

APPLICATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ADVERTISING FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PRODUCTS IN AHMEDNAGAR DISTRICT

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Abstract: *This study is basically a qualitative study in nature. It evaluates the various applications of Social Media in the marketing of agricultural products in India. The study basically helps to collect and disseminate the market information about the fresh fruit and vegetable products. There are so many different options out there for agricultural consumers and suppliers. Whether you are looking to launch a new product to the market or just looking for a new way to advertise an already successful one, the following options will be available to any producer such as print media, classifieds, Internet, Radio, TV and social media. All these marketing sectors have their pros and cons. However, social media provides the excellent way to influence an audience outside of traditional advertising revenues. As the world is going social, agriculture cannot remain an exception. Internet based communication tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Instagram, LinkedIn, Printrest, YouTube etc known collectively as Social Media are gaining popularity for large and small business alike including agricultural marketing for fresh fruit and vegetables. Social Media is increasingly becoming integrated into people's daily lives and they visit it multiple times a day. When done in a correct way social media can bring your marketing and sales messages to an audience through a persuasive channel. It helps to advertise product in the market to maintain balance between supply and demand of the agricultural commodity. Nowadays Social Media not only helps in connecting people but also make it easy to modernize the marketing activities for different product. Presently it contributes more to every sphere of marketing like product, price, place, promotion and developing the market base. Now the farmers of India use Social Media to search the source of supplies of seed, insecticides, pesticides, fertilizers, food grains and fruits and vegetables as well as to market the product in country and abroad. Farmers also test the validity of information about the product advertised by the use of Social Media. Moreover, farmers enjoy the agricultural news from the different electronic and print media through Social Media. Afterall, the Social Media technology has dramatically changed the marketing activities for the agricultural products.*

Keywords: *Social Media, Advertising, Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, Marketing Activities.*

Introduction

Being an agricultural country, the agriculture sector employs nearly half of the workforce in India (53%). However, it contributes to 17.5% of GDP of the nation. The major population of India is depending for their living on agriculture business. In most of the developing countries 40% of the people are related with agriculture sector (Lanjouw J. O. and Lanjouw P., 2001). Today India ranks second worldwide in farm output. As per the 2010 FAO world agriculture statistics India is the world's third largest producer of many fresh fruits and vegetables, milk, major spices, select fibrous crops such as jute, staples such as millets and castor oil seeds. India is the second largest producer of wheat & rice, the world's major food staples. (FAOSTAT, 2010. foostat.fao.org. reviewed 27.09.2011.) Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra state of India is a major fruit growing district where variety of fruits such as pomegranates, guava, lemon grapes etc are grown and sold on large scale. The major vegetables grown in this district are cauliflower, cabbage, onion, tomatoes, brinjals etc. Fruits like grapes and pomegranates are exported to various countries from this district. As fruits and vegetables are the perishable commodity, earlier the farmers had to sale their products only in local market or through the commission agents. Marketing of fruits and vegetables is very complicated and risky due to the perishable nature, seasonal production and bulkiness. The spectrum of prices from producer to consumer, which depends on demand and supply of transactions between various intermediaries at different levels in the marketing system, is also unique for fruits. Moreover, the marketing arrangements at various stages also play an important role in price levels at different stages such as from farm gate to the ultimate user. The marketing system of fruits and vegetables is different from other agricultural commodities due to these features, particularly in providing time, form and space utilities. While the infrastructure for fruits and vegetables markets are not well developed as compared to the market developed for food grains. Most of time markets are congested and unhygienic for fruits and vegetables.

As regards to fruits and vegetables the producers i.e. farmers do not know the price at which the produce would be sold to the ultimate consumer. Only the intermediaries decide the final price of fruits and vegetables. The farmer is not sure of his revenue. The fruits and vegetables need to be stored in cold storages so that they can be made available at right time in the market. However, storage facilities are very limited and the produce cannot be preserved for a long time. Most of the villages do not have proper roads. The lack of proper transport facilities leads to delay in the produce reaching the market. Fruits and vegetables also have a longest chain of middleman. There are a number of intermediaries in the market like the wholesalers, brokers, commission agents, retailers and so on. Thus, the price paid by the consumer does not reach in proper proportion to the grower. It is pocketed only by the middleman. They also indulge in many undesirable practices to make quick money at the cost of farmers and consumers. Thus, the farmers have to face number of problems in marketing the produce using conventional method. There is need of advanced and direct method to connect farmers with consumers directly by eliminating the middle chain.

