



MANAGE Agricultural Extension “Evening4Learning (E4L)” Webinar Series



Theme: “Innovations in Extension with Entrepreneurship”



Topic: : “Farm TV: Transforming Agricultural Communication through Digital Media”



Schedule:

29-04-2024, 20:00-20:30 PM

MANAGE

Agricultural Extension “Evening4Learning” Webinar Series

April 27-30, 2024

19.00-20.30 pm (IST)

Theme: Innovations in Extension with Entrepreneurship



Speaker

Dr. Venkatraman Hegde

Chief Managing Director

Shramajeevi Television Pvt. Ltd.

vsh@shramajeevi.com

 DR. Venkatramana Hegde

About the Speaker

Dr. Venkatraman Hegde is the Chief Managing Director of Shramajeevi Television Pvt. Ltd., Bengaluru, with over two decades of experience in the visual media and production industry. He has held various leadership positions within the organisation and previously served as a Producer and Director at Shramajeevi Television for more than 16 years. His expertise encompasses television production, film direction, media management, and strategic communication, with a strong focus on leveraging visual media for effective knowledge dissemination and social impact.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has created new opportunities for strengthening agricultural extension and expanding the reach of information and advisory services. However, a significant gap continues to exist in the availability of professionals who possess both agricultural knowledge and professional media and communication skills. This highlights the need to bridge conventional extension systems led by agricultural universities and government departments with emerging digital communication platforms. In this context, agricultural media platforms can serve as important intermediaries between scientific institutions and farming communities by translating technical knowledge into simple, accessible, relevant, and farmer-oriented information. Such platforms can complement existing extension mechanisms by facilitating timely communication, interactive engagement, and wider dissemination of need-based agricultural information.

Farm TV Model

The Farm TV model integrates OTT-based digital streaming with conventional television formats to strengthen the reach and accessibility of agricultural information. The platform provides agricultural programmes free of cost through its mobile application and extends its outreach through digital platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and other social media channels. Farm TV regularly conducts live interactive programmes, facilitating direct engagement among farmers, agricultural experts, and other stakeholders. It also maintains a repository of recorded programmes, enabling wider and flexible access to agricultural content.

The model emphasises multichannel communication as an important component of contemporary agricultural extension. In addition to television and OTT platforms, Farm TV utilises social media, WhatsApp groups, and digital magazines to disseminate timely and relevant agricultural information. Its digital magazine is distributed free of cost through farmer and institutional WhatsApp networks, with linkages established with agricultural universities, government departments, and Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs). To cater to farmers with limited access to digital platforms or those who prefer physical reading materials, a print version of the magazine is also made available. This integrated approach enables Farm TV to combine traditional and digital communication channels, thereby enhancing the accessibility, inclusiveness, and reach of agricultural extension services.

Farm TV Health

Farm TV has recently expanded its services beyond agriculture by launching Farm TV Health on 1 April, with the objective of leveraging its extensive rural viewership across Karnataka to improve access to healthcare information and services. Although the channel continues to operate under the Farm TV brand due to its strong recognition among viewers, the health initiative focuses exclusively on healthcare. The platform features both recorded and live programmes, including Ayushman Bhava, through which qualified medical professionals provide expert guidance on various health issues.



A live health programme is broadcast daily from 4:30 PM to 5:30 PM, allowing viewers to interact directly with doctors and seek advice. Through its Soukya Setu (Health Bridge) model, Farm TV connects patients with leading corporate hospitals with minimal technological intervention. Viewers can access the service by downloading a free mobile application, which generates a permanent unique identification code. This code is used to facilitate referrals and authenticate beneficiaries when connecting them with hospitals and other healthcare service providers.

Individuals accessing healthcare services through Farm TV Health are eligible for discounts of approximately 10–15% on medical bills at partner hospitals, along with guidance and support in navigating healthcare services. The initiative demonstrates how an established agricultural communication platform can be leveraged to extend social services and improve healthcare accessibility in rural areas.

Farmer-Centric Communication and Advisory Services

The effectiveness of digital agricultural communication should not be assessed merely through indicators such as downloads, views, or follower numbers. Instead, its meaningful impact should be reflected in the extent of farmer engagement, adoption of recommended practices, and observable improvements at the field level. The speaker emphasised that farmers increasingly seek timely, practical, and problem-oriented solutions rather than simply consuming digital content.

In this context, the Farm TV model adopts a farmer-centric and interactive approach by facilitating direct communication through telephone and WhatsApp. Farmers can share pest and disease-related concerns, soil test reports, photographs, and other field-level information, enabling the platform to provide need-based guidance and practical advisory support. The interaction is not limited to crop production-related issues; farmers also approach the platform for guidance at different stages of agricultural decision-making, including seeking advice before purchasing agricultural land. This illustrates the importance of responsive, accessible, and need-based advisory mechanisms that extend beyond information dissemination to support farmers in making informed decisions.

