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ASSESSMENT OF FARMERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS SOCIAL NETWORKING FOR INFORMATION DISSEMINATION IN AGRICULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This research endeavors to assess the attitude of farmers towards social networking for information dissemination in agriculture. As agriculture becomes increasingly pervasive, understanding the perspectives of farmers on utilizing social networks for information exchange is crucial. The study to ascertain different perspectives of farmers on social networking was conducted in Guntur, Kurnool and Anakapalli districts of Andhra Pradesh during 2023-24 with 240 farmer respondents selected by using random sampling. The study employed a mixed-methods approach combining surveys and interviews to gather comprehensive insights. The findings disclosed that major proportion (54.17 %) of the respondents had favourable attitude towards social networking while one fourth (25.42 %) of the respondents had high favourable attitude. The study further revealed that most of the farmers had positive attitudes which indicated farmers receptiveness to use their social contacts for agricultural information while negative attitude represented their resistance or concerns that need to be addressed.

Keywords : *assessment, attitude, social networking, likert scale, information dissemination*

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture growth has been varying widely and farmers income remained low due to lower levels of productivity brought about by lower levels of adoption of scientific technologies by farmers. Science-based knowledge has abled to reach only a small fraction of their desired recipients. The adoption and diffusion of innovations are closely related to farmers' characteristics and their interaction and knowledge sharing with influential agents for the adoption of innovations. Hence, facilitating the adoption of innovation by farmers is the need of hour to sustain agricultural productivity. To provide reliable information to farmers, an effective and efficient information delivery system is crucial.

Governmental and private extension agencies are increasingly responsible for disseminating information mediated by information and communication technologies. However, as farmers mainly rely on informal interpersonal communication networks, viewing formal channels as the only means of information may obscure the reality. These diverse information needs of farmer are satisfied by the fellow farmers, extension personnel, agricultural research and education establishment and agricultural extension organizations through an unseen interconnected path of communication, called 'Agricultural information Network'. Social networks can therefore be the effective platforms for disseminating knowledge and encouraging the use of cutting-edge farming techniques. Identifying farmers' attitudes towards social networking can reveal the potential barriers or facilitators for the adoption of new techniques, technologies and sustainable practices. Understanding farmers' attitude is influential in initiating/formulating any strategy to promote the adoption of technology within the agricultural community.

Farmers' readiness to take part in group activities and peer learning can be inferred from studying their attitudes towards social networking. We can comprehend the influence these social networks have on their decision-making procedures, availability of resources and general well-being, which might result in increased access to markets and financial inclusion. Comprehending farmers' perspectives on social networking might facilitate the evaluation of these communication channels' efficacy during emergencies and enhance strategies for disaster readiness and response.

In conclusion, understanding the attitudes of farmers towards social networking aids in our understanding of their needs, preferences and behaviour. This information is essential for framing agricultural policies that are more successful in increasing market access, encouraging sustainable farming practices and increasing technology uptake. It is crucial to comprehend farmers' attitudes on social networking in light of the significant role that these platforms play in agriculture. The researcher has chosen to evaluate farmers' attitudes towards social networking in light of this factor.

OBJECTIVES

(1) To assess the attitude of farmers towards social networking

(2) To ascertain the relationship between selected characteristics of the farmers and their attitude towards social networking

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted during 2023-24 in Guntur, Kurnool and Anakapalli districts of Andhra Pradesh state (Fig. 1) which were selected purposefully due to practical considerations such as the ease of access and logistical feasibility of the researcher. From each district 80 farmers were selected randomly thus constituting the total sample of 240 respondents. An *ex-post facto* research design was used to conduct the study.

Keeping in view the objectives and variables of the study, a structured interview schedule was developed by consulting experts and referring to the relevant literature. The primary data was collected from the farmers through personal interview method in an informal atmosphere. The variables pertaining to personal, socio- economic and psychological characteristics of the farmers were used in the study. Statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage, and correlation were used to perform the data analysis.

Attitude is a psychological construct and operationalized as positive or negative feeling of farmers towards social networking. Likert scale was used to construct attitude scale as this technique has high reliability co-efficient and it gets a 3point judgement on each item rather than mere acceptance or rejection. Attitudes can be positive, negative or neutral and can influence a person's thoughts, actions and decisions.

