



Factors influencing the Utility of Information Kiosk by the farmers in Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT's) possess vast potential to promote agriculture and rural development through speedy transfer of technology. They have a lead and edge over other technologies. ICT's offer flexibility in providing information on various modes of farming practices including all crops, specific commodities and enterprises, real time price information and all other information related to technological advances and tracking global competitiveness. Recompenses of these cyber extension tools can be offered to the farming community by Information Kiosk by utilizing them for dispersal of agricultural messages and advances. Hence, the study was taken up with an objective of assessing the relationship between the Profile characteristics of farmers and the Utility of the Information Kiosk as perceived by the farmers. The study yielded that there was positive correlation between the Utility of Information Kiosk with the profile characteristics of the farmers such as education, awareness about Information Kiosk, frequency of use of messages by the farmers, information needs of the farmers, attitude of farmers towards Information Kiosk and effectiveness of the Information Kiosk messages in generating the desired result.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology, Information Kiosk, Utility, Farmers, Profile

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INTRODUCTION

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enabled extension systems act as significant operators for transforming the current agrarian scenario by boosting the access to knowledge, communication and sharing of information, building abundant opportunities and reinforcement of farming communities. Nagalakshmi and Swamy [1] reported that ICT will help in providing need based, timely, accurate and quality information at a faster rate. Information Kiosks act as a stage for spreading of farm innovations which had already been begun in different states through different undertakings. Information Kiosk displays the essential information on twelve major crops of the Kerala state in bilingual mode. It is totally touch screen driven with data supported by graphics, animations and has very simple, clear navigational paths. They are an efficient Information and Communication Technology tools which are accessible anytime and aid in timely delivery of agricultural messages to farmers. Thysen [2] reported that farmers want ICT application that supports the operation aspects of farming i.e., real-time decision support of internet connections, e-mail and applications by photos, videos and sound.

Senthil kumar [3] assessed the respondent's perception about the information requirement through different cyber extension tools and indicated that all the respondents required the technological information via web page and group mail and mobile phone followed by IMCD and computer conferencing. Manhas *et al.* [4] observed that in this era of globalization, Indian farmers need to be updated with latest information to compete for global marketing. The farmers who access this information have a better chance of succeeding than those who do not access the same. Vijai and Asokhan [5] found that about three fourth of dairy farmers (75.50%) perceived that they could get information in time through ICT. Dairy Information Services Kiosks at collection centers describe best practices in animal care to enhance milk yield and quality and assists dairy cooperatives to effectively schedule and organize veterinary, artificial insemination, cattle feed and related services [6]. Hence, the study was taken up with an objective of assessing the relationship between the Profile characteristics of the farmers and Utility of the Information Kiosk.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in the Thiruvananthapuram district of South Kerala region during 2013-2014. Ex-post facto research design is employed. From the twelve block panchayats present in Thiruvananthapuram district, five block panchayats were selected on the basis of maximum number of users of Information Kiosk facility based on the records available in the KrishiBhavans and in the data base of IT (Information Technology) cell, Directorate of agriculture, Thiruvananthapuram. Vamanapuram, Athiyannoor, Vellanad, Nedumangad, Kazhakootam block panchayats are selected for the study. Forty farmers were selected through random sampling method from Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala as respondents. Utility of Information Kiosk means the extent of utility observed by the messages obtained through Information Kiosks perceived by the farmers.

Profile characteristics of the farmers alike age, education, Exposure to ICT, awareness about Information Kiosk, information dissemination ways of the farmers, frequency of use of messages, information needs of the farmers, attitude of the farmers, constraints faced by the farmers while accessing Information Kiosk, effectiveness of Information Kiosk, were correlated with utility of the Information Kiosk to know the significant and non-significant relationship between the variables

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented along with the inferences drawn in the light of the objective set forth for the study. Correlation analysis was employed to assess relationship between profile characteristics of the farmers obtaining information from Information Kiosk with the utility of Information Kiosk. The correlation coefficients were worked out and the significance was tested by comparing with the table values. The results are represented in Table 1. It indicates that frequency of use of messages (0.464**), information needs of farmers (0.532**), attitude of farmers about Information Kiosk (0.430**) and effectiveness of Information Kiosk (0.500**) were positively correlated and were significant at 1 per cent level. Education (0.346*) and awareness about Information Kiosk (0.358*) were positively correlated and were significant at 5 per cent level. The r values of profile characteristics such as age of the farmers (-0.185^{NS}), exposure to ICT (0.091^{NS}), information dissemination ways of the farmers (0.042^{NS}) and constraints faced by the farmers while accessing Information Kiosk (0.734^{NS}) were having non-significant relationship with the utility of the Information Kiosk.

Table 1. Correlation between profile characteristics of the farmers and Utility of Information Kiosk

S. No	Profile characteristics of farmers	Utility of Information Kiosk (Correlation Coefficient values)
1	Age	-0.185 ^{NS}
2	Education	0.346 ^{NS}
3	Exposure to ICT	0.091 ^{**}
4	Information dissemination ways	0.042 ^{**}
5	Awareness	0.358 ^{NS}
6	Frequency of use of messages	0.464 ^{**}
7	Information needs	0.532 ^{**}
8	Attitude of the farmers	0.430 ^{NS}
9	Constraints	0.131 ^{NS}
10	Effectiveness	0.734 ^{**}

*' Significant at 5% level, '**' Significant at 1% level, Not Significant 'NS'

From the table 1, it can be observed that educated farmers can read, understand the content displayed by the Information kiosk and can search by themselves the needed information without or little support from others. Hence education level of farmers had positive correlation with the utility of messages obtained through Information Kiosk. Awareness acquired by farmers by different sources about Information Kiosk such as self -visit of the Information Kiosk by the farmer, canvassing through Kiosk operator/project staff, knowing about Information Kiosk through friend/relative, newspaper, extension personnel facilitated in developing a positive perception towards Information Kiosk which in turn increased its utility. Frequency of use of messages of Information Kiosk denotes the number of times the messages of Information Kiosk were put to use by the farmers. Hence as more frequency of messages usage was reached, Information Kiosk messages utility was also increased.

Information needs of the farmers vary from crop to crop and from location to location. When the information given through Information Kiosk meets the needs of the farmers such as information on market prices, quality inputs, latest package of practices, input prices, crop loans, crop insurance, agriculture news, weather forecasting etc., utility of the messages also increases. Positive attitude of farmers towards Information Kiosk develops more interest in accessing and utilizing messages displayed through Information Kiosk. Effectiveness of Information Kiosk includes its conversational ability, quick availability, ability to exploit a considerable amount of knowledge, reliability, scalability, preservation and improvement in its knowledge content. They play an important role in realizing its use as a significant agricultural information source for the farmer's benefit. Hence, as effectiveness of Information Kiosk increases, it also increases the utility of the Information Kiosk.

CONCLUSION

Increase in education level of the farmers increases the utility of the messages through increased awareness as educated farmer has more awareness about ICT tools. As awareness increases, frequency of use of messages also increases which develops a positive attitude towards Information Kiosk. Hence, the utility of the messages also increases. Effectiveness of an ICT tool increases its message utility.

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