

Social Media: A Way Forward to Reach the Unreached

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Social media is all about interaction among people digitally. It is a means to build relationships, share information, and connect with diverse audience of people. Social media in blink of eyes become a key information and networking source for the all the sectors. Social media has been the fastest adopted media technology in the world as it took around 38 years for radio, 13 years for television, 4 years for iPod, 3 years for internet but one year for Facebook and 9 months for twitter to reach 50 million users (Chui *et al.*, 2012).

India being agrarian nation agriculture plays a significant role in the overall socio-economics of India. Agricultural extension in the current scenario of a rapidly changing world has been recognized as an essential. The ratio of Extension workers to Farmers is low at 1:1162 at national level as against recommended ratio of 1:750 (Reform agri extension to boost ryots income, 2018). Many new service providers and institutional arrangements in agricultural extension have emerged over the last two decades to overcome this difference. One among them is ICT tools and social media. Social media is becoming a crucial ICT tool in farming because it can connect with farmers and agribusiness people from around the world over large geographical distances. The benefits of this can be as large or small as the farmers choose, depending on how much time we wish to spend on it. Social media gives farmers a voice and an opportunity to directly connect with their customers, which can help in direct marketing and increased profits alongside facilitating mass-personal communication (Carr and Hayes, 2015). The term “social media” refers to the wide range of Internet-based digital tools that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content, or join online communities. These digital tools allow users to maintain social relationships by viewing, visiting, and sharing their lists of social connections with other members (Dewing, 2010).

Overview on social media

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The global active social media users as of Jan 2022 are 4,623 million. The global internet and active social media users have been increased by 4.0 percent and 10.1 percent respectively from Jan 2021 to 2022. Facebook is the most used social media platform globally with 2910 million users followed by WhatsApp (2562 m), YouTube (2000 m), Instagram (1478 m). (Hootsuite, February 2022).

The active social media users in India are 467 million which has been increased by 4.2 percent from January 2021 to 2022. The average time spent by internet users in India is 2 Hours/Month. The Social media users constitute 71.0 percent of total internet users and 42.6 percent of total Indian population. WhatsApp is the most used social media platform in India accounting for 81.2 percent of internet users followed by Instagram (76.5%) and Facebook (74.7%).

What is social media?

Social media are a group of internet-based interactive technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, and thoughts virtually among the communities. The Merriam-Webster (2015) defines social media as forms of electronic communication through which users can create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content. "Social media are web-based tools of electronic communication that allow users to exchange information individually or in groups, share ideas and opinions, make decisions and create, store, retrieve and exchange information -Allows to provide the facility of providing (text, images, videos, etc.), by anyone in the virtual world (Suchidipata and Saravanan, 2016).

Why social media for agricultural extension? (MS Kumar and H Philip)

- Globalization and Modernization –to implement modern communication tools in extension activities and globalize the extension activities
- Sharing of knowledge across the world – accessing and sharing information and knowledge about various aspects of agriculture and extension across the world without any barriers
- Public Expenditure in Extension could be reduced- as the social media are cost effective when compared to traditional methods.
- Penetration of smart phones even in villages – paves an easy means to professionals to reach the wide client base in villages.
- Accessibility of connectivity- helps an extension agent to be connected with the clients.

Most popularly used social media platforms in agriculture

Even though there are many social media platforms available online only few platforms viz., WhatsApp, Facebook, You Tube, Twitter are popular among the farming community and commonly used by agricultural professionals. The reasons for their extensive use may be: User friendliness; Easy access; Available in multi-language/ Language friendly i.e., information available even in local language; Cost effective; Limited procedures to create account

1. **WhatsApp**-is a messaging platform which allows users to share videos, photos, files, location, text, and audio messages, send and receive money and make individual and group audio and video calls. It is a user-friendly platform which is gaining more popularity among farmers, agricultural professionals, and practitioners to share information, which is aided by the group messaging feature which enables to provide advisories regarding field operations, pest and disease management, input source and market information to many farmers at a time.
2. **Facebook**-is a social networking site that connects the people globally online. It can be used to communicate agriculture information in large scale by posting the photos and videos of various agricultural activities at field level, interactions with farmers, demonstration, government schemes and benefits, advertisement regarding agricultural fairs, training programmes, agro tourism, new technologies, varieties and inputs.
3. **YouTube**: is a video-sharing platform where one can watch, like, share, comment and upload the videos. YouTube provides an great opportunity to online learning and demonstration of various farm activities through videos. Extension agents, scientist and farmers can create technology related videos, instructional videos and all agricultural related videos with the help of their smartphones and upload in their YouTube channel so that many interested farmers can make use of it.
4. **Twitter** - is a social media platform where one can share text-based content, videos and images. Tweet about government announcements, newspaper articles, farmer's scheme, events etc., with links to original sources. Encourage farmers to tweet their issues, problems, posts photos from the field and to publicize their products and other details.

Conclusion:

Social media has become a very important tool in to revolutionize the society in every aspect. It is also becoming a very important tool in agriculture and allied sectors as it has ability



to connect with farmers and other stakeholders around the globe virtually without the hindrance of geographical boundaries. Penetration of mobile phones and strengthening of internet connectivity in rural areas paves an great opportunity to extension agent to disseminate the information to rural community through various social media platforms. Hence, efforts should be made to provide the authentic and useful information to the farming community.

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