

EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL NETWORKS IN DISSEMINATING AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION: A CASE STUDY IN MAHA WELI SYSTEM H IN SRI LANKA

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Information needs of farmers in new settlements are context-specific and depend on several factors. Farmers' use of different information sources to support decision making in agriculture and social networks play a significant role. Identifying farmers' social networks is helpful to identify their communication channels and use them effectively to disseminate information. However, the types of social networks and their effectiveness in disseminating agricultural information in new settlements gained limited scholarly attention. This study was conducted to explore farmers' information needs, access to information and effectiveness of such information using different social networks. As the respondents 100 *Mahaweli* H farmers were selected using random sampling technique. A survey was conducted using a pre-tested, semi-structured questionnaire to collect information from the respondents. Descriptive statistics, Kruskal–Wallis test and an Effectiveness of Agricultural Information Index were used to analyse the data. According to the survey, 47% and 32% of farmers had very high and moderate need of information, respectively. The highly needed information were pest and disease control, pest and disease infestations, availability of fertilizers, and market prices. Government extension officers (33%), input traders (26%), and fellow farmers (18%) remain the most accessed sources of information. Accordingly, majority of the respondents (75%) perceived that agricultural information disseminated through social networks was effective in terms of its' content, satisfaction, retrievability, relevancy, practicability, utility and timeliness. It can be concluded that the agricultural information received through social networks is perceived as effective for farmers. Therefore, social networks can be effectively utilized to disseminate agricultural information.

Keywords: Effectiveness of information, Information dissemination, Settlements, Social networks