

Social Media: A New Tool for Farmers' Empowerment

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Introduction

Social media are web-based electronic communication tools that allow users to engage with others individually or in groups with the goal of exchanging information, expressing thoughts and opinions, and influencing and facilitating decision-making by anyone in the virtual world by producing, storing, retrieving, and transferring material in any form i.e., text, photos, video, etc. (Suchiradipta and Saravanan, 2016). These are digital networks that are used to share and discuss user-generated information - opinion, video, audio, and multimedia (Andres and Woodard, 2013). With the surge in smartphone users, social media has become a popular mode of communication around the world, and its influence is growing. It's expanding across the country, even to isolated locations, and it's revolutionized the way farmers communicate and connect.

Social Media Penetration

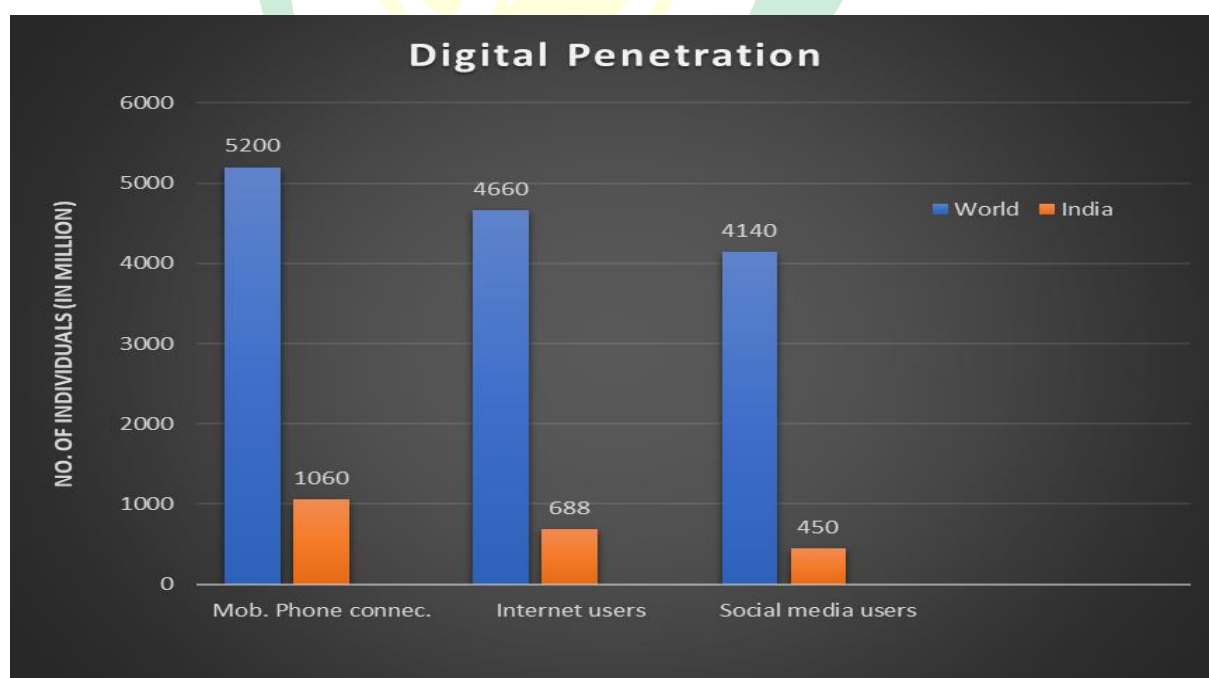


Fig. 1 Digital Penetration in India & World

According to digital 2020, the world's mobile phone users numbered 5.2 billion, while internet users numbered 4.66 billion. The total number of active social media users globally was 4.14 billion, representing a penetration rate of 53.00 percent. Every day, the entire world spends 10 billion hours on social media, with the average active user spending 2 hours 29 minutes on various social media platforms. In addition, 99.00 percent of social media users utilize mobile devices, while roughly 20.00 percent use desktop machines (including laptops). With a population of nearly 1.3 billion people, India has 1.06 billion mobile phone users. In India, there were 687 million active internet users, with 355 million in rural India while the number of social media users have surpassed 450 million by 2020.

