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CHAPTER 10

The digital transformation of agricultural fairs in Brazil: an analysis from the perspective of their organizers

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INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has challenged all sectors, which needed to reinvent themselves to minimize the damage caused by the disease. Since the SARS-Cov-2/Covid-19 registration in China in December 2019, humanity has been facing a serious global health crisis (Aquino *et al.*, 2020; Souza *et al.*, 2020).

With face-to-face activities suspended, one of the sectors affected by the pandemic was agricultural events. In March 2020, the cancellation or postponement of 13 agricultural events in the country until the end of May (including agricultural exhibitions, workshops, ceremonies, forums, and pre-events) impacted this market by R\$ 10.8 billion, based on the amounts moved in 2019 (Soares, 2020).

Even with difficulties, some companies and organizations implemented actions aimed at overcoming such a situation. With the aid and use of technologies, innovation, and creativity, the agricultural fairs and events sector has continued activities by digital platforms (ABMRA, 2021).

Some agribusiness fairs have reinvented themselves and adopted Internet technological tools to make their events viable and generate business, taking advantage of the greater public reach, without the barrier of physical distance (ABMRA, 2021). Thus, the need to maintain social relations and economic activities led to greater use of digital communication tools during the pandemic period, breaking current societal stereotypes (Ricarte, 2020).

For this chapter, we are particularly interested in the Digital Transformation (TD) triggered during the Covid-19 pandemic in the rural environment, especially agricultural fairs. Recognizing that the TD process, in this case, was not initiated and conducted strategically but as a reaction and adjustment to the situation caused by the pandemic, the organizing and exhibiting companies relied on digital technologies to transform their offers and manage various structural and cultural changes and barriers.

In this context, this chapter aims to verify the emergency adaptation of agricultural fairs to the virtual environment, by identifying the strategies and challenges of agricultural events due to the pandemic period and verifying the benefits and disadvantages of this emergency adaptation.

The theme presented in this chapter contributes to scientific knowledge around sustainable development, which is in line with the objectives of the Postgraduate Program in Agribusiness and Development (PGAD) at Unesp, Campus de Tupã. In this sense, it contributes to discussions within the scope of the eighth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), which aims to “promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all” (United Nations Brazil, 2021). More specifically, it addresses sub-item 8.2 of the SDG, which aims to “achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading, and innovation, including through a focus on high-value-added sectors and labor-intensive sectors” (United Nations Brazil, 2021).

AGRICULTURAL FAIRS AND EVENTS

Agricultural fairs are events where information about techniques, machinery, and other innovations are presented to the public. They are configured as spaces for the exhibition and presentation of information related to agricultural activities, to meet the informational needs of rural producers, as well as to move the business of exhibiting companies (Savran *et al.*, 2018).

Considered the showcase of agribusiness in Brazil, agricultural fairs are present in the event calendars of states and municipalities and are relevant for covering information related to the most diverse agents in the agricultural chain. Zanella (2006) describes them as meetings between people or entities, held on specific dates and aimed at providing an environment for business, social, and scientific activities.

Agricultural fairs occur throughout Brazil and move billions of reais with the sale of machinery, agricultural implements, inputs, and animals. According to Soares (2020), the number of events in the area, which between 1990 and 2000 approached 500, currently only the most structured ones remain on the market, which today are national references (about 300 fairs). Such events constitute an important channel for scientific research to capture the demands of rural producers and collaborate in solving field problems. Held at the municipal or regional level, agricultural fairs are organized by associations, cooperatives, sector institutions, companies, and public bodies. They are characterized as a showcase of technologies and services aimed at agribusiness (Brannstrom; Brandão, 2012; Vieira, 2017). In addition to presenting their launches to rural producers, exhibiting companies use the fair space as an important marketing strategy, carrying out activities that connect a large volume of customers with potential buyers; space for product promotion; strengthening the relationship with rural producer customers; collecting information about competitors; conducting market research and opportunity to improve corporate image (Situma, 2012).

