



# Finding Product-Market Fit: Go-To-Market Strategies of German B2B SaaS Startups

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## **Abstract**

The concept of Product-Market Fit (PMF) is widely recognized among practitioners as a milestone for startup success. However, PMF has received limited attention in academic research.

This dissertation investigates the GTM strategies employed by German B2B SaaS startups to attain PMF, focusing on their early-stage customer acquisition approaches, growth strategies, and the key indicators used to assess PMF.

It employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating qualitative expert interviews with a quantitative survey. This approach provides in-depth insights into best practices while enabling validation across a broader sample of startups.

The findings reveal that German B2B SaaS startups follow Lean Startup principles, particularly through customer feedback loops and structured experimentation. However, additional patterns emerged such as prior industry expertise of founders, allowing them to leverage existing networks and knowledge. The study identifies two primary GTM strategies – Sales-Led Growth (SLG) and Product-Led Growth (PLG) – with the choice largely influenced by Average Contract Value (ACV). Additionally, startups assess PMF using a mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators.

By bridging practical insights with academic research, this dissertation contributes to the literature on PMF and GTM strategies. Additionally, it offers valuable insights for early-stage B2B SaaS startups on their path to PMF.

**Title:** Finding Product-Market Fit: Go-To-Market Strategies of German B2B SaaS Startups

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**Keywords:** Product-Market Fit (PMF), Go-To-Market (GTM) Strategies, B2B SaaS Startups, German Market, Lean Startup, Growth Strategies, PMF Indicators, Founder Industry Expertise

## Sumário

O conceito de product-market fit (PMF) é amplamente reconhecido entre os profissionais como um marco para o sucesso de uma startup. No entanto, o product-market fit tem recebido pouca atenção na investigação académica.

Esta dissertação investiga as estratégias de entrada no mercado empregadas por startups B2B SaaS alemãs para alcançar o product-market fit, concentrando-se nas suas abordagens iniciais de aquisição de clientes, estratégias de crescimento e os principais indicadores utilizados para avaliar o product-market fit.

Utiliza uma metodologia de investigação mista, integrando entrevistas qualitativas a peritos com um inquérito quantitativo. Esta abordagem permite obter um conhecimento aprofundado das melhores práticas, e ainda a validação numa amostra mais alargada de startups.

Os resultados revelam que as startups B2B SaaS alemãs seguem os princípios Lean Startup, particularmente através de ciclos de feedback do cliente e experimentação estruturada. No entanto, surgiram padrões adicionais, como a experiência prévia dos fundadores no sector, que lhes permite tirar partido das redes e conhecimentos existentes. O estudo identifica duas estratégias principais de entrada no mercado - Sales-Led Growth (SLG) e Product-Led Growth (PLG) - sendo a escolha largamente influenciada pelo Valor Médio de Contrato. Além disso, as startups avaliam o product-market fit usando uma combinação de indicadores qualitativos e quantitativos.

Ao combinar conhecimentos práticos com investigação académica, esta dissertação contribui para a literatura sobre product-market fit e estratégias de entrada no mercado. Além disso, oferece insights valiosos para startups B2B SaaS em estágio inicial no seu caminho para o PMF.

**Título:** Encontrar a Adequação Produto-Mercado: Estratégias Go-To-Market de Startups B2B SaaS Alemãs

**Autor:** Daniel Martin König

**Palavras-chave:** Product-Market Fit (PMF), Estratégias Go-To-Market (GTM), B2B SaaS Startups, Mercado Alemão, Lean Startup, Estratégias de Crescimento, Indicadores PMF, Experiência do Fundador no Setor

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## List of Abbreviations

|      |                                   |
|------|-----------------------------------|
| ACV  | Annual Contract Value             |
| ABM  | Account Based Marketing           |
| AI   | Artificial Intelligence           |
| ARR  | Annual Recurring Revenue          |
| B2B  | Business-to-Business              |
| BMC  | Business Model Canvas             |
| CAC  | Customer Acquisition Cost         |
| DAU  | Daily Active Users                |
| GTM  | Go-To-Market                      |
| ICP  | Ideal Customer Profile            |
| LTV  | Lifetime Value                    |
| MAU  | Monthly Active Users              |
| MRR  | Monthly Recurring Revenue         |
| MVP  | Minimum Viable Product            |
| MLG  | Marketing-Led Growth              |
| NPS  | Net Promoter Score                |
| NRR  | Net Revenue Retention             |
| PMF  | Product-Market Fit                |
| PLG  | Product-Led Growth                |
| PLS  | Product-Led Sales                 |
| SaaS | Software-as-a-Service             |
| SEO  | Search Engine Optimization        |
| SEA  | Search Engine Advertising         |
| SMB  | Small and Medium-sized Businesses |
| SLG  | Sales-Led Growth                  |
| VC   | Venture Capital                   |

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# 1 Introduction

The dynamic and highly competitive landscape of business-to-business (B2B) Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) startups presents significant challenges for companies striving to achieve sustainable growth. Central to this journey is attaining Product-Market Fit (PMF), a concept popularized by Marc Andreessen (2007), which validates the alignment between a product and its target market. Its significance is underscored by data that highlights that the top two reasons for startup failure are “no market need” (35%) and “running out of cash/failed to raise new capital” (29%) (CB Insights, 2021). Overall, more than 90% of startups fail (Giardino et al., 2014). Failing to address a genuine market demand prevents startups from gaining traction, while prolonged efforts to achieve PMF without clear progress drain financial resources.

PMF is widely recognized as a critical milestone, enabling startups to scale operations and attract investment (Retterath, 2024). However, the theoretical underpinnings of PMF have not yet been thoroughly researched (Zellweger & Zenger, 2023), and its practical realization, particularly through effective Go-To-Market (GTM) strategies, remains an ongoing challenge for entrepreneurs. In this thesis, I aim to explore how German B2B SaaS startups find PMF and which GTM strategies primarily contribute to this achievement.

The German B2B SaaS market is closely intertwined with the country's economic strength, particularly through its small and mid-sized enterprises and industrial sectors. These businesses, which have historically driven Germany's prosperity, present significant opportunities for innovation as they cautiously adopt digital technologies (Büchel et al., 2021). Startups play a vital role in addressing these gaps, particularly in automation, process optimization, and value chain digitization (Röhl & Engels, 2021). Reflecting this trend, 74.7% of startups in Germany focus on B2B customers, making this sector pivotal to the country's startup ecosystem (Hirschfeld et al., 2024). Despite recent economic challenges, the SaaS sector continues to grow, driven by advancements in Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) and a strategic shift among startups toward balancing profitability with growth. Success stories like Celonis (Becker, 2021a) and Personio (Becker, 2021b) highlight the sector's importance and its potential to redefine traditional industries.

The study seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical applications by investigating how German B2B SaaS startups are working towards PMF and which GTM

strategies have proven to be particularly effective. Therefore, the study addresses the following research questions:

- ***RQ1:*** *What methods do German B2B SaaS startups use to work towards PMF?*
- ***RQ2:*** *Which growth strategies enabled startups to gain significant traction?*
- ***RQ3:*** *How do German B2B SaaS startups identify and measure PMF?*

The dissertation is structured to provide a comprehensive analysis of the topic. Chapter 2 reviews existing literature, delving into the theoretical underpinnings of PMF. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, detailing the qualitative interviews and quantitative survey used to collect data. Chapter 4 presents the findings, offering insights into the strategies employed by successful startups to achieve PMF. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

This research aims to contribute to the scientific knowledge on PMF and GTM strategies while offering practical insights for B2B SaaS startups. By uncovering patterns and best practices, the study aspires to empower early-stage startups to make informed decisions and enhance their prospects of achieving sustained success.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 The Concept of PMF

PMF originated as a concept in venture capital (VC), aiding investors predict which startups will succeed (Stotz, 2023). It was popularized by Marc Andreessen (2007) in his article “The Only Thing That Matters”, where he defined PMF as *“being in a good market with a product that can satisfy that market.”*

Andreessen described PMF as a distinct stage in which customer demand surges, word-of-mouth accelerates, sales cycles shorten, and revenue grows rapidly. At this point, scaling becomes the primary challenge. Conversely, startups without PMF experience slow sales cycles, hesitant customers, and stagnating growth due to a lack of perceived value.

To contextualize PMF within the startup lifecycle, Andreessen (2007) distinguished two phases: before PMF, a startup must focus solely on iterating towards PMF, adapting its product, target audience, and strategy as needed. After PMF, growth and scaling take precedence, leveraging the validated market fit.

Despite its widespread use among practitioners, PMF has been subject to limited academic scrutiny (Zellweger & Zenger, 2023). Although widely used to describe a target state for startups, PMF has not been systematically analyzed (Dennehy et al., 2016; Giardino et al., 2016; Gregoire & Shepherd, 2012). To the best of my knowledge, Zellweger and Zenger (2023) are the only scholars who have critically examined PMF, incorporating it as a central component of their “Entrepreneurs as Scientists” approach. They define PMF as the alignment between an entrepreneur's market belief and the market's actual response. The stronger the correlation between these, the stronger the PMF.

Zellweger and Zenger (2023) argue that PMF is far more complex than Andreessen's (2007) original description. Their framework categorizes entrepreneurial action into belief formation, testing, and response, each carrying inherent doubts – whether PMF exists, whether feedback is valid, and whether pivots are properly executed. They emphasize that PMF emerges through structured iteration, requiring entrepreneurs to rigorously test assumptions and continuously refine their approach.

## **2.2 The Importance of PMF for B2B SaaS Startups**

The literature identifies PMF as a critical success factor for B2B SaaS startups, shaping their ability to scale effectively and attract investment. Retterath (2024) describes PMF as a key milestone, often marking the transition from Seed to Series A funding. It validates founders' core assumptions and confirms genuine market demand, which is essential for securing investor confidence and accelerating revenue growth.

The inability to reach PMF is one of the leading causes of startup failure. Dennehy et al. (2016) emphasize that many startups misjudge market needs, launching products that fail to resonate with customers, leading to misalignment and wasted resources. Additionally, PMF provides operational advantages. Connect Ventures (2023) notes that startups with PMF benefit from organic growth via referrals and high retention rates, which lowers customer acquisition costs (CAC). Conversely, startups without PMF struggle with costly and inefficient growth, akin to “force-feeding” customers a product they do not need.

Achieving PMF also enhances a startup's perceived stability and valuation. Ewens et al. (2023) demonstrate that PMF correlates with higher founder-CEO compensation, reflecting increased investor confidence and market recognition. This highlights PMF's role not just in validating the product-market relationship but also in making a startup more attractive to stakeholders.

Given its importance, a structured approach to achieve PMF is essential. Entrepreneurs must identify efficient strategies to achieve PMF and determine the optimal timing for transitioning to scaling. The following chapters will explore methodologies (section 2.3) and metrics (section 2.4) that help navigate this process.

## **2.3 Working towards PMF**

### **2.3.1 The Lean Startup Methodology**

This dissertation focuses on the Lean Startup methodology due to its practical relevance and popularity among world-class institutions (Felin et al., 2020). However, its limitations will be critically evaluated in section 2.3.3. For explanations and principles, it primarily draws on Blank and Eckhardt's (2024) latest publication in the *Journal of Management*.

The Lean Startup methodology employs scientific principles to entrepreneurship, aiming to reduce uncertainty and enhance decision-making through structured experimentation (Zellweger & Zenger, 2023). This iterative approach contrasts with traditional models that rely

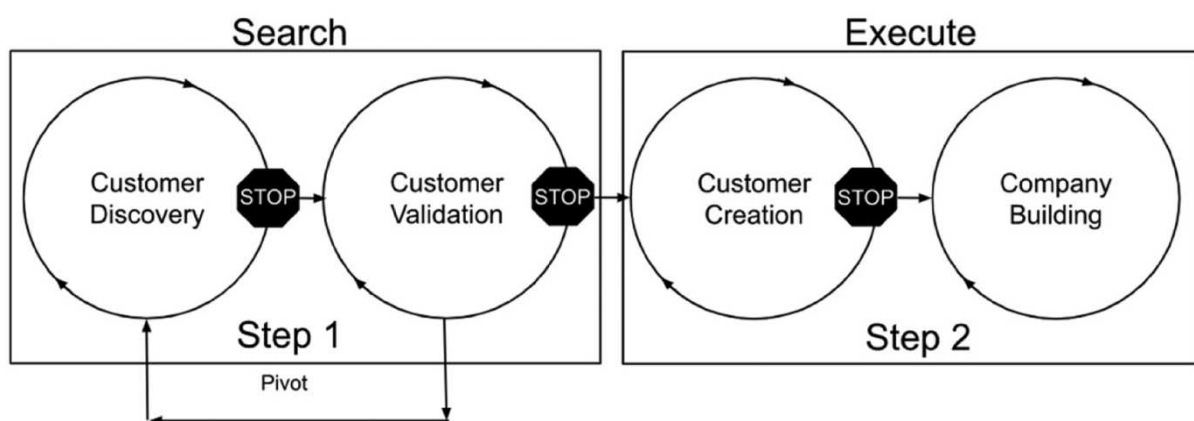
on predefined strategies; instead, it emphasizes continuous adaptation based on real-world feedback to minimize risks and resource waste (Blank & Eckhardt, 2024; Ries, 2011; Zott & Amit, 2024).

The Lean Startup methodology introduced actionable strategies to achieve PMF, shifting the focus from identifying PMF to actively working towards it (Blank & Eckhardt, 2024). Entrepreneurs systematically refine their offering through customer discovery, hypothesis testing, and iterative prototyping, leveraging tools such as customer interviews, expert consultations, MVP testing, and surveys (Münch et al., 2013). These structured learning loops help startups validate demand, optimize GTM strategies, and reduce the risk of premature scaling (Blank & Eckhardt, 2024).

### 2.3.2 The Lean Startup Process

A core principle of the Lean Startup methodology is “getting out of the building” (Blank, 2013; Blank & Eckhardt, 2024; Leatherbee & Katila, 2020), which emphasizes direct engagement with customers to understand their perceptions of value.

The Lean Startup methodology divides the entrepreneurial journey into two phases as illustrated in figure 1: *Search* and *Execute* (Blank & Eckhardt, 2024).