The method of summated rating scale suggested by Likert (1932) was used in the construction of scale. A tentative list of 84 statements were prepared keeping in view of the applicability of statements suited to the construct "Attitude". The statements were subjected to scrutiny by judges to determine the relevancy and screening for inclusion in the final scale. For this purpose, the list of all the 70 statements were prepared in the form of questionnaire and was sent to 100 judges. The judges were requested to critically evaluate each statement for its relevancy to measure attitude of farmers towards social networking.

Based on relevancy test, a total of 37 statements were selected and then administered to a small sample of 40 farmers from the non- sampling area. After computing 't' values for all the 37 statements, 14 statements with 't' value more than 1.75 were selected. The final scale constituted of 14 statements comprising 9 positive statements and 5 negative statements was standardized to measure the attitude of farmers towards social networking. The developed scale was included in the interview schedule and administered to the respondents of the study area for their responses. The methodology is also followed by Rathod *et al*. (2023), Patel *et al*. (2022) and Yeragorla *et al*. (2021).

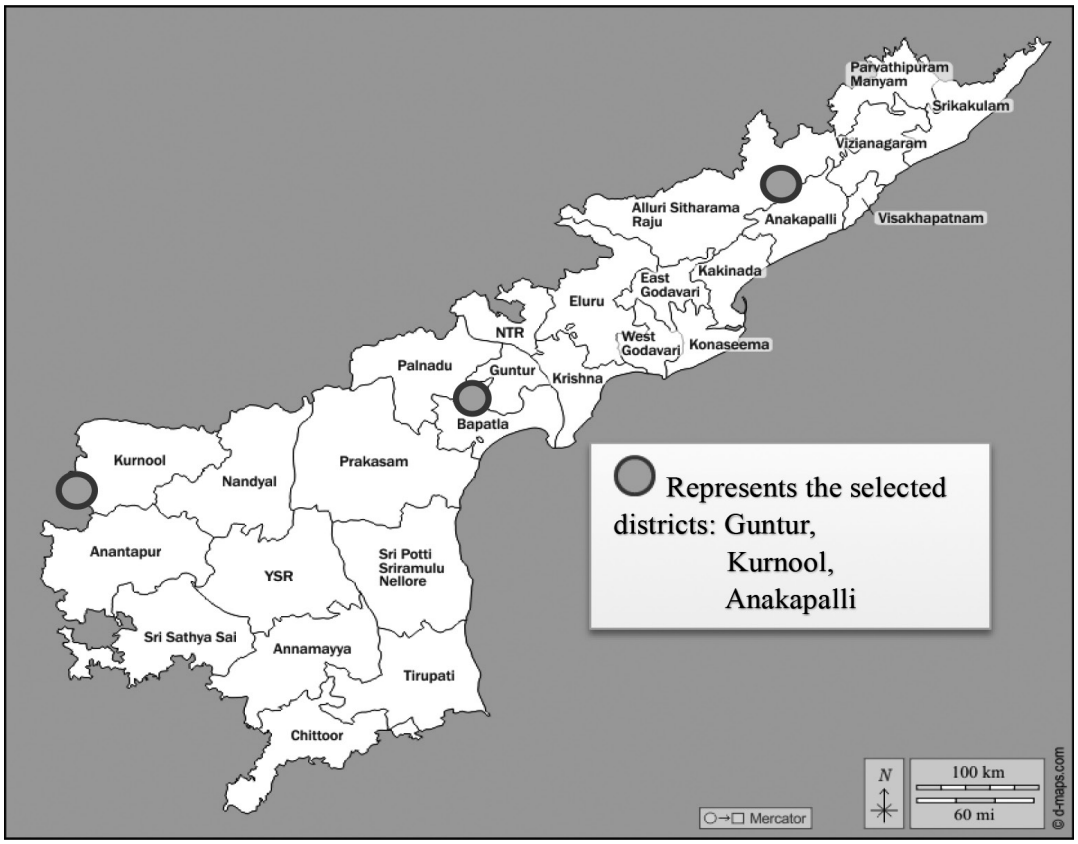

Fig.1. Map showing the study area

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The personal, socio- economic and psychological characteristics of the farmers were studied and quantified. The results were systematically presented below.

Table 1: Categorization of farmers according to their attitude towards social networking (n=240)

Sr. No	Category	Frequency	Percent
1	**Less favourable** (< 25.11)	49	20.42
2	**Favourable** (25.11 - 31.79)	130	54.17
3	**Highly favourable** (> 31.79)	61	25.42
SD=3.34		Mean =28.45	

It was clear from the [Table 1] that majority of the farmers had medium (54.17%) level of attitude, followed by high (25.42%) and low (20.42%) level of attitude towards social networking, somewhat similar findings reported by Karravula Rakesh and Naik (2023), Ambadkar *et al.* (2023), Jyothi and Vijayabhinandana (2022).

