

Evaluating the effectiveness of Facebook as a knowledge transfer tool to farmers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of social media and in particular Facebook for enabling extension workers to share knowledge, information and advice to farmers, farm managers and farm technicians. In general social media is gradually being appreciated in agricultural extension service delivery. It was especially highlighted as an effective communication tool during the Covid-19 pandemic period where normal face to face meetings between advisors and farmers were restricted. There are numerous social media platforms used in agricultural extension service delivery worldwide with Facebook having the highest popularity and penetration (Barau and Afrad, 2017). The social media tool being examined in this study is Facebook.

The research design was based on a mixed method approach using a secondary data and quantitative research approach. The data for the study was collected from three different sources connected with an agricultural-trading business in the Irish midlands (J Grennan and Sons). Data was collected through two online questionnaires. There was one questionnaire for farmers and their perception of social media and particularly Facebook at providing agricultural information for their utilisation. The second on line questionnaire was for agronomists/advisors and their outlook on social media and Facebook as a tool in delivering agricultural information to farmer clients. These surveys were emailed to participants. There was also an evaluation of analytical data sourced from J Grennan & Son's Facebook page. This data was analysed over a 5 month period from March through to July, 2020.

The key finding from the study are that people were more likely to use social media to access agricultural information if they had completed formal agricultural education. There was no real significance between use of social media and age. The majority of farmer respondents (78%) were using social media to obtain agricultural information and 42% of respondents had increased their participation in social media during the Covid-19 pandemic. Facebook was the most popular social media platform chosen by respondents for daily

access to agricultural information. Facebook video posts are the most effective method in communicating with farmer clients. Extension agents require further training in social media and Facebook to inform them of new innovative ways of communicating to farmer clients. This was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when Zoom and Microsoft team virtual meetings were adapted and used as opposed to face to face meetings with farmers whenever possible.