

Satisfaction and Constraints in Accessing Services of Soya Choupal: A Case of Madhya Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

The satisfaction and constraints of farmers in accessing the services of soya choupal was studied in the indore district of Madhya Pradesh. A sample of sixty soya choupal farmers was drawn through random sampling technique. The soya choupal provides a number of services, which the rural communities need, from input supply to marketing of the final produce. Among the services, market prices always before selling their soybean produce. A high level of overall satisfaction towards the use of soya choupal services was felt by 50.0 per cent of farmer. About 40.0 per cent were found in medium level of overall satisfaction. The soya choupal farmers ranked power breakdown as the most important constraint followed by internet connectivity and poor transport facilities.

Farming today is far different from what was before, even, two decades ago. Today farming is seen as an enterprise where farmers need varieties of information for various aspects in this competitive world to secure their livelihood. They need information viewing agriculture as a business, about the systems and sub-systems innovations of other farmers, market information, best farming practices and other related information affecting the agricultural production systems. This has created the need for timely and relevant generic information. The ICT provides the flexibility in providing information on various modes of farming practices including the crops, specific commodities and enterprises, real time price information and all other information related to technological advances and tracking global competitiveness. Information communication technology has been proved to be an effective alternative and suitable in providing needed information of varying nature appropriate to the different farming environment systems and situations. Thus, the ICT play an increasingly important role in linking the research-extension-market continuum towards developing professional competencies and entrepreneurship capabilities.

There are several ICT initiatives in India. Most of them are location specific or crop specific, isolated

and are confined to a small area. E-choupal, one among the numerous private ICT initiatives needed to be studied in detail. E- Choupal project, started by Indian Tobacco Company (ITC), places computers with Internet access in villages since 2000. The e- choupal (choupal means gathering place in Hindi) serves as both a social gathering place for exchange of information and an e-commerce hub. Today, ITC network reaches more than 4 million farmers in nearly 39,000 villages through 6500 e-choupals in the states like Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala and West Bengal covering soybean, shrimp, rice, coffee and the network is growing rapidly. The e-choupal covering the crop soybean (Soya choupal) in Madhya Pradesh was concentrated in this study.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted among the soya choupal user farmers in Indore district of Madhya Pradesh. Three villages were selected randomly from Indore district of Madhya Pradesh where soya choupal is in operation. Twenty samples from each village comprising sixty soya choupal farmers constitute the total sample of the study. Those farmers who were availing the services of soya choupal atleast once either in *Sanchalak's* (agent of ITC at village level) home or by marketing the soybean

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to the ITC was considered as soya choupal farmers.

The access to services of soya choupal was studied under two heads; one, access to various services provided by soya choupal and another, access to modern farm information provided by soya choupal

Access to Various Services of Soya Choupal

The access was measured based on the schedule developed on nine parameters. The respondents were asked to mention their access to soya choupal based on the five- point scale developed as always, most often, often, less often, and not at all and the scores assigned were 4, 3, 2, 1 and 0 respectively.

Access to Modern Farm Information for Soybean Cultivation from Soya Choupal

The access was measured based on the schedule developed on seven parameters. The respondents were asked to mention their access to soya choupal based on the five- point scale developed as always, most often, often, less often, and not at all and the scores assigned were 4, 3, 2, 1 and 0 respectively.

Satisfaction of Farmer's Towards Services of Soya Choupal

The farmers' satisfaction towards services of e-choupal was measured using the modified scale developed by Arunkumar (2005). The scale followed the ranking procedure of 0, 1, 2, 3 and 4 for strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree and strongly agree respectively.

Constraints in Utilizing the Services of Soya Choupal

On the basis of available literature, survey of the locality and discussion with sanchalaks, an exhaustive list of constraints was prepared. The respondents were asked to respond to the constraints applicable to them. The score was assigned 1, 2 and 3 for not severe, severe and very severe respectively. The total score for each constraint was calculated with the help of the responses received from respondents. The mean score for a particular constraint was worked out by dividing the weighted score of the constraints with the total number of respondents. Later, the ranking of constraints was done according to mean score of each statement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Extent of Access of various services provided by Soya Choupal

The soya choupal provides a number of services, which the rural communities need, from input supply to marketing of the final produce. Sanchalaks act as the mediator in providing the services to villagers that includes provision of farm practices for soyabean cultivation collected from various sources like research institutes and universities; market price of soyabean; weather information suitable to a particular area; questions and answers service under which farmers can put any questions to sanchalaks and the answers are sought from respective specialists from research institutes and universities within 24 hour. The soya choupal also procures soyabean directly from farmers without the involvement of middlemen by quoting its own price based on the quality of the beans. Soya choupal also had provision for entertainment. Villagers can access latest films; songs, cine news and can even see the movies in sanchalak's house. It was found that, this particular service was mostly used by the village youths during their free hours. Also, students can access board exam results through the Internet. Apart from this, farmers can get farm inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, etc through soya choupal.

