

From Information to Info-Pollution: Agro-Advisories from Social Media

Haripriya. V¹, T. Lakshmi², K. Raghavendra Chowdary³, Y. Reddi Ramu⁴

¹M. Sc. (Ag.) Research Scholar, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, S.V. Agricultural College, Tirupati

²Sr. Professor and Head, Department of Agricultural Extension Education, S.V. Agricultural College, Tirupati

³Sr. Scientist and Head, Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Banavasi, Yemmiganur, Kurnool

⁴Professor, Department of Agronomy, S.V. Agricultural College, Tirupati

Corresponding Email: veelanmandhar111@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION:

“This one pesticide is your one stop solution. I saw it on YouTube!”

As 21st century has witnessed increased social media reliance by farmers for agro-advisories such conversations are becoming increasingly common among farmers. Two decades before, farmers seek advice from an extension officer, he visited Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), contacted agricultural university or discussed the problem with fellow farmers. Today, majorly farmers are dependent on social media like, YouTube videos, WhatsApp messages, Facebook posts and Instagram reels for almost every aspect of farming. This digital transformation has brought agricultural knowledge closer to the farmers. Now the question is, “Are we giving farmers more information or creating more confusion?”

This is where the idea of “info-pollution” becomes important.

When information becomes pollution?

Generally, when something that is in excess than necessary it creates pollution. Exactly the same happens with information as well. Now in present digital world social media is mediating this info-pollution. Farmers are bombarded with lots of technical information from every sources possible like, from extension agents, agricultural universities and now by ‘social media influencers’.

Claiming every solution as the best, pushes farmers in a dilemma of which method to believe? Who is trust worthy?

This is the beginning of info-pollution.

Social media: A friend and a foe

Social media has enormous potential for agricultural extension. A farmer learns new cultivation techniques without travelling to an institution; Weather alerts can reach farmers quickly; Experts can interact directly with farming communities; Successful farmers can share their experiences with fellow farmers etc. But the same openness that makes social media powerful also creates its greatest weakness- “Anyone can become an agricultural expert online”.



Some attractive thumbnail, confident presentation and impressive claims can make unreliable information appear trustworthy. Sometimes, the content that receives the most views is not necessarily scientifically correct.

Why farmers are convinced with social media?

From multiple *ex-post facto* studies, it is revealed that farmers were highly using YouTube and WhatsApp for their information gathering and this behaviour has seen increasing trends. In spite of confusions caused, farmers still fall for social media claims because they feel the recommendations are customized. Visually seeing a farmer's field, getting connected with their social background and likely lifestyles, builds farmers' trust in the information disseminated.

Why social media advisories can be misleading?

Agriculture is highly location and context specific. Soil type, climate, crop variety, crop stage etc., all influence the farm outcome. There is no proven concept of one-stop-solution in agriculture which most of the social media solutions claim. Recommendations needs to be highly specific and are tailor made by subject matter specialists.

Faulty information leads to visible consequence of loss of trust which makes it more difficult for agricultural institutions and extension professionals to reach farmers through digital platforms.

The problem is not only “fake news”

Info-pollution includes false information, misleading claims, unverified recommendations, outdated content, commercial promotions presented as scientific advice, information taken out of context and even an overload of conflicting recommendations. Sometimes, the information itself may be scientifically correct but unsuitable for a particular farmer or situation. This distinction is important. The challenge is therefore not simply to identify what is ‘true’ or ‘false’. It is also to ask: Is the information relevant? Is it current? Who provides it? What evidence supports it? And does it apply to my situation?

From digital literacy to information clarity

Farmers and emerging agri-enthusiast need greater information clarity. Before following an online recommendation, farmers must -

- Check the genuinity of its source,
- Look for accredited information from recognised agricultural universities, KVKs, government

departments, research organisations or qualified experts’ opinions.

A simple habit of Pause; Check; Cross-check; Then act can make a big difference.

Conclusion***A new responsibility for agricultural extension agents***

The role of an extension professionals is no longer limited to transferring information. Agricultural Extension must help farmers navigate the information ocean.

- The extension agents should promptly encounter misleading agricultural claims online.
- Extension should not merely compete with misinformation - it should provide farmers with better information that they can trust.

The future of digital agriculture should therefore not be measured simply by how much information reaches farmers, but by ‘how credible and relevant that information is?’. In future much importance must be given for “How to rises the right information above noise?”