Rzemieniak (2017) and Souza (2018) describe that fairs provide spaces for content exposure to bring new strategies to the field to producers. Each agricultural event has a strategy, ranging from business realization; dissemination and implementation of the latest market technologies; exhibition and sale of animals (Brannstrom; Brandão, 2012), often accompanied by scientific dissemination and technical assistance and rural extension. According to Melo (2020), the 17 main fairs in Brazil together earned R\$16.9 billion in 2019. Box 1 presents a list of 13 of these events canceled and/or postponed since the beginning of the quarantine, and the financial amount moved by each in 2019.

Box 1 – Agricultural exhibitions postponed or canceled between March and May 2020 and amounts moved in the face-to-face editions in 2019

Event	Location	Financial movement (in R\$)
TecnoShow Comigo	Rio Verde – Goiás (GO)	3.4 billion
Agrishow	Ribeirão Preto – São Paulo (SP)	2.9 billion
AgroBrasília	Brasília – Distrito Federal (DF)	1.2 billion
Norte Show	Sinop (MT)	1 billion
Rondônia Rural Show	Ji-Paraná (RO)	703.5 million
ExpoLondrina	Londrina (PR)	615.6 million
Femec	Uberlândia (MG)	420 million
ExpoZebu	Uberaba (MG)	220 million
Parecis SuperAgro	Campo Novo do Parecis (MT)	150 million
ExpoPec	Porangatu (GO)	72 million
ExpoAgro Afubra	Rincão Del Rey (RS)	70.6 million
ExpoGrande	Campo Grande (MS)	26.5 million
ExpoJardimMS	Jardim (MS)	No data

Source: Adapted from Soares (2020).

Fairs like Expodireto Cotrijal, Coopercitrus Expo, Agrishow Experience, Expointer Digital, and Agrotins are examples of agribusiness events in Brazil that adapted their programs to the virtual environment in 2020. Some organizers report that there was already an intention to present digital content during their events and that the pandemic only accelerated this process. Debate rounds, auctions, company stands, equipment exhibitions, and even family farming product fairs were adapted to virtual platforms for the drive-thru format (Agricultural News, 2021; Rural Channel, 2021a; Rural Channel, 2021b).

In 2021, other events announced a new cancellation or postponement of the next edition to 2022, such as Tecnoshow Comigo in Rio Verde-GO, and Norte Show in Sinop-MT. Other events remained with their programming only in digital format, due to the impracticality of the

hybrid format, such as the Paraná Show Rural Coopavel fair in Cascavel (Toledo, 2021).

In this scenario, there are three possible event formats according to Martin and Lisboa (2020), and Rêgo, Barros, and Lanzarini (2021): virtual fair (online), totally web-based, with people interacting isolated at all points of the connection, eliminating crowds and travel, a priority during the pandemic period and, on the other hand, limiting available activities and technologies; hybrid format, which uses digital technologies (such as streaming and the Internet) to complement the participants' experience, who can be present at the event location or connected remotely; face-to-face format, which takes place with all participants present in the same location, and which, considering the pandemic times, depends on new social behavior and health safety protocols.

This new reality of digital events, in addition to demanding new skills and knowledge from organizing professionals, also points to new participant needs. Remotely, events are different when compared to the needs of the face-to-face format, as they require adjustments in dynamics, content, and the choice of platforms and tools, among other actions and suppliers (Events, 2020).

While digital events emerge as a safe alternative, regarding health restrictions during the pandemic period, Rêgo, Barros, and Lanzarini (2021) emphasize that they also modify the culture and behavior of consumers and businesspeople in the sector. The 'virtual wave' that advanced in the pandemic scenario brought a new proposal for many event organizers, although they were already known in the digital environment, and reached the agribusiness sector, becoming an extension of face-to-face activities.

However, although digital events are being considered a temporary alternative, for Rêgo, Barros, and Lanzarini (2021), the infrastructure regarding participants' access to technology is limiting, warning of the possibility of financial results being significantly lower, especially when it comes to agricultural fairs and events.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE ADAPTATION OF AGRICULTURAL EVENTS

According to Vial (2019, p. 118), Digital Transformation (TD) is “a process that aims to improve an entity, triggering significant changes in its properties through combinations of information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies,” which means that it goes beyond organizational boundaries and the workplace, occurring and affecting different spheres of people’s lives.