**Figure 1.** *The Lean Startup Process (Blank & Eckhardt, 2024).*

The *Search* phase focuses on validating PMF through two stages:

1. *Customer Discovery*: Entrepreneurs formulate key hypotheses (e.g., demand existence, value proposition fit) using the Business Model Canvas (BMC) (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). These hypotheses are tested through problem validation methods, including customer interviews and prototype testing. The MVP serves as a tool to gather insights from early adopters, reducing information asymmetries and refining product features,

distribution channels, value propositions and sales strategies through iterative learning (Ries, 2011). According to Blank & Eckhardt (2024) customer discovery concludes when specific customer segments are identified, and a predictable, repeatable sales process is established.

2. *Customer Validation*: Building on customer discovery insights, this phase establishes scalable, repeatable sales processes. Entrepreneurs refine MVPs, design marketing strategies, and establish performance metrics to validate sustainable customer acquisition. Critical aspects, such as identifying decision-makers and optimizing the sales cycle, are addressed. Completion of this phase signals readiness for systematic scaling efforts (Blank & Eckhardt, 2024).

The *Execution phase* transforms validated concepts into scalable operations:

1. *Customer Creation*: Startups systematically acquire new customers by developing tailored marketing strategies that align with validated value propositions and customer segments. Instead of applying generic approaches, marketing efforts are built from scratch based on insights gained during customer validation. This process ensures that the startup effectively fosters demand and reaches customers through the most suitable channels (Blank, 2003; Blank & Eckhardt, 2024). Startups should avoid copying established marketing strategies from other companies, as success depends on developing unique approaches tailored to specific market dynamics (Blank, 2012).
2. *Company Building*: Startups develop functional teams (e.g., marketing) to support scaling and transition from early adopters to mainstream customers (Blank & Eckhardt, 2024).

### **2.3.3 Constructive Criticism of the Lean Startup Methodology**

Despite its widespread adoption, the Lean Startup methodology has been criticized for its overreliance on customer feedback, weak theoretical foundation, and risk of unstructured pivots (Ehrig & Schmitt, 2022; Felin et al., 2024; Gruber & Tal, 2024; Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2020).

While Felin et al. (2024) acknowledge the value of customer feedback, they highlight the challenge of distinguishing valuable insights from “noise”, given that customer preferences are often heterogeneous and difficult to articulate. This aligns with Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), who emphasize the difficulty of selecting the right customers to heed. Particularly in disruptive innovation, customers may struggle to express latent needs, as illustrated by Henry Ford's

famous assertion that people would have asked for a “faster horse” rather than a car (Vlaskovits, 2011). Felin et al. (2024) suggest that internal experimentation and problem-solving – rather than immediate market validation – may sometimes yield better results. Early employees, co-founders, and investors may offer more valuable guidance than customers due to their deeper understanding of the problem space and vested interest in the venture’s success.

In response, Blank & Eckhardt (2024) contend that the Lean Startup methodology is not merely reactive but also proactive in uncovering latent demand. They emphasize that customer interaction serves a form of hypothesis testing, rather than passive feedback collection. Successful entrepreneurs may not blindly follow demand signals but develop a deep understanding of unmet needs, shaping solutions accordingly.

Another critique concerns the methodology’s lack of a strong theoretical framework (Felin et al., 2024). Although widely used, the BMC is often seen as lacking strategic depth (Felin et al., 2020). The Lean Startup approach prioritizes speed and iterative learning over formal strategic planning, which can lead to an underestimation of rigorous, theory-based hypothesis development (Felin et al., 2024).

However, Blank & Eckhardt (2024) counter this critique by arguing that Lean Startup does not reject theory but rather integrates theory generation and testable predictions before action. Entrepreneurs are expected to develop an initial theoretical foundation before iterating on their ideas, ensuring a structured transition from conceptualization to empirical testing.

A related critique is the risk of misinterpreting feedback, which can result in arbitrary, non-strategic pivots (Felin et al., 2024). The methodology lacks a clear mechanism for evaluating when and how to pivot, which can result in reactive, short-term decision-making rather than deliberate strategic shifts. Since customer feedback is often fragmented or inconsistent, founders may overcorrect based on limited or conflicting insights, leading to unnecessary product changes or weakened market positioning (Zellweger & Zenger, 2023). Moreover, Kirtley & O’Mahony (2020) found that pivots are often incremental rather than abrupt, accumulating over time rather than occurring as sudden transformations. Their findings suggest that pivots should not be framed as reactive responses to short-term signals, but as deliberate strategic decisions triggered by significant market shifts or emerging opportunities. Additionally, frequent pivots may erode investor confidence, as excessive changes can create legitimacy risks and stakeholder uncertainty.

### **2.3.4 The applicability of the Lean Startup within German B2B SaaS startups**

Although the Lean Startup methodology offers a structured approach to iterative product development and market validation, its scope and limitations remain underexplored (Blank & Eckhardt, 2024). Teece et al. (2016) argue that the methodology is particularly suited for ventures with low development costs and rapid iteration cycles, conditions common in software startups. However, its applicability is more constrained in deep-tech and contrarian ventures (Ehrig & Schmitt, 2022; Felin et al., 2020; Thiel, 2014). Even Blank and Eckhardt (2024) acknowledge this, stating: “Perhaps the Lean Startup might not be the best framework for an entrepreneur building a business based on an application of biotechnology” (p. 3029).

The German B2B SaaS sector largely operates within these favorable conditions, as digital solutions for business process automation and optimization can often be developed, tested, and refined with relatively low upfront costs. However, startups operating in highly specialized or deep-tech domains, such as cybersecurity or machine learning, may face additional challenges in fully applying the Lean Startup approach due to complex product-market dynamics and extended validation processes.

Additionally, the Lean Startup methodology classifies startups into one of four market types: (1) new product in an existing market, (2) new product in a new market, (3) cost-differentiated resegmentation, and (4) niche resegmentation (Blank, 2012). Most German B2B SaaS startups offer innovative solutions within established industries, aligning primarily with the first or fourth market type. Given the strong presence of industrial and manufacturing SMEs in Germany (Büchel et al., 2021), many SaaS startups focus on enhancing operational efficiency, supply chain management, and compliance automation (Röhl & Engels, 2021). These characteristics generally support the adoption of the Lean Startup methodology.

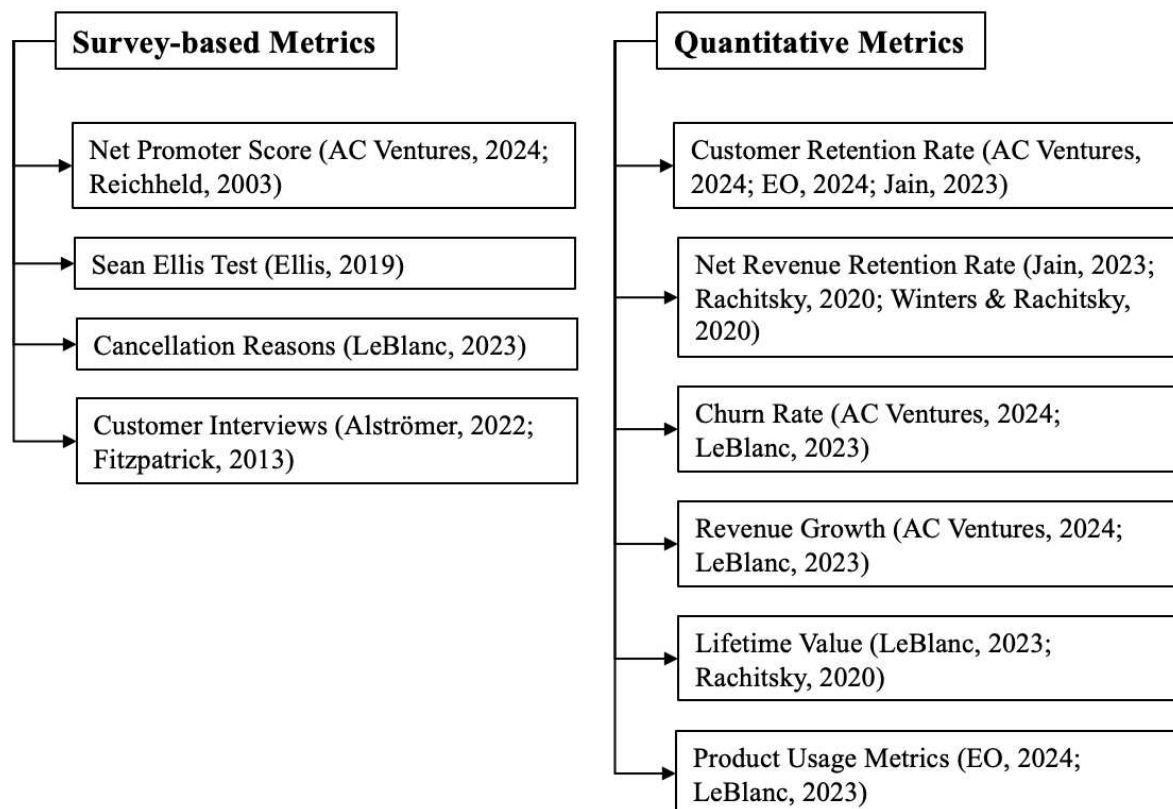
## **2.4 Indicating PMF**

Although the Lean Startup method provides a structured approach for startups striving to achieve PMF, it leaves a critical question unanswered: How can startups determine whether they are on the right path to achieving PMF? This gap is particularly significant, as PMF represents a pivotal milestone in a startup’s journey toward scalability (Retterath, 2024).

The Lean Startup method places strong emphasis on validation through qualitative interactions with (potential) customers but does not specify metrics to quantitatively measure a startup’s success (Blank & Eckhardt, 2024). Zellweger and Zenger (2023) discuss heuristics which

startups can use to simplify the process of validating their beliefs. However, they also do not provide concrete indicators to measure a startup's success.

To bridge this gap, experts within the startup ecosystem have leveraged their experiences to propose specific indicators that startups can use to assess their performance and benchmark themselves against competitors. Given the scope of this thesis, an in-depth discussion of individual metrics is not possible. Instead, blog articles and reports from leading experts have been analyzed and synthesized in Figure 2. Furthermore, Chapter 4 presents both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the metrics used by German B2B SaaS startups to indicate PMF.



**Figure 2.** *PMF Metrics.*

## **3 Research Design and Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design and Purpose**

This dissertation investigates GTM strategies employed by German B2B SaaS startups and their contribution to achieving PMF. The study addresses a notable gap in existing research as the concept of PMF is popular among practitioners but has received only limited attention from academic scholars (Zellweger & Zenger, 2023). Moreover, research on how startups should design their GTM strategy to effectively reach customers has so far found little place in academic literature (Kuester et al., 2017). Additionally, practitioners often focus on the U.S. market. By examining GTM practices specific to the German market, this research seeks to provide actionable insights for early-stage B2B SaaS startups operating within this context.

This study adopts a fully integrated mixed methods research design (Saunders et al., 2023) combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively explore the complexity of GTM strategies and their role in achieving PMF. The research design commenced with qualitative interviews conducted with experts to gain detailed insights into the strategies associated with pre-PMF stages. These interviews provided a robust foundation for understanding GTM practices and identifying relevant themes for further exploration (Kreis et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the insights from these interviews informed the design of a structured quantitative survey. This survey was carefully developed to complement the qualitative data by enabling the collection of broader, population-wide insights.

The purpose of this dissertation is twofold, encompassing both descriptive and evaluative dimensions. It is descriptive in its aim to document the approaches employed by German B2B SaaS startups to achieve PMF. The evaluative aspect explores the relative effectiveness of these strategies, assessing which approaches have proven most impactful in achieving PMF. By integrating both descriptive and evaluative elements, this research not only outlines the practices that have contributed to success but also offers practical insights that can guide early-stage startups in refining their GTM strategies. This dual approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the factors that lead to PMF, thus contributing valuable knowledge to the German B2B SaaS ecosystem.

## 3.2 Data Collection Methodology

### 3.2.1 Qualitative Interviews

As primary data collection method qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, representing a diverse range of experts from the German B2B SaaS startup ecosystem. These participants included founders, CEOs, growth and revenue managers, VC investors, angel investors and advisors. This diversity ensured gaining comprehensive insights from key stakeholders involved in the early stages of startups.

| Interview ID | Job Role                                              | ACV Range           |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| IV1          | Founder & CEO                                         | €50,001 – €100,000  |
| IV2          | VC & Angel Investor, Entrepreneurship lecturer at WHU | N/A                 |
| IV3          | Angel Investor & GTM Advisor                          | N/A                 |
| IV4          | Head of Growth                                        | €50,001 – €100,000  |
| IV5          | Head of Growth                                        | €50,001 – €100,000  |
| IV6          | VC Investor                                           | N/A                 |
| IV7          | VP Revenue                                            | €1,000 – €10,000    |
| IV8          | Head of Growth                                        | 100,000             |
| IV9          | VC Investor                                           | N/A                 |
| IV10         | VC Investor                                           | N/A                 |
| IV11         | Founder & CEO                                         | €100,000 – €250,000 |
| IV12         | Chief of Staff                                        | €1,000 – €10,000    |
| IV13         | Chief of Staff                                        | < €1,000            |
| IV14         | VP Revenue                                            | €10,001 – €50,000   |
| IV15         | Founder & CEO                                         | €1,000 – €10,000    |

**Table 1.** *Interview Participants.*

A purposive sampling method was employed to recruit participants who could provide relevant and rich data. Three criteria were established for selection: 1) the interviewee must work for a German B2B SaaS startup that has already achieved PMF and have been involved with the startup from its early stages or 2) the interviewee must work for an early-stage and B2B SaaS focused VC firm in Germany where PMF is central to investment decisions or 3) the interviewee must be a GTM advisor and/or angel investor focusing on German B2B SaaS startups. Participants were recruited through my personal network and LinkedIn.

The interviews were conducted virtually using Google Meet, with each session lasting between 25 and 45 minutes. The semi-structured format allowed for a consistent exploration of key topics while providing the flexibility to adapt questions to the expertise and context of each participant (Misoch, 2018). The non-customized interview guide can be found in Appendix B.

