

## **ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTUARY IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Communication is the two way process between two or more people to transfer of information, facts, ideas which leads to common understanding. Since the introduction of social media, communication is becoming more and more dynamic with each passing day. The number of total internet users in India will reach 462 million mark by June 2016. Platforms like Facebook and what's app have 142 million and 70 million active monthly users as of June 2016. In a world where social media etiquettes are probably more important than table manners, ignoring it is not something that the development sector can afford to do. Especially for agricultural extension whose primary element is communication, social media can be a potential goldmine. Engaging with clients online, helping rural community gain a voice, making development bottom-up, more fruitful innovation brokering, engaging with all the factors in agricultural innovation systems on the same platform – social media has more than one use. But in spite of all the advantages, its actual use in rural areas of developing countries is still low due to infrastructural difficulties and psychological barriers. Training programs, awareness campaigns, and workshops can help extension officer in agricultural extension understand and use social media better. survey on use of social media in agricultural extension conducted online in India and 220 respondents provided interesting results. Face book was found to be the most popular social media platform used by respondents. 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 was considered as the most important feature of social media (95 %). 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. So we can say that "SM is not only a tool for reaching large audiences; it is also an opportunity to develop relationships."*

**Keywords:** social media, ICTs, agricultural extension, facebook, whats app

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social media refers to the internet-based digital tools for sharing and discussing information among people. It refers to the user generated information, opinion, video, audio, and multimedia that is shared and discussed over digital networks. Aspects of social media that makes them an important and accessible tool in development communication are their easy access through mobile phones, mass-personal communication and mass-self communication, a larger set of weak ties to ensure receipt of novel ideas, high degree of connectedness, and linkability and content sharing across multiple platforms.

Social media is more about sociology and psychology of communication than about technology (Saravanan and Bhattacharjee, 2014). Social media sites gained their popularity not only because they connected

friends and family but the huge potential of communication was soon realised and it started finding its use in professional communication. The preferences of social media platforms are still different based on the purpose. While Facebook has the highest reach among all social media platforms, LinkedIn is still the number one choice for professional communication as it is more likely to have a professional, well informed discussion in LinkedIn which is not possible in Facebook or Twitter. social media itself has been viral in the world of communication. As of January 2015, 29 per cent of the world population was active on social media, a 12 per cent increase from January, 2014. Facebook dominates the global social media landscape with 1.415 billion active users and 47 per cent of all internet users as of March, 2015. LinkedIn dominated the professional social networks with 347 million registered members and 39 million students. Whatsapp has 600 million users, Facebook messenger has 500 million

users, WeChat has 468 million users, Viber has over 200 million users, and Snapchat grew 56 per cent in 2014 .

A major boost to social media use comes from increased mobile phone subscriptions. Unique mobile subscribers are 51 percent of the global population, whereas, global mobile penetration is 97 per cent. In growing markets like India, of the 118 million active social media accounts, 100 million are mobile users.

Agriculture and social media – a review Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can provide new opportunities in fostering innovation, facilitating communication, and innovation. ICTs have long been used in agriculture for facilitating communication among stakeholders, especially farmers and extensionists, and of its various applications, social media is the most recent addition. Within a few years, it has completely changed communication globally, forcing enterprises and development agencies to take notice. Social media has already impacted the wind of global development making people more informed and aware.

Few other important applications of social media like – polls, events, group discussions, forums, documents, webinars, chats (individual, groups, memories, advertisements etc). These applications are very useful for extension professionals for planning, organising, and evaluating extension programmes. The facebook also gives insights of the user engagement and offer several publishing tools.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- (a) To measure the role of social media in agricultural development
- (b) To study the profile of farmers
- (c) To study the difference between the social media user and non- user farmers

## **METHODOLOGY**

The structured survey questionnaire was specifically developed for this study using Google Forms and circulated through social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, emails, and web portals of GFRAS, e-Agriculture, AESA and other agriculture communities with an appeal for extension professionals to fill the survey. A total of 229 respondents from 62 countries responded to the survey with 78.5 per cent of them belonging to developing countries. Based on the findings of the study, some future steps are suggested to successfully integrate social media in AEAS. Data were analysed through descriptive statistics using Microsoft Excel

software.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Personal details of the respondents**

The diverse set of respondents of the study includes researchers (25.9 %), extensionists (21.5 %), academicians (20.6 %), entrepreneurs (5.7 %), policy makers (4.4 %), farmers (0.4 %) and others (21.5 %) from a variety of institutions. (Figure 1). One fourth of the respondents were female. 48.2 percent of belong to 26 to 45 years age group, followed by 46 – 65 years (42.1 %).

### **Social media participation**

The study identified Facebook as a most preferred social media platform by a large majority of the respondents (64.7 %) followed by Whatsapp (37.3 %), Google+ (32.5 %), Wikis (30.9 %), Twitter (23.4 %), blogs (22.2 %) and YouTube (20.00 %). Sharing news items and events, and exchanging knowledge in the form of discussions are becoming major activities on social media sites, especially for agricultural professionals and practitioners as was evident from the responses in the survey.

### **Reasons to use social media**

Personal mobile phones were the most used device by the respondents to access social media (68.2 %) followed by personal laptop (60.1 %), personal computer (49.8 %), office computer (41.7 %) and office laptop (26 %). Though mobile phones are getting increasingly popular, globally laptops and PCs are still the most used devices to access social media according to the research results of Global Web Index ([www.incite-group.com](http://www.incite-group.com), 2015).

