

EFFECTIVE USAGE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES IN
EXTENSION ACTIVITIES
A CASE STUDY OF 'AGRICULTURIST' FACEBOOK GROUP

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Abstract:

Newspapers and Magazines has been dominating the agricultural Information exchange until television was invented. Now with the advent of internet it has found a new dimension with Social Media. A tool used to connect millions of people worldwide such as Social Networking sites have provided a voice to the voiceless.

Keywords:

Social Media,

Agriculture,

Communication,

Virtual community,

Development communication,

Agricultural Extension.

Handheld devices further revolutionised the concept bringing in more opportunities. Social Media is now a mainstream form of communication around the world and continues to grow in popularity. Whilst coming with its own set of challenges such as educational and technological limitations in rural India the opportunities are abundant.

This paper follows qualitative content analysis and in depth interview method, as well as statistical data analysed to understand the perspectives of effective usage of social media platform for agricultural development. This paper aims to highlight the merits as well as demerits of virtual community in the effectiveness of communication strategy. Also tries to assess the value social media could provide towards the agricultural industry in India.

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Introduction

Social media has become a powerful tool that connects millions of people globally from the comfort of our homes; social media is revolutionizing the way business is carried out bringing new ways of communication and exchange of information across the globe. With the introduction of smartphone, social media has become an easily available form of communication.

Built as a tool for socialising Facebook was never purposefully intended to become a revolutionary form of information sharing platform. Tech savvy generation of today found exemplary ways to make use of the technology.

Agriculture in India was in a dire need for a platform where all the problems and solutions be brought under the same roof. Facebook happened to be what the doctor ordered.

Social media plays a major role in enhancing the knowledge and skills of the farmers globally. Through this platform the farmers all around the world can be interconnected where they can gain and share the information and knowledge. Due

to which they can improve their agricultural techniques.

There was never a technology such large and cheap that people can be connected globally. Providing direct access between business entities and consumers, Facebook became a bridge between genuine thoughts, relevant information and supply to demand preferences.

Making the idea of global village a reality, tapping into the human need of forming groups, sharing information, providing entertainment and communication social media has achieved so much in such a short span of time.

Extension activities

In order to remain competitive in a changing world farmers constantly manage and adapt their farm businesses. Making required adjustments in the agricultural practices and updating them from time to time is a really important task. Every new innovation should meet the demand of the consumer.

Agriculture being the backbone of India in the past and in the present it is fitting that the latest technology has found its way.

Technology helps farmers access reliable, timely and relevant information.

Complex decision undertaken by farmers requires the collection of a range of information from a number of sources that individual farmer have their favoured information sources which they can access depending on the specific information being sought.

Digital Age

Most people use the internet for personal communication through email, e-commerce and access to information. With the advent of Internet and world wide web, access to information is unlimited. After initial scepticism some leaders of media industries proclaimed the internet to be the universal information highway and were bullish on its development.

They even found this platform more advantageous where a businessman can effortlessly advertise his products and service without spending on printing and broadcast productions. Moreover, he can be in direct contact with the consumer himself without the interference of the middlemen. Instant feedbacks of the consumers are the add-on quality to improvise the business.

Agricultural extension and social media in India

Social media is increasingly being used as a medium of sharing information and

creating awareness. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs have been used to engage with various audiences. The users generate and shape the content. Social media strengths are complementing traditional media in facilitating the shaping of content.

Users of social media have access to platforms like Livestock information, agriculturist, Farmsurge and such others. Farmers and those interested in farming obtain information from these social media platforms. These platforms educate and inform on agricultural matters as well as facilitate the buying and selling of agricultural produce and related products.

The users exchange information and discuss issues concerning agriculture based on experience and knowledge. They also buy and sell agricultural produce and inputs and use pictures, links and videos to facilitate this. This sharing of information facilitates the marketing of the farmers produce and formation of networks. The social media platforms are also used to share links, news articles, information, feedback and for queries.

Agricultural institutions in India have also incorporated social media in their information system. For instance, Vivasayam Karkkalam page managed by Madubalan, Public Extension

Officer. However not all institutions have fully embraced Web 2.0 as a tool for disseminating information.

Impact of media convergence

It is also evident that there is convergence of traditional media and social media to provide and shape content. Agricultural programs are using social media to engage audiences and obtain feedback. For example, In Kenya, programs like Shamba Shape Up on Citizen Television and the pull out seeds of gold, in the Saturday Nation have social media platforms. Mkulima Young a radio program on Coro Fm also obtains its feedback on the Mkulima Young social media platforms.