Ethical considerations were central to the data collection process. Each interview was recorded with the informed consent of the participant. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to all participants, and they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point. This ensured that the research adhered to ethical standards and fostered an open and collaborative environment for the participants.

### **3.2.2 Quantitative Survey**

To complement the qualitative insights and validate findings from the interviews, a quantitative survey was conducted to map a larger population of German B2B SaaS startups. The survey aimed to obtain key facts such as the application of Lean Startup principles and the perceived effectiveness of specific GTM elements. The online survey was designed and administered using the Qualtrics platform allowing cost efficiency and rapid response collection (Evans & Mathur, 2005). The survey utilized a combination of multiple-choice and Likert scale questions to ensure both structured responses and the ability to gauge perceptions and opinions (Theobald, 2017).

Participants were selected through a purposive sampling strategy via LinkedIn to ensure eligibility and relevance to the research objectives. To the begin of the survey, eligibility criteria were validated through two initial screening question, which confirmed that participants worked for a B2B SaaS startup based in Germany that has achieved PMF based on a given definition. Respondents who denied this were automatically excluded from the survey. To avoid multiple entries from the same startup, the recruitment process ensured that only one employee per company participated.

To uphold ethical standards, all survey responses were anonymous and treated with strict confidentiality. Participants were informed that the data would be stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

#### **3.3.1 Qualitative Interviews**

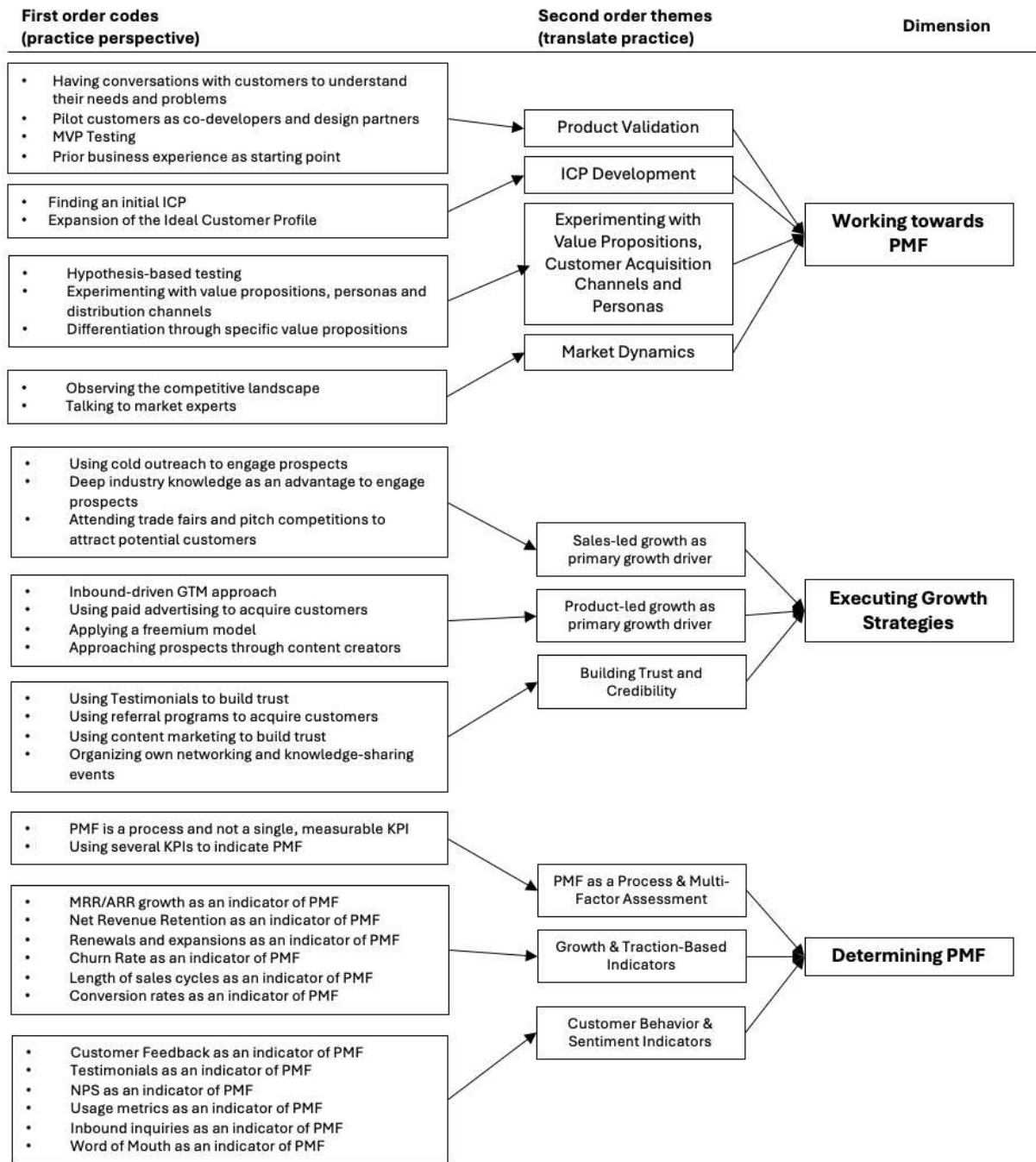
To ensure a high level of accuracy in the analysis, all interviews were transcribed verbatim. Auto-generated transcripts were carefully reviewed and corrected where necessary to maintain fidelity to the original conversations.

The data analysis was conducted following the principles of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), with a particular emphasis on the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013). This approach was chosen due to its systematic framework for inductively deriving conceptual insights from qualitative data.

The coding process began with an open coding phase, in which the interview transcripts were examined in detail to identify relevant passages and sentences linked to the research questions. This initial coding step was conducted manually using the software Atlas.ti. Furthermore, the constant comparison method (Kolb, 2012) was applied, allowing for a systematic comparison of newly identified codes with previously coded text segments. This process facilitated the recognition of recurring patterns and distinctions across interview transcripts, ultimately resulting in 104 first-order codes.

Following the open coding phase, axial coding was performed to establish thematic connections among the first-order codes. This step enabled the identification of broader second-order themes that encapsulated clusters of related first-order concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). As a result, ten second-order themes emerged from the data.

The final step of the coding process was selective coding (Spiggle, 1994), where the second-order themes were grouped into broader, overarching dimensions. These dimensions helped structure the findings and highlight the key insights from the qualitative data. As a result, three main dimensions emerged: *Working Towards PMF*, *Executing Growth Strategies*, and *Determining PMF*. The complete data structure is presented in figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Data structure.

### 3.3.2 Quantitative Survey

To systematically analyze the quantitative survey data, a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical methods was applied. The analysis was conducted using SPSS.

The data underwent a cleaning and preparation process before analysis. First, responses that did not meet the inclusion criteria were filtered out. Additionally, incomplete responses were removed to maintain data integrity. To prevent distortions in the results, outliers that were

deemed non-representative and led to failures in statistical tests were identified and excluded. This ensured the final dataset was both valid and reliable for analysis resulting in a sample size of  $n = 104$ .

According to Crunchbase, there are 2,125 active German B2B SaaS startups (Appendix B). Given that 74.7% of German startups focus on B2B customers (Hirschfeld et al., 2024), this would result in an estimated population of 1,587 B2B SaaS startups. However, this figure includes 95 startups that have only received angel funding and 483 startups that have secured pre-seed funding. Retterath (2024) suggests that achieving PMF often marks the transition from the seed stage to Series A funding. While it is likely that these early-stage startups have not yet reached PMF, this cannot be categorically ruled out. Consequently, the relevant population size is estimated to be between 1,000 and 1,500 companies.

For a sample to be considered representative, it should be large enough to provide a margin of error between 5% and 10% at a 95% confidence level (Bartlett et al., 2001). According to Israel (1992), a population of 1,000 to 1,500 would require a sample size of approximately 175. While this dissertation's sample is not large enough to be fully representative, it still enables a robust analysis to identify patterns within the data.

Following data preparation, descriptive statistical methods were employed to summarize key characteristics of the dataset. For categorical variables, frequencies and percentages were calculated to provide an overview of respondents' backgrounds, startup characteristics and the GTM elements used. As these variables were collected in a multiple-choice format, this approach allowed for a clear representation of their distribution across the sample. For continuous variables, including the perceived importance of PMF indicators and the principles of the Lean Startup methodology, measures of central tendency and dispersion were computed. Specifically, the mean, median, standard deviation, and range were used to assess trends in responses, as these variables were measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5.

To explore relationships between variables and identify significant differences among startup characteristics, inferential statistical analyses were performed (Stapor, 2020). Crosstabs analysis, including Chi-Square tests, was applied to test for significant differences between groups regarding key themes collected through multiple-choice questions. This method allowed for an examination of associations between categorical variables, such as startup characteristics (e.g., ACVs) and GTM elements.

For continuous variables, such as PMF indicators and Lean Startup principles, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test for significant differences between groups. Before applying ANOVA, Levene's test for homogeneity of variances was performed to determine whether the assumption of equal variances was met. In cases where variances were unequal, the Brown-Forsythe test was used as a robust alternative to ensure the validity of the results. If ANOVA or Brown-Forsythe tests indicated significant differences, post-hoc tests were conducted to determine which groups differed significantly from each other and to interpret the results. The Tukey HSD post-hoc test was applied when equal variances were assumed, while the Games-Howell post-hoc test was used when variances were found to be unequal.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Qualitative Findings

#### 4.1.1 Working towards PMF

The experts extensively described processes aimed at identifying suitable customers, understanding their specific challenges and needs, and developing a product that effectively addresses these. They also emphasized the importance of finding effective communication channels and creating unique value propositions that resonate with customers and differentiate from competitors. These elements were systematically tested through hypothesis-driven experimentation to ensure alignment between the product offering and market demand.

One can already note clear procedural parallels to the Lean Startup methodology (Ries, 2011) and the Lean Startup Process, particularly its Search Phase (Blank & Eckhardt, 2024). The importance of Lean Startup for German B2B SaaS startups was emphasized by IV2:

*“I always recommend startups to initially follow the principles of lean startup – building an MVP, gathering feedback and iterating based on this feedback. The core principle is not to develop a product in isolation, perfecting it, only to discover later that there’s no market for it, or customers aren’t willing to pay. That’s why the advice we give our founders is to engage with potential customers early, understand market segments better, and develop solutions that are closely aligned with the market. In this sense, the Lean Startup methodology is very close to reality.”*

The following subchapters provide a detailed examination of the steps and approaches employed by German B2B SaaS startups on their path towards PMF.

#### ***Product Validation***

The findings show that B2B SaaS startups leverage the principles of the Lean Startup methodology to validate their products, particularly focusing on understanding the customer and building a product that resonates with the market (Blank & Eckhardt, 2024; Ries, 2011). However, the interviews also indicated that there is often already a connection between a founding team and the market they want to enter. This connection can serve as an initial validation, as founders themselves or their close networks have experienced challenges that existing software products could not solve, leading them to create a startup in that space. As IV5 described:

*“The idea actually came from a personal pain point experienced by one of our founders. He was an advisor at one of our first customers, noticed the pain point there, and said, “Hey, you need a technical solution for this. Let’s co-develop it.”*

Another example comes from a team that initially built an agency for process automation in customer service to support large enterprises. They later recognized the potential to turn their service into a product, as IV8 described:

*“Then we realized that the customer service use case was enormous and that the market was vast. So, we decided to move into this space. We sold the agency [...] and basically transitioned [startup] into a productized version of the agency business. [...] We already had significant interactions with companies and tested the first prototypes [...].”*

These two statements reflect what nearly all participants confirmed – the importance of having a personal connection and prior expertise regarding the problem they aim to solve. At the same time, as mentioned in these statements, such connections often lead to early customer relationships in the form of pilot customers and design partners. The expert interviews revealed that close collaborations were highly important. This allowed them to further develop their product in a trusted environment, gain a deeper understanding of customers, and build credibility. IV2 described this approach:

*“In my view, it helps to start by acquiring a cohort of three to five initial customers willing to engage in a kind of co-creation. These customers [...] are open to participating in the development process, knowing the product won’t be perfect initially. The obvious choice is often people you already know.”*

Such relationships often develop into deep customer partnerships, where a startup benefits from the expertise of one or more contacts, while the contact person within his or her company gains recognition as an “Internal Champion” for an innovative solution to an existing problem. IV1 described such a relationship as follows:

*“[...] We had an excellent contact person – a young and ambitious [...] manager who was highly interested in our product. [...] He put a lot of effort into co-developing the product with us by providing ongoing feedback on what such a product should look like for a company like [customer name] [...].”*

The significance of pilot customers and design partners highlights the necessity for B2B SaaS startups to receive deep qualitative feedback. To facilitate this, the findings suggest that it helps startups cultivate a few long-term relationships that not only provide continuous insights for product refinement but also foster trust and alignment.

Despite the fundamental importance of customer feedback, the experts noted that it must always be evaluated critically and placed within the right context. It is particularly important to distinguish whether feedback is specific to a single customer or resonates with the market. IV11 shared:

*“You shouldn’t let customers influence product development too much. Otherwise, you risk ending up with an overloaded, confusing product. [...] You need to engage with customers, listen to them, and then filter what’s worth implementing versus what needs rethinking.”*

IV9 highlighted that this risk is amplified when startups rely heavily on pilot customers from their close network, emphasizing the need to acquire at least one customer through cold outreach:

*“You might build software for your first three customers, and they seem happy, but that’s only because you’re developing a highly tailored solution for them, not for the broader market. [...] This often happens when you recruit your first customers through a narrow network, where they’re all quite similar. That’s why I think it’s always a good signal when a company acquires at least one pilot customer through completely cold outreach.”*

The findings highlight that product validation in B2B SaaS startups often stems from a combination of Lean Startup principles and the founders' pre-existing market knowledge. While personal connections facilitate early traction and enable close collaboration with pilot customers and design partners, these relationships should be managed carefully. Startups benefit from continuous qualitative feedback, yet they must critically assess whether customer insights align with broader market needs.