Now a day social media provides new approach to farmers to make tentative decisions more easily than before. Social media has developed significantly in the past few years. The subscription rates increase day by day in Ahmednagar district. Android phone is a device that can store, access and share information anytime anywhere. Mobile phone Technology helps to create a good communication with rural and urban populations and provides latest information about market, weather, natural disaster and other related issues (Aker, Jenny and

Mbiti, 2010). Generally, the farmers require easy access of information like availability, access and utilization. Social Media creates opportunities for rural farmers to obtain information and knowledge about market, agricultural issues, problems and suggest how to develop the agricultural marketing. Mobile services in agricultural sector provide more information on weather, market, transport service and agricultural techniques that help to contact with the other agencies and department (Aker, 2011). Facebook and WhatsApp groups of farmers could be good source of developing strong relationship with all agriculture business stakeholders by communication, email, text SMS and WhatsApp messages, thus benefiting farmers by timely market information to increase the income and sale of farm product. Now a day's social media technology has increased rapidly and spread to the remote areas of Ahmednagar district.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to know the uses of Social Media in advertising fresh fruits and vegetable products in Ahmednagar District. In the light of the main objective the researcher has also considered the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the nature of agricultural marketing in Ahmednagar District.
2. To examine the uses of Social Media in advertising fresh fruits and vegetable in Ahmednagar District.
3. To assess the new ways for using social media as a tool in advertising fresh fruits and vegetable products in Ahmednagar District.
4. To measure the attitude of the people towards the use of social media in advertising fresh fruits and vegetable products.

Literature Review

“Social Media means forms of electronic communication (Such as websites for social networking and micro blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (such as videos, Photos)” – Merriam Webster (www.merriamwebster.com). As per Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, Social media means websites and computer programmers that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary and Thesaurus @ Cambridge University Press). With the technological development at large scale adoption of social media breaks out like a revolution. With the advance in the android phones, the interconnectivity between individuals has expanded on an internet. This development enables customers and business to collaborate on the internet (Filler et al. 2009). This trend is widely spreading into the farmers. They are using social media such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, etc in exchanging market information, weather report and business information. By the advances in technology the farmers can have easy contact with the brokers or agents to sell their products. An increase in mobile phone based social networking has become integral part of agricultural development. The social network of technology allows better connectivity offers and benefits to many farmers. (Bayes et al., 1999, Donner, 2008). Earlier the farmers without smart phones were facing various problems while selling their products and getting information related to market in comparison to farmers who use smart phones. In rural areas most of the farmers are unable to contact the agricultural experts due to lack of communication. Earlier farmers were mostly depending on conventional methods of communications like posters, voice amplification, etc. Most of times this type of information could not reach to its targeted audience by these methods. This shows that farmers faced the main problem of communication. (Duncombe, 2011). In some underdeveloped countries technology is still

beyond the reach of farmers. For this reason, poor farmers and entrepreneurs could not afford a smart phone. (Frempong et al., 2007). Earlier the cost of smart phone and its maintenance cost was a big factor for farmers. However, there were certain issues detected that the method of using social media by this group was different and the scope to get the market information was very low. (Ashraf et al., 2005, de Silva, 2008). In developing countries especially in rural community, particularly farmers were facing challenges and obstacles in using information technology tools like mobile phone. Some of these challenges are technical, financial, social and illiteracy. The big issues in using ICT programs in rural areas are the lack of interest in private sector entrepreneur and poor-quality service offered by the company. Lack of technical knowledge was a major issue in the development and use of technology. As the majority of the rural people were not technosavy, they could not learn and run technological tools like mobile phone properly. (Samuel et al., 2005.). Agricultural department is trying stimulating the expected agricultural outcomes by transferring knowledge and information to farmers, training and advising in their decision making, enabling farmers to fixing their own goals and possibilities. Various extension programs are being introduced to overcome the barrier in the adoption of technology in comparison with the less successive public sector extension programs (Aker et al., 2010). Large population of developing countries of the world largely depend on agricultural production. The farmers and the small entrepreneurs are facing many problems due to the recent price hikes and fluctuations in food sector. Farmers and small entrepreneurs had no way to know the price before going to the market and this is because poor communication services. In addition, the improper market structure, insufficient market experience and lack of agricultural inputs keeps the poor farmers a behind their capabilities. Now use of social media is proving to be a boon in fruit and vegetable marketing.

