

Utilization of agriculture service of e-choupal by rural people of Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT : ITC's e-choupal is internet kiosk, village gathering place and e-commerce hub all rolled into one. It caters to the information needs of the farmers at their doorstep by bridging the information and service gap of rural India. It also established a low-cost fulfillment system focused on the needs of rural India, which helps in mitigating rural isolation, create more transparency for farmers, and improve their productivity and income. e-choupal has been running since June, 2000 and till now no systematic effort has been made to study the usefulness of e-choupal for rural people. Thus, the present research was undertaken to study the utilization of e-choupal services by rural people which will be useful in improving present effort. The present study was conducted in four districts namely Sri Ganga Nagar, Kota, Bharatpur, and Chittorgarh of Rajasthan. Two panchayat samities from each district and two villages from each panchayat samiti were selected on random basis. The sample consisted of 160 women and 160 men users of e-Choupal. Personal interview technique was used for collecting data. The data were analyzed by using frequency, percentage, mean per cent score and Z test. The findings of the study clearly indicated that majority of the users were using e-Choupal website to access information about market price of agriculture products (74.1%) and weather forecast (67.8%). Findings further revealed that the utilization of Choupal Pradarshan Khet and Choupal Hub was good. Rural people utilized these services to get high profit on their crops. Thus, e-Choupal has helped in socio-economic development of rural people in terms of increase in agriculture production, adoption of improved technologies, marketing of agriculture produce and timely access to agriculture inputs.

KEY WORDS : Utilization, e-Choupal, Choupal Pradarshan Khet

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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is economically and socially vital to India. Yet despite economically vital role, Indian agriculture has until recently been regulated in an archaic fashion that limits its productivity. Non optimal farming practices and capricious weather pattern left post-independence India with an under-performing agricultural sector, acute food shortages, and dependence on food imports. To tackle these challenges of Indian agriculture, ITC (Indian Tobacco Company) conceived

e-Choupal that places computers with internet access in rural farming villages. e-Choupal is internet kiosk, village gathering place and e-Commerce hub all rolled into one. e-Choupal also established a low-cost fulfillment system focused on the needs of rural India, which helps in mitigating rural isolation, create more transparency for farmers, and improve their productivity and income. e-Choupal aims to provide rural people ready access to specific real time information and customized knowledge in their native language. The choupal is run by an operator called the "Sanchalak" who himself is a farmer

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recruited by ITC, to be interface between the computer terminals and the farming community. e-Choupal gives information regarding improved agronomical practices, weather forecast, market prices of agriculture products etc. Besides these information they were also exposed to *Choupal Pradarshan Khet* to show the production potentiality of different crops. The concept of e-Choupal hub has also been introduced in order to facilitate farmers in marketing of agriculture products as well as key inputs for agriculture (www.itc.com, www.echoupal.com). The effectiveness of these services depends upon how well they are being used by rural people. Thus, the present research was designed to study the utilization of e-Choupal services by rural people.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in four purposively selected districts namely Ganga Nagar, Kota, Bharatpur, and Chittorgarh of Rajasthan where e-Choupal is in operation. Two panchayat samities from each district and two villages from each panchayat samities were selected on random basis for the purpose of investigation. The sample consisted of 160 women and 160 men users. Thus, the total sample was 320 rural people. Interview technique was used to collect data from the respondents. The data were analyzed by using frequency (F), percentage (%).

OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT

In e-Choupal, the agriculture service gives more control over their choices, a higher profit margin on their crops and access to information that improves their productivity.

Utilization of basic information of agriculture by users :

Daily weather and market prices of agriculture product is very popular sections on the website of e-Choupal. Thus, it is necessitated to know the utilization of these services.

Data in Table 1 clearly show that 91.9 per cent men and 56.3 per cent women users were using e-Choupal to access the daily ITC (e-Choupal) procurement rate and the local *mandi* rates for various agriculture commodities. They stated that they used this information to get high profit on their crops.

Most of the men (84.4%) and more than half of the women (51.3%) users were using e-Choupal to access weather related information.

The table further shows that only 20.3 to 26.6 per cent users were using e-Choupal to obtain information about improved agronomical practices (seed rate, improved varieties of seed, appropriate temperature for cultivation of crop, right time of sowing, seed treatment and dose of fertilizers and herbicides), harvesting and safe storage of wheat. As per the discussion with users, it was found that the information provided on e-Choupal website regarding farming practices was almost similar to what they were practicing, they thus less referred e-Choupal website for this purpose.

Though the respondents were aware that e-Choupal is also a channel for soil testing service, but only 25 per cent men users were using this service as Government provides this facility on lower rates (Rs. 5/- per sample) than e-Choupal (Rs. 25/- per sample).

It is encouraging to note that 73.8 per cent men and 37.5 per cent women used to seek solution to their problems related to agriculture by sending emails to scientists who, after careful examination and assessment, provided specific solutions.

Utilization of services of *Choupal Pradarshan Khet* (CPK) :

Choupal Pradarshan Khet (CPK) is a front line demonstration unit on the farmer's field to show the production potentiality of different crops. This is an effort to compare the improved agronomical practices of particular crop with that of traditional practices so that by seeing the farmers can be convinced regarding the adoption of improved practices. Through *Choupal Pradarshan Khet* e-Choupal brings innovative and modern techniques of farming to small and marginal farmers. *Choupal Pradarshan Khet* of wheat was laid down in three districts namely Kota, Chittorgarh and Ganganagar while soybean's *Choupal Pradarshan Khet* was demonstrated in Kota and Chittorgarh. *Choupal Pradarshan Khet* of bajra was laid down in Bharatpur and Chittorgarh and maize's *Choupal Pradarshan Khet* was demonstrated in Chittorgarh only.

Regarding utilization of this service (CPK) of e-Choupal Table 2 reveals that 75 per cent users have seen the *Choupal*

Table 1 : Utilization of basic information of agriculture by the users				(n= 320)
Sr. No.	Aspects	Men n = 160 f (%)	Women n= 160 f (%)	Total
1.	Access information about			
	Market prices of agricultural products	147 (91.9)	90 (56.3)	237 (74.1)
	Weather forecast	135 (84.4)	82 (51.3)	217 (67.8)
	Improved agronomical practices of wheat	63 (39.4)	22 (13.8)	85 (26.6)
	Harvesting of wheat	48 (30.0)	19 (11.9)	67 (20.9)
	Safe storage of wheat	43 (26.9)	22 (13.8)	65 (20.3)
2.	Get soil tested at e-Choupal Lab	40 (25.0)	0 (0.0)	40 (12.5)
3.	Seek solution to their problems related to agriculture	118 (73.8)	60 (37.5)	178 (55.6)

Pradarshan Khet of wheat while equal number of users *i.e.* 50 per cent have seen *Choupal Pradarshan Khet* of soybean and bajra. The table further shows that 25 per cent users have seen *Choupal Pradarshan Khet* of maize.

In an informal discussion with users, it was found that they were also convinced by seeing the result of the improved practices being demonstrated under *Choupal Pradarshan Khet* and have actually adopted practices in their field. They also stated that after utilizing improved practices, their average productivity was increased up to 20 per cent. During discussion with *Sanchalaks*, it was found in those villages where *Choupal Pradarshan Khet* was demonstrated all the users have visited the demonstration site. However, in some of the districts where *Choupal Pradarshan Khet* was not demonstrated, the users did not get an opportunity of witnessing the improved agronomical practices of different crops.

Utilization of services of e-Choupal hub :

A hub is a place where farmers have to come to sell their produce and buy agriculture inputs. Each e-Choupal hub caters to about 30-40 e-Choupal centers. e-Choupal hub could be used for many commodities and inputs. Table 3 depicts that all the respondents sold wheat at hub while 43.8 to 68.8 per cent of them sold mustard and soybean there. Respondents felt that e-Choupal had overcome the disadvantages of the *mandi* system. The users reported that the selling of agriculture produce at hub is very beneficial for them as they do not have to bear the cost of transportation of the produce. The transaction was also much faster than at *mandi*, usually taking not more than 3-4 hours. They further said that ITC's electronic weighing scales were accurate and not susceptible to sleight of hand like manual weighing system at *mandi*. The system

also did not require produce to be bagged, which avoids the associated loss of produce by intentional spillage. Thus, the e-Choupal system has logistical and transaction efficiencies. Many a times the buying at hub is restricted to some specific crop only, in such conditions they are compelled to sale their produce at *mandi* or to the middlemen.

Regarding buying of inputs, Table 3 shows that 61.9 to 66.9 per cent users bought fertilizer, seeds and insecticides from the hub while only 16.6 per cent of them bought herbicides from there. The reason for buying these products from e-Hub might be that e-Choupal cost substantially less than other local sources such as village traders. Farmers expressed that they could also save their time as they bought goods when they go for selling of agriculture produce. Around one third of the users expressed that they did not buy anything from hub as there is no system of credit thus they had to do cash payment for their buying.

On the basis of results it could be concluded that utilization of services of e-Choupal was good. This indicates that e-Choupal has exerted a great impact on rural people. The benefits perceived by the users from utilization of e-Choupal services are :

- Better price for their crop: Farmers got better price for their produce due to the awareness of local and global market rates and market trends and less transportation charges which in turn increases their income and standard of living.
- Weather: Farmers got timely and proper information about localized weather along with advisories which helped them in reducing their losses in crops.
- Best farming practices: e-Choupal established Choupal Pradarshan Khet of wheat, soybean, bajra

Sr. No.	Choupal Pradarshan Khet	Men n = 160 f (%)	Women n= 160 f (%)	Total
1.	Wheat	120 (75.0)	120 (75.0)	240 (75.0)
2.	Soybean	80 (50.0)	80 (50.0)	160 (50.0)
3.	Bajra	80 (50.0)	80 (50.0)	160 (50.0)
4.	Maize	40 (25.0)	40 (25.0)	80 (25.0)

Sr. No.	Component	Men n = 160 f (%)	Women n= 160 f (%)	Total
1.	Sale agriculture produce at hub			
	Wheat