### ***ICP development***

An Ideal Customer Profile (ICP) is a critical concept in lead qualification, defining the characteristics of target customers who are most likely to benefit from a company’s product or service (Priya V & K, 2020). This concept closely aligns with the Lean Startup process, particularly the customer discovery stage, which aims to identify specific customer segments. These segments can emerge from MVP testing or value proposition experiments with potential customers and early adopters such as pilot customers (Blank & Eckhardt, 2024).

The findings indicate that defining an ICP is crucial but complex for B2B SaaS startups. It is often unclear who the ICP is, and startups – eager for revenue growth – may onboard customers who do not fully benefit from the product. IV3 described this challenge:

*“Startups often try to target too many markets or personas simultaneously. Instead, they should identify their best customers, focus on them, and ensure the chosen market segment is large enough to support sustainable growth.”*

However, he noted that it is natural for startups to go through this process:

*“It’s understandable – first-time founders are learning as they go. Early traction can be chaotic, driven by multiple hypotheses and opportunities. Once they’ve gained traction, it’s time to clean up, refine the focus, and build a scalable foundation.”*

Over time, customer feedback and key metrics such as retention rates and willingness to pay help refine the ICP. Additionally, market conditions and technological advancements can influence the ICP as the product itself evolves. The experts emphasized that their understanding of their ICP developed gradually. While pilot customers initially provided valuable insights into companies with a need for their software, enabling them to target similar prospects, they noted that, with experience, they gained a more nuanced understanding of which customers were truly the best fit for their product.

### ***Experimenting with Value Propositions, Customer Acquisition Channels and Personas***

The expert interviews highlight the critical role of experimentation in refining value propositions, positioning strategies, and customer acquisition approaches, again aligning with the Lean Startup process described by Blank & Eckhardt (2024). Startups often begin with hypotheses about their target personas, value propositions, and acquisition channels, testing and iterating based on market feedback. As IV3 explained, this process helps determine the right message-market fit:

*"Testing hypotheses about your problem-solution fit, messaging angles, and target personas helps gauge market interest before fully committing resources. It's a core part of finding a message-market fit."*

This iterative approach allows startups to adjust their strategies as they gain deeper insights into customer behavior. IV5 shared how their company initially assumed that legal counsels were the primary target audience but later discovered that technical professionals were equally relevant due to the operational nature of the problem:

*"Initially, we started by figuring out who our target audience was – what companies we wanted to approach and especially which contacts within those companies. At first, the hypothesis was that legal counsels were our target audience. Over time, we realized we could also target tech professionals since our solution addresses operational processes in data privacy and information security."*

Beyond refining personas, startups also experiment with different customer acquisition channels to identify the most effective ones. The same expert emphasized the trial-and-error nature of this process, highlighting that different audiences respond differently to various outreach methods:

*"You are gaining knowledge regarding whom you reach via LinkedIn, which target audience you reach through partnerships, and which one over the phone. It's just trial and error. Eventually, you realize legal counsels shouldn't be cold called because they get annoyed. You can effectively reach executives through LinkedIn. SMEs are primarily reached through partners as they're less inclined to engage on LinkedIn. These are all learnings you gain by testing different channels, wordings, etc."*

While identifying the right personas and channels is essential, the experts also emphasized that differentiation comes from a deep understanding of the customer that enables unique value propositions and communication. Some startups initially relied on intuition based on conversations with stakeholders and early customer wins. However, others implemented structured approaches to systematically collect and analyze customer insights. IV8 described how their company created customer frameworks to refine both product positioning and messaging:

*"We developed a Jobs-to-be-Done or customer framework. For every interaction – not just with customers but with anyone we spoke to – we tracked details like the persona involved, their exact job role, their functional pain points such as KPIs they needed to improve, and even emotional factors like wanting recognition or a promotion. We used every interaction to inform product features and messaging, which helped drive product-market fit."*

This structured approach enabled highly personalized customer outreach, making communication more relevant and effective. As the same expert explained:

*"Based on this, we tailored openers. For example: 'Hi, you're in position XY. Most of your industry peers face problem XY. Is that the case for you as well? We've helped our customers improve KPIs by X%. Would you be interested in a meeting?'" Then we'd also personalize interactions further based on persona-level insights."*

These insights illustrate that the process of identifying the right value proposition, customer personas, and acquisition channels is rarely straightforward. Instead, it requires continuous testing and adaptation, allowing startups to refine their approach and allocate resources more effectively. Furthermore, systematically collecting customer knowledge and integrating it into messaging enhances differentiation by ensuring that outreach efforts resonate with the specific pain points and motivations of target personas.

### ***Market Dynamics***

While startups primarily validate problems, develop products, and engage customers through direct market interactions, the interviews revealed that German B2B SaaS startups also incorporate broader market insights into their strategic decisions. Experts emphasized that observing competitors, identifying emerging industry trends, and leveraging external expertise can provide valuable guidance, even though these aspects were not explicitly asked about during the interviews.

IV5 highlighted the role of competitive analysis in shaping strategic direction, explaining that their company actively monitored competitors to identify differentiating factors:

*"Of course, we also looked at what our competitors were doing. In Europe, I'd say our competition is less tech-heavy and more focused on consulting. In the U.S., we have two major*

*competitors that we can learn from. While it helps to observe the competition, we primarily focus on our customers and their needs.”*

Beyond competitive analysis, some startups relied on market experts to refine their strategic focus. Angel investors and venture capitalists were frequently mentioned as valuable sources of industry insights, particularly when they had long-term experience in specific markets. IV13 described how investor feedback shaped their company’s positioning:

*“They had studied the market, spoken to customers, and concluded that they couldn’t fund us because they didn’t see the product fitting the segment. They advised us to focus more on invoicing solutions and adopt a strong vertical focus rather than spreading across industries. Initially, we thought we could develop software that would work across all industries, like trucking or other blue-collar fields. But we realized narrowing our focus to one industry, even though it reduced our total addressable market, was the right move.”*

The findings suggest that startups do not rely solely on customer feedback for validation but instead also integrate their own analytical insights about market dynamics or the opinion of market experts such as investors. This aligns with Felin et al. (2024), who argue that validation can stem from various sources beyond direct customer interactions. One key advantage of internal validation is that founders, early employees and investors often have deep market expertise or even firsthand experience with the problem being addressed. As the interviews demonstrated, investors sometimes act as strategic advisors, helping startups sharpen their market focus.

#### **4.1.2 Executing Growth Strategies**

Growth strategies of B2B SaaS Startups are a widely discussed topic among industry experts (e.g., Ellis & Brown, 2019; Schäfer, 2025; Voje, 2023), but to the best of my knowledge, it has received little attention in academic research so far. In expert literature, growth strategies are typically categorized into three to four overarching approaches: Sales-Led Growth (SLG), Product-Led Growth (PLG), Product-Led Sales (PLS), and Marketing-Led Growth (MLG), whereby PLS can also be considered a tactic that falls under the broader PLG strategy (e.g., Schäfer, 2025). IV3 succinctly described these strategies as follows:

*“Startups typically adopt one of three approaches: First, sales-led: Founders or early sales teams engage directly through outreach – emails, calls, LinkedIn etc. Second, marketing-led growth which involves using primarily paid advertising and content marketing, and third, product-led growth where the product drives demand, supported by community-building.”*

The findings from this study indicate that German B2B SaaS startups predominantly follow two overarching growth strategies: SLG and a hybrid of PLG and MLG. It became evident that PLG and MLG are closely intertwined, with startups frequently combining these approaches.

For instance, the startups in our sample leveraged marketing tactics such as paid advertising to raise awareness and direct potential customers to their websites. To convert these visitors into customers, they incorporated PLG elements, such as providing direct trial access to the product, allowing users to experience it firsthand.

For simplicity, this combined approach will be referred to as PLG throughout the remainder of this dissertation. The following subchapters present an in-depth analysis of both SLG and PLG, detailing the specific approaches employed by the startups examined in this research.

### ***Sales-led Growth as primary growth driver***

The SLG approach emerged as the predominant growth strategy among the expert participants. Most of the startups indicated that they primarily operate with a sales-driven model, and the investors and advisors stated that most of their portfolio companies follow an SLG approach, though not exclusively.

As previously mentioned in chapter 4.1, it is often advantageous for founding teams to have prior experience in their target market. This experience frequently leads to early pilot customer relationships. At the same time, the interviews revealed that in an SLG strategy, the first non-pilot customers also often come through the founders' or early employees' networks. IV9 highlighted the importance of this approach with the following statement:

*“Leveraging your network is the number one channel – starting with the founder’s network, then the VC network, early hires’ networks, and even customer networks.”*

This quote by a VC investor accurately describes how SLG startups in the sample operated. There was only one exception: A startup whose product was driven by regulatory changes. New regulations had forced companies in a specific industry to comply with new reporting requirements. Recognizing the complexity of these requirements, the startup developed a solution and approached customers directly via cold outreach. Their strategy from the outset was to acquire large enterprise customers within their target industry to create a strong signaling effect. IV4 explained this approach as follows:

*“We segmented the market, identifying those who are frontrunners in this space – a space that’s still highly educational and evolving. [...] The idea was that if we engage five to ten key players and iterate with them, others will follow. That’s proven true. [...] We approached them through cold outreach. Cold outreach via sequences and then telephone calls.”*

This approach can be described as strategically daring and was driven by a highly specialized product and clear customer demand, but it has proven successful.

However, in most cases, target customers and their demand are not as obvious. This is why, for many startups, the logical first step is to leverage their network. Not only does this provide easier access to potential customers, but it also creates trust effects because other companies are more likely to engage when they see that the startup already has early customer relationships.

Once they secured their initial customers, all SLG startups in our study used cold outreach as a key customer acquisition strategy. They iterated on their outreach efforts based on insights gained from early customer interactions, refining their target personas, messaging, and outreach channels (see Chapter 4.1). The findings indicate that startups initially build on their early customer acquisition successes by targeting customers with similar characteristics or those from the same industry. IV1 illustrated this approach as follows:

*“[One of our customers] operates in the enterprise sector in paper manufacturing. It was a perfect fit [...]. It was the logical next step to focus on targeting paper manufacturers and companies in the forestry sector.”*

This industry-focused approach allows startups to tailor their messaging more effectively. Each industry has its own unique challenges, and startups can increase engagement by customizing landing pages or referencing industry-specific issues in their outreach messages.

A key insight from the study is that one of the founders – usually the CEO – is the most important salesperson in an early-stage SLG startup. Every startup in our sample confirmed that the CEO was actively involved in sales, and VC investors and advisors also emphasized the critical role of founder-led sales. IV2 explained:

*“It obviously depends on the price point, but for the first 20 to 40 customers, I’d say founder-led is essential. Ultimately, customers expect the founders to take personal responsibility. That’s just part of what founders do. It would seem strange if a founder didn’t do it themselves.”*

IV6 added:

*“From what I see, founder-led sales is typically the way to go for B2B SaaS companies, at least initially. It makes sense capacity-wise and because staying close to the process early on is invaluable.”*

Beyond personal networks and cold outreach, trade shows have proven to be a highly effective customer acquisition channel for SLG startups. This is largely because attendees at trade shows are actively searching for solutions. As IV2 pointed out:

*“Trade shows often work well in my view [...]. Why? Because your target customers are in the mode of actively looking for new solutions. If you call them during their daily routine at the*

*wrong moment, they're unlikely to be interested in hearing about another startup solution, especially when they're already bombarded by pitches."*

All SLG startups in our study confirmed the effectiveness of trade shows, but they also acknowledged a key limitation: Trade shows are not a scalable acquisition channel. Most startups only have a handful of relevant industry events per year, making trade shows a valuable yet supplementary tactic rather than a primary growth tactic.

### ***Product- and Marketing-led Growth as primary growth driver***

The findings indicate that customer acquisition differs significantly for PLG startups. While they initially follow similar steps as SLG startups – conducting customer interviews and onboarding pilot customers to refine product development – they either do not engage in cold outreach at all or do so only for a very short initial phase to deepen their understanding of the market.

Beyond this early phase, the findings show that PLG startups quickly shift their focus to generating inbound interest through marketing and their product itself so that customers approach the startup proactively. This fundamentally different growth strategy is largely due to the lower Average Contract Values (ACVs) associated with PLG startups. Since they typically have significantly lower ACVs than SLG startups, they need to acquire a larger number of customers to achieve similar revenue levels. IV7 explained this as follows:

*"[...] We have relatively small ACVs, which means we need to be significantly more efficient. In our early days, we charged €29 per user, often targeting solo entrepreneurs. [...]. Even if you closed ten deals per day – a tremendous amount – that would only generate €290 in MRR. So, it quickly became clear to us that to survive in this market, we needed scalable channels. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been sustainable."*

The PLG startups in this study primarily relied on a combination of Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Search Engine Advertising (SEA), and Content Marketing. All of them develop software focused on process optimization and operate in established markets, which allowed them to utilize SEO and SEA effectively. As IV13 explained:

*"[...] In the beginning, you can rely on search intent since this isn't a new category. Our innovation lies in moving the processes to the cloud and simplifying it. People were already searching for "[...] software" on Google, and that's how they first encountered our product."*

Interestingly, the findings also showed that some PLG startups collaborated with content creators to build awareness for their product. As IV7 described:

*"Initially, we worked with creators [...] and built up our paid channels. For us, smaller niche creators worked best. At the end of the day, people often say B2B is different, but it's still about reaching people."*

The startups analyzed in this study primarily leveraged search engine optimization (SEO), paid advertising, and content creators to generate awareness among potential customers. However, a different approach was employed to convert these prospects into paying customers: freemium and product-led sales (PLS).

The process follows a structured sequence: a prospective customer becomes aware of the product through the aforementioned channels. If they express interest, they visit the company's website, where they can create an account and access the software free of charge for a limited period, typically seven days. After this trial phase, continued use of the software requires transitioning to a paid subscription. In theory, this entire process can be completed independently by the customer, with access granted through an online payment system.

