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SOCIAL NETWORKS USE AND AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION AMONG SMALL SCALE FARMERS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of social networks use on agricultural information among small scale farmers in Kenya. The study was purely literature reviewed and used both published and “gray” literature. The documents used for analysis and reporting consisted of journal articles, books, book chapters, and research reports. The study used qualitative analysis. The study found out that there was information need by small scale farmers, who sought the information on social networks. The findings showed that small scale farmers could access information with ease at comfort of their homes, anytime and anywhere. The study showed that the platforms were convenient and cheap. The study concluded that farmers were seeking for reliable information and that they had positive attitude towards the platform used. It was noted that the social media platforms and Youtube were often used by farmers for networking, education and marketing their produce. The study recommended that Organizations, National and County governments should embrace use of social networks platform to inform farmers.

Key Words: *Social Media, Agriculture, Technology, Farmers, Access to Information*

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INTRODUCTION

Social networks have become a powerful tool that connects millions of people globally, revolving daily as technology advance. The way business is carried, network created has brought out new ways of communication and exchange of information across the globe. According to Kipkurgat, Onyiego & Chemwaina (2016), Social media is now a mainstream form of communication around the world, and continues to grow in popularity with the increase in the number of smartphones, and the ease of use. Also, is becoming a very important tool in farming because it has the ability to connect with farmers and agribusiness people from around the world over large geographical distances.

Dissemination of agricultural information is important to ensure farmers have adequate knowledge and skills to address their needs and sustain production. In the agriculture sector, social networks have gained popularity as one the most effective methods of diffusing innovation and technology due to the ability of the medium to reach a large audience within a short time. This has facilitated the transfer of agricultural innovation contributing significantly to the development of the sector (Asenso-Okyere, 2009).

Balkrishna & Deshmukh (2017) states, the most popular social media among farmers are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, WhatsApp etc. The use of social media is on personal basis, they tell their stories of success, failure etc., they also shares updates regarding harvesting, post harvesting, promoting agricultural produce, market information, answering problems of farmers if it is related to their known areas. The users of social networks create their own groups, pages, community, blogs to share information, sell and buy agricultural commodities. It is facilitated by sending images, pictures, links, videos among others on many blogs covering agricultural information. Farmers in rural communities require information on supply of inputs, new technologies, early warning system (on drought, fresh, and diseases), credit, market price and their competition. Such information, knowledge, technology and services will contribute to expanding and energizing agriculture (Pur, & Gwary, 2008).

Social Networks and Small Scale Farmers

Small-scale farmers have the ability to organize themselves into cohesive groups for a common goal. This is a form of collective action involves the networks and relationships that a farmer may call on to meet her or his objectives (Davis, 2004). These groups also act as a vehicle for community-based training, economic empowerment and extension (World Bank, 2003).

Social networks are increasingly being used as a medium of sharing information and creating awareness on farming knowledge and skills. They are complementing traditional media in facilitating the shaping of content due to its development and strength. Some platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and blogs have been used to engage with various small scale farmers, where users generate and shape the content. In Kenya social networks, Mkulima Young, Young Farmers Market, Digital Farmers Kenya and Mkulima Hub Kenya are some of platform that users of social media have access to.

Individual farmers within a particular social network exchange ideas and adopt whatever idea they feel is beneficial to them. Agricultural institutions in Kenya have also incorporated social media in their information system. For instance the Agricultural Information Resource Center has Facebook and YouTube platforms and a blog. However not all institutions have fully embraced Web 2.0 as a tool for disseminating information. A 2012 report by CIARD states that the use of Web 2.0 to enhance visibility and exchange of research outputs, including metadata, has not been widely embraced for sharing research outputs.

Geographical boundaries are not limited within social networks users, they can also access traditional media for agricultural information. Convergence has led to agricultural shows broadcasted on Television and Radio having online platforms for comments, and users also seek out information from traditional media social media platforms. Rhoades and Hall (2007) noted that there was a large presence of blogs covering topics on agriculture.

Agriculture sector is beginning to understand Web 2.0 applications phenomenon and utilize it. Therefore, it is important to understand how audiences would like their information presented to them in this fast-paced society (Rhoades & Aue, 2010). How much of agricultural information will be required and not too much to the audiences. Cline (2011), argue that respondents allocate a large portion of their time to social media sites for agricultural purposes and were participatory in 'advocacy' process via social media.

Challenges of Social Networks use in Disseminating Information

- Adoption of social network as a tool of disseminating information.
- There is a occurrence of limited access to social network because of data, network among others.
- Education and skills are required enable ability of use of social network in disseminating information.
- People lack trust of agricultural information disseminated on social networks.
- Activities are restricted by time, technology, and networks.