As per GOI Data (2021), WhatsApp is the most popular social media in India with 53 crores users followed by YouTube and Facebook with 44.8 Crores and 41 Crores users respectively. Instagram has 21 crore users and was found to be the fastest-growing social media platform with huge popularity among youngsters in both rural and urban India. Twitter is prevalent only in urban centers with most of the users being literate and professionals.

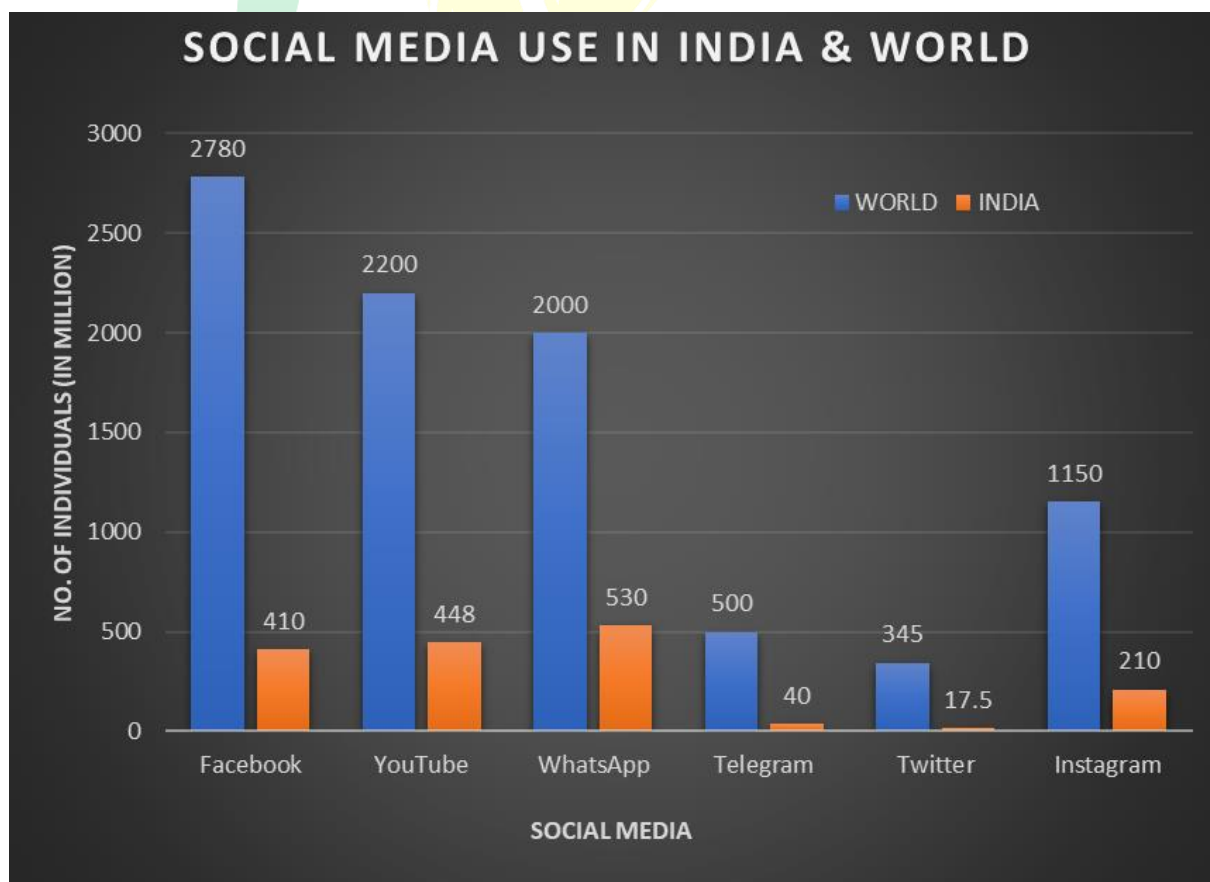


Fig. 2 Social Media users in India and World



Social Media Vs Traditional Media

Everything that goes through conventional media channels is known as traditional media. Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and other modern sources of communication are included. The sender normally determines what to publish, broadcast, or webcast in traditional media, while the recipient always receives the information. Websites and software that are available for social networking are referred to as social media. It is a type of electronic communication in which users can use social networking websites and applications to generate and exchange information, ideas, messages, and material. Traditional media, such as television and radio, broadcast a single message to as many people as possible through one-way contact. This indicates that only the sender or source of the information determines what to publish, telecast, or broadcast, whereas the receiver is always the recipient. In social media, on the other hand, communication is two-way; in fact, two-way conversation is at the heart of social media marketing. Social media provides a great deal of flexibility in terms of information development and dissemination. Traditional media is all about reach, whereas social media is about interaction. Actual engagement and response are required in social media. You'll need to develop eye-catching, captivating material that is unavoidably engaging to do this. Social media is an excellent tool for interacting with your audience and, as a result, marketing your product or spreading your message. Social media aim to start the conversation by getting involved. Traditional media, on the contrary, is a one-way street that includes contemporary modes of communication. It simply means broadcasting your message to as many people as you can.

Key differences between social media and other media platforms

1. Social media reaches a maximum audience, while traditional media's audience is generally more targeted.
2. Social media is versatile (you can make changes once published), whereas traditional media, once published, is set in stone.
3. Social media is immediate, while traditional can be delayed due to press times.
4. Social media is a two-way conversation, and traditional is one-way.
5. Social media often has unreliable demographic data, but traditional media is more accurate.

Role of Social Media in Agriculture