Farmers' attitude towards social networking may vary for a variety of reasons. Being agriculture as their main occupation and with high farming experience since ages farmers might be self-reliant and reluctant to seek out outside information. Working long and hard hours is a common part of farming, especially during the planting and harvest seasons. This may reduce the amount of time available for the farmers to socialize with friends and others on a regular basis.

In more traditional contexts, farmers give more value to social connections within their local networks and farming community due to which they might be reluctant to provide personal information or engage in activities outside of their own group. They may decide to restrict their social networks due to privacy concerns.

Cultural and generational differences might have influence on attitude toward social networking. Older farmers might have different perspectives on the importance of personal connections compared to younger generations. The social infrastructure that is present in metropolitan environments such as entertainment centers, social groups and recreational opportunities may not be present in rural locations because of which farmers might be perceived to have less social interactions due to the lack of these social outlets.

It is important to understand that farmers exhibit a wide range of individual attitudes and behaviour and few of them may actively participate in interpersonal social interactions both inside and outside of the farming community. It is suggested that as technology continues to connect people globally farmers should increasingly find ways to balance their traditional values with a broader network of their social contacts.

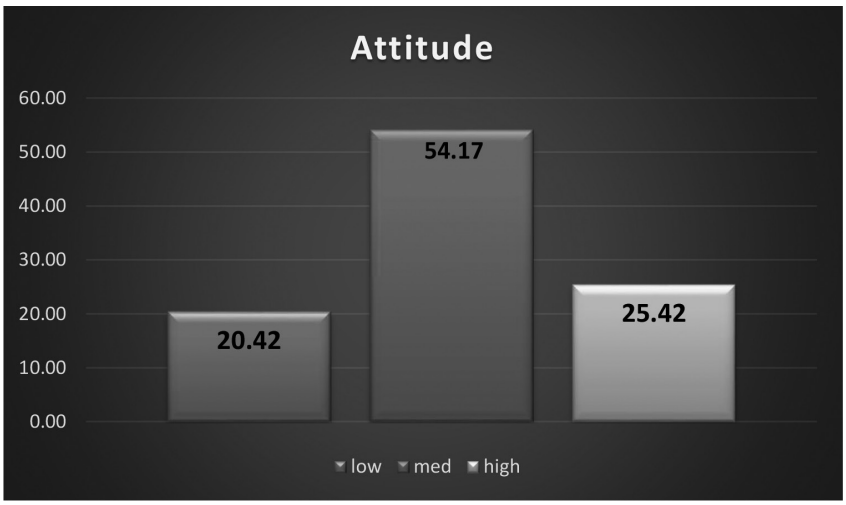

Fig.2. Attitude of farmers towards social networking

Table 2: Statements contributing to the attitude of farmers towards social networking

Sr. No.	Attitude statements	Mean	SD	Rank
1	I feel the information received through social networks as credible	7.456	0.404	I
2	Neighbours, friends and fellow farmers are better sources for agri based information	6.567	0.677	II
3	There is an opportunity to learn new techniques and practices from others in networks	5.833	0.750	III
4	Information through social networks creates more confusion in minds	5.667	0.721	IV
5	Technology adoption can be facilitated through social networks	5.533	0.264	V
6	I prefer to have more external social contacts	5.467	0.780	VI
7	I can travel a reasonable distance to scientists or extension personnel to seek farm based information than rely on fellow farmers*	5.378	0.732	VII
8	Agricultural information through social networks is good for awareness but applying it is difficult*	5.222	0.683	VIII
9	Social networks influences the perceptions and decision making of individuals	5.167	0.848	IX
10	Social networks provide local agricultural information round the clock	4.989	0.513	X
11	Social networks can create specific interest groups in agriculture*	4.981	0.513	XI
12	Discussions in social networks can easily lose its focus and divert from main topic under discussion*of individuals	4.833	0.888	XII
13	Sometimes social networks leads to substantial wastage of time for me*	4.656	0.584	XIII
14	It is possible to discuss in detail on farm related topics through social networks	4.111	0.632	XIV

Note: * Negative statements

The results from Table 2 denoted the attitude of farmers towards social networking. The attitude statements were organized in descending order and ranked accordingly based on the values on mean and standard deviation revealing farmers attitude towards social networking.