Research Methodology

In undertaking any applied research, a clear and specific methodology has to be adopted where methodology is a set of methods sample size, sample selection procedure, data collecting process, data interpretation, data analysis, other relevant activities and combination of rules and techniques have been used. The nature of the study is qualitative. As a result, mainly secondary data was used for the study. Several papers, journals, magazines, book, reports of various surveys and online study material was used for secondary data. However, to meet the requirements of specific objective the researcher has also used primary data. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaire and Interviews of farmers. In the present study, the farmers are considered as the sample for the study. The researcher has utilized stratified random sampling to assemble the sample for the study. The researcher has also utilized this method to assemble the sample for measuring the service quality of social media in agricultural marketing. Maharashtra state is the main supplier for the fruit and vegetables where Ahmednagar is one of the important districts for producing the major fruit and vegetables. As a result, for the convenience and betterment of the study the researcher has selected sample area as Ahmednagar District in Maharashtra State. About 150 farmers were targeted and approached by the researcher. However, data have been collected from 100 respondents from various age groups using criteria's such as gender, educational levels and use of android phones. The data has been collected in the second quarter of the year 2018. The data thus obtained is tabulated and graphical represented by using percentage method.

Findings of the Study

To Examine the Nature of Agricultural Marketing in Ahmednagar District

Agriculture is the largest single industry in every developing country. The marketing systems of agriculture is the heart of the economic growth process in rural area. India being an agriculture country, majority of population depends on Agriculture for their livelihood. Ahmednagar district is not an exemption to this. Hence majority of Population has agriculture as the main source of Income. Thus, the agricultural products produced are to be marketed in a proper manner through a proper channel. Production and consumption of fruit and vegetables play the major role in the economy of Ahmednagar district.

Agricultural Marketing can be well defined as buying and selling of agricultural products. Today's concept of Agriculture marketing has gone through the series of transformation initiatives. In older days, it was mainly through barter system but in current scenario it involves assembling of produce, its preparation for consumption and finally distribution of produce to the end consumers. Agricultural marketing includes tasks like planning, production, growing and harvesting, grading, packing, transportation, storage, food processing, distribution, advertising and sale etc. Agricultural marketing process is dynamic. It is always competitive and involves continuous change and improvement. Some businesses having lower costs, are very efficient, deliver quality products, and they do prosper. Some business having high costs, fail to accept the changes in market demand and provide poorer quality are often opt out of business. Agriculture marketing is customer-oriented and it provides the farmer, transporter, trader, processor, etc, with a profit. This process is involved in marketing chains to understand buyer requirements as well as product and business conditions.