Literature reviews

As majority of the blogs were not media related, they could not reach the targeted audiences. Agriculture media utilised the situation and thus started to work on web 2.0 technologies to reach the audience. (Rhoades and Aue, 2010)

The Agrarian society is quickly embracing the social media and getting connected with the like-minded agriculturist. Even the villagers have begun to use the social media to come out of isolation which arises due to the nature of their work. (Cline, 2011)

Social media overcomes geographical boundaries and creates communities who

share common interests. The users also seek out information from traditional media social media platforms. Scholars noted that there was a large presence of blogs covering topics on agriculture. (Rhoades and Hall, 2007)

Social media bypasses traditional media specifically radio medium which is considered to be one of the very effective medium of agricultural communication because of its reach and local dialect. (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006)

Twitter is a best platform to share not only news but also for views, opinion, guidance and advice which has huge need in development support communication. (Cline, 2011)

Problem Statement

In the digital era, understanding proper usage of social media platform extension activities is very essential and to do so, there should be a proper model in this segment where people democratically manage a page which serves specific demography of the nation. There is a lack of academic process of research in this area.

Objectives

This study has been conducted with a core objective of understanding the decentralised virtual community in a specified demographic region which

resulted in providing benefit to the participant members. Understanding decentralised virtual extension model. Analysing the specific social media platform with various aspects. Critical review of virtual extension platforms.

Methodology

With specific objectives this study uses qualitative content analysis and in-depth interview methodology. Available secondary data is scrutinised based on peer review of various literatures related to the topic. Interview of the admin has been conducted to understand working process of the extension platform and how such social media groups can be viable model both economically and in practice.

Facebook

Facebook is considered to be one of the very effective social media platform in every field of interest in concern. Credit goes to Facebook for right implementation of web 2.0 technology and virtually community platforms to bring likeminded people together worldwide.

Facebook has over 1.86 Billion active users in a month and it increases 17 percent over a year. As of December 2016, there are 1.15 Billion Mobile users who use Facebook on daily basis. And its growth rate is 23 percent over a year.

Facebook usage in agriculture extension

| Facebook Group/Pages | Details | Target users | Region | Followers/ Members* |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Mkulima Young (Young Farmer) (https://www.facebook.com/mkulima.young) | This is an information sharing platform, widely used by young farmers. This page is started by Joseph Macharia, emerging farmer of Kenya. This page shares agri related advices and market information. | Young farmers | Kenya | 1,03,673 |
| Livestock Information and Marketing Centre (https://www.facebook.com/mkulima.young) | Members of Livestock Information and Marketing Centre share information | Agricultural stakeholders related to | Tamil Nadu, India | 96,755 |

| | | | | |
|--|--|---|-------------------|---------------|
| com/groups/Livestock. TN/ | related to livestock production, management, marketing and such related issues. | livestock | | |
| Agriculturist (https://www.facebook.com/groups/Agriculturist/) | Members from farming sectors of Dakshina Kannada and rest of Karnataka share agriculture related information, graphics, videos and other details for sharing, knowledge, advice as well as for business purpose. | Agricultural stakeholders | Puttur, Karnataka | 44,343 |
| Natural farming Development Centre (https://www.facebook.com/groups/NaturalFarmingTN/). | Members share information about organic farming, permaculture, hydroponics, aquaponics, Natural Repellents and related to natural farming techniques. | Farmers interested in organic and zero budget agriculture | Tamil Nadu, India | 18,976 |
| Turmeric Farmers' Association of India (https://www.facebook.com/turmeric.farmers) | Turmeric farmers started this page to stabilize price of turmeric in the market. Here turmeric farmers community connected through this page and share crop and market details, which results in stable price for turmeric in the Indian market. | Turmeric farmers | India | 5,291 |
| The Weekend Agriculturist (https://www.facebook.com/groups/theweekendagriculturist/) | Here members can volunteer themselves as free labour for agriculture on weekends. Even they can contribute essential materials to needy farmers. | Farm volunteers | India | 14,900 |
| National Ecological Producers Association (APNE) | Ecological farming information is shared in this page. | Farmers | Peru | 6,060 |