Agricultural information was previously primarily delivered through industrial mass media such as newspapers, radio, television, and magazines; however, in recent years, technological awareness, computer literacy, and the widespread use of Smartphone's and the internet have revolutionized the way farmers interact and obtain agricultural information. Farmers may now access a wealth of information via social media while sitting in the comfort of their own homes. Farmers have been able to enhance their methods and marketing techniques thanks to social media. Farmers can collaborate on the material through social media, and it also encourages farmers to learn from one another. Farmers, for example, now have WhatsApp groups where they can interact and share ideas. Social media allows for real-time connection, allowing farmers to communicate with stakeholders quickly and affordably. Social media can be an excellent tool for farmers to network and develop social capital in the form of trust, engagement, and community involvement. Furthermore, these techniques can help alleviate the problems of physical distance and isolation in agriculture.

Social media sites bring variety and provide farmers with holistic knowledge about overall development in rural areas, not just about agriculture. It increases their social, economic, political, and cultural awareness, allowing people to make better decisions and stay informed and connected. Social media can also be used by rural residents to affect the growth of their community and the flow of money into infrastructure development. Farmers can sell their products directly to consumers using social media techniques through venues like community-supported agriculture. Farmers can also use social media to engage with extension agents and specialists in real time to acquire real-time solutions to their challenges. Many progressive farmers can sell their products directly to retailers and consumers by using social media.

Because it is highly cost-effective and can concurrently reach vast numbers of clients regardless of where they live, social media can be beneficial in agricultural extension. It can also assist in giving location-specific, client-specific, problem-oriented solutions. It features user-generated material and encourages community members to converse. It has also enabled the democratization of information by uniting all stakeholders onto a single platform and making it available to everybody. It also gives extension staff the ability to track the number of visitors, friends, followers, mentions, likes, discussion indexes, and shares to determine their reach and success. Thus, the recent developments in information and communication

technologies have made it easier to provide effective, efficient, and instant information to the farmers in an interactive and participative way.



Fig. 3 Social media use by farmers

Conclusion

As a result of the smart phone revolution and cheap mobile data, social media has reached even the most rural regions of the country. It has provided farmers with a powerful means of expression. Social media allows businesses to connect with scientists in real-time for real-time solutions to their problems, as well as promote their products to customers. Farmers no longer need to rely on traditional media outlets or extension programmes run by KVKs, universities, or agriculture departments; instead, they can get all of their information from a small device in their palm. The concept of physical distance has become meaningless with the growing number of social media users, particularly in rural India. This powerful tool if used properly can revolutionize the process of agricultural communication.

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