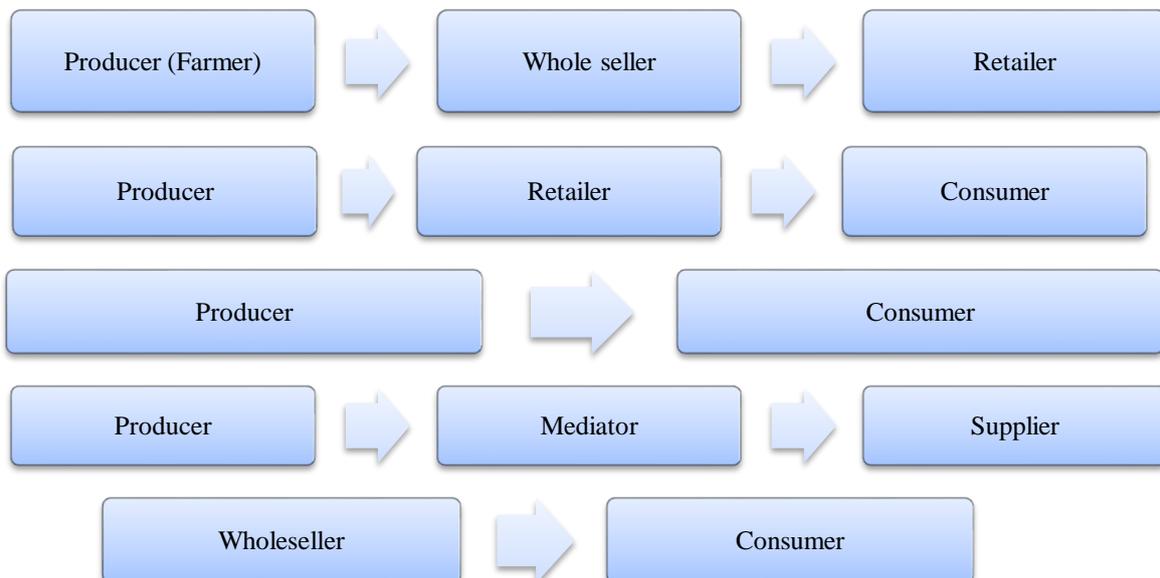


Figure 1: Traditional Distribution System for the Agricultural Product (Developed by the author).

The information is obtained through the answers from structured questionnaire asked to farmers. Interviews were taken of the farmers to facilitate them easy answering of the questionnaire

The produce thus is sold directly to the market or may undergo some kind of processing as per the demand of the consumers. The produce is sold directly in wholesale or through retail channel as per the existing need and demand of the market. Most of the agriculture produce in Ahmednagar district is sold by the farmers to village traders or to the middlemen or agents. The produce sometimes is also sold through weekly village market, irregular market or the APMC's and Mandis.

Thus, there are five major systems of agricultural marketing in Ahmednagar district which can be listed as below:

Sale of fruits and vegetables in villages:

Here the sale of produce is done locally in the market availed in the villages. It is termed as 'Daily Bazaar'

Sale of fruits and vegetables in markets:

Here the sale of produce is done in the "Weekly Bazaar" known as 'Hat'.

Sale of fruits and vegetables in *Mandis*:

This is the common form of Agricultural Marketing. Most of the large-scale produce and surplus produce is marketed through *Mandis* or APMC's. These *Mandis* are located at long place hence the transportation cost is to be borne by the farmers. This produce is mostly sold through Brokers and *Dalals*.

Sale of fruits and vegetables through co-operative Marketing:

Here the farmers form marketing societies and the produce is sold by collectively bargaining for obtaining better price.

Sale of fruits and vegetables through regulated markets:

Agricultural marketing is also done through regulated markets operated by Government Agencies whose basic objective is to give reasonable price to both farmers and consumers for maintaining fair supply and demand for the produce.

To Examine the Uses of Social Media in Advertising Fresh Fruits and Vegetable In Ahmednagar District.

After considering various secondary data sources (Brodholt 2015, Chandan 2016) and answers from farmers, several uses of social media can be listed as below:

Negotiating with Traders

Social Media makes it certain that farmers can negotiate deals with traders and improve their timing of getting crops to the market.

Avoiding Brokers and Dalals

Social Media can be useful in avoiding Brokers and Dalals. Social Media helps in creating innovative partnership which gives the facility of direct communication with consumers, or through the ability to supply product based on just-in-time or quality needs.

Search of Finance Option

Several finance options can be made available with the help of social media in marketing of agricultural produce.

Storage and Warehouse Facility

Farmers can make more efficient use of existing storage, packaging, transport, and processing and warehousing facilities through Social Media.

Transport Facility

Social Media is helpful in increasing monitoring and coordination of freight transport operations, including collection of product, delivery, and security.

To get Regulated Market

Suppliers can use social media to conduct real-time market research wherein entire produce in transit can be bought and sold while still on the road. Regulated Markets can be tapped easily.

Formation of Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Societies.

Groups on social media can come together and help each other in forming Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Societies

To develop Marketing Intelligence

Social Media helps potential for reducing lack of symmetry of information between traders and producers, lowering cost of transaction, and enhancing farmers ability to fine-tune their production strategies to match the speedy rates of change in consumer demand and marketing channels.

Easy disposal of Perishable goods

Social Media has been more useful for perishable crops like fruit and vegetables and that farmers have gained particularly from being able to arrange transportation more efficiently.

To Get Maximum Profit

Farmers use Social Media to improve income from farms and other rural businesses and build trust with trading partners.

Market Information

Social Media is a source of latest information about prices of crops and market before they travel long distances to markets.

Weather Data

Social Media provides farmers with decisive weather data so they can properly manage their crops of fruit and vegetables.

To Assess the New Ways for Using Social Media as A Tool in Advertising Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Products in Ahmednagar District.

