

## **UNDERSTANDING RURAL FARMERS' INFORMATION BEHAVIOUR**

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**I**ndeed, farmers have an inevitable need for information to perform their daily farming activities efficiently and effectively. The information concerning improved agro-technologies created by agricultural scientists should be disseminated in a way that is compatible with, and results in the farmers' satisfaction. Agricultural production in Pakistan is quite lower than its potential in spite of the hectic struggle by the agriculture departments and other allied agencies. It may have various reasons. Farmers' lack of awareness of the current agricultural information and technologies is one of the major reasons for low agricultural productivity.

For consistent growth in agric-production, it is indispensable to equip farmers with need-based, focused, accurate, reliable, and timely information. The dream of advancement in agric-production cannot come true until timely access to the information that farmers need is assured. The consideration of farmers' information needs and information seeking behaviour is an important element while designing need-based, focused, and user-oriented information delivery system that can provide more relevant, accurate, and timely information to its users. Effective information communication is known to be the key to optimal agricultural productivity. Conducting research on farmers' information behaviour would be an important first step in the design of need-based, focused, and farmers-oriented agricultural information policy and information infrastructure.

The research examining Pakistani farmers' information behavior is meager and narrow in focus. Naveed and Anwar (2012) provided a critical review of published research examining farmers' information seeking behavior. They identified that majority of Pakistani farmers relied mainly on "interpersonal relationships with friends, neighbors, relatives, co-farmers or progressive farmers, followed by mass media (radio and television only" in obtaining information they need (p. 6). The main modes of information transfer were personal contacts and observation. The findings of Naveed(2011, 2013) and Naveed and Anwar(2013) also support that farmers residing in Saleempur village depend mainly on their personal experience, informal information networks (e.g. co-farmers, progressive farmers, sales agent, and pesticide dealers) and mass media. The role of printed materials especially newspapers, agricultural extension agents, formal information sources were almost non-existent for obtaining agricultural advice. There seems a very weak contact between the rural farmers and Agricultural departments.

These results did not confirm whether farmers' dependability on informal communication for meeting information needs indicated a real preference or a compromise due to the lack of quality formal information infrastructure. If the preference for interpersonal relationships was real, then the question of information reliability arose because farmers might be misguided by those who are not trained in information selection and dissemination. The role of individuals providing information in the rural setting was also questionable because these individuals were not professionals. Furthermore, obtaining information through interpersonal relationships and informal social networks raises questions about accuracy, relevancy, and currency of information. Also, these information sources could not always provide timely, accurate, relevant, and current information.

Farmers' information sources were mainly social in nature and related to the facility available at home or somewhere near indicating that farming community was locality-oriented in Pakistan. It implies that farmers' intention to seek information about new innovations outside community was very low which means that Pakistani farmers were still using conventional methods that yielded lower production per acre. Moreover, the role of mass media is not very effective, especially the newspapers and agricultural extension agents as source of information.

- Our farmer needs user-oriented information delivery system that can provide more relevant, accurate, and timely information.

- Our farmer looks for need-based, focused, and farmers-oriented agricultural information policy and information infrastructure.

- Printed and digital media have very weak contact between the rural farmers and Agricultural departments.

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The Agriculture Department spent a lot of money on advertising agricultural information in newspapers but the rural farmers were unaware and did not have access to newspapers. It indicates that a lot of precious resources are in danger for being wasted on the information sources that were not fit for the rural community. Therefore, there is a need for redesigning the existing information support system for farmers by considering their information behavior.

**References:**

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**Concluding Remarks:** In view to the mentioned results and implications, there is a need for critical and comprehensive examination of the existing agricultural information infrastructure and services in order to prepare a detailed plan to improve them. This exercise will only be meaningful if extensive information behavior research is carried out, especially focusing on agricultural scientists and researchers, information providing agencies and specific groups of farmers. The efforts should be made to develop and provide integrated information services at the community level which cover socio-economic development, agriculture, health, and education. Such a service will lead to improved farmers' life and make them better informed and more productive.

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