However, the findings of this study reveal that PLG startups still incorporate a human sales component into this process. Specifically, after a new account is created, the user is contacted. IV12 described this approach as follows:

*“While there is a hurdle to registering, users can test our software for free for seven days. Within the first hour of account creation, we try to call and assist them. For example, we ask, ‘What’s your pain point, and how can we solve it?’ The goal is to either offer a product demo or let them test it themselves and then make a purchase.”*

The findings suggest that conversion rates increase significantly when PLG startups engage with customers on a personal level, addressing the customers’ specific needs. This is possible despite the lower ACVs because the sales cycle is typically shorter than in SLG models. This can be explained by the fact that the leads already have an interest in the product, and the implementation effort is typically lower for PLG software than for SLG software.

Additionally, experimenting with different freemium structures has proven to be an effective strategy. One founder (IV15) reported transitioning from a conventional freemium model to a “guarantee phase”. Instead of granting full access during a free trial, potential customers receive a limited preview of the software and are subsequently contacted by a sales representative, who directly attempts to sell a paid subscription. This approach is supported by a 100-day money-back guarantee. IV15 elaborated on this shift:

*“At some point, we stopped offering free trials altogether. A Head of Sales advised me to optimize for acquiring paying customers as quickly as possible and instead offer a money-back guarantee. This strategy has worked exceptionally well for us.”*

To conclude, PLG startups rely on scalable inbound channels such as SEO, SEA, and content marketing to generate awareness, leveraging existing search intent in established markets. While the freemium model plays a central role in customer acquisition, the findings suggest

that human sales interactions remain an important component in guiding users through the conversion process. Direct outreach shortly after sign-up has proven effective in increasing conversion rates, as it allows startups to address user needs early on. Moreover, alternative freemium structures, such as limited previews combined with money-back guarantees, offer additional levers to optimize the transition from free users to paying customers.

### ***Building Trust and Credibility***

Kuester et al. (2017) found that perceived trust in a startup's digital innovation not only positively influences its adoption but also reduces perceived uncertainty, which is a key barrier to adoption, highlighting the critical role of building trust and credibility for startups. The findings of this study suggest that German B2B SaaS startups employ various strategies to foster credibility, including testimonials, referral programs, content marketing, and industry events. These approaches vary based on whether a company follows a SLG or PLG model, with SLG startups relying more on content-driven trust-building and PLG startups integrating referral mechanisms early on. However, both models recognize the importance of customer testimonials and "Knowledge sharing" events as a foundation for establishing credibility.

One of the most universally adopted strategies is the use of customer testimonials and case studies. By showcasing success stories, startups provide potential buyers with tangible proof of value, reducing perceived risk. SLG and PLG startups alike integrate testimonials into their marketing materials, with early adopters often playing a crucial role in validating a product's effectiveness.

The interviews also show that SLG startups tend to utilize content marketing to build long-term credibility. As IV1 emphasized its importance:

*"Blog articles served as an important trust-building tool for us. Some companies even approached us, saying they were impressed by the depth of our blog articles."*

Additionally, some experts emphasized that public relations efforts, such as announcing funding rounds, can play a strategic role in trust-building.

For PLG startups, the interviews suggest that referral programs play a key role in early trust-building and customer acquisition. Satisfied users act as brand advocates, recommending the product to peers, which significantly reduces the perceived risk for new adopters. As IV15 explained:

*“Referrals are incredibly valuable. We always encourage satisfied customers to refer us to others with similar needs, and they often do. [...] We also incentivize referrals financially, which makes it even more appealing.”*

Beyond these approaches, some startups reinforce trust through knowledge-sharing events, such as industry roundtables, webinars, and networking sessions. These events serve as platforms for startups to engage directly with potential customers, demonstrate expertise, and facilitate discussions on relevant industry challenges.

#### **4.1.3 Determining PMF**

Zellweger & Zenger (2023) define PMF as the measure of alignment between the entrepreneur’s idea (the product/opportunity belief) and the market’s reality (customer needs, demand, and feedback). PMF is high when these two models strongly correspond, for instance when the entrepreneur’s assumptions about needs and solution features match what customers truly desire and will pay for.

This definition highlights that PMF is not a single key performance indicator (KPI) that can be measured in isolation. Rather, Zellweger and Zenger describe PMF as existing along a spectrum rather than being a binary state.

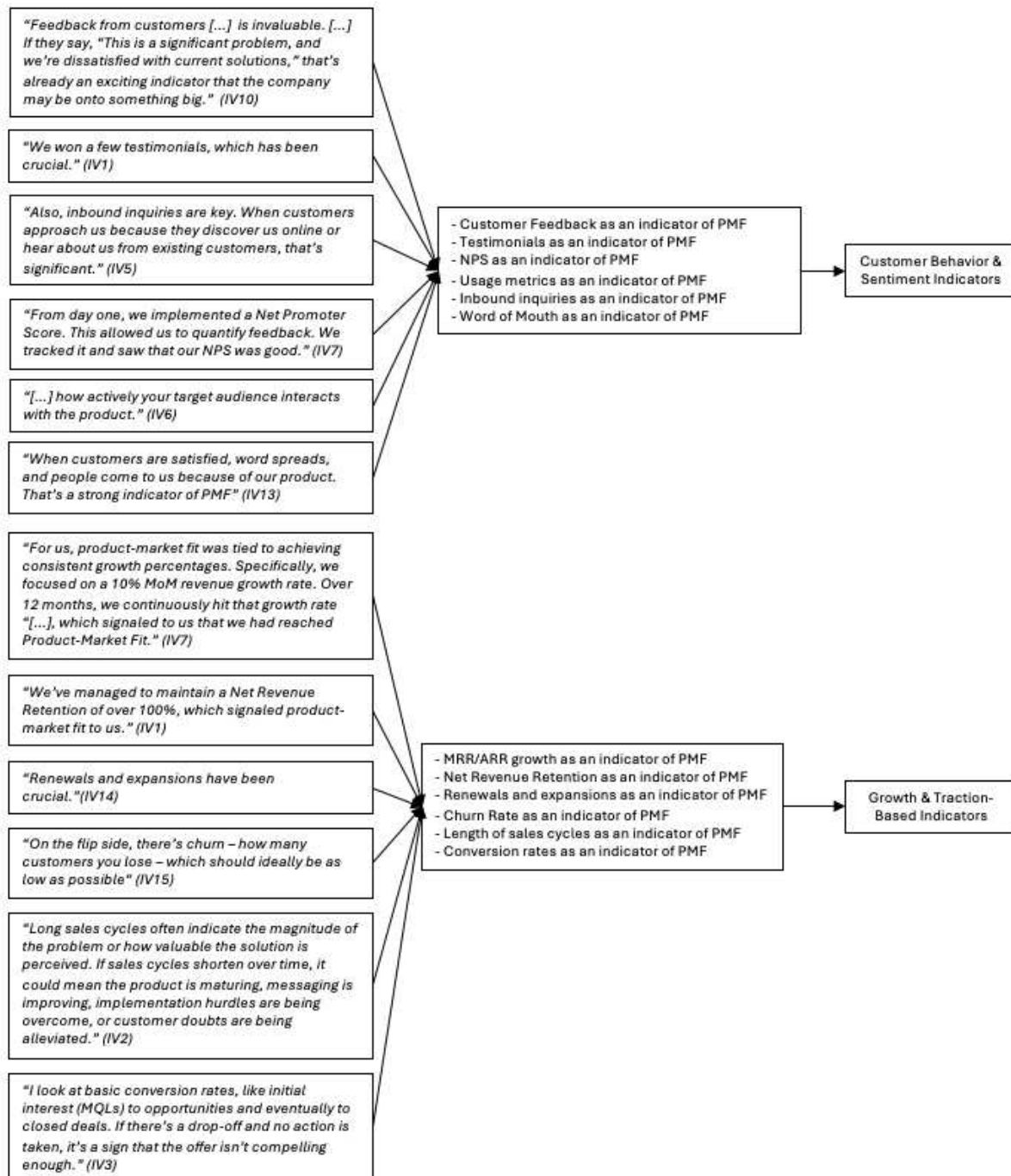
The findings of this study align with Zellweger and Zenger’s (2023) perspective. The experts interviewed in this research also conceptualized PMF as an evolving process, assessed through multiple metrics rather than a single quantifiable measure. PMF is best understood as an interplay of various indicators tailored to a startup’s specific characteristics and collectively provide insights into its success. IV2 emphasized this point:

*“I think the term Product-Market Fit is a bit slippery. There isn’t a single variable to measure it definitively on a 0 to 100 scale. Instead, there are various KPIs or indicators that allow you to approximate it. [...]. It’s definitely a mix of variables, not all equally weighted, as it depends on the business model.”*

This statement encapsulates the consensus among the interviewed experts: PMF is determined by a combination of success indicators that enable startups to assess the degree of alignment between their product and market needs. The experts provided insights into the specific indicators they have employed, which were categorized into two primary groups: *Customer Behavior & Sentiment Indicators* and *Growth & Traction-Based Indicators*. Evaluating PMF requires a blend of both categories, with the key objective of identifying metrics that most effectively measure a startup’s and its product’s success.

However, the composition of these indicators varies significantly between startups. For instance, an SLG startup targeting the enterprise sector with only a handful of customers may not consider the Net Promoter Score (NPS) particularly useful, as customer relationships are still closely managed through direct interactions. Conversely, a PLG startup at a similar revenue stage might view NPS as a crucial metric to gain a representative understanding of customer satisfaction.

Therefore, no universal framework exists for measuring PMF. Figure 4 presents the key indicators identified by experts as critical for PMF evaluation. Furthermore, the quantitative analysis in 4.2.3 provides additional insights into the relative importance of these indicators.



**Figure 4.** Expert insights on PMF indicators.

## **4.2 Quantitative Analysis**

The quantitative analysis enables a more in-depth examination of the research questions by discussing their complexity through expert interviews and testing the findings in a subsequent step with a larger sample population. The quantitative findings are used to identify parallels or deviations from the qualitative findings. Thus, the structure of this chapter aligns with the qualitative analysis and provides factual evidence that supports or challenges the qualitative findings.

Additionally, the qualitative findings have shown differences between startups with lower and higher ACVs. Particular attention is given to this finding in the following analysis. Information on the participants of the online survey, as well as the characteristics of the startups, such as funding stage, revenue growth, and customer focus, can be found in Appendix D.

### **4.2.1 Working towards PMF**

As previously noted in the literature review, this dissertation has focused on the Lean Startup methodology due to its significant popularity (Felin et al., 2020). The expert interviews confirmed that German B2B SaaS startups in general follow Lean Startup principles when working towards PMF, though with certain adaptations (see chapter 4.1.1).

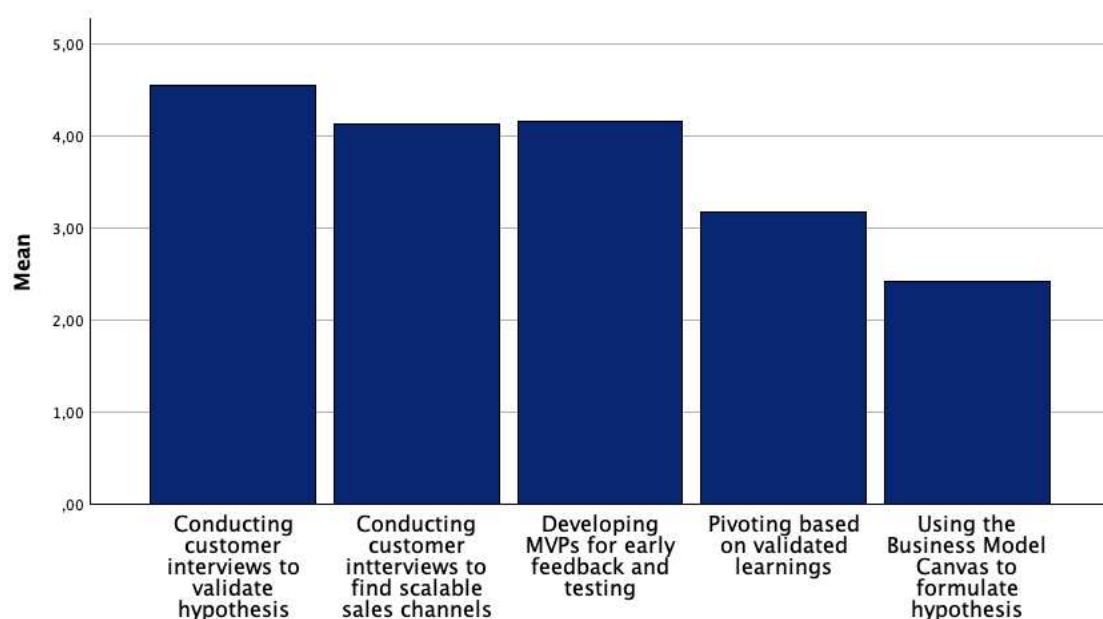
A strong alignment is evident in the survey's top-rated principles: conducting customer interviews to validate hypotheses about product features, value propositions and distribution channels ( $M = 4.54$ ); conducting customer interviews to find repeatable and scalable sales processes ( $M = 4.13$ ); and developing MVPs for early feedback and testing ( $M = 4.15$ ). These findings reinforce the qualitative insights, where experts emphasized that early-stage startups must engage potential customers to refine their product and GTM efforts like specific value propositions and distribution channels. The high rating of customer interviews also validates the expert opinion that structured feedback loops are essential for understanding user needs and identifying scalable GTM tactics.

Similarly, the emphasis on developing MVPs corresponds well with expert insights suggesting that startups should avoid over-engineering products before real-world testing. The qualitative findings stressed that pilot customers and design partners play a critical role in shaping MVP iterations, and the high rating in the survey suggests that this practice is widely adopted across a broader startup landscape.

While the expert interviews acknowledged the role of pivoting, they also highlighted that startups often refine their approach gradually rather than making dramatic changes, such as by changing their main value proposition. The survey result – pivoting based on validated learnings ( $M = 3.17$ ) – suggests that while iteration is recognized, it is considered less central than hypothesis testing through customer interactions and MVP development. This aligns with the findings of Kirtley & O’Mahony (2020) that significant pivots are less frequent in practice than in theoretical Lean Startup discourse.

A notable divergence arises in the relatively low rating of using the BMC to formulate hypotheses ( $M = 2.41$ ). The qualitative findings made little mention of this tool, indicating that while hypothesis-driven iteration is crucial, the importance of the framework to support the path towards PMF may not play a major role in practice.