### **Types of user**

The respondents were familiar with social media, majority (52.7 %) having been using it for more than past five years, followed by those who have been using it for last three to five years (38.8 %). Only few have been using it for last one to two years (6.3 %) or less than one year (2.2 %). Depending on how active an individual is on social media platforms in sharing information and communicating with others on a regular basis, four types of social media users were identified – introverts (only update profile and mostly communicate through private messaging), novel users (updates profile, actively seek out information, spend time tagging photos, logs in between 1 – 5 hours a week), versatile users (updates profile, sends public and private messages, shares links, comment on discussion threads, mostly in social media for professional activities) and expert communicators (logs in several times a day, actively engaged in all social

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media / networking activities, stay updated and interact very frequently both professionally and personally) A sizable portion of the respondents identified themselves as versatile users (33.5 %) followed by expert communicators (28.1 %), and novel users and introverts tied at 19.2 %.

Globally, an individual spends about 2.4 hours a day on social media but in the present study, many of the respondents (21.70 %) reported using social media for 1 – 2 hours per day followed by those who use it for 31 – 60 minutes (19.5 %), those using for 15 – 30 minutes (19.5 %) and 2 – 3 hours each day (11.10 %). But some reported not to use social media every day (11.10 %) and of them, 66 % logged in to their social media accounts 3 – 5 times a week.

### **Drawbacks in using social media**

Faulty internet connection (35.20 %) and unproductive use of time (33.90 %) were considered as the major drawback in using social media (Fig. 5). Lack of expertise was also reported by about 20 per cent of the respondents. While internet connections are infrastructural issues and needs to be looked into by the service providers and governments, personal constraints and privacy concerns can be easily taken care of with awareness creation and learning to better use social media through trainings and workshops, if needed.

### **Attitude towards social media in agricultural extension**

The importance of social media in development and the same trend has also been reflected by the respondents of the study where 94 per cent deemed social media to be useful in Agricultural extension, while 1.8 per cent disagreed and 3.5 per cent said they were not sure about the importance of social media in Agricultural extension.

### **Advantages of social media**

Global reach is considered one of the most important features in any development sector and it is same for social media use in Agricultural extension as has been reflected by the respondents. Global audience for the information shared is considered the greatest advantage of social media (79 %) followed by knowledge pool creation in real time and discussion among local and global peers.

### **Disadvantages of social media**

Social media has some perceived disadvantages too. Information being one of the most important inputs in agriculture, lack of authentic information can do more harm than good to the farmers. Since the knowledge pool in social media are mostly anonymous, without proper citation, most

of the time source of information is difficult to trace. Added with diverse information on the same topic, it becomes confusing to users. Also, many extensionists and experts have not started using social media either because they are sceptic about its usefulness, concerned about privacy issues, or for lack of technical skills which keeps an important part of AEAS outside social media. There are also arguments about utility of global knowledge in agriculture when it is a location specific activity. Numerous conversations at the same time were also distracting for some users.

### **Social media for market-led extension**

Linking farmers to market and helping them get maximum returns out of their enterprise is one of the basic objectives of AEAS and diverse set of location specific technologies are put into use. In market led extension, the process of advisory also become pluralistic and inclusion of consumers become more important to help local farmers get high returns. Interaction between agribusinesses and with their customers was considered the biggest advantage of social media in market led extension (69.7 %). Attracting large number of customers through social media platforms (60.6 %) and flourishing of local farmers' markets (49.8 %) were also considered as important benefits.

### **Reason for using SM for agricultural information**

Specifically for agricultural information, 93.4 per cent of the respondents used social media. Because of the peer presence in social media, it makes a great platform to discuss idea and problems and get professional views. The major uses of social media, according to the respondents, were to find information (75.7 %), to share information / ideas (73.8 %), to discuss topics with peers (56.2 %), to promote new technology / information / ideas (56.2 %), and to get suggestion from peers on academic / professional matters (35.2 %). Personal interest was the major reason for using social media by the respondents (72.7 %).

### **Type of information shared**

Major category of information that respondents' organizations share through their social media handles and accounts are publications in agriculture and Agricultural extension, recent development in agriculture, videos, podcasts, etc.

## **CONCLUSION**

While traditional ICTs were the weak ties for diffusion of innovation, modern day ICTs are bringing vast amount of information to rural communities. But among these, social media are unique because of the potential they provide

for forming both strong and weak ties in communication. The society – the rural people, the field level extensionists, farmers – do not read journals; they read blogs, watch YouTube and use Facebook and Twitter and these are the mediums that reach them effectively. These platforms provide incentives to every actor to communicate online forming networks and initiating development. Empowered by mobile technology, social media has a huge potential to revolutionise communication but its success depends, to a large extent, on the innovativeness of Agricultural extension and grassroot level organizations. Moreover, without infrastructure, only information can do very little. Further research into actual impact of social media on rural development and then scaling up are needed at local and global level. Extension is not just about communicating but bringing behavioural change thus meresharing posts and social media activism is not going to change much without practical actions. A multi level approach and initiatives at institutional and individual level together is needed to make social media a reality in every sphere of agricultural extension.

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