The Indian Journal of Veterinary Sciences & Biotechnology ***(2017) Volume 13, Issue 1, 96-98***

ISSN (Print) : 2394-0247 : ISSN (Print and online) : 2395-1176, abbreviated as IJVSBT

***http*://dx.doi.org/10.21887/ijvsbt.v13i01.8747**

Submitted : 04-04-2017 ***Accepted : 25-06-2017*** ***Published : 16-08-2017***

Utilization of WhatsApp for sharing livestock related information: An Experimental Study

Devesh Thakur* and Mahesh Chander

Department of Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Extension Education

College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, CSK Himachal Pradesh Agricultural University, Palampur, 176062

Corresponding Author: drdth4@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper is based on the use of WhatsApp in sharing of livestock related information among the farmers. A WhatsApp group of randomly selected 96 farmers from eight different districts of the Himachal Pradesh, India was created under the study. In a period of six months, information was shared in multiple forms among the farmers. A total of 62 queries during six months to seek information and advice on various livestock related problems were posted by the farmers. Maximum number of queries pertained to animal health followed by animal breeding, feeding, government programmes and dairy processing .The livestock extension agencies have the opportunity to explore and develop relevant information which can be disseminated through WhatsApp to the farmers.

Key words: WhatsApp, Livestock extension, Queries.

Introduction

The proportion of households receiving any sort of information from veterinary institutions remained 8 percent for the year 2013 (GOI 2014). Budgetary insufficiency, shortage of manpower and institutional structure (Ravikumar and Chander, 2011), absence of coordination among establishments (Chander and Rathod, 2013) and obsolete approach (Hegde, 2012) are some of the contributing factors for poor scope and coverage of livestock extension services. Social media tools such as WhatsApp help users to create their own content and therefore are helpful in democratization and dissemination of information (Andres and Woodard, 2013). This makes the application of WhatsApp an interesting proposition for generating and sharing relevant, localized content in livestock extension activities.

Materials and methods

This experimental study was undertaken to analyse the capability of WhatsApp in the dissemination of agriculture and animal husbandry related information among farmers in Himachal Pradesh. The internet usage of 28 percent in rural regions of Himachal Pradesh is one among the highest in the country (Jain and Sanghi 2016). Eight out of twelve districts of Himachal Pradesh, India were selected, wherein; *Krishi Vigyan Kendras'* (KVKs') of State Agricultural University were located. The initial list of farmers using social media was prepared in consultation with officials of these KVKs.

Subsequently, 12 farmers from each district were randomly selected. Thus, a total of 96 farmers across 8 districts were purposively selected. After initial arbitrary selection, extensive field visits to these respondents were conducted between April 2016 to June 2016. These visits were conducted to interview and explain the concept of WhatsApp use in agriculture and animal husbandry. Consequently, WhatsApp group "*Unnat Krishi Avam Pashupalan*" was created in June 2016. This group was backed by a team of experts from diverse fields, including veterinarians from State Animal Husbandry Department (SDAH) and from State Agricultural University (SAU). This was ensured to improve the quality of advice offered to the farmers and livestock owners.

Results and discussion

As evident from table 1, through WhatsApp, information was shared in a wide variety of formats. This included pictures accompanied by text messages, PDF files ,screen shots, photographs, news clipping of newspapers, farm magazines, videos and video links in farming. Over the period of six months, 109 posts were shared in WhatsApp group by the student researcher/group administrator. These posts pertained to information on all major aspects of agriculture and animal husbandry. Social Media tools such as WhatsApp can serve as a potent internet learning medium as there are various ways (content, photographs, pictures, sound, sound visuals and the web joins) through which farming community can learn and share information adequately (Andres and Woodard, 2013).

Table 1: Frequency and type of posts shared by researcher and farmers in the WhatsApp group

Type of post shared by researcher/group administrator	Frequency	Type of animal husbandry queries posted by Farmers	Frequency	Queries of farmers accompanied by pictures
1. Picture and text messages	24	i. Animal feeding	11	4
2. Text messages	21	ii. Animal breeding	15	5
3. PDF files	21	iii. Animal health	24	21
4. Screenshots	12	iv. Government programmes and marketing of livestock	7	0
5. Photos	10	v. Dairy processing and value addition	5	0
6. News clippings	8	*	*	*
7. Videos	7	*	*	*
8. Video links	6	*	*	*

**Intentionally left blank*

As far as posting of information on the part of farmers was concerned, diverse set of animal husbandry related queries (Table 1) pertaining to livestock related problems were shared by them. The pattern of queries can be indicative of information source requirement of these types of farmers in the region. Moreover such type of queries can provide feedback loop to research system and also help in establishing functional linkage in Farmer-Research-Extension interface.

Animal health based queries formed the maximum number of queries asked by respondents followed by queries on animal breeding, animal feeding, government schemes and dairy

processing.The results are in agreement with a study in which queries received through Kisan Call centers were assessed (Tiwari *et al*. , 2010). In that study, queries pertaining to animal health were the highest of all types of queries. In the current study, majority (21 out of 24) of the animal health queries were accompanied by pictures. This substantially improved the assessment of the clinical condition through visual examination of the problem. During six months, maximum queries were posted in the month of August followed by July. This may be due to prevalent rainy season which creates more livestock health, breeding and milk processing problems.

Conclusion

WhatsApp offers multiple ways of livestock information dissemination to farmers. Use of PDF files ensures that detailed information delivery is also possible which can be archived as well. Use of pictures, photos and videos can promote better understanding among farmers. The platform has potential to offer real time solutions to livestock problems and supports mobile learning among the farmers.

Conflict of interest: All authors declare no conflict of interest.

References:

Andres, D. and Woodard, J. (2013). Social media handbook for agricultural development practitioners, ISBN: 0-89492-918-6, USAID Washington D.C. United States.

Chander, M. and Rathod, P. (2013). Investment in livestock extension activities by State Departments of Animal Husbandry (SDAH) in India: An appraisal.*Ind. J. of Anim. Sci.,***83**(2):185-189.

GOI.(2014). Key Indicators of Situation of Agricultural Households in India. NSSO 70th Round, National Sample Survey Office, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, New Delhi.

Hegde, N. R. (2012). Dairy Extension for Transfer of Technologies. Indian Dairying: Perspective 2020. *Souvenir, XL Dairy Industry Conference*, New Delhi, India. Feb. 2-5. pp: 75-80

Jain, N. and Sanghi, K.(2016).The Rising Connected Consumer in Rural India,A Report,The Boston Consulting Group,New Delhi,India

Ravikumar, R. K. and Chander, M. (2011). Livestock extension education activities of the State Departments of Animal Husbandry (SDAH) in India: A case of Tamil Nadu state. *Ind. J. of Anim. Sci.,* **81**(7):107-112.

Tiwari, R. Sharma, M. C. and Singh, B P. (2010). Animal health information needs of livestock owners: a Kisan Call Centre analysis. *Ind. J. of Anim. Sci.,* **80**(2): 187-188.

❑