

Importance of Social Media in Agricultural Outreach Activities

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Abstract

The use of social media in information exchange has enormous potential. However, there is considerable skepticism about its use for farm extension education activities; therefore, documentation of its current use for communicating farming-related information is vital. This study outlines social media's current and prospective users in the agricultural and extension sectors.

Keywords: Agriculture Extension, Social Media, Facebook, Twitter.

Introduction

The scale, sustainability, and impact of agricultural extension services in India are restricted. Public extension programs reach only 6.8% of farmers on average. According to the NSSO (2014), 40.6 % of households got extension help, with just 11% of services provided by physical government machinery extension agents, agricultural science facilities, and agricultural universities. There is a need to close this gap by introducing new agricultural extension service delivery modalities with the help of Information and communication technology (ICT) precise, timely, relevant, and high quality information services. A fundamental concern for the country is that sustainable agriculture production necessitates current and relevant information from professionals in this industry.

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Web portals, telecenters, mobile telephony, and hybrid projects are examples of ICT-based agricultural applications (ICTs with traditional extension elements). In India, the mass media, including the internet, is currently the second most important source of relevant information for farming households. Social media is yet another ICT-based instrument that, while primarily used for amusement, has enormous potential for application in information exchange and collaboration, even in agriculture (Goyal, 2011). These ICT devices are generally simple to use and have become increasingly popular in the agricultural sector (Saravanan and Bhattacharjee, 2016). Social media has enormous potential for usage as a tool for communication and networking in the farming sector.

What is Social Media?

Social media refers to internet-based digital tools that allow people to share and discuss information. It refers to user-generated content such as information, opinions, video, audio, and multimedia shared and discussed over digital networks. (Andres and Woodard, 2013). According to Michelle Chmielewski (2011), social media is about what we do or say collectively, globally, to communicate in all directions using whatever digital technologies are available, rather than what we do or say individually.

Table -1: Types of Social Media Platforms and their brief description

Social networking sites	Facebook, Friendster, MySpace, Google+	These platforms are mainly used to build personal profiles and networks with friends, co-workers, and peers. Because of their reach, they are the most popular sort of social media network and have the most reach.
Blogs and vlogs	Blogger, WordPress	They are mainly personal web pages, although corporations are increasingly utilizing them to reach out to their customers. Blogs have a lot of media, but vlogs don't have as much.

Micro-blogs	Twitter, Instagram	They are similar to blogs but have a character limit (240 for Twitter) and let users produce and share information in different formats.
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Commonly Used Social Media Tools in Agricultural Extension

In recent years, the usage of social media in the agriculture sector has gained importance, with only prominent platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube being used for agriculture and extension-related activity. WhatsApp is another popular tool for extension experts to engage with peer or client farmers.

Facebook

With over 1.87 billion monthly active users, Facebook is the most popular social networking platform globally, which means extension professionals have many opportunities. Individuals, professional networks, and extension organizations use Facebook as an extension tool.

Twitter

With 320 million users, the microblogging service Twitter is one of the world's most popular social media platforms. It has been one of the primary catalysts for forming public attitudes and organizing people into organizations in a social environment. It is also one of the most popular platforms in agriculture.

YouTube

It is a video-sharing platform to give everyone a voice and show them the world. Four values were founded on it: freedom of speech, knowledge, freedom of opportunity, and belongingness. Users can submit and watch videos, and there are options for sharing and commenting on them and the ability to subscribe to other users' subscriptions. Since its acquisition by Google, YouTube has extended beyond the website to include mobile apps, network television, and connecting to other services.

Table - 2: Examples of how Social Media can be used in Agriculture

Facebook By Farmers		
Livestock Information and Marketing Enter (https://www.facebook.com/groups/Livestock.TN/)	Members of this group (farmers, extension employees, scientists, market functionaries, customers, local leaders, and others) communicate information about livestock production, management, and marketing. There is also a Facebook page dedicated solely to livestock marketing. (https://www.facebook.com/Livestock.Market)	Agricultural stakeholders involved in livestock.
By Extension centers		
Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Namakkal (https://www.facebook.com/krishi.namakkal)	Through this account, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Namakkal conveys information about farmer training programs, input availability, etc.	KVK subject matter experts, farmers, and agricultural stakeholders.
Twitter By Farmers		
AgChat (https://twitter.com/agchat)	The AgChat (AgChat Foundation's Twitter online discussion group) was founded in 2009 by a group of American farmers and is widely used in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland to facilitate discussions of industry issues between farmers and agribusinesses.	Farmers, entrepreneurs, Farm product consumers.
YouTube		
Farming First (https://www.youtube.com/user/FarmingFirst/)	This channel showcases the mission of Farming First- a global network of 131 Organisations, prioritizes natural resource protection, information sharing, local infrastructure, harvests, market access, and innovative research.	Policymakers, scholars, agriculturists, and practitioners.

Conclusion

In India, major social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube are used for knowledge delivery and sharing across several agriculture subsectors (crops, horticulture, dairy, and goat husbandry). The majority of them are the result of individual efforts. There is a distinct dearth of structured efforts to exploit social media by the public extension system in India. The Minister of Agriculture in India has a Facebook account and recently used Facebook to answer public questions (Statesman, 2016), a huge step forward in increasing social media usage.

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