Furthermore, the survey did not reveal significant differences in how startups with varying ACVs assessed the importance of these principles, indicating that the process of working toward PMF follows a broadly similar pattern as described in chapter 4.1.1 (Appendix E).

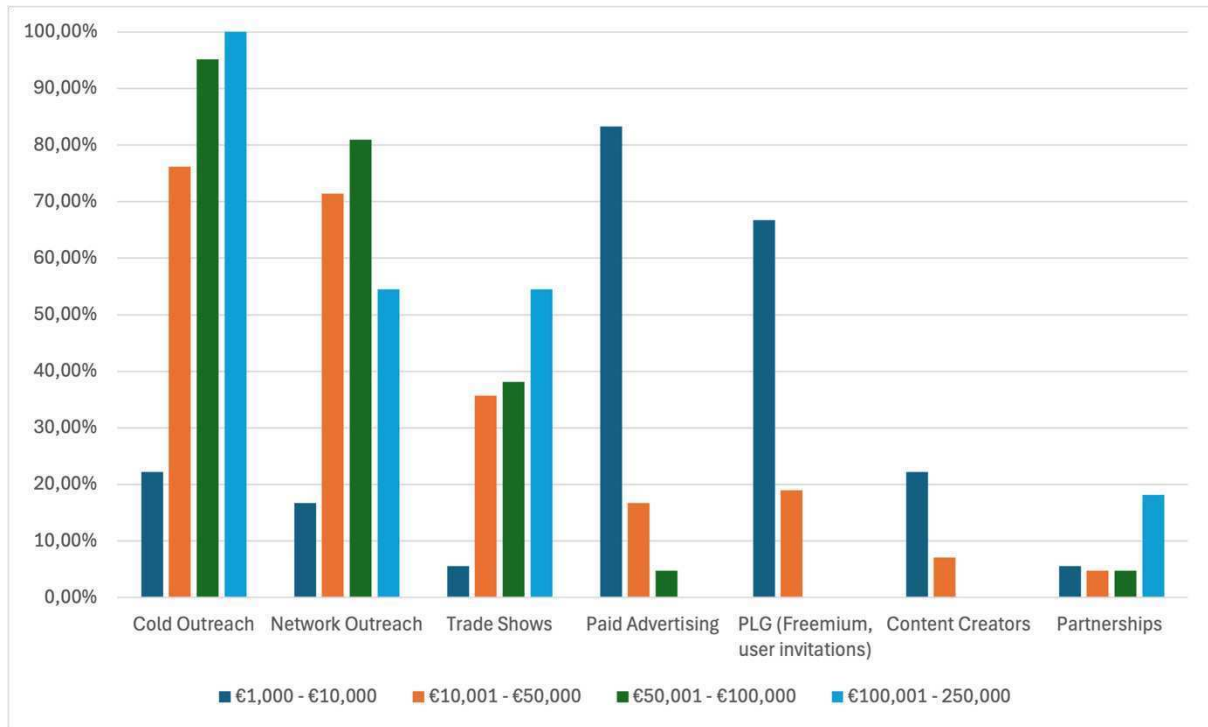


**Figure 5:** Mean distribution among principles of the Lean Startup methodology.

## 4.2.2 Executing Growth Strategies

The qualitative analysis has already revealed that growth strategies of German B2B SaaS startups can be categorized into two fundamental approaches: SLG and PLG. The interviews

further indicated that a startup's typical ACV is the determining factor in the choice between SLG and PLG. The quantitative analysis confirms these findings by identifying significant differences between startups with varying typical ACVs regarding their main GTM tactics (see Appendix F).



**Figure 6:** Main GTM elements among different ACV ranges.

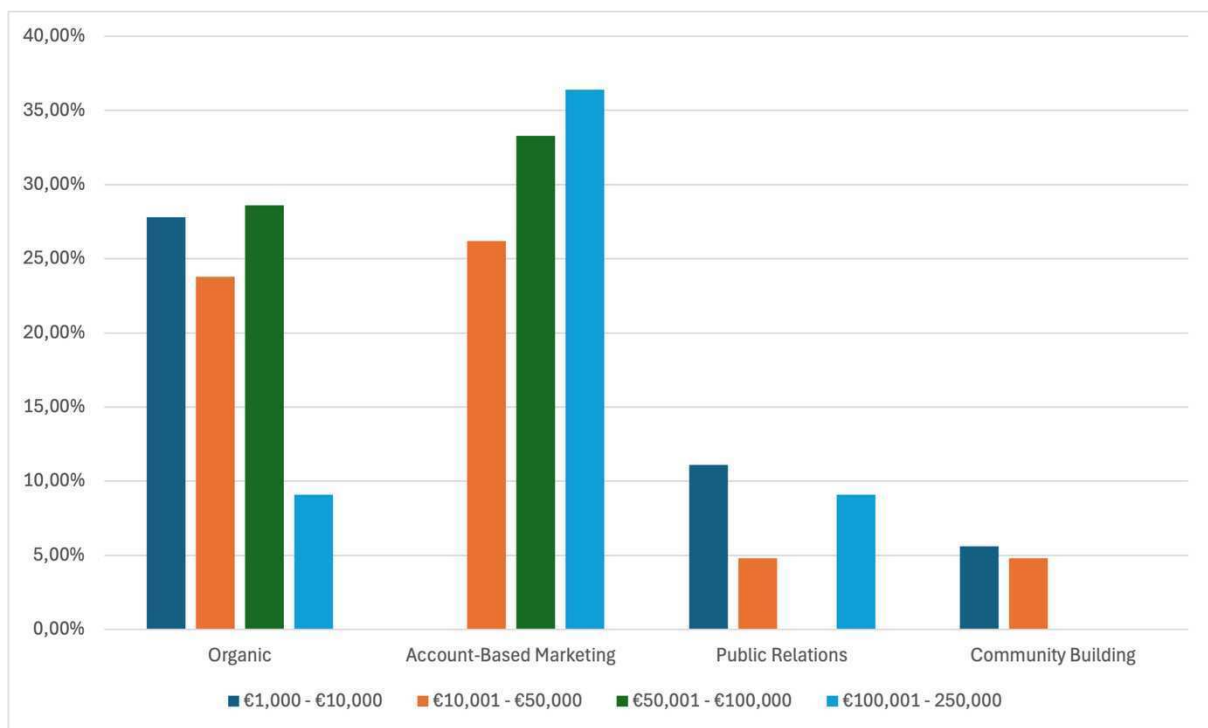
The survey results, visualized in figure 6, demonstrate a clear relationship between ACV and the main GTM tactics used by startups to achieve PMF. Startups with high ACVs (> €50,001) predominantly rely on outbound sales tactics, including cold outreach and network outreach, which enable targeted customer acquisition in high-value markets. Additionally, trade show participation plays a crucial role. These strategies reflect the need for high-touch, relationship-driven sales processes, where direct engagement is essential for closing large contracts.

In contrast, low-ACV (€1,000 - €10,000) startups favor scalable digital marketing such as paid advertising and product-led strategies, where mass reach and automation drive customer acquisition. PLG approaches, such as freemium offerings, are particularly effective in this segment, enabling companies to scale efficiently without direct sales efforts.

Mid-ACV (€10,001 - €50,000) startups also primarily rely on outbound sales including cold outreach, network outreach, and trade shows. However, digital acquisition strategies are also

employed by this group, although this may be primarily due to startups that are relatively close to an ACV of €10,001.

The GTM tactics that did not reveal significant differences between ACV ranges are visualized in Figure 7. One can notice that organic marketing initiatives such as SEO and content marketing also play an important role for startups with an ACV of between €1,000 and €100,000. Account-based marketing is also an important element for startups with an ACV of between €10,000 and €250,000.



**Figure 7:** GTM elements without significant differences between ACV ranges.

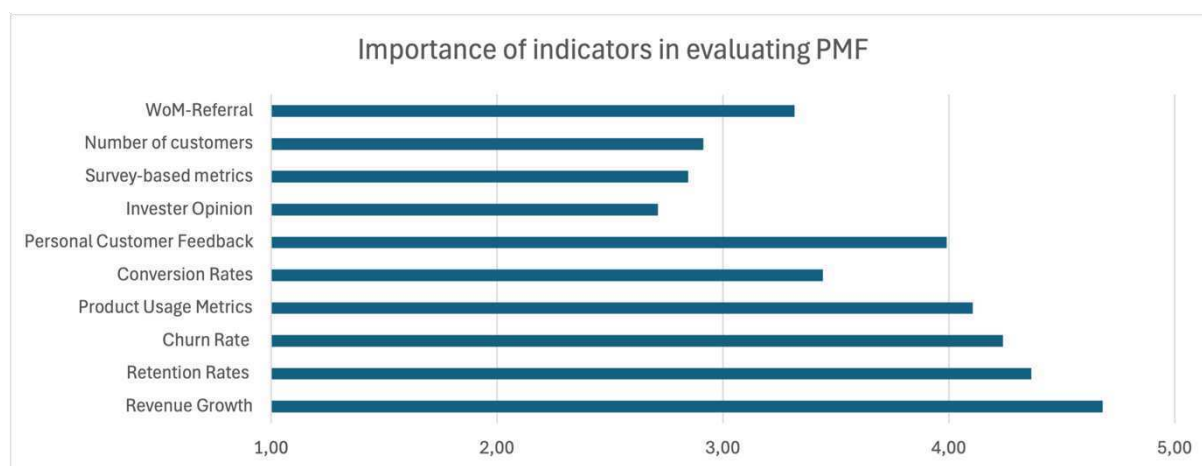
The findings from both qualitative interviews and quantitative analysis reinforce a clear ACV-driven distinction in the growth strategies of German B2B SaaS startups. Startups with higher ACVs predominantly rely on SLG, using cold outreach, network-driven acquisition, ABM, and trade shows to engage high-value enterprise customers. This aligns with the interview findings, where SLG startups emphasized the importance of direct sales efforts and industry relationships. It can also be seen that organic marketing activities play an important role, which confirms the qualitative findings that content acts as an important trust factor.

Conversely, rather low-ACV startups employ PLG strategies, utilizing primarily paid advertising, freemium models and organic approaches such as content creation for customer acquisition, consistent with interview insights that highlighted SEO (organic), SEA (paid

advertising), and content creator collaborations as key tactics. Overall, the findings underscore that growth strategy selection is closely linked to ACV.

### 4.2.3 Determining PMF

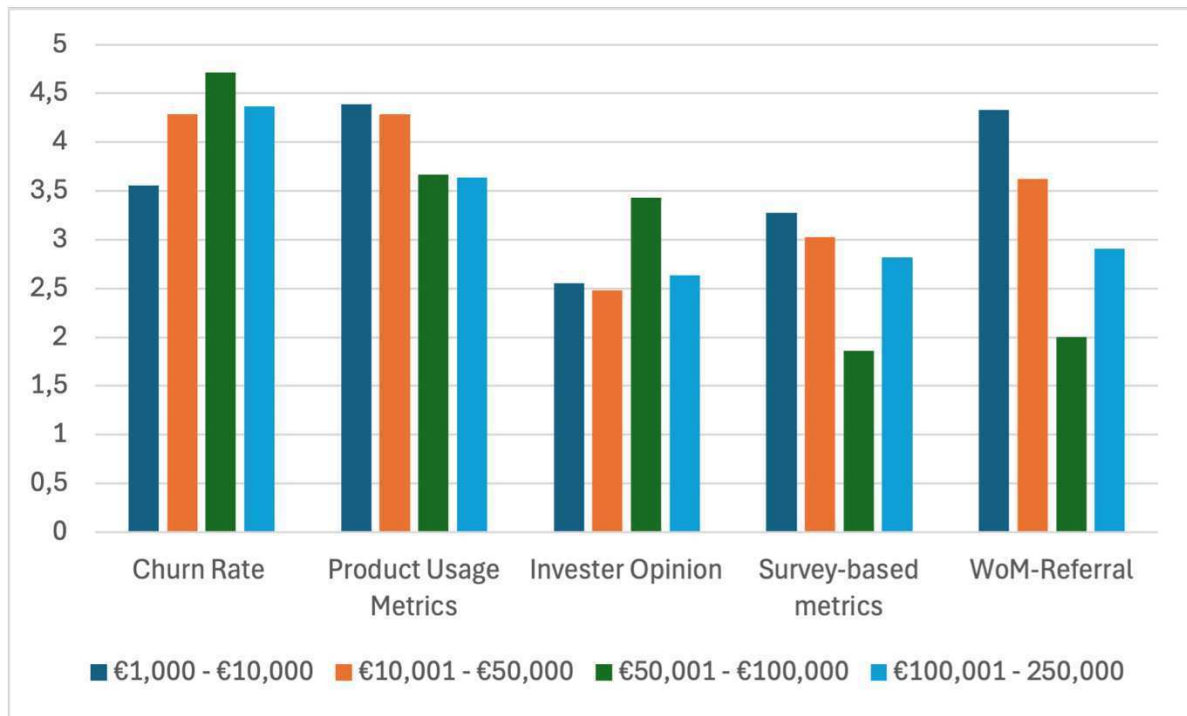
The expert interviews have already revealed that startups use a combination of different indicators to assess their PMF. The indicators mentioned in the interviews were tested in the survey for their importance in evaluating PMF. The results, shown in Figure 8, indicate that *Revenue Growth* (4.68) is considered the most important indicator, followed by *Retention Rates* (4.37), *Churn Rate* (4.24), *Product Usage Metrics* (4.11), and *Personal Customer Feedback* (3.99). The high rating of multiple indicators further underscores that PMF is assessed using a combination of different factors. In comparison, *Investor Opinion* (2.71), *Survey-based Metrics* (e.g., Net Promoter Score) (2.85), and *Number of Customers* (2.91) were rated as less relevant.



**Figure 8:** Importance of PMF Indicators.

Moreover, significant differences between various ACV ranges were identified again, as shown in Figure 9. Notably, for startups with lower ACVs, *Product Usage Metrics*, *Survey-based Metrics* (e.g., NPS), and *Word-of-Mouth Referral* were considered more important. In contrast,

the *Churn Rate* was less importance for startups with lower ACVs, while *Investor Opinion* was rated significantly higher by startups with an ACV between €50,001 and €100,000.