Survival in increasingly competitive environments leads companies to seek waste reduction, limit resource consumption, and produce more efficiently, adding new development technologies to traditional business strategies (Caliskan; Özkan Özen; Ozturkoglu, 2020).

Among the available technologies, Augmented Reality (AR), Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing, data analysis, and cybersecurity are digital tools that deeply influence business processes, being able to be applied in different ways as marketing strategies in the search for offer differentiation, delivering a greater experience to the consumer.

Pandey (2021) indicated the need to adopt digital technologies to manage the effects of the pandemic more efficiently, as more and more people are connected due to the lockdowns imposed by governments of different countries. Therefore, the use of digital marketing has been essential to reach consumers, emphasizing the importance of digital marketing communication tools in interactions between companies and customers.

Digital marketing is defined as a tool capable of promoting products or services that reach consumers through digital platforms, enabling them to be retained in more intimate and lasting relationships. In this sense, the digital relationship, which was previously an option, became indispensable during the pandemic, forcing organizations to adapt to Digital Information and Communication Technologies (TDIC) to make the offer of products and services viable to their consumers (Cani *et al.*, 2020).

TDICs are increasingly embedded in society, whether in companies, schools, or homes, providing facilities for the human-information

relationship in daily life. According to Melović *et al.* (2020), TD is an evolutionary process, modifying people's lives and the ways organizations do business, providing technological solutions based on information and technology services.

The employability of TDIC benefited, in addition to urban organizations, rural businesses that use technologies to boost their activities and understand the agricultural sector and its context. Communication is attributed to the advancement of TDIC, which has taken information developed outside the rural sphere to the producer, adding competitiveness to agribusiness in all links of the production chain (Cardoso; Prado, 2008).

The digitalization of agriculture has found fertile ground in Brazil, with 84% of the country's farmers using at least one digital technology during their production process (Bolfe *et al.*, 2020). Other sector data also reflect a positive scenario in this direction, as indicated by the latest national survey conducted by the Brazilian Association of Rural Marketing and Agribusiness (ABMRA) in 2017 on the consumption habits of rural producers, when it was found that some of the interviewed rural producers use Internet resources to carry out purchase activities, mainly seeds (20%), agricultural pesticides (20%), fertilizers (17%), and agricultural equipment (12%). This scenario demonstrates the producer's approach to available communication technologies, although Internet access is still not the majority, as 58% of the interviewees still did not have the technology on their properties (ABMRA, 2017).

The adaptation of the event industry, according to Campillo-Alhama and Herrero-Ruiz (2015), depends on digital communication tools to establish closer interaction ties, creating proximity experiences and increasing the harmony of the company-client relationship. This more direct connection also requires concern with the values and brand image being propagated to customers, ensuring they are consistent with the identity and intention the companies wish to convey.

By developing their marketing tools, companies boost their businesses and survive in the market, transitioning from offline marketing to online marketing through the digitalization of the tools used, taking

advantage of the progress of the digital economy and the mass adoption of smartphones, which have profoundly influenced consumer behavior and lifestyle (Petrů *et al.*, 2020). This includes corporate portals and business platforms in disseminating information.

The marketing strategies of contemporary companies are often associated with the digital relationship with customers through communication tools for brand advertising and sales promotion from websites, social networks, and online conferences. Cyber contact with consumers occurs from the pre-sale phase to post-sale follow-up and generation of potential new business (Labanauskaitė *et al.*, 2020).

According to Kumari *et al.* (2021), the main challenges in adopting digital technologies in rural areas include the lack of technological infrastructure, digital skills, and Internet inaccessibility. In Brazil, it is no different, and to advance in this TD, challenges related to infrastructure and connectivity need to be overcome, with the aggravating factor that, according to the 2017 Agricultural Census, released in 2019 by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), 71.8% of Brazilian rural properties do not have Internet access.

The next section presents case studies conducted at two events, which were named Event A and Event B.