After considering various literatures available and study (Harlow 2016, Cohn 2010, Huq et al 2017, Post 2012), different popular tools to use Social Media can be given as follows:

WhatsApp

WhatsApp is a social platform wherein one can connect with each other directly or through formation of groups. The information about farms, pictures, videos can be shared on WhatsApp. Formation of groups allows in sending information to mass people just at one click. Several farmers come together from different regions and different areas to discuss on common topic. It is now the fastest social media platform in use.

Facebook

Facebook is great tool for connecting with people. It has more than 2.2 billion active users. Updates and activity about farms can be posted on Facebook. Facebook also offers to share

pictures, and see what friends, celebrities, organizations, and groups are up to. Facebook has all the community which consists of people you know in real life. Facebook is a good tool to engage personally with consumers and get acquainted with the need and preference of them. It can thus help in developing a customer base, increasing the sales and ultimately creating buzz about products and crops.

Twitter

Twitter is a popular option that allows anyone to “tweet” 280-character updates and connect with people from around the world. One can share farm information & product availability directly. Retweet messages to increase their reach to mass audience and send direct messages is another way to share market information. Twitter allows to connect with people who you have never met but share like-minded interests thus helping and developing a proper marketing channel for agriculture commodity.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is geared toward the professional community. It allows to network with work colleagues and is a powerful for developing new market for the farm produce. One can post farm photos, connect with other professionals, and keep up to date with market news. One can follow groups focused on topics relevant to farming operations and different markets for sell of produce.

Instagram

Instagram is a simple way to capture and share the world’s moments. One can follow friends and community in agriculture sector to see what they’re up to, and discover accounts from all over the world that are sharing things in this field. It helps in joining the community of more than 1 billion people and sharing all the moments of agricultural operations, the highlights, experiences and everything in between. Several information can be gathered by just following different groups in this sector.

YouTube

YouTube is another visual social media tool that is user- friendly and reaches a large population. YouTube is the third most popular search engine. Here farmers can post videos about authenticity of all the farming operations carried out on farms. People can be assured of produce by viewing these videos on YouTube.

Blog

Blogs are the websites that are freely available, user friendly and allow to post information immediately and easily. Positive messages can be communicated by blogging about agriculture through longer posts. Still to have a great successful blog, it takes time and effort to cultivate a steady following. Blogs can be used by the farmers to keep update about the harvest of crops and thus it can be used for sales. Farmers can use blog to take new orders for their cultivable crops. A calendar for all farming operations can be created by blog.

Pinterest

Pinterest is currently the fastest growing social media platform. It is an online pinboard where farmers can share picture of their farms and produce. It is a great tool to share pictures from the farm, your favorite agriculture fact, or unique product features of the produce. Pinterest focuses on visual sharing.