**Figure 9:** Importance of PMF Indicators between ACV Ranges.

The findings confirm that startups assess PMF through a combination of multiple indicators. Additionally, the importance of specific indicators varies across different ACV ranges. Startups with lower ACVs tend to place greater value on Product Usage Metrics, Survey-based Metrics (e.g., NPS), and Word-of-Mouth Referral, while Investor Opinion holds more weight for startups with ACVs between €50,001 and €100,000. This highlights that PMF evaluation is context-dependent and influenced by business model characteristics and customer dynamics.

## **5 Discussion**

### **5.1 Discussion of Research Question 1**

#### **5.1.1 Working towards PMF**

The findings indicate that German B2B SaaS startups – both consciously and, to some extent, unconsciously – apply the principles of the Lean Startup methodology. A central focus is the continuous interaction with (potential) customers to test various hypotheses. Product-related hypotheses are formulated and tested to validate fundamental demand, while hypotheses concerning value propositions, personas, and specific channels serve to effectively reach potential customers with the appropriate messaging.

A common critique of the Lean Startup methodology is its heavy reliance on customer feedback, which can be heterogeneous and on the fact that customers may lack the foresight necessary for truly innovative solutions (Felin et al., 2024). In this context, Felin et al. (2024) argue that internal stakeholders, such as founders, employees, or investors, may possess more valuable insights.

The findings suggest that, in practice, startups employ a hybrid approach that combines both external and internal insights. Founders often have a personal connection to the problem they are addressing and bring relevant industry expertise, enabling them to formulate well-founded hypotheses, that are subsequently tested through customer interactions. However, customers are not the sole source of information. The interviews revealed that startups also conduct competitive analyses, engage with industry experts and rely on their own market perceptions based on their domain expertise. Additionally, multiple interview participants proactively highlighted that customer feedback must be carefully interpreted, particularly in terms of whether the feedback is representative of the broader market. This suggests that entrepreneurs generally act with logical reasoning and sound judgment when evaluating customer feedback, which aligns with the argument by Blank and Eckhardt (2024) that successful entrepreneurs do not blindly follow demand signals.

During an in-depth analysis of the Lean Startup methodology, it became evident that the concept of PMF is used by Blank and Eckhardt (2024) to describe a critical milestone that a startup should achieve before transitioning into a scaling phase. However, their conceptualization of PMF remains somewhat ambiguous. While they initially state that achieving PMF is the primary objective of the "Search Phase," they later claim that PMF is already attained at the

end of the customer discovery stage: *“The customer discovery phase is complete once entrepreneurs have established product-market fit [...]”* (Blank & Eckhardt, 2024, p. 3018). Furthermore, they elaborate: *“Customer discovery is complete when the entrepreneur knows who will buy (customers), what they will buy (product), why they will buy (value propositions), how they will buy (channels), and at what price they will buy.”* The language used by Blank and Eckhardt (2024) suggests a forward-looking perspective, implying that critical hypotheses have been validated, and initial customers have been acquired. However, this does not necessarily indicate that PMF has been achieved at a significant scale. The findings of this study demonstrate that German B2B SaaS startups do not yet refer to this stage as PMF. For the interviewed experts, achieving PMF was associated with measurable success, often determined through various indicators. A clearer definition or elaboration by Blank and Eckhardt (2024) would be beneficial to avoid ambiguity in the interpretation of PMF within the Lean Startup framework.

### **5.1.2 Theoretical Implications**

This dissertation particularly contributes to a clearer understanding of the concept of PMF in relation to the Lean Startup methodology. As critically discussed, Blank and Eckhardt (2024) address the concept superficially and do not demonstrate consistency in their statements regarding PMF.

Additionally, this dissertation introduces new perspectives into the Lean Startup discourse, including its critiques (e.g., Felin et al., 2024). The findings indicate that entrepreneurs had already gained substantial experience with the problem they aimed to address before founding their startups. This prior expertise served as an initial form of validation, enabling them to formulate well-founded hypotheses and critically assess customer feedback.

### **5.1.3 Practical Implications**

The findings reveal clear patterns in the approaches taken by B2B SaaS startups on their path to achieving PMF. This is particularly valuable for inexperienced B2B SaaS entrepreneurs or those aspiring to enter the field, as it provides insights into best practices employed by successful startups and enables them to derive actionable recommendations. Additionally, this dissertation offers insights into the practical application of the Lean Startup methodology. This can assist early-stage startups in gaining a deeper understanding of the principles and tools proposed by Ries (2011) and Blank and Eckhardt (2024).

## **5.2 Discussion of Research Question 2**

### **5.2.1 Growth Strategies in German B2B SaaS Startups**

The findings of this study indicate that German B2B SaaS startups predominantly adopt two overarching growth strategies: Sales-Led Growth (SLG) and Product-Led Growth (PLG). Notably, PLG is not implemented in its purest form but rather as a hybrid approach, combining marketing-driven and product-driven elements, which became evident both in the qualitative interviews and the online survey.

Furthermore, the data suggest that the primary determinant in choosing between SLG and PLG is the typical ACV. Startups with lower ACVs tend to favor digital, scalable acquisition strategies such as search engine advertising and freemium models. In contrast, startups with higher ACVs predominantly rely on outbound sales processes, emphasizing personalized interactions with prospective clients.

### **5.2.2 Theoretical Implications**

The growth strategies of B2B SaaS startups have attracted significant attention from practitioners but remain relatively underexplored in academic literature. To the best of my knowledge, the study by Kuester et al. (2017) is the only academic work that specifically investigate GTM strategies in startups. Their research found that startups should build GTM strategies that signal trustworthiness (e.g., security, brand reputation, and customer testimonials) and usability (e.g., ease of use and customer education). Through expert interviews, they identified concrete tactics employed by startups to enhance trustworthiness (e.g., professional brand presence, customer testimonials, and referrals) and usability (e.g., freemium models and process simplicity).

Although Kuester et al. (2017) primarily focused on B2C startups, parallels can be drawn to the findings of this study. Specifically, this research demonstrates that German B2B SaaS startups implement specific elements to enhance trustworthiness (see section 4.2.3). Additionally, usability plays a critical role. The data show that freemium models are a central component of PLG strategies, whereas SLG startups present usability through structured product demonstrations within the sales process.

By integrating qualitative and quantitative data, this study sheds light on the relatively unexplored domain of growth strategies for B2B SaaS startups. The identification of recurring patterns and successful approaches employed by German startups provides valuable insights

into this field and contributes to the broader academic discussion on GTM strategies in the SaaS industry.

### **5.2.3 Practical Implications**

The findings of this study hold practical value, particularly for early-stage B2B SaaS startups seeking to understand which growth strategies have been successfully employed by more experienced companies to achieve PMF. The expert interviews, in particular, offer deep insights into concrete execution methods, enabling emerging startups to make informed decisions regarding their GTM strategies and elements. By understanding the relationship between ACVs and growth strategies, startups can align their acquisition tactics with their pricing models and customer segments, thereby enhancing their chances of sustainable growth and market success.

## **5.3 Discussion of Research Question 3**

### **5.3.1 PMF as a Dynamic Process**

The findings of this study reveal that PMF is not a single, measurable metric but rather an assessment based on various indicators. German B2B SaaS startups employ a range of qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate their PMF, emphasizing that it is not a fixed point in time but rather a continuous and evolving process. This perspective challenges the traditional binary view of PMF as a definitive inflection point that signals the start of a new growth phase, as previously described by Andreessen (2007), Blank & Eckhardt (2024), and Giardino et al. (2014).

The research findings support the notion that PMF should be understood as a dynamic process rather than a static milestone. This dissertation builds upon the work of Zellweger & Zenger (2023), who define PMF as the alignment between an entrepreneur's market belief and the market's actual response. The evidence suggests that PMF exists on a spectrum, with varying degrees of strength rather than a strict dichotomy.

Nevertheless, the findings indicate that there is a transition phase toward scalability in a startup's lifecycle, for instance like Blank & Eckhardt's (2024) description of the shift from the *Search* to the *Execution Phase*. The findings suggest that this transition is the result of a *strong* PMF, which startups assess over time using the identified indicators.

### **5.3.2 Theoretical Implications**

Zellweger & Zenger (2023) called for further research on the concept of PMF, which this dissertation addresses in two key ways. First, the expert interviews confirm their definition of PMF as a spectrum rather than a fixed milestone. Second, this study introduces specific indicators that German B2B SaaS startups use to evaluate their PMF. By doing so, this research contributes to the academic discourse on PMF by offering empirical insights into how startups operationalize this concept in practice.

### **5.3.3 Practical Implications**

The findings of this study are valuable for both B2B SaaS startups and VC investors. Startups gain a structured overview of the indicators that other companies use to assess PMF, providing guidance, particularly for young startups with inexperienced founders. By learning from the approaches of more established startups, early-stage companies can identify and adapt the most relevant indicators for their unique contexts.

For VC investors, the ability to recognize early signs of PMF is critical in identifying high-potential startups. The insights from this research can contribute to their investment processes by offering a set of indicators that signal a startup's likelihood of achieving sustainable growth. Consequently, these findings can help investors refine their evaluation frameworks.

## 6 Limitations & Future Research

The research focuses exclusively on German B2B SaaS startups, limiting the generalizability of the results to other geographies and industries. The dynamics of achieving PMF may differ in other markets due to varying customer behaviors, regulatory environments, and competitive landscapes.

Second, the qualitative component relies on expert interviews, which, while providing rich insights, are inherently subjective. The perspectives captured may not fully represent the diversity of experiences across the broader startup ecosystem. Additionally, as the sample consists primarily of founders, GTM professionals, and investors, the views of other key stakeholders, such as customers or product managers, remain underexplored.

Third, the quantitative survey, while valuable in validating qualitative findings, has a sample size that is not representative. While the results indicate meaningful trends, they lack the statistical power to make broad generalizations. Future studies could benefit from larger, more diverse datasets to strengthen empirical conclusions.

Given the limited academic research on PMF, this study aligns with Zellweger & Zenger (2023) in emphasizing the need for further exploration.

Future research could examine how startups form hypotheses about their target markets. This study identified that hypothesis testing occurs in practice, yet the Business Model Canvas played a relatively minor role, suggesting a gap in understanding how early-stage strategic assumptions are shaped.

Another promising avenue for research is a shift in perspective toward startup customers. While this study explored the strategies startups use to achieve PMF, future studies could investigate how potential customers evaluate startups and what factors influence their purchasing decisions. Understanding the customer's perspective could provide critical insights into the demand-side dynamics of PMF.

Finally, while this dissertation focuses on early-stage growth strategies, further research could analyze how B2B SaaS startups adapt their GTM approaches once they transition from early traction to scaling. Identifying the key strategic shifts and operational challenges during this phase would provide valuable insights for both entrepreneurs and investors.

## **7 Conclusion**

This dissertation demonstrates that German B2B SaaS startups follow distinct GTM strategies based on their Average Contract Value, with Sales-Led Growth dominating high-ACV segments and Product-Led Growth playing a crucial role in lower-ACV startups. The findings confirm that PMF is an evolving process rather than a singular milestone, assessed through a mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators. By bridging academic insights with practical approaches, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of effective development strategies in early-stage SaaS startups.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A: Interview Guide

### 1. Introduction

- Purpose of the Interview
  - Confidentiality Assurance
  - Permission to Record
- 

### 2. Participant Background

- **Name, Position, Experience:** Could you please share your name, current role and experience, and your involvement with the company's GTM strategy?
  - **Company Overview:** Can you provide a brief overview of your company, including its growth stage and target market?
- 

### 3. Understanding Product-Market Fit (10 minutes)

- At what stage did your company feel that it has achieved PMF?
  - What indicators did you use to confirm this?
  - What were your strategies working towards PMF (MVPs, design partners etc., ICP development etc.)?
- 

### 4. Go-To-Market Strategy Details (10 minutes)

- **GTM Approach:** What initial GTM strategy did your company adopt to reach your target customers? (e.g., (cold) outbound, partnerships, network outreach, paid advertising)
  - **Key Channels:** Which acquisition channels or methods proved most effective during the push towards PMF?
- 

### 5. Conclusion and Open-Ended Question

- **Reflection:** If you could go back, what would you do differently in your GTM approach to achieve PMF more efficiently?
- **Final Thoughts:** Are there any additional insights or thoughts on GTM strategies and achieving PMF that you'd like to share?

## Appendix B: Crunchbase Search

The screenshot shows the Crunchbase search interface. At the top, there are tabs for 'Companies', 'Contacts', 'Investors', and a 'More' dropdown, along with a 'Clear All' link. Below this, there are five filter categories, each with a blue button labeled 'includes any' and a search input field. The filters are: 'Headquarters Location' (with 'Germany' selected and a search input 'E.g. Japan, Boston, Europe'), 'Operating Status' (with 'Active' selected and a search input 'Active, Closed'), 'Company Type' (with 'For Profit' selected and a search input 'For Profit, Non-profit'), 'Industry Groups' (with 'Software' selected and a search input 'Software, Mobile, Health Care'), and 'Funding Status' (with 'Early Stage Venture', 'Late Stage Venture', 'Seed', and 'Early Stage' selected). Below the filters, there is a pagination bar showing '< Prev 1-50 Next > of 2,125 results'.

## Appendix C: Online Survey

### PMF Analysis - Dissertation

#### Start of Block: Introduction

Dear Participant, Thank you for participating in this study, which focuses on **Go-To-Market (GTM) Strategies that led to Product-Market Fit**. Your insights are essential in helping to understand GTM motions, and strategies to achieve PMF in the B2B SaaS ecosystem. The survey will take approximately 3 minutes to complete. Your responses will be anonymous and kept confidential. All data will be stored securely and used solely for academic purposes. This research is part of a Master's thesis at Catolica Lisbon School of Business and Economics. Your time and contribution are highly appreciated!

#### End of Block: Introduction

#### Start of Block: Section 1: Eligibility Confirmation

Do you work for a B2B SaaS Company based in Germany?