The model thus demonstrates a shift from content-centric communication to solution-oriented extension, wherein digital platforms serve as an interface between farmers, experts, and relevant knowledge resources. Such two-way communication can strengthen trust, improve the relevance of advisories, and enhance the potential of digital extension to translate information into meaningful action at the farm level.

Building Trust and Credibility

Credibility, trust, and professional responsibility are fundamental to effective agricultural communication. Agricultural communication platforms have a responsibility to provide technically sound, evidence-based, and farmer-oriented information without allowing commercial interests to influence the nature of recommendations. In this regard, the Farm TV model does not endorse or recommend agricultural products merely on the basis of advertisements or commercial considerations. Such an approach has contributed to building confidence and credibility among farmers, who increasingly seek independent and reliable guidance while evaluating agricultural inputs, technologies, and service providers.

Moreover, caution is needed against the growing prevalence of misleading, exaggerated, and sensational content on social media. Although attention-grabbing topics and titles may generate higher viewership and engagement, agricultural extension communication should prioritise the accuracy, relevance, and practical utility of information. The platform therefore focuses on delivering technically credible and need-based content to farmers rather than pursuing viewership through sensationalism or unsubstantiated claims.

There is a need to maintain editorial integrity, transparency, and accountability in digital agricultural extension. By placing farmers' interests and the credibility of information at the centre of communication, digital platforms can strengthen trust, support informed decision-making, and contribute to more responsible and effective agricultural knowledge dissemination.

Digital Media for Technology and Market Linkages

The potential of digital agricultural communication in facilitating linkages among farmers, agricultural experts, input suppliers, technology providers, and other value-chain stakeholders should be recognised. Digital media can serve not only as a channel for information dissemination but also as an interface for connecting farmers with relevant technologies, production resources, and emerging market opportunities.

In this context, Farm TV has supported the dissemination of information on high-value crops such as cocoa, coffee, black pepper, cashew, and nutmeg, covering aspects such as suitable varieties, nursery sources, pest and disease management, production practices, and other location-specific technical information. The platform's experience in creating awareness about cocoa cultivation across several districts of Karnataka illustrates the potential of media-led extension in promoting emerging and economically promising agricultural enterprises.

It is also important to understand farmer preferences, information needs, and behavioural responses while designing digital extension interventions. The experience of Farm TV indicates relatively higher farmer interest in high-value crops and technologies associated with visible and potentially attractive economic opportunities, while some routine agricultural enterprises generated comparatively lower levels of engagement.

Such insights from audience interactions and digital engagement patterns can provide valuable feedback to extension organisations for identifying emerging information demands and designing more relevant, demand-driven, and farmer-centric communication strategies.

Thus, digital media can contribute to a more responsive extension system by combining technology dissemination, stakeholder linkages, and continuous feedback from farmers. Systematic analysis of farmer engagement and preferences can further help extension agencies refine content, identify priority areas, and align communication strategies with farmers' evolving aspirations and livelihood opportunities.

Key Highlights

- **Bridging Agriculture and Media:** Agricultural media platforms can bridge conventional extension systems and emerging digital communication channels by translating scientific and technical knowledge into simple, accessible, and farmer-oriented information.
- **Multichannel and Interactive Extension:** The Farm TV model integrates television, OTT, social media, WhatsApp, and digital/print magazines while enabling live interaction among farmers, experts, and other stakeholders for wider and more inclusive outreach.
- **From Reach to Impact:** The effectiveness of digital extension should be assessed beyond views, downloads, and follower numbers, with greater emphasis on farmer engagement, adoption of advisories, and tangible field-level outcomes through timely, need-based, and interactive services.
- **Trust and Credibility:** Technical accuracy, evidence-based communication, editorial integrity, and independence from commercial interests are essential for building farmers' trust and countering misleading or sensational agricultural content.
- **Technology, Market Linkages and Demand-Driven Communication:** Digital media can connect farmers with experts, technologies, inputs, and emerging market opportunities. Understanding farmer preferences, information needs, and engagement patterns is critical for designing demand-driven and farmer-centric extension strategies.

YouTube Link:
<https://youtu.be/bZXGGEbs5Sw?t=2888>

E4L Report Prepared by:
Dr. Vavilala Priyanka
MANAGE Fellow

MANAGE - Center for Agricultural Extension Innovations, Reforms and Agripreneurship (MANAGE- CAEIRA)
National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE)
Rajendranagar, Hyderabad- 500 030, INDIA