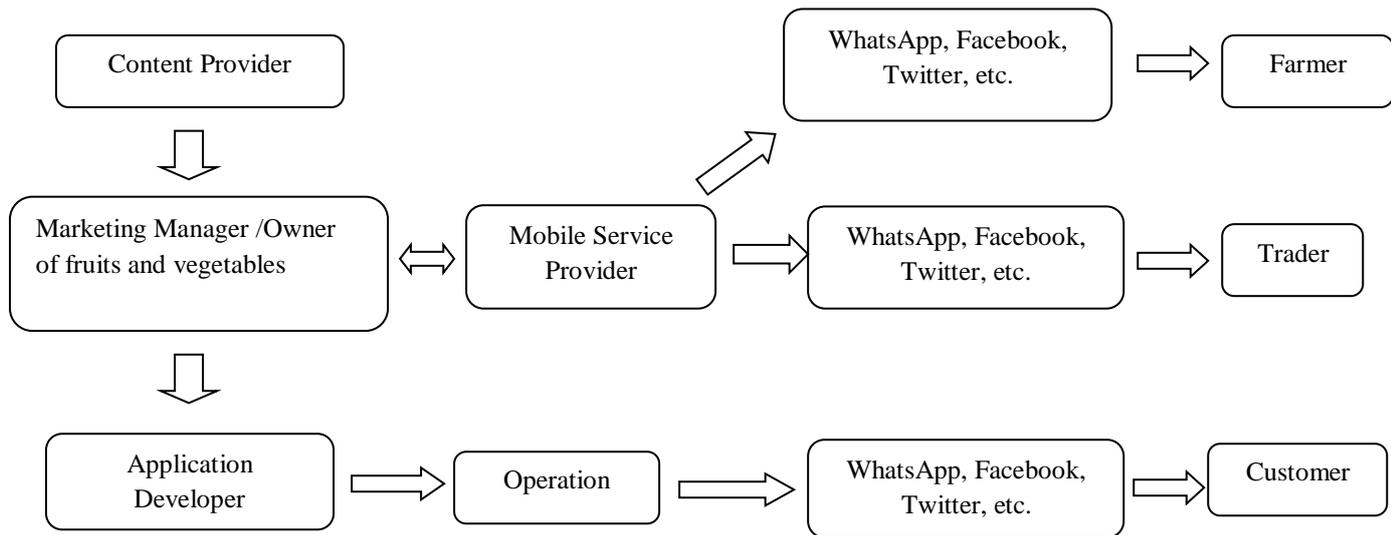


Figure 2: Basic Social Media Agriculture Services & Agents Involvement in Social Media Marketing

To measure the attitude of the people towards the use of social media in advertising fresh fruits and vegetable products.

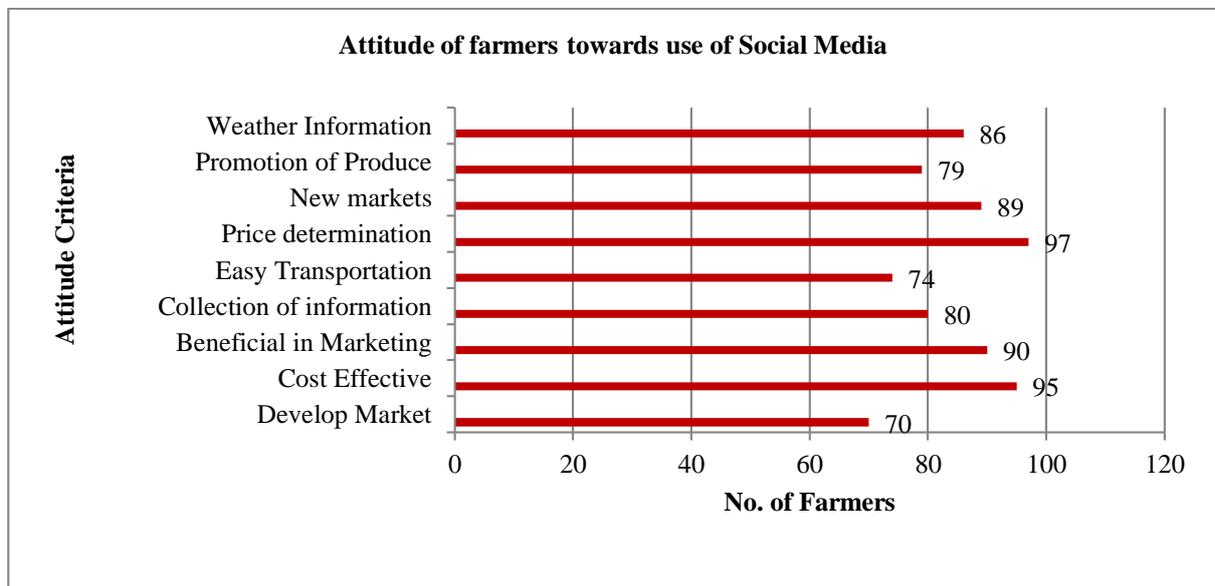


Figure 3: Attitude of Farmers Towards Use of Social Media

When the farmers were asked whether social media can help to develop the market of fruits and vegetables, most of the farmers replied positively. About 70% farmers use social media like WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter. The farmer groups on WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, etc. are very active as regards to the marketing of fruits and vegetables.

As regards to the cost effectiveness it has been observed that farmers don't have to pay much for using social media for marketing their produce. Many service providers provide low cost services for internet access and the farmers are benefitted. There is a cut throat competition

among various companies for attracting customers to their network and farmers take advantage of the same.

The use of social media is very beneficial in marketing fruits and vegetables. The farmer groups circulate the information about latest market position and so also the forecast in coming days. The farmers can send their produce accordingly to the market nearest to them. They can also have direct contact with consumers and supply fresh fruits and vegetables as per their requirements.

Social media is very useful in collecting information of products. The farmers can contact the agricultural department, agri-service societies and search on internet the latest information. The same information can be shared on WhatsApp groups, Facebook or Twitter, etc.

