

Use of Social Media for Marketing of Agricultural Products Among Agricultural Producers in Lakhimpur District in Assam: A Study

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Abstract

This study aims to know the use, purpose, importance, and problems the farmers face in marketing agricultural products through social media. For this study, 124 farmers are selected as the research sample. The findings of this paper showed that the most preferred social media among farmers are Youtube and WhatsApp. Samples under study use social media to promote agricultural products and share photos and videos relating to agricultural produces. A structured questionnaire was distributed to the respective farmers in the Lakhimpur district.

Keywords: Social Media, Agricultural Marketing, YouTube, WhatsApp, Farmers, Agricultural Products.

Introduction

Agriculture is a significant term associated with our life. Agriculture shapes our life. From the morning till night, we eat Agri products. Without agricultural products, we cannot exist. However, during lockdown, people faced problem to get required agricultural and food products on daily basis. At that crucial time, we continuously search on social media to catch agri-vendors who supply agricultural products at our doorstep. Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram, Youtube, etc., are widely used social media tools for this purpose.

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Agri products growers and vendors also use these social media tools to reach their customers during the lockdown. The Agri products grower and vendors widely use Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram, Youtube, etc., to market their products. The use of social media is getting more popular among agricultural producers and vendors. India's well-established company Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) launched the "Mahakrishi Plan" to help the farmers. Social media is a tool through which one can communicate with customers directly to sell or market their products. Social media helps agricultural producers to create and share information with their customers.

Social media also create an atmosphere among agricultural producers to get instant feedback about their products. Nowadays most widely used smartphones develop a communication chain between farmers and customers. Social media has achieved increasing popularity day by day and has become a vital tool among all levels and all types of users.

During lockdown, farmers use social media to promote and sell their products door to door. Social media minimizes the geographical distances and help farmer grow their business. Social media provide a better solution to the problem of agricultural marketing. Mainly farmers use social media to create awareness among customers about their agricultural products, each product's price, availability, delivery options, etc. Social media provide a platform for the farmers to create their groups, pages, blogs, vlogs, communities to sell and market their products. The farmers create images, videos, and other links to connect with their customers. These activities facilitate the farmers to market their agricultural commodities and develop a vast network with customers.

What is Social Media

Social media can be defined as a web-based service through which one can create

- 1) Public or semi Public profile within a bounded environment
- 2) Communities with whom they can share information.
- 3) View connections made by the account owner or other friends, review the list, and change the setting within the system.

The nature and setting may vary from Facebook to YouTube, Youtube to Instagram, Instagram to Twitter. Whatever the Social Media tool, the primary purpose of Social Media is to create, publish, collaborate and discuss. There are different Social Media tools available, which can be grouped into the following groups-

Facebook: Facebook provides a platform to create users' groups, page, etc., to communicate with other users.

LinkedIn: LinkedIn generally provides a platform to communicate with professionals with the same interest or diverse interests.

Twitter: Twitter can be used to tweet, retweet, share information.

WhatsApp: WhatsApp is also a viral social media to create groups and share product images, videos, and information.

YouTube: Youtube is also a famous social media to share videos, create polls, and post information in the community tab.

Literature Review

Social media minimizes geographical boundaries and provides a platform to share information among people with a common interest. Rhoades and Hall(2007) state that so many blogs cover topics related to agriculture. The article further explains that gratification and satisfaction encourage users to use social media to fulfill their needs. In his article, Conrad Caine(2012) mentions that social media accelerates agricultural marketing, helps understand the consumers through interaction, and increases the sales of agricultural products. Bite, Deshmukh, & Dresel (2017) in their study among farmers and states that using social media for marketing is very useful.

They further added that it saves time and cost for the farmers to get information. Among farmers, Facebook and WhatsApp are the most preferred social media. The farmers rely on official pages, blogs, and groups to access needed information.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are:

- To understand how social media helps in agricultural marketing
- To know the use of popular social media among farmers.
- To know the challenges of social media in agricultural marketing.

Research Methodology

The proposed study is descriptive, so a purposive simple random sampling method is used to collect data. The study was conducted among 167 farmers in the Lakhimpur district in Assam. Only 124 farmers actively participated in the research process and provided their responses to the questionnaire distributed among them. The observation and interview methods were also adopted simultaneously wherever necessary.

Analysis and Results

The data collected by the questionnaire method is analyzed and interpreted, and presented in tables. A total of 167 questionnaires were distributed. However, only 124 filled questionnaires were returned and considered for evaluation.

Age-wise Respondents

Table 1 shows age-wise respondents. Among respondents majority 43% of the respondents are between the age group of 40 to 50 years; followed by 23% of respondents whose age is above 50; 18% of respondents are between the age group of 20-30, and only 16% respondents are between 20-30.