- Yes (1)
- No (2) – survey ends

#### End of Block: Section 1: Eligibility Confirmation

#### Start of Block: Section 2: Achieving Product-Market Fit (PMF)

The next questions will focus on **Product-Market Fit**. To ensure a uniform understanding, Product-Market Fit is defined as follows: **Product-Market Fit** refers to the point where a startup validates that its product meets a real market demand. It confirms core assumptions,

demonstrates strong customer interest, and often signals readiness to scale and attract significant investment.

---

Do you feel that your company has achieved Product-Market-Fit?

- Yes (1)
  - No (2) – survey ends
- 

Please rate the importance of each indicator in evaluating PMF for your business (1 = Not Important, 5 = Very Important)

|                                                                                                             |   |   |   |   |   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Retention Rates                                                                                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Investor Opinion                                                                                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Product Usage Metrics (e.g., daily active users,1 transactions etc.)                                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Personal Customer Feedback (e.g., via interviews)                                                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Revenue Growth                                                                                              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Word-of-Mouth Referral                                                                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Survey-based Metrics (e.g., Customer Satisfaction1 Score (CSAT); Net Promoter Score (NPS); Sean Ellis Test) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Churn Rate                                                                                                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Number of Customers                                                                                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Conversion Rates                                                                                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

End of Block: Section 2: Achieving Product-Market Fit (PMF)

---

Start of Block: Lean Startup Methodology

The **Lean Startup methodology**, developed by Steve Blank and Eric Ries, is a popular approach for building businesses efficiently by focusing on customer feedback, testing ideas quickly, and adapting based on results. Please rate the **principles of the Lean Startup**

**methodology** according to their importance in your company's journey toward achieving Product-Market Fit (1 = not important, 5 = very important)

|                                                         |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Using the Business Model Canvas to formulate hypothesis | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Developing Minimum Viable Products (MVPs) for early feedback & testing

Conducting customer interviews to validate hypothesis about Value Proposition, Product Features & Distribution Channels

Conducting customer interviews and experiments to find repeatable and scalable sales processes

Pivoting based on validated learnings

**End of Block: Lean Startup Methodology**

---

**Start of Block: Section 3: GTM Strategies**

What were your main GTM elements you used to achieve PMF? (Select up to 3)

- Cold outreach (e-mail, social media, phone) (1)
- Partnerships (2)
- Organic (e.g., content marketing, SEO) (3)
- Paid advertising (e.g., social media, search engine) (4)
- Network Outreach (e.g., investor network, founder network) (5)
- Account-Based-Marketing (6)
- Product-led growth (e.g., freemium, viral features, user invitations) (7)
- Influencers (13)
- Public Relations (PR) (14)
- Community (engaging and creating content for community members) (8)
- Trade Shows / Events (15)

---

**End of Block: Section 3: GTM Strategies**

---

**Start of Block: Company Background**

Which of the options best describes your role?

- Founder (1)
  - Chief of Staff (5)
  - Founder's Associate (6)
  - Growth Manager (2)
  - Sales Manager (3)
  - Marketing Manager (4)
  - Strategy Manager (7)
- 

How long has your company been in operation?

- Less than 1 year (1)
  - 1 - 2 years (2)
  - 2 - 3 years (3)
  - 3 - 4 years (4)
  - 4 - 5 years (6)
  - More than 5 years (5)
- 

How many employees does your company have?

- 1 - 10 (1)
  - 11 - 50 (2)
  - 51 - 100 (3)
  - 101 - 200 (4)
  - 201 - 500 (5)
  - More than 500 (6)
-

What is the current funding stage of your company?

- Angel Investment/Pre-Seed (1)
  - Seed (2)
  - Series A (3)
  - Series B or later (4)
  - Bootstrapping (5)
- 

What net Annual Recurring Revenue (ARR) range are you currently in? (EUR)

- Less than 500k (1)
  - 501k - 1m (2)
  - 1m - 2m (3)
  - 2m - 5m (4)
  - 5m - 10m (5)
  - More than 10m (6)
  - Prefer not to say (7)
- 

Which category does your typical customer fall into?

- Micro-business (1)
  - SMB (20-100 employees) (2)
  - Mid-market (101-1000 employees) (3)
  - Enterprise (>1000 employees) (4)
- 

What is the typical annual contract value (ACV) of your company?

- Less than €1,000 (1)
  - €1,000 - €10,000 (2)
  - €10,001 - €50,000 (3)
  - €50,001 - €100,000 (4)
  - €100,001 - €250,000 (5)
  - More than €250,000 (6)
  - Prefer not to say (7)
-

What is your company's Year-on-Year (YoY) revenue growth rate?

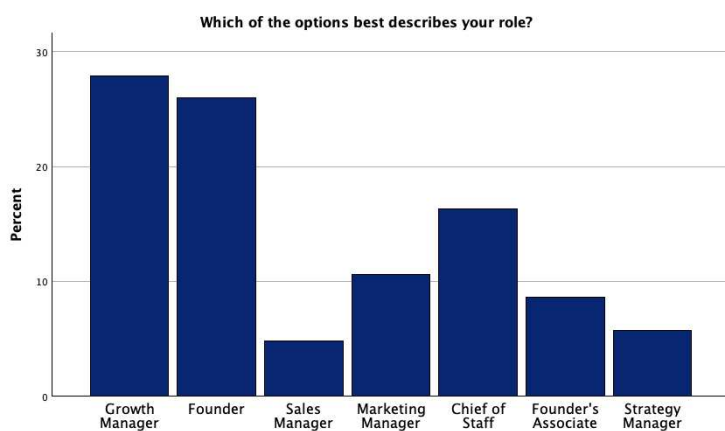
- 51% - 75% (4)
- 76% - 100% (5)
- 101 - 150% (6)
- 151 - 200% (7)
- More than 200% (8)
- Prefer not to say (9)

**End of Block: Company Background**

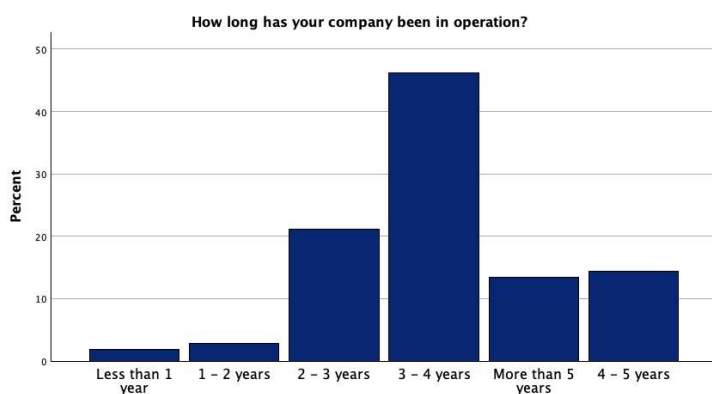
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## Appendix D: Statistical Analysis – Background of Survey Participants

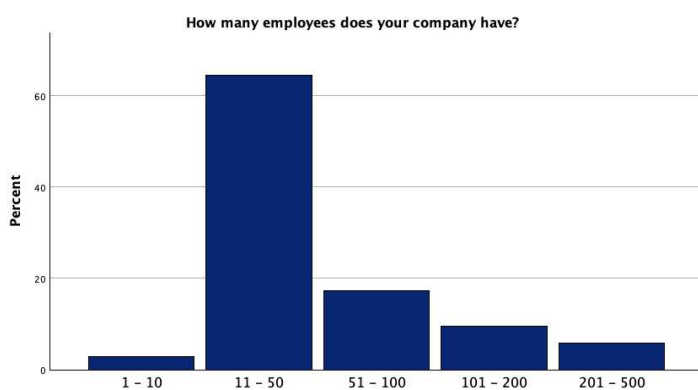
### *Appendix D 1: Job Role Distribution*



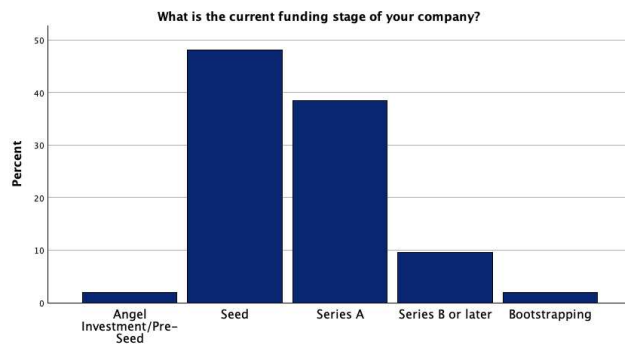
### *Appendix D 2: Operating Time since Startup was founded*



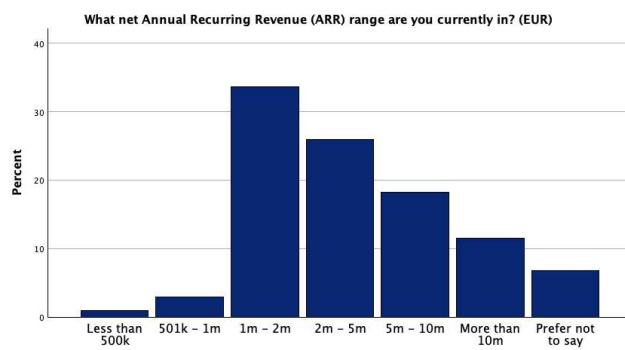
### *Appendix D 3: Employee Count Distribution*



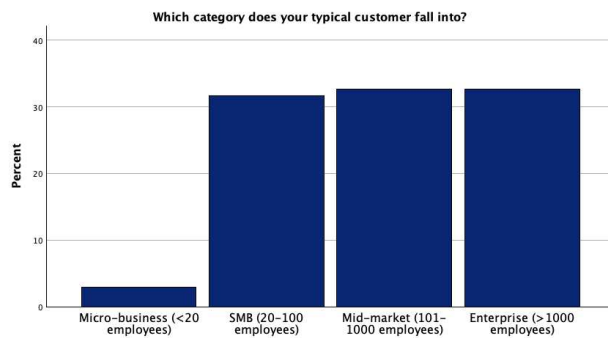
#### Appendix D 4: Funding Stage Distribution



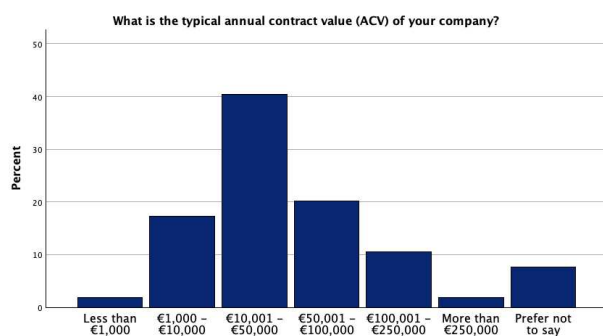
#### Appendix D 5: ARR Range Distribution



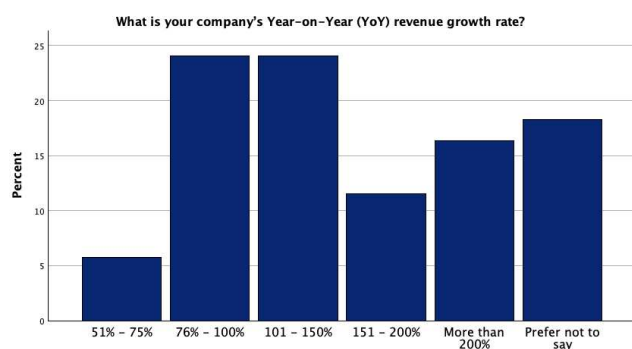
#### Appendix D 6: Typical Customer Distribution



## Appendix D 7: Typical ACV Distribution



## Appendix D 8: YoY Revenue Growth Distribution



## Appendix E: Statistical Analysis – Working towards PMF

| LS Principle                                                   | Levene's test – Sig. | ANOVA – Sig. | Brown-Forsythe – Sig. | Result          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Conducting customer interviews to validate hypothesis          | <0,001               | n/a          | 0,698                 | Not significant |
| Conducting customer interviews to find scalable sales channels | 0,450                | 0,407        | n/a                   | Not significant |
| Developing of MVPs for early feedback and testing              | 0,364                | 0,455        | n/a                   | Not significant |
| Pivoting based on validated learnings                          | 0,048                | n/a          | 0,077                 | Not significant |
| Using the Business Model Canvas to formulate hypothesis        | 0,721                | 0,625        | n/a                   | Not significant |

## Appendix F: Statistical Analysis – Growth Strategies

| GTM element                      | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) | Result          |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Cold outreach                    | <0,001                            | Significant     |
| Partnerships                     | <0,001                            | Significant     |
| Organic                          | 0,797                             | Not significant |
| Paid Advertising                 | <0,001                            | Significant     |
| Network Outreach                 | 0,002                             | Significant     |
| Account-based Marketing          | 0,128                             | Not significant |
| PLG (Freemium, user invitations) | <0,001                            | Significant     |

|                    |       |                 |
|--------------------|-------|-----------------|
| Content Creators   | 0,031 | Significant     |
| Public Relations   | 0,751 | Not significant |
| Community Building | 0,771 | Not significant |
| Trade Shows        | 0,042 | Not significant |

## Appendix G: Statistical Analysis – Determining PMF

| Indicator                  | Levene's test – Sig. | ANOVA – Sig. | Brown-Forsythe – Sig. | Result          |
|----------------------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Retention Rates            | 0,031                | n/a          | 0,119                 | Not significant |
| Investor Opinion           | 0,011                | n/a          | 0,009                 | Significant     |
| Product Usage Metrics      | 0,586                | 0,003        | n/a                   | Significant     |
| Personal Customer Feedback | 0,424                | 0,528        | n/a                   | Not significant |
| Revenue Growth             | 0,001                | n/a          | 0,279                 | Not significant |
| Word-of-Mouth Referral     | 0,059                | <0,001       | n/a                   | Significant     |
| Survey-based Metrics       | 0,146                | <0,001       | n/a                   | Significant     |
| Churn Rate                 | 0,030                | n/a          | <0,001                | Significant     |
| Number of Customers        | 0,005                | n/a          | 0,084                 | Not significant |
| Conversion Rates           | <0,001               | n/a          | 0,095                 | Not significant |