Objective of the Study

The study investigated the effects of social networks us on agricultural information among small scale farmers in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory

Developed by Albert Bandura, Social learning theory is the most influential theory of learning and development, developed 1977 (Bandura, Bryant & Zillmann, 2002). The pioneering learning and motivation theorists usually developed their concepts by experimenting with animals in artificial settings. They observed how animals solved puzzle boxes or mazes and learned to press levers. Bandura noticed one omission in these experiments; they were not social. There were no other animals present. Behaviorists then showed that the same principles can be applied to humans in social contexts. Skinner noted that "just as rats learn to press levers to get food, people learn to interact with others to obtain social rewards".

Bandura argues that in social situations we learn a great deal through imitation. In behaviorist theory, learning often appears to be a gradual process in which organisms must act to learn based on their environment. The repetition of that behavior is then based on the type of reinforcement one receives (positive vs. negative). Bandura however, argues that in social situations people often learn much more rapidly simply by observing the behaviors of others. Humans appear to acquire large segments of new behaviors all at once, through observation alone. Bandura suggests that both internal and external factors are equally important.

The basic equation is thus: Personal factors, such as beliefs, expectations, attitudes and knowledge (cognitive) plus environmental factors, such as resources, consequences of actions, physical setting (behavioral) plus behaviors, such as individual actions, choices, and verbal statements influence learning and motivation (O'Rourke, 2003). One of the more important concepts with social learning theory is observational learning. No-trial learning is when a human acquires new behavior all at once, entirely through observation. Observation also teaches us the probable consequences of new behavior; we notice what happens when others try it. Bandura calls this process vicarious reinforcement.

As described by Bandura, there are four components of observational learning. To successfully imitate a model we must; 1) attend to the model, 2) have some way of retaining what we have seen, 3) have the necessary motor skills to reproduce the behavior. If these conditions are met, we probably know how to imitate the model. Still, one may choose not to. Our actual performances are controlled by, 4) reinforcement contingencies, many of which are vicarious. These four components are not totally separate. Reinforcement processes, in particular, influence what we attend to. As Bandura noted people often attend to powerful,

competent, prestigious models because we have found that imitating them, rather than inferior models, leads to more positive consequences.

As noted before, the exposure that one experiences through social networks is often a contributing factor toward behavior, but even humans that do not watch or listen from social networks are affected by the media. People are intertwined in networks of relationships that include co-workers, friendships, classmates, teammates, intimate relationships and family members. Because these social networks often overlap, people are often directed by the media to designate what is important to discuss and what the current public agenda may be during a given time period. Therefore, the individual that does not watch television is often involved in social interaction that is based on communication with television viewers and other media consumers. This communication can lead to the same behavior being displayed by the consumer as well as the non-consumer.

METHODOLOGY

The paper was purely literature reviewed on both published and “gray” literature based on social networks use to disseminate information among small scale farmers. Purposively journal articles, book section, reports and online publication was reviewed, included multi-subject databases. It involved searches of bibliographic databases as well as reference list of studies and contacts relevant to the paper with this content. The documents selected for analysis and reporting consisted of journal articles, books, book chapters, and research reports. Flick (2007) states, qualitative analysis was involved because of heterogeneity in methods and purposes among the identified studies.

DISCUSSIONS

Social networks are created by people who have common interest, driven by need to satisfy. Through platforms available their demonstration of activities are guided step by step to be imitated for adoption. The study is guided by Bandura theory, whereby the content owners post information with visual for farmers to adopt change. Farmers are expected to ask questions, give opinions, network for market and demonstrate on work plan for new methods to be adopted.

There many factors affecting agriculture systems, making them more complex, farmers’ access to reliable, timely and relevant information sources become more critical to their competitiveness. Information must be relevant and meaningful to farmers, and also be packaged and delivered in a way preferred by them (Diekmann, Loibl & Batte, 2009). Considering, agriculture sector plays an indispensable role in the Kenya economic growth, and has the potential to reduce inequality and poverty as explained in a World Bank report (World Bank, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is information needed by small scale farmers, who seek that information on social networks. At comfort of their homes, anytime and anywhere, farmers can access information with ease. The platforms being convenient and cheap, farmers seek agricultural basic education, scientific and application information.

Reliable sources are what farmer sought as, they have positive attitude towards the platform. Social media and Youtube are often used by farmers for networking, education and market of the produce.

The study recommended that organizations, both National and County governments should also embrace use of social networks platform to be informing farmers. Farmers are being affected by many challenges for example climate change, certified seed to plant, seasons and market. When they are updated there would be more productive, well informed farmers and sustainable development because of food security.

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