An attempt was made to find the importance of these services among users. How often farmers were using these services was studied and the results are reported in Table 1. It is clear from this Table that the market price was the most important service that was accessed by the farmers received first rank. As much as 81.7 per cent of farmers were regularly (always) accessing the market price from soya choupal and 18.3 per cent were accessing it 'most often'. This has helped soya choupal farmers to sell their produce at a higher price. The second most important service was marketing service that received second rank with a mean score of 3.09. Nearly 47 per cent of farmers were selling their soyabean produce often and 26.6 per cent most often to soya choupal. Latest best agricultural practices were ranked third in its access with a mean score of 2.32. A majority of 38.3 per cent of farmers were using this service less often. Access to inputs through soya choupal was ranked fourth. Apart from these services; soya choupal also supplied Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) like biscuits, salts, etc through sanchalaks. Because of quality of these products, villagers preferred the same.

Table 1. extent of access to various services of E-choupal by farmers

N=60

Sl. No.	Services	% Farmers having Access	Always often	Level of access (in %)				Mean score	Rank
				Most often	Often often	Less often	Not at all		
1.	Market price	100.0	81.7	18.3	-	-	-	3.82	I
2.	Marketing of soybean	88.3	6.7	26.6	46.7	8.3	11.7	3.09	II
3.	Latest best agriculture practices	67.8	6.7	8.3	18.3	38.3	28.4	2.32	III
4.	Input supply	70.0	6.7	8.3	15.0	40.0	30.0	2.22	IV
5.	e-education	70.0	-	5.0	36.7	28.3	30.0	2.17	V
6.	Agriculture news	33.3	6.7	8.3	8.3	10.0	66.7	1.78	VI
7.	Weather information	43.3	1.7	3.3	18.3	20.0	56.7	1.73	VII
8.	Entertainment	35.0	-	8.3	5.0	21.7	65.0	1.57	VIII
9.	Questions – answers service	33.3	-	-	3.3	30.0	66.7	1.37	IX

Extent of Access of Modern Farm Information Provided by Soya Choupal

The extent of access of modern farm information on soybean cultivation provided by e-choupal was studied based on seven parameters. It is clear from the data reported in Table 2 that the most sought after information on improved soybean cultivation was on 'plant protection measures' (I rank), followed by 'varieties' (II rank), 'seed rate' (III rank), 'sowing time' (IV rank), 'weed management' (V rank), 'manures and fertilizers' (VI rank) and 'seed treatment' (VII rank). The data in Table 2 also shows the various level of access (always to not at all) with respect to different components of information for soy bean cultivation. It was observed that e-choupal was also supplying farm inputs such as bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides through *sanchalaks* and farmers were more interested in purchasing insecticides.

Satisfaction of farmers towards the services of soya choupal

The level of overall satisfaction of farmers towards the services of soya choupal is presented in Table 3. The data in table 3 reveals a high level of satisfaction by 50 per cent of the soya choupal farmers, followed by 40 per cent of farmers who had medium level of satisfaction and the remaining 10 per cent had low level of satisfaction from the use of services of soya choupal. The satisfaction of user farmers with the marketing facilities arranged by soya choupal was reflected by the higher profit they could able to get compared to non-users of soya choupal. No farmer was found in the category of very high or in very low. It is also inferred from the table that majority of user farmers had high level of satisfaction with respect to marketing of soy bean, *sanchalaks* competence and timeliness of services. The field *level* observation and discussion with farmers revealed several reasons for high level of satisfaction. t important reason, possibly, the

Table 2. Extent of access of modern farm information provided by E-choupal in soybean cultivation N=60

Sl. No.	Particulars	%Farmers having access	Always	Level of access (in %)				Mean score	Rank
				Most often	Often	Less often	Not at all		
1.	Plant protection measures	73.3	33.3	23.3	5.0	11.7	26.7	2.50	I
2.	Varieties	83.3	20.0	30.0	16.6	16.7	16.7	2.20	II
3.	Seed rate	83.3	20.0	30.0	16.6	16.7	16.7	2.20	III
4.	Swing time	68.3	18.3	18.3	11.7	20.0	31.7	1.90	IV
5.	Weed management	66.7	8.3	26.7	16.7	15.0	33.3	1.80	V
6.	Manures & fertilizers	55.0	1.7	13.3	20.0	20.0	45.0	1.75	VI
7.	Seed treatment	41.7	-	8.3	6.7	26.7	58.3	1.70	VII