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|--------------------------|----------------------|
| https://www.facebook.com/anpe.peru | | | | |
| <p>Vivasayam Karkkalam (Let us Learn Agriculture) (https://www.facebook.com/groups/madhualan)</p> | <p>This group dedicated to share details about latest and successful agri techniques and technologies. There will be continuous debates and discussions about usage of technologies, and which will result in improved versions of tools. This group started and monitored by Mr. Madhu Balan, Public extension officer.</p> | <p>Farmers and others those who are interested in agriculture</p> | <p>Tamil Nadu, India</p> | <p>16,043</p> |

*as of 15 March 2017

Analysis of Agriculturist, Facebook group

The Facebook group, AGRICULTURIST (www.facebook.com/groups/agriculturist) plunged on 27 October 2007 by tiller Mr. Mahesh Puchchapady. Mr. Mahesh Puchchapady and Ramesh Delampady being group admins manage to monitor the policies related to adding members to the group along with keeping a tab on ethical and legal aspects of the contents discussed in the group. An active Facebook bracket holds 44343 members, on 15 March 2017 count. More than 35% of members are active in posting, sharing and discussions and an average of 13 discussions will be posted every day and each discussion gets 150 to 200 likes speaks its endorsement. Attractive 590 albums, 4000 photo

captions and 800 videos posted by the members made its canopy to cover quite a large extent. It's highly notable that, the contents posted are related to agricultural and allied services explains its focused interest. While taking into account of videos, more than 85% of videos fetching the demonstration of agricultural related facilities and equipment. The ideal duration of 150 seconds made easy glue to video as observed by multimedia experts.

The objective of the group is to cater the needs of tech savvy agricultural community who belongs various strata of society. This group provides communication platform where people share their experiences and put the question forward and others try to provide the practical solution. The purpose of this

group is standardise agricultural practice into a professional business entity.

The founder and admin of the group Mr. Mahesh Puchchapy (Agriculturist and Journalist) opines in stressing the proper admin policy channelized them to entertain agricultural related contents and stick to the core purpose of the group. The Facebook platform evolved in many avenues providing more members to come face to face, telephonic and virtual contacts, in return discuss their problems related agrarian sectors. The practical exposure farmers always on toes to discuss, disseminate and proper guidance to needy people.

The group has organised various agriculture related programmes in collaborations with various governmental, non-governmental and private organisations which gave the opportunity to interact each other and understand better on virtual community.

Findings

After analysing available secondary data and statistical figures related to the group, and also understanding the in depth interview of the founder and admin, this study has the possibilities to list out various aspects in correlation with communication strategy with ICT based agricultural extension activities. The

findings of the study are very much practical on the basis of theoretical framework.

- Using Facebook platform is a very efficient and economically viable model
- Cloud based social media networking with demographical categorisation is more applicable than universal or offline or traditional media communication
- Need based extension activities will always yield the benefit
- Discussions are monitored by the admin panel to cater the core objective of the group
- Posting self-made demonstration video is very innovative and practical in nature
- Comments are based the post rather than gossips, hence purpose is served
- Facebook to Face2Face concept is very unique and innovative practice in development communication domain
- Virtual group organizing venue based events in collaboration is with various bodies is good thing to practice
- Percentage of active user is lower than essential

Conclusion

Developing countries like India, has done tremendous experiments in the domains of

agricultural extension. Social networking media platforms like Facebook has been a better cloud based free platform to create a virtual community and communicate among like-minded people. Demography based virtual groups like Agriculturist made it possible to provide 'Facebook to Face2Face' for elite groups of agricultural sectors and it can be a unique and innovative practice which can be followed by other groups of same or different sectors of the society. India is not achieved agricultural development in a proper and scientific manner, even though experimenting lot of extension activities. In this juncture this study concludes that efficient and constructive usage of such platforms will yield the reap and benefit agri-business sector of any country.

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Short Biography

Mr. Srinivasa Pejathaya working as Assistant Professor at The Department of Post Graduate Studies in Journalism and Mass Communication, Alva's College, Moodbidri. He has 8 years of experience in media profession and academia all together. He has presented number research papers in various seminars and published the same in different journals. His area of specialisation includes communication theory and research, new media technology, and apt usage of communication models for constructive purposes in various domains.

Ms. Sushmitha J. is pursuing her master's degree in Journalism and Mass Communication at Alva's College, Moodbidri. She has done her internship in public and community relation sector and keen enthusiast in agricultural related communication models.