CASE STUDIES - EVENT A

The first edition of Event A took place in a digital format during the second half of 2020, presenting three days of programming with discussion forums, debates with experts and politicians, cattle auctions, and company stands. The event was organized by an institution in northern Brazil, and therefore, the theme of the virtual meeting was focused on agribusiness in that region. Event A was driven by the moment of diffusion of lives and digital events resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and the impossibility of holding another traditional agricultural fair in the city in a face-to-face format. The main information collected in the interview can be found in Box 2.

Although the organizers considered the time interval short between the start of site development and the event's realization, the number of registered participants, exhibiting companies, and business volume were considered quite satisfactory by the organizers.

Despite the virtual fair was initially planned with a focus on small rural producers, the event saw participation from farmers of all sizes and areas of activity, as well as other interested parties, such as researchers, politicians, companies in the field, and the press.

Box 2 – Information on Event A

Elements	Event A
Time to organize the virtual fair	3 months
Number of registrants	3.6 thousand people
Organizer's satisfaction with the virtual event	Positive
Programming	Interviews, auctions, and debates with experts from the entire agribusiness chain in response to producers' demand
Target audience	Rural producers and other interested parties
Interaction among participants	No tool was provided by the organization
Exhibitors	About 300 companies
Banking institutions	Participation and offer of special credit lines
Difficulties during the events	Insufficient or non-existent connection, handling of the platform via cell phone, and platform resolution via cell phone
Participants' feedback	90% positive
Scientific dissemination and participation of research institutions	Participation of the Technical Assistance and Rural Extension Company (Emater) and the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa)
Business volume	R\$ 41 million – including closed contracts and projected for the next 12 months
Benefits of virtual events	Adaptation and investment of agricultural events to the virtual environment
Expectations for future fairs	Continuity and start of a digital transformation

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024)

It is noteworthy that there was no interaction between the audience and the speakers or even among the audience, as there was no space for real-time information exchange. Some participants pointed out this difficulty, and therefore, the organizers intend to provide a chat in the next edition of the event in 2021, according to the organizers' report: "People want this, they want to communicate, right? It is an opportunity to implement it next year, yes" (Organizer A, 2020).

The organizers indicated some challenges and experiences observed regarding the digital format, such as the telecommunication infrastructure (availability and stability of the Internet connection) in the state, considered to be of low quality, constituting one of the factors preventing the participation of several rural producers and other interested parties; the touchscreen functionality in handling the platform and its resolution for those who accessed the event via smartphone, since being a 3D environment, the quality and ease of access were greater via computer. However, the organizers stated that the participants had fewer difficulties than expected.

The negotiations carried out during Event A totaled R\$41 million, considering the conversion of transactions in dollars and the projection of exhibitors for the next twelve months in closing contracts resulting from the virtual fair. The organizers emphasized that, in addition to the sales made or planned, the exhibitors promoted their brands (Organizer A, 2020).

The experience in organizing the online fair, according to the organizers of Event A, highlighted an important benefit, as it marked the beginning of a 'turning point' for the digitalization of agribusiness, as emphasized in a section of the interview: "the beginning of a digital transformation (...) those who do not have this mindset, unfortunately, will not continue in the job market in a certain time" (Organizer A, 2020).

At the time of the interview, the organizers considered not yet knowing whether future events would be held only in virtual mode or in a hybrid format, given the possibility of reaching a larger target audience, but there was an understanding that the pandemic contributed to the opportunity for virtual agricultural events with good acceptance by rural

producers. “Virtual is here to stay, that does not mean there will be no face-to-face because even if you can do a lot remotely, people want contact, they want this coexistence” (Organizer A, 2020).

CASE STUDIES - EVENT B

Event B is an international agricultural technology fair held annually since 1994 in a southeastern state of Brazil. It is considered not only the largest agribusiness fair in Brazil but also the largest in Latin America in its segment and is currently organized by a committee of professionals.

The online edition of Event B took place in the second half of 2020 and was the first digital version of this large and traditional Brazilian agribusiness fair. The organization reports that it was an emergency way to keep the fair active, highlighting its name, in addition to minimizing the damages that the cancellation of the face-to-face edition brought to the organizers.

Thus, Event B featured debate rounds with experts, company stands, and a live show closing, during which the audience could follow more than 20 hours of live and recorded content. The main information collected in the interview regarding Event B can be found in Box 3.