Table 3. Satisfaction of farmers towards the services of soya choupal (N=60)

Sl. No.	Dimensions	Level of satisfaction(per cent respondents)				
		Very high	High	Medium	Low	Very low
1.	Satisfaction of farmers toward provision of appropriate technological information	10.0	40.0	50.0	50.	5.0
2.	Satisfaction of farmers towards supply of proper inputs of soybean	5.0	3.3	66.7	13.3	11.7
3.	Satisfaction of farmers with respect to marketing of soybean	41.7	51.7	6.6	-	-
4.	Satisfaction of farmers in sanchalaks competence	26.67	36.6	23.3	13.3	-
5.	Satisfaction of farmers in timeliness of services	5.0	53.3	26.7	11.7	3.3
6.	Satisfaction of farmers in miscellaneous services	1.6	46.7	40.0	11.7	-
Total satisfaction level		-	50.0	40.0	10.0	-

technology *per se*, which is highly relevant to the farming system. Second, the high level of satisfaction of farmers, was due to sanchalaks competence. The farmers felt the technical competence of sanchalaks in solving their problems related to cultivation of soybean and in marketing of soybean produce. Third, the timeliness in services of soya choupal enhances the satisfaction level of the farmers.

Constraints

Under the structured schedule the constraints such as physical, time, social and service constraints were studied on a three-point scale not severe, severe and very severe with scores of 3, 2 and 1 respectively it is inferred from Table 4 that the users ranked power breakdown as the most constraint with a mean score of 1.97 out of 3. Electricity is a major problem in rural India even today. Even though soya choupal has the battery backup for connectivity the charge cannot sustain for longer period. Connectivity, *per se*, is not a problem in soya choupal but the power backup together with

connectivity was viewed as one of the major problems by the users.

It is not to mention about the rural infrastructure. Villages of Indore district where the researcher surveyed was worst connected by roads. As movement of farmers were restricted by the infrastructure, many invisible factors operating takes advantage, leaving farmers at the vulnerable end. Poor transport facilities was ranked third by the users, based on the intensity of severity, for selling their soyabean produce with a mean score of 2.11 out of 3. Rural connectivity is of the utmost importance that has to be dealt at the policy level as infrastructure plays an important role in rural development. Though sanchalaks, who acts as a mediator between computer and users, provides the needed information some were of the opinion that low literacy level and especially low information technology literacy hinders the use of e choupal. This reflected the view that villagers should be taught about the preliminary uses of computer and its applications

Table 4. Constraints faced by farmers in using the E-choupal

Sl. No.	Constraints	Response categories (percentage of respondents)			Mean score	Rank
		Not severe	Severe	Very severe		
A. Physical/ Technological/Constraints						
1.	Power break down	41.7	25.0	33.3	1.97	I
2.	connectivity break down	66.7	11.6	21.7	2.06	II
3.	Poor transport facilities to soya choupal hub/saagar	30.0	6.7	63.3	2.11	III

B. Time constraints

1.	Slow response of computer	83.3	8.4	8.3	2.75	VI
2.	Slow response by sanchalaks	86.7	8.3	5.0	2.81	X
3.	Unsuitability of timing	100.0	-	-	3.00	XIV

C. Social Constraints

1.	Low literacy	66.7	10.	23.3	2.50	IV
2.	Low IT literacy	73.3	3.4	23.3	2.60	V
3.	Low social status	88.3	3.4	8.3	2.80	VIII
4.	Low income level	88.3	3.4	8.3	2.80	VIII

D. Service constraints

1.	Less efficient sanchalaks	93.3	3.4	33.3	2.90	XIII
2.	High social status of sanchalaks	85.0	8.3	6.7	2.78	VII
3.	Biasness of sanchalaks	88.3	8.4	3.3	2.85	XI
4.	Lack of appropriate farm technological information	91.7	5.0	3.3	2.88	XII

CONCLUSION

The study clearly shows that soya choupal is an effective web based information and procurement system to improve the overall satisfaction of the farmers. The soya choupal system is a good example of market-led extension strategy. Though the farmers were accessing various services from so a choupal, the market price information was found to be the most important service in demand. The soya choupal has helped the farmers to have access to market price information and making use

of marketing infrastructure for sale of the produce. Farmers were not very much interested in getting improved agronomic practices, but they found soya choupal useful with regard to facilities created for procurement of the produce and provision of market information. The constraints serve an opportunity to the ITC to improve the efficiency further. Moreover, with poor infrastructure like roads, electricity, water supply, etc. any developmental efforts seem to be a nightmare. Indian Government should take every effort to improve the rural infrastructure.