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SOCIAL MEDIA FOR AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION & ADVISORY SERVICES

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Abstract

The paradigm shift in approaches to agricultural extension and internet technology has brought the agriculture and its services to the doorsteps of the farming community. With the advancement in mobiles and androids, agriculture has been introduced on the platform of World Wide Web. Now, even the marginal farmers can afford agricultural advisory services if he has access to net, androids and mobiles. Fourth and Fifth Generation technology in the field of internet has fasten the speed of delivery of advisory services. In this article we would come to know about the social media, its status and use and role in agricultural advisory and extension services in detail.

Introduction

“Social Media is more about sociology and psychology of communication than about technology”, says Saravanan & Bhattacharjee, 2014.

Suchiradipta & Saravanan, 2016, defined social media as the web-based tools of electronic communication that allows users to personally and informally interact, create, share, retrieve and exchange information and ideas in any form (text, pictures, video etc.) by anyone in the virtual world.

Social media originated as a way to interact with friends and family and later adopted for many profitable/non-profitable public/private works. It is now a mainstream form of communication to grow in popularity with the increase in the number of smart phones and the ease of use.

Estimates of Global Reports :

Global Social Media Research Summary July 2020 exposed that –

- More than half of the world now uses social media.
- 4.57 billion people around the world now use the internet, out of which 346 million new users joined within last 12 months.
- 8% of the world's internet users are not on social media, this shows opportunity or the future growth.

Statista.com 2020 reported that -

- Indian social network users reached 376.1 million in 2020 which were 142.23 million in 2015 and are predicted to reach 447.9 million by 2023.

StatcounterGlobalstats 2020 specified the categorization of social media users as following by Sep, 2020-

- Facebook – 79.3 %
- YouTube – 7.35 %
- Pinterest- 5.32 %
- Instagram – 3.9 %
- Twitter – 1.91 %
- LinkedIn – 0.17 %
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Types of social media platforms -

S.No.	Types of platform	Examples
1	Social networking sites	Facebook, Google+
2	Blogs	Blogger, Wordpress
3	Micro-blogs	Twitter, Instagram
4	Collaborative projects	Wikis
5	Social gaming	Farmbook
6	Content communities	Video (YouTube) Photo (Instagram) Audio (Podcasts) PDF, PPT (Slideshare)
7	Forums	Google hangout
8	Socially integrated messaging platforms	Whatsapp, Facebook
9	Professional networking	ResearchGate, LinkedIn

Advantages of using social media in agricultural extension, Saravanan et. al. 2015 -

- Cost effectiveness: Social media has made the agriculture extension cost effective and affordable to every class of the society.
- Broader reach :Agriculture through social media gained broader reach and virtually reaches the users who can't be reached offline.
- Time efficient :Within a short period of time it can reach anywhere and everywhere.
- Problem oriented : Through social media certain problems regarding the agricultural field can be solved in minutes with proper and reasonable solutions from experts.
- User generated content :Any type of text or video or audio etc developed and posted or uploaded by people themselves on the social platforms.
- Mobile phone accessibility : With access to cheaper and affordable mobile phones any information on social media can be accessed.
- Virtual presence of extension org. and client reach : Clients and experts through virtual presence over social media verifies the reliability of the content on social media.
- Democratization of information : Information available on social media is of the people, by the people and for the people.
- Single platform for stakeholders : Through single platform many branches or fields can be approached.
- Measures reach and success : Information reach and utilization can be well measured through likes and dislikes on social platforms.

• Challenges and opportunities of social media in Extension -

Challenges :

- Passive users : Only a certain class of users respond on social groups rest remains silent and passive.
- Irrelevant information : Many times irrelevant information is also available which needs to be sorted out.
- Participation of agricultural Stakeholders : Not all participants actively joins.
- Infrastructure issues : Network connectivity and availability is the main requirement for social platforms to provide services.
- Mindset of people : Sometimes people get prejudiced and are reluctant to use or trust the content available on social platforms.

Opportunities :

- Forming global interest groups is possible.
- Reaching one to many in short period of time.
- Few social media apps are available without internet too which denies the requirement of internet all time.
- Allows integration of wider range of stakeholders through single platform.
- Can act as catalyst for resource mobilization (technological, organizational, and financial).
- **Social media in extension – Prominent cases from World and India :**
- Here are some of the platforms which provides agriculture extension services through social media :

1. Global Good Practice Note on Social Media for Rural advisory services

1. Facebook	2. Twitter
• Livestock Information and Market Centre	• e-Agriculture
• Agricultural Extension in South Asia	• YPARD
	• #AgChat
	• IFFCO
	• FAO

3. Watsapp

- eHorticulture
- Directorate of Extension (DoE), University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS), Raichur

4. YouTube

- Peterson Farm Bros
- Kissan Kerala
- Digital Green

5. Blogs

- World Bank blogs
- Agricultural Extension in South Asia (AESAs) blogs
- Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) Blog

Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) survey report -

GFRAS global survey on use of social media in agricultural extension and advisory services conducted online across 60 countries and 226 respondents provided following interesting results-

- Face book was found to be the most popular social media platform used by AEAS actors.
- The major activity on social media was searching for news and events and sharing information.
- A major impeding factor for social media use was the lack of authenticity of information shared online.
- Social construction of information (development and publication of information socially by the users) was considered as the most important feature of social media
- Ninety five percent of the respondents believed social media can play an important role in bridging the gap between stakeholders in Agricultural Innovation Systems (AIS)
- Overall, the survey found that social media is a very useful tool in agricultural extension and rural advisory services. To quote one respondent, “SM is not only a tool for reaching large audiences; it is also an opportunity to develop relationships.”

Suggestions for Effective Use of Social Media in Farm Extension Activities, Devesh Thakur and Mahesh Chander, 2018 -

- The internet connectivity should be improved.
- Reduction in internet data tariffs can be the important step to avail full benefits of social media use in agriculture.
- More awareness should be created about such type of possible use of social media in agriculture so that increased number of farmers get benefited.
- Social media should be used by state line departments in sharing and discussing agricultural issues.
- Respondents reported that the number of irrelevant posts in the WhatsApp group should be minimized.
- Reduction in the cost of smartphones and data exchange among rural communities can boost the spread of agricultural extension advisory services through social media among the farmers.

Conclusion

Extension professionals have greater ability of expanding the influence of their programming efforts through thoughtful use of social media.

The online extension is not the substitute for offline contact, rather it is the support for enhancing the connectivity between extension service and clientele. The professionals could reach the wide range of audience from diverse geographical, economic, and social backgrounds and address their needs using cost-effective social media to reach new and traditional audiences in a relevant, accessible, and timely manner.

As these media provide platform for the people with specific interests to connect and share knowledge and technologies through certain means such as developing groups or pages; it helps society to socialize, and the extension professionals need to consider this platform for the effective program implementation and analyze how these media can influence the outcome delivery to the cliental.

In general, social media is gradually appreciated in agricultural extension service delivery, but faced with challenges. Thus, the necessity to put structures in place and required efforts by all stakeholders to ensure good use of its benefits.

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