The organization time of the virtual experience was four months, from planning to execution, with the number of participants being positively evaluated by the organization, which was satisfied with the results, having fulfilled all its purposes, believing it promoted an unprecedented and innovative experience for Brazilian agribusiness.

Box 3 – Information on Event B

Elements	Event B
Time to organize the virtual fair	4 months
Number of registrants	6 thousand
Organizer's satisfaction with the virtual event	Positive

Programming	Webinars, interviews with experts from the main areas of Brazilian agribusiness, and closing show
Target audience	Rural producers and other professionals in the field
Interaction among participants	Low interaction in chat and networking
Exhibitors	569 participating companies (71% of the face-to-face volume)
Banking institutions	There was no participation
Difficulties during the events	No reports of difficulties in accessing and handling the site
Participants' feedback	90% positive
Scientific dissemination and participation of research institutions	There was none
Business volume	There was no business
Benefits of virtual events	Adaptation and investment of agricultural events to the virtual environment
Expectations for future fairs	Greater investment in technologies for virtual events

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

The virtual edition presented the audience with a different perspective from the face-to-face fairs, as the purpose of its realization is the sale and commercialization of the products and services exhibited at the event. However, during the virtual version, no business was closed, but the organizers emphasized that this was not the fair's objective.

“It was a way for us to keep the fair alive, in action, keeping the fair's name in evidence. To not say the fair ended because it did not end, we were forced not to hold this event, anyway, no major event happened this year, so what we organized was a series of lectures, interviews, and webinars on some topics, it was a totally thematic fair, but without business” (Organizer B, 2020).

The priority of Event B was the interaction between the participating public (on one side rural producers, researchers, and other interested parties,

and on the other, speakers, companies, and professionals from the most varied sectors of the agribusiness production chains). The interaction occurred through a chat on the platform and in a space provided for the public to connect with companies and for personal and professional networking.

Among the exhibitors participating in the online edition of Event B, a large and varied number of companies directly and indirectly linked to agribusiness were verified, from input suppliers, rural producers, the processing industry, and support sectors for these activities. In comparative terms, while the face-to-face event traditionally brings together about 800 exhibiting brands, the virtual version had 569 participating companies, as many did not believe in the realization of the event in the digital format.

An important absence was the financial institutions, as it occurs in the face-to-face version, however, the organization reports that: “in the virtual, there was no time to make an arrangement with the banks, we could not do that (...) most likely next year we will have something more practical in this matter” (Organizer B, 2020).

The organization of Event B highlighted difficulties and positive points for holding the online fair, emphasizing that not holding it would imply contractual damages:

“The biggest challenge was not holding the face-to-face fair! And if you want to know, not holding a fair is more work than holding it. Because it cost a lot of money, we were with the fair ready (...) so it’s like this, the fair was practically set up, the companies mobilizing to make their stands when we were prevented by the pandemic and decrees. And even if the decrees were not in force, it would be very imprudent to hold a fair” (Organizer B, 2020).

There were no reports of difficulties in accessing and navigating the website built for the event, and the organizers’ understanding is that the Brazilian farmer is quite virtualized, that is, increasingly using digital channels to seek information and make purchases, a process that accelerated

in 2020 due to the quarantine period and social isolation resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

“It is a young agriculture, we can say that there are many new people in the market. The people who were watching and were willing to buy and need information, the first place they visit is the company’s website. If you have an event, they seek information through this event. But the first place they go is the company’s website. And during this pandemic period, this grew a lot, especially from the companies’ part regarding communication tools” (Organizer B, 2020).

A negative aspect of the event refers to the interactions between rural producers and research institutes, frequently present in the face-to-face editions of the fair, and responsible for the dissemination of the latest research and scientific knowledge. Thus, the virtual event lost this characteristic, presenting itself more commercially to the participating audience.

“In the face-to-face fair, all research institutes in São Paulo are present at the fair, we have the Fisheries Institute, the Agronomic Institute, the Zootechnics Institute, and the Biological Institute, all are present (...) we also count on Embrapa, presenting the latest research and knowledge. This face-to-face is one thing, and virtually it is very difficult to set this up on a platform” (Organizer B, 2020).