The inference from Table 3 indicated that positive and highly significant association was found between gender, localiteness- cosmopoliteness, social participation, extension contact, scientific orientation indicating their influential role on attitude of farmers towards social networking. Additionally, education, economic motivation, innovativeness and risk orientation showed positive and significant relationships with attitude of farmers towards social networking. While positive and non-significant relationships were observed with land holding and annual income. Surprisingly, age exhibited a negative and non-significant relationship, challenging the notion that older farmers were less likely to have more social contacts. These insights highlight key factors influencing the attitude of farmers towards social networking. Similar findings reported by Meenu Maheswaran and Pandya (2022), Vinaya Kumar *et al.* (2018).

Table 3: Association between selected characteristics of the farmers and their attitude towards social networking (n=240)

Sr. No.	Independent variable	Correlation-Coefficient ('r' value)
X1	**Age**	-0.118*
X2	**Education**	0.142*
X3	**Gender**	0.174**
X4	**Land holding**	0.106 NS
X5	**Annual income**	0.039 NS
X6	**Localiteness- Cosmopoliteness**	0.325**
X7	**Social participation**	0.242 **
X8	**Extension contact**	0.200 **
X9	**Economic motivation**	0.056*
X10	**Innovativeness**	0.137 *
X11	**Scientific orientation**	0.261 **
X12	**Risk orientation**	0.156*

NS = Non significance *= 5 % level of significance
**= 1 % level of significance

Table 4: Extent of contribution of personal, socio-economic, psychological characteristics of the farmers cassava growers on their attitude towards social networking (n=240)

Sr. No,	Independent variables	Regression coefficient	S. E of Regression coefficient	't' value
X_1	**Age**	0.630	0.148	1.63*
X_2	**Education**	0.537	0.756	2.03*
X_3	**Gender**	0.296	0.693	2.42 *
X_4	**Land holding**	0.167	0.331	0.98 ^{NS}
X_5	**Annual income**	0.023	0.810	o.69 ^{NS}
X_6	**Localiteness- Cosmopoliteness**	0.127	0.541	3.60 **
X_7	**Social participation**	0.165	0.412	3.12**
X_8	**Extension contact**	0.466	0.255	2.80**
X_9	**Economic motivation**	0.342	0.352	2.29 *
X_{10}	**Innovativeness**	0.380	0.829	2.33 *
X_{11}	**Scientific orientation**	0.551	0.410	3.57**
X_{12}	**Risk orientation**	0.259	0.216	1.84 *

NS- Non-Significant, *- Significant at 5 per cent level, **- Significant at 1 % level, SE= Standard Error; **$R^2 = 0.766$**;

A cursory look into the data furnished in the table 4 explained that the regression model's R-squared value is approximately 0.766. This indicates that about 76.6% of the variance in the dependent variable (whatever it may be) is explained by the independent variables included in the model. The adjusted R-squared, which considers the number of predictors in the model is normal as the regular R-squared indicating that the model's explanatory power will be improved by the inclusion of additional variables.

In summary, based on this regression analysis, the independent variables have a significant linear relationship with the dependent variable and the overall model had provide a good fit to the data.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the results of the study depicted the favorable attitude of farmers towards social networking. Further in order to enhance the farming sustainability, social interactions have to be strengthened to promote farming innovation and adoption of the technologies. Extension support should also focus on network building among actors within the farming community and understand how farmers exchange experiential knowledge to compensate for the lack of formal sources of knowledge. Policy makers should frame and support local policies based on the inclusion of farmers in the technological development in rural areas. Thus, strengthening the knowledge exchange among farmers and supporting local farmers' initiatives can potentially contribute to the diffusion of agricultural information.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

(1) The study underscored the importance of social networks for disseminating agricultural information among farmers. Policymakers and agricultural extension agencies should recognize the significance of utilizing these social networks to enhance knowledge exchange and promote the adoption of new farming techniques.

(2) The study highlights the influence of various social factors such as gender, localiteness, social participation, and extension contacts on farmers' attitudes towards social networking. Policymakers and extension services should consider these factors when designing interventions to promote technology uptake and knowledge sharing among farmers.

(3) The findings suggest the need for policies that support local initiatives and inclusion of farmers in technological development in rural areas.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of Interest" among researcher.

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