of these disadvantages is that consumers may need to trust farmers. The farmer who starts selling on a new website must prove reliable. Some elements can be done for this. For example, it can present photos and videos of the production area to the consumers by adding the food safety and production certificates it has to the website. For entrepreneurial farmers, it is essential to gain consumers' trust because consumers buy products from the internet on the sites they trust. Although consumers' knowledge level in e-commerce is high, this is not valid for the e-commerce of agricultural products (Erdal & Kablan, 2019). In this sense, it is crucial for entrepreneurial farmers who will sell their agricultural products through e-commerce to make moves that will gain consumers' trust.

SOCIAL MEDIA

One of the areas where farmers can do e-commerce entrepreneurship is social media. An essential factor distinguishes e-commerce in social media from the other two methods. This is how consumer analysis can be done quickly on social media. Farmers can analyze them after building a particular audience on social media sites. For example, which age group, which gender group, which city shows more interest in which product? The answers to these questions can be easily found through social media tools. This consumer analysis is also called social media measurement. *Social media measurement* is defined as monitoring social media activities in line with the objectives of communication and measuring the performance of these activities. Collecting data and measuring in different areas of social media platforms provides companies with detailed information about both their customers' decision processes and what is happening in social media (Özata, 2013). The farmer can revise the products he sells according to these measurements, develop new products, and create brand loyalty thanks to the high trust he has established with his consumers. Brand loyalty means that the consumer develops a positive attitude towards a specific brand, buys the brand he is affiliated with frequently, continues to buy and uses that brand for a long time (Odabaşı & Barış, 2002). An example of such a situation is the sale of honey in the agricultural sector. People often want to buy honey from people they trust and do not readily accept changing that seller.

Examples of sites where farmers can make e-commerce entrepreneurship are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok and Youtube. The emergence and trends of these social media sites are shown in Figure 2. It would be more beneficial for farmers to operate on these social media sites. In addition, after the farmers determine the consumer audience, it would be appropriate to increase their activities on the social media site where this audience is located.

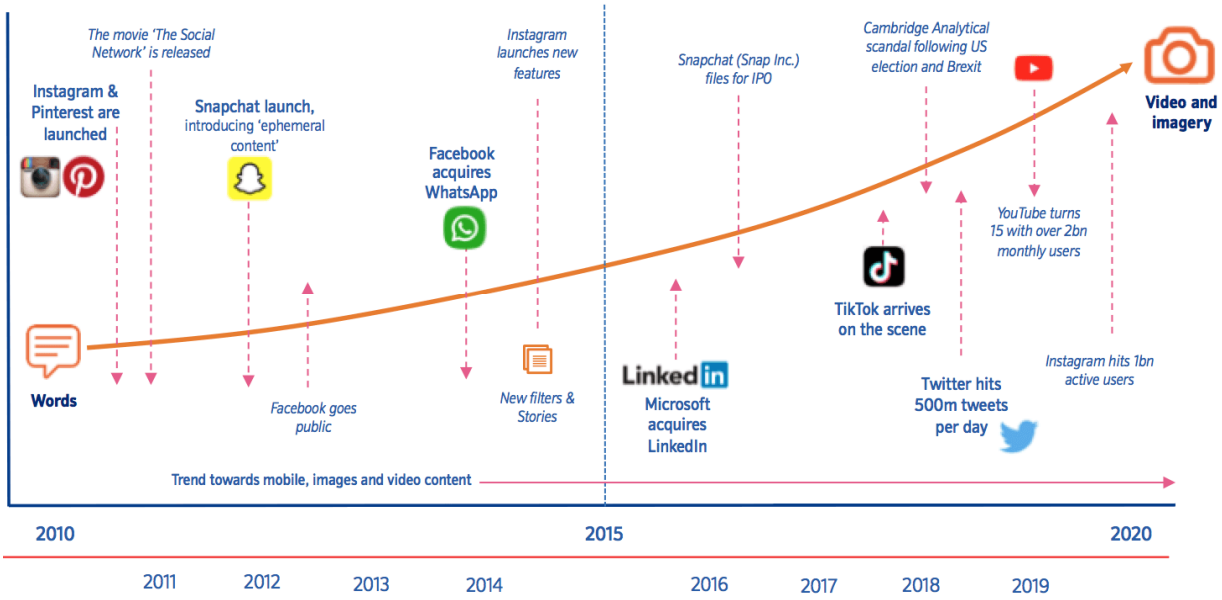

Figure 2 Maturity Social Platforms, Activity, and Cultural Moments (smartinsights.com)

Again, if we go through the example of honey, it would not be appropriate for an e-commerce entrepreneur farmer selling honey to concentrate his social media activities on Tiktok because it is known that 32.5% of the people using the Tiktok application are between the ages of 10-19 as of 2020 (ranktracker.com, 2022). Trying to sell honey in this age group, where most of them are underage, will not work. Instead, it would be appropriate for him to concentrate his social media activities on Facebook. Because as of 2021, the age group that uses Facebook the most is the 25-34 age group, with 31.5%, and in addition, it is known that high-income people use Facebook to search for various products (Websiterating.com, 2021). As a result, e-commerce entrepreneur farmers can develop their e-marketing through the e-marketplace and their websites. In addition to these, they can use social media for advertising purposes and have the chance to benefit from all components of e-commerce. Producers use social media for advertising purposes, increase the product's popularity by making advertisements at different times, and thus increase the sales volume of the agricultural product.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many reasons for farmers to become e-commerce entrepreneurs. Carrying out trade activities in an electronic environment can provide efficiency in many aspects for the farmer. This productivity provided by the farmer can increase the farmer's income depending on efficiency and enable him to develop new products.

The farmer can start e-commerce by creating his brand. A farmer who succeeds in creating his brand will be able to sell his products at higher prices and experience severe increases in his income. For the farmer to capture these advantages, he must have sufficient knowledge about e-commerce, make the necessary investments for e-commerce and follow the e-commerce trends. By organizing applied agricultural

publications on e-commerce for farmers, they should be informed about these issues, and they can be directed to e-commerce.

It is seen that the farmers need more knowledge about e-commerce. The obscure terms on the internet can keep farmers from using the internet and doing e-commerce. To overcome this obstacle, applied agricultural extension activities on the internet and e-commerce should be planned for farmers.

It will be possible for farmers to become e-commerce entrepreneurs with the widespread use of the internet among farmers. Farmers who learn to use the internet can be organized efficiently, and government decisions can be delivered to farmers quickly and economically. Therefore, to popularize the internet among farmers, internet applications that will be useful to farmers should be provided free of charge, or the government should provide incentives.

Due to the nature of the internet, every person can upload information to the internet. This can cause information pollution on the internet because every person can defend the information he/she deems correct according to his/her own experience on the internet. Examining the information about agriculture and e-commerce circulating on the internet, only the information that has been proven correct should remain in Internet circulation. Expert teams appointed by the government should carry out these checks.

Internet applications have been developed and continue to be developed by the government so that farmers can become e-commerce entrepreneurs. However, farmers may experience problems in the process of adopting these practices or while performing the procedures related to the application. The government should facilitate registration and other processes in the websites and applications developed for farmers and explain these processes to farmers practically.

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