Table-1: Age wise Respondents

Age	Frequency
20-30	20(16%)
30-40	23(18%)
40-50	53(43%)
Above 50	28(23%)

Gender wise Respondents

Table 2 shows the gender-wise responses of the respondent. Among all respondents, 97% are Male, and 3% are female.

Table-2: Gender Wise Respondents

Age	Frequency
Male	120(97%)
Female	4(3%)

Education of the Respondents

Education plays a vital role in upgrading our lives, for farmers who are educated and able to use the latest electronic gadget. Among all respondents, 36% of respondents are matric pass, 29% respondents are Higher Secondary pass, 20% respondents are graduates, and 15% respondents are postgraduates. While interviewing the farmers, it was found that all the farmers can operate social media to market their agricultural produce very effectively.

Table-3: Education of the Respondents

Education	Frequency
Matric	45 (36%)
Higher Secondary	25 (20%)
Graduate	36(29%)
Post Graduate	18(15%)

Types of Social Media used by Farmers

In recent years, it has been seen that Facebook and Twitter are the most used social media among people, but the results shown in Table 4 indicate that most of the respondents 100% are using YouTube and Whatsapp most frequently. The next most widely used social media is Facebook 79%, Twitter is used by 60% of users. Only 19.35% of users use other social media to market agricultural products.

Table-4: Types of Social Media used by the Farmers

Social Media	Frequency
Facebook	98(79%)
Twitter	75(60%)
Youtube	124(100%)
Whatsapp	124(100%)
Other	24(19.35%)

Frequency of using Social Media

Table 5 shows the frequency of using Social media among farmers. Moreover, it is depicted from the table that 44% of respondents use social media daily. Only 9% of respondents sometimes use social media.

Table-5: Frequency of using Social Media

Frequency of using Social Media	Frequency
Daily	54(44%)
Weekly	30 (24%)
Forthnightly	29(23%)
Sometimes	11(9%)

Purpose of using Social Media

The respondents were asked about their reason for using social media. Table 6 reveals that 124(100%) respondents use social media to sell or buy agricultural products. 67(54%) respondents use social media to share videos about their Agri products. It is followed by 34(27%) respondents who use social media to share photos about Agri products and 21(16%) respondents said that searching for information is very fast on social media. 13(10%) respondents use social media to find solutions to problems. 11(9%) respondents use social media to seek information. They reveal that information seeking is very fast on social media; instant messaging is another popular purpose among the respondents and 10(8%) respondents use it for general purpose.

Table-6: Purpose of Using Social Media

Purpose	No. of Respondents	Rank
Instant Message	10	7
To sell or buy agricultural products	124	1
To share information	21	4
Information seeking	11	6
To find a solution to problems	13	5
Sharing Photos of Agri products	67	2
Sharing videos about their Agri products	34	3

Problems faced in using social media

Table 7 depicts various problems the respondents face while using social media marketing. The data reveals that 60(48%) respondents express that poor internet connectivity is a major problem whereas, 30(24%) respondents find the problem in the adoption of social media as a tool for marketing, about 22(18%) respondents stated that lack of technical knowledge is a problem, followed by 12(9%) respondents express that people do not show their trust on e- buying and re-selling of agricultural products.

Table-7: Problems Faced In Using Social Media

Flexibility	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Lack of technical knowledge	22	18
Poor internet speed	60	48
Adoption of social media as a tool for marketing	30	24
People do not show their trust in e- buying and e-selling agricultural products	12	10

Findings, Suggestions & Conclusions

The study found that 97% of respondents are male among all respondents, and 3% of respondents are female. The majority of the respondents (43%) are between forty to fifty years of age. In terms of education, 36% of respondents are matric pass, and 15% have a postgraduate degree. YouTube and WhatsApp are the preferred social media among respondents. The study reveals different problems the farmers face, and "poor internet speed" is the common problem among 48% of respondents, 24% of respondents and state that "adoption of social media as a tool for marketing" is another problem. The respondents express that there are various websites of many institutions through which they found important information related to agriculture. It saves their time and cost of searching for information. Again most of the respondents state that many telecom companies provide data packs at lower prices which is beneficial to market their agricultural commodities. Young farmers show faith in using social media to market agricultural products. By applying social media, farmers can interconnect with the customers and sell their products through online orders. Social media help them promote their Agri products and make them more visible to the broader community.

At present, social media is a prevalent medium to communicate with people. Every person uses social media in their day-to-day life for different

activities. So, seeing this wide popularity among people, farmers can use these social media to promote Agri products. Social media is an excellent way to interconnect with the customer community. There are different social media available in the market. Farmers need to be judicious in selecting appropriate social media to market agricultural products. Sometimes farmers find it very difficult to utilize social media for promoting agricultural products. In such a situation, they can take help from various agricultural institutions. Moreover, agricultural and other ICT institutions can arrange short-term training for farmers to use different ICT tools. Again, farmers should show their eagerness to handle the new technology swiftly and efficiently for different agricultural activities.

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