

FARMERS' USE OF NEWSPAPERS AS CHANNELS OF AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

Apata, O. M.

Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension Services

University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

E-mail: *simboapata@yahoo.com.*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to assess farmers' use of newspapers as channels of agricultural information in Ekiti State, Nigeria. As a survey, accidental sampling procedure was used to select 60 respondents from the three senatorial districts of the State. Questionnaire was used to collect data which was subjected to frequency count, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Linear regression was used for inferential analysis. The result showed among other things that many of the respondents receive information on timely planting, easy way of obtaining credit, improved varieties of crop and livestock, processing of farm produce and appropriate type of fertilizer application. It was recommended among others that adult literacy should be more encouraged in the rural communities so that farmers can have access to education thereby help them to make use of Newspaper and other print media for their agricultural information channel.

Keywords: *Newspaper, information dissemination, constraints of Newspaper and relevance of information*

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture cannot experience significant development without exploiting all possible channels of agricultural information because agricultural information are best disseminated by using as many as possible information channels. In addition to the advantages of other mass media houses, information can be kept for future reference when Newspaper is used for agricultural information dissemination. Hence it should not be under utilized in the field of agriculture.

Agricultural information dissemination is a crucial stage of agricultural technology development and transfer. It is crucial because if it is not done properly and through the appropriate channel it would not serve the purpose it was intended to serve. Importance of information in agricultural development can never be over emphasized. Information generally is considered as being an essential production factor in agricultural and rural development (Zijp 2002, Dutoit and Mc Connell, 1995) Saraceveic and Wood (1981), Munyua 2000 observed that the direct or indirect impact of development is difficult to measure quantitative empirical evidence demonstrating the direct impact of information in social processes is widely recognized scientific, and technical information is particularly important in both subsistence and commercial agricultural production system (Youdewei, 1995).

Although farmers usually have rich knowledge of local conditions and valuable practical knowledge or experience of how best to successfully exploit their environment, they require timely and innovative information generated from research and development to cope with exigencies of weather and pestilence (Correa et al, 1997 cited in Zijp 2002). Olawoye (1996) observed that agricultural messages could enhance the productivity of farmers when they have access to it. Jonston (1986) observed that extension programmes have been largely tailored to provide sufficient information that is relevant to rural farmers. Mass media communication therefore, should be a major concern in the dissemination of agricultural information.

A mass media is a form of technological apparatus which is capable of reproducing the same message simultaneously for a large number of people over a given period of time. This may be through large printing press, broadcasting transmitters, film-camera, bill board exhibitions and audiovisuals. The last decades have witnessed a growing awareness of the importance of mass media in the development of agricultural productivity overtime (Davies 1992 as cited in Olowu and Oyedukun, 2000).

Mass media communication is a neutral channel for the flow of information but they determine both the organization and the contact of the messages. For the purpose of this study, Newspaper media houses are the focus, print media such as Newspaper, magazines, newsletters, leaflets, pamphlets and posters have been widely used to disseminate information to farmers (Van den Ban and Hawkins, 1999; Olowu and Oyedokun 2000). Newspaper media houses can provide information at rate driven by pressure of time and population, geographical constraints and shortage of trained extension in developing countries like Nigeria.

The information disseminated through Newspaper media houses can be on production, harvesting, processing, storage, marketing and source of micro and macro credits to farmers. The main focus of this study is to assess the dissemination of agricultural information through the Newspaper media houses to both literate and illiterate farmers. Newspaper media houses can disseminate information to illiterate farmers through the interpretation of Newspaper headlines on radio and television in local dialects of the farmers. The advantage of Newspaper media houses over other mass media houses can never be under mined. The information recovered through Newspaper can be documented for future references by the farmers which other mass media houses such as radio, and television houses cannot provide.

The study was designed to identify the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers, the type of agricultural knowledge gained by farmers through Newspaper, the relevance of agricultural information disseminated to the needs of the target audience, the constraints of both Newspaper media houses and the farmers in agricultural information dissemination and the variables that contribute to farmers use of Newspaper media houses.

METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Ekiti State is one of the six States in the south western region of Nigeria and was created from the old Ondo State in October 1, 1996. Ekiti State is one of the educationally advantaged States in Nigeria. The State is an agrarian state. Over 76% of the state's population earn their living from agriculture. The study design was survey. Accidental sampling procedure was used to select 60 respondents from the three senatorial districts of the State. Questionnaire schedule was used to collect data for the study. Data were subjected to descriptive analysis such as frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviation. Linear regression analysis was used for inferential analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic Characteristics of the Respondents: The result showed that most of the respondents fall between 30 and 50 years of age. This implies that most of the respondents are in their productive age. They need information to be more productive in their various agricultural activities. Fifty five percent of the respondents are male. About 31.7% and 51.7% of the respondents have primary and secondary educational qualifications respectively. This means that the respondents are moderately educated who can read and write, hence can receive agricultural information through the Newspaper media houses. Table 1 shows that 58.3% of the respondents belong to Christianity religion while 16.7% and 20.0% belong to Islam and traditional religion respectively. This implies that religion of the people does not prevent them from receiving information through Newspaper media houses. 51% of the respondents practised mix farming while 35.3% and 15.0% practice crop and livestock farming respectively. 53.3% of respondents have farming experience between 10 and 20 years, 30.0% of them have farming experience above 30years.

Agricultural Knowledge Gained through Newspapers by Respondents: Table 2 reveals that 35.0% of the respondents gain knowledge about easy access to credit through Newspaper. 25% of the respondents indicated that they gain knowledge on timely crop planting through Newspaper. About 21.7% of the respondents gain knowledge about appropriate type of fertilizer to apply and methods of application of such fertilizer. About 15.0% of the respondents indicated that they gain knowledge on disease, insect and pest control while 11.7% of them indicated that they gain no knowledge through Newspaper. The implication of this finding is that the respondents gain vital knowledge about agriculture through Newspaper media houses, hence their access to it should be increased.

Table 3 below reveals the relevance of the knowledge the respondents gain through Newspaper media houses to their farming activities. It reveals that 6.7% of the respondents indicated that the knowledge they gain through Newspaper media houses is very relevant to their agricultural activities whereas 71.3% of them indicated that the knowledge is just relevant to their agricultural activities. This further strengthened the fact that knowledge gained through Newspaper media houses are important and can be helpful to further improve agricultural productivity. Majority of the respondents indicated that information received from Newspapers are relevant to their farming activities. On the other hand, Newspaper media houses identified lack of patronage by agricultural

research institutes as their constraints of disseminating agricultural information to the farmers. Of all the socio-economics characteristics considered, educational status, family size, age and sex contribute to the farmers' receiving agricultural information through Newspaper media houses.

Constraints of Farmers and Newspaper media houses to Receive and Disseminate Agricultural Information through Newspapers: Table 4 shows 43.3% of the respondents indicated that their constraint is the high cost of Newspaper. On the other hand, 41.7% of them indicated that Newspaper is not always available to them and 15.0% of them indicated that language barrier is their own constraint to receiving agricultural information through Newspaper media houses.

This finding implies that language is no more a serious barrier to receiving agricultural information through Newspaper media houses. Rather agricultural information through print media should be made more available at low or no cost in the rural communities so that farmers can have access to it. On the other hand, Newspaper media houses indicated that their own constraints to disseminating agricultural information is that the researcher or agricultural technology development agencies do not always make agricultural information available to them for dissemination.

Relationship between Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents and their usage of Newspapers Media Houses: Regression analysis was carried out to determine the socio-economic characteristics that influence farmers' receiving information through Newspaper media houses. The result showed that f ratio was 3.546 and R^2 , 30.3 at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that the variables considered only contribute 30.0% to the use of Newspaper media houses. The remaining 70.0% are due to exceptional error and other variables that were not considered in this study.

The variables considered in this analysis are age, sex, educational status, leadership role, marital status and types of family, the study showed that a unit decrease in age from average age of 42.25 years will increase farmers use of Newspaper media houses by 1.317 since we have more male than female, it shows that more male farmers make use of Newspaper than female. This may be due to the fact that men have more time to read Newspapers than women after the day's work. While women will take up household chores the men will be reading Newspaper, or listening to radio or watching television. An increase in years of formal education would bring about increase in use of Newspaper by 1.77. The study further showed that increase in number of leadership role will

increase the use of Newspaper media houses by 0.158. The implication of these findings is that more youths should be involved in agricultural activities since they can obtain information about agriculture through Newspaper media houses. Rural dwellers should be encouraged to have formal education through mass literacy services since education will give them the opportunity to obtain information through Newspaper media houses. Farmers should be encouraged to take up leadership roles in their various communities since this would help them to obtain information through Newspaper probably because they have free access to it.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Agricultural information need to be disseminated to the farmers through appropriate channels which can be kept for further reference of the farmers. Newspaper media houses are one of the ways this can be achieved. Newspaper publishers indicated that researchers do not bring agricultural information to be published as their constraints to agricultural information dissemination. On the other hand, farmers identified high cost of Newspaper and inaccessibility of Newspaper as their own constraints of receiving information through Newspaper. Of the entire socio-economic variables considered in the regression analysis age, sex, educational qualification and leadership role can significantly influence receiving agricultural information through Newspaper media houses. From the forgone study, the following recommendations emanate:-

1. There should be creation of farmers' library at the community level where farmers can go to obtain information from Newspaper and other print media which would be bought by the Local Government areas.
2. More youths should be encouraged by giving them incentives to take agriculture as a profession since they can obtain agricultural information through prints media in addition to other mass media houses as this would help them to improve on their farming activities.
3. Adult literacy should be more encouraged in the rural communities so that farmers can have access to education thereby help them to make use of Newspaper and other print media for their agricultural information channel.
4. Government should make it compulsory for agricultural research institutes in addition to other channels of agricultural information to disseminate information on agriculture through Newspaper media houses.
5. Government should provide Newspaper media houses in the three major languages of Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa for effective and efficient

- dissemination of agricultural information to meet the needs of the farmers.
6. Government or well to do individual, or group of individuals in the society should establish media house (print) that produces Newspaper that is purely agricultural oriented, introduce and make them accessible to the rural as well as urban farmers at a moderate price.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentages
Age		
Below 30	6	10.0
31-40	18	30.0
41-50	21	35.0
51-60	12	20.0
Above 60	3	5.0
Sex		
Male	37	55.0
Female	23	45.0
Marital Status		
Married	57	95
Single	3	5.0
Educational qualification		
Non- Formal Education	1	2
Primary Education	19	32
Secondary Education	32	53
Post Secondary Education	8	13
Religion		
Christianity `	35	58
Islamic	10	17
Traditional religion	15	25
Types of agricultural activities		
Crop farming	20	33
Livestock farming	9	15
Mixed farming	31	52
Faming experience		
Between 10-20	32	53.3
Between 21-30	10	16.7
Above 30	18	30.0
Total	60	100

Source: Field survey, 2008

Table 2: Frequency Distribution Knowledge Gained By The Respondents

Knowledge gained	Frequency	Percentage
Improved varieties of crop & livestock	16	26.7
Timely crop planting	15	25.0
Yam mini set technology	7	11.7
Appropriate types of fertilizer Application method	13	21.7
Farm produce processing	10	16.7
Easy access to credit facilities	21	35.0
Proper management of growing crop	3	5.0
Disease, insect and pest control	9	15.0
No knowledge gained	7	11.7

Source: Field survey, 2008

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Relevance of Knowledge Gained through Newspaper to Farmers Agricultural Activities

Relevance of knowledge gained	Frequency	Percentage
Very relevant	4	7
Relevant	43	72
Not relevant	13	21

Source: Field survey, 2008

Table 4: Constraints of Respondents to Receive Information through Newspaper Media Houses

Constraints	Frequency	Percentages
Expensive	26	43.3
Not always available	25	41.7
Language barrier	9	15.0

Source: Field survey, 2008

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