The evaluation of Event B is that since the digital version, it will not be possible to hold an event only in a face-to-face format, requiring new resources to conquer the target audience. Therefore, for the coming years, the organization expects the fair to take place in a hybrid format, with access for visitors and a virtual public.

“I want you to be able to enter the stand from wherever you are, tour the machine you want, from wherever you are. Part of the public has gotten used to this new virtual reality, and the public will look for activities that offer their products and services in a hybrid

way (...) people want to see what is happening at the event, like a news system of everything that happens inside the fair, because you call the public to see what is happening at the fair and consequently business happens. This woke us up, we need to invest more and more in technological tools” (Organizer B, 2020).

The organizers’ understanding is that investments in tools improve the presentation of the event, reflecting returns and gains since digital technology contributes to the virtualization of agricultural fairs.

DISCUSSION

Online events A and B did not fully achieve the commercial, cultural, social, and scientific contacts that occurred in previous years at face-to-face events. These characteristics are important at an agricultural fair (Zanella, 2006). Even though the proposed virtual scenario and the tools used were adequate for the moment, given the unpredictability of events – considering that events of this size begin to be structured as soon as the previous editions end – Campillo-Alhama and Herrero-Ruiz (2015) highlight the importance of adapting the event industry to intensify the relationship between the event and its audience.

The year 2020 was crucial to accelerate the TD of agricultural fairs and events, which timidly rehearsed an evolution towards the implementation of new communication strategies. Although the gains from this process should make events more attractive to rural producers, in addition to adding gains for the organization and conduct of events, it is evident that the advance was carried out under pressure for results that would minimize the losses from the cancellation of these fairs. Thus, it is understood that the improvement and planning of future editions will bring greater benefits to all involved in their realization.

During the participation of researchers to observe the realization and conduct of virtual fairs, it was verified that Event A invested in an experience closer to face-to-face, with a platform in a three-dimensional

(3D) environment, showing products and animals in virtual auctions, equivalent to what would happen in person at the agricultural fair. Meanwhile, Event B presented itself to the public as a traditional corporate portal, highlighting a program of debates and lectures, concluded by a live show with a musical attraction. Thus, by presenting themselves differently, some comparisons cannot be made between the events but rather highlight the experiences obtained with the proposed digital transformation.

Box 4 contributes to the analysis of the proposed problem, summarizing some aspects observed in the two events, complemented by interviews conducted with their respective organizers.

Although there are simultaneous communication technologies available in the market, in Event A there was no verification of interaction between participants, as there was no specific space (such as a chat) for the audience to communicate among themselves and with exhibitors. With a different purpose, Event B enabled social interaction among participants with areas providing networking and chats. Despite this space, it was observed that the participating public did not receive feedback on the questions raised in the chat, which would likely not occur in person.

Box 4 – Aspects observed at Events A and B

Observation	Event A	Event B
Program including lectures or workshops	Yes	Yes
Interaction between speakers and audience	No	No
Interaction among participants	No	Yes
Availability of chats	No	Yes
Accessible language for all audiences	Yes	Yes
Technical communication	Yes	Yes
Disclosure of services and products	Yes	Yes
Virtual reality technology (3D)	Yes	No
Sales and business	Yes	No
Networking area	No	Yes
Themes related to the rural sector	Yes	Yes
Organization sought feedback from participants	Yes	Yes

Source: Prepared by the authors (2024).

The participants of the online events had access to innovations and technical information in the agricultural sector, however, they could not share their experiences with their peers, as Zhong and Luo (2018) traditionally consider. In this case, the absorption of information that informally circulates in personal contact and is essential in knowledge construction, according to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1997), was impaired in these virtual editions.

It was also observed that the interactions between the public and the event organization were simplified, forgetting that the attention given to the participating public is part of the consumption experience, especially in a digital version of the event, where everything is new. Adding to this the fact that the ease of connecting to one event or another does not depend on travel and accommodation, saving time and money for rural producers, should create a more competitive environment among agricultural fairs, considering a competition for the available resources of the buyer. Therefore, feedback is important and, according to Schermerhorn, Hunt, and Osborn (1999), an essential factor for promoting effective communication.

Zanella (2006) and Soares (2020) reinforce that the objective of events is to generate commercial relationships; however, Event B did not conduct business, despite the presence of exhibitor stands participating in its program. The commercial relevance of events for exhibiting institutions was calculated at R\$41 million in Event A, resulting from online negotiations and projected for the 12 months following the event.

Although no business was closed at Event B, the exhibiting brands were present. Martin and Lisboa (2020) and Labanauskaitė *et al.* (2020) highlight the relevance of companies' strategic presence in digital environments, maintaining their commercial relationship where their consumers are inserted. That is why the organizers of Event B considered that the conference's objective was achieved, as it aimed to maintain the fair's liveliness during the pandemic period.

The participation of exhibiting companies in both events was different, reaching 300 companies in Event A and 569 organizations in Event B. The numbers did not reach the results of the face-to-face versions,

as some of the invited companies did not participate because they did not believe in the positive results from the migration of the face-to-face event to the virtual one (Event B) or because they already had their annual order demand complete for 2020 (Event A). These positions are contrary to what Labanauskaitė *et al.* (2020) state about the need for organizational marketing to transpose from the offline to the online environment.

Agricultural fairs are essential events that contribute to the development of rural businesses, becoming important allies in promoting scientific understanding, facilitating the expansion of knowledge and ideas to farmers and ranchers, as Duarte (2004) emphasizes. However, at a time when a lot of technical and managerial information was made available through digital means, such as business lives and webinars, many free, in the form of digital content generation, a low participation of research institutes and universities was observed in these virtual versions of agricultural fairs. On one side, Event A counted on the participation of two research institutes in its program (Embrapa and EMATER), while Event B did not have the participation of these institutions in its virtual version.

After the virtual fairs ended, the organizers of both events collected feedback from participants and exhibitors, having, according to both, reached 90% of positive responses, indicating the event's approval and the desire to participate in future editions.

The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the TD, forcing different sectors of society to make a significant digital leap in their daily practices, including sectors related to agribusiness, from contract closure to training and education. Quickly, many businesses transitioned from a traditional approach to digitalized and/or remote practices, leaving rural producers to adapt to available technologies, managing and mastering different digital tools.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The reinvention of the rural event market due to the Covid-19 pandemic took place urgently to mitigate the economic damage caused

by the cancellation of the face-to-face editions of these events. To this end, investments were made in digital tools and platforms, so that Events A and B found new opportunities to hold fairs in a virtual format, still guaranteeing partially positive results for those involved, and which should be incorporated and improved for their future editions.

However, it is important to highlight that, despite this TD of agricultural events following a trend of other types of business, there are some obstacles that must be considered and solved over time: digitalization, while integrating and connecting different actors, excludes those who do not have access to TDIC, either due to lack of aptitude for use, technical and educational deficiencies, or even the absence of adequate telecommunication infrastructure for a large portion of rural producers.

This means that the Internet and its resources are essential tools for holding and participating in these events, and while the organizers use the terms 'turning point' and 'digital transformation' to describe the current moment of adaptation, the same does not occur with the infrastructure and connectivity in the field. On one side, technology is positioned as the main strategy used in the articulation and execution of agricultural events, while on the other, the challenges lie in the many rural properties that still do not have Internet connection, lack of technological equipment, and digital skills, imposing a communication barrier. In this sense, adjustments were and still are necessary in all spheres, with companies taking the lead in the process, which is not complete without the participation of rural producers.

In conclusion, there were significant gains with the digital edition of these events, highlighting the convenience and expanded reach. However, it is likely that some particularities of face-to-face agricultural events cannot be completely transferred to the digital format, especially those that promote the exchange of tacit information and generate knowledge, such as more intimate personal interaction, physical contact, or even a conversation and coffee with a technician. This finding points to a balance path, possibly in the format of hybrid events, capable of providing the best of both experiences, as a trend of a new era determinant for Brazilian agribusiness events.

In this context, the reflections and discussions presented in this chapter, regarding SDG 8, encompass the perspective of social development, collaborating with subsidies that can assist research and actions towards fulfilling the 2030 Agenda.

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