Easy transportation is a problem before farmers of remote villages. These farmers, with the help of social media groups can arrange transportation on sharing basis. Many such social groups have their own transportation systems.

As regards to price determination, nowadays farmers can get latest prices of fruits and vegetables as per the gradation on WhatsApp, Facebook or via e-mail. Farm produce can be sent to the nearest market where the farmers get good returns.

It is easy for the farmers to search new markets with easy access through social media. Promotion of the farm produce in the market has become easy with the help of social media. Farmers can make promotion of their produce directly to the consumers. They can send photos, videos, etc. of their farm through social media and reach to the consumers.

There is a direct access to the farmers for availing weather forecast through internet and they can plan the plantation, harvesting and other operations accordingly.

Farmers are well aware about the use of WhatsApp and Facebook. But still the other forms of social media remain untapped. By using all the forms of social media, farmers will be in position to advertise their fresh fruits and vegetables globally at competitive price.

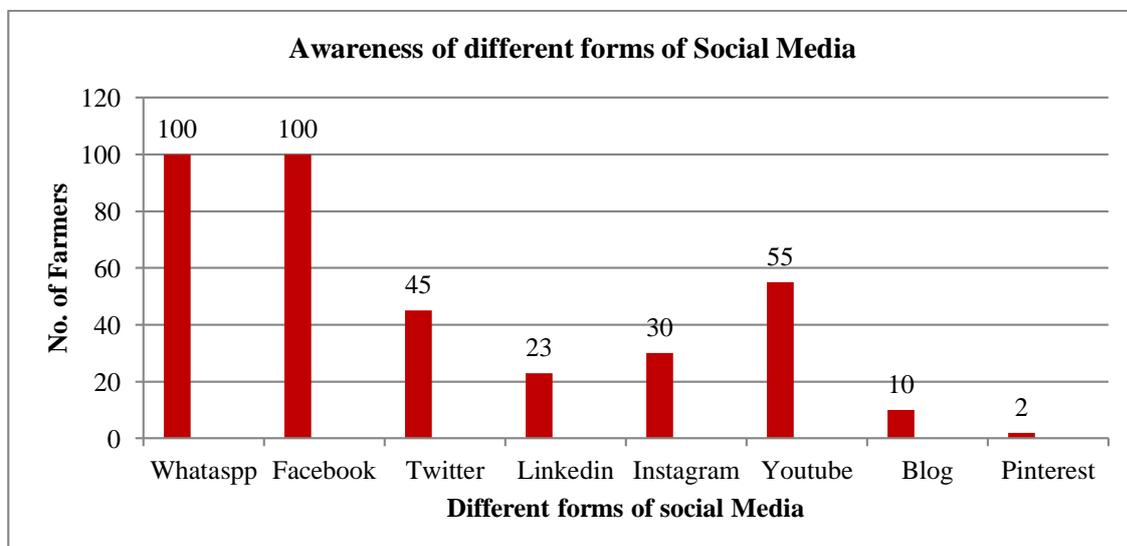


Figure 4: Awareness About Different Forms of Social Media.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was mainly initiated to examine the role of social media as an empowering tool, a factor increasing opportunities for increased income and a tool for reducing vulnerability to risks for fruit and vegetable growers in Ahmednagar District. The experience gained during data collection laid the basis for giving recommendations on how social media use can best continue to improve farmers life. Some technical information providing agencies, the Government Agriculture Department, Mahatma Phule University of Agriculture, Trade and mobile phone service providers and fruit and vegetable market committees have tried to send updated market information via social media to the farmers. It is recommended that mobile phones companies should establish a wider, affordable and effective service or product offering instant market prices and latest market information. Prices printed in the print media are not useful for all farmers, because few farmers have an interest of buying newspapers. Efforts to control market prices through warehouse systems established by the government should be extended to fruits and vegetables growers in Maharashtra. More cold storage should be provided to the farmers. All this information has to be clubbed with social media tools backed by technology. This will surely increase their revenues and reduce much risk associated with travelling to market centers far away. The service providers should leverage the benefits of smart phones such as portability, flexibility of content, delivery capability and both way communications to deliver low-cost but highly customized solutions. Farmers should get information delivered to them at a time and place of their choice. Social network of farmers such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and other groups may play an important role in building trust and confidence required to influence the adoption of new mindsets and actions by small farmers. To bridge the critical infrastructural gaps, increased public and private investments will be necessary in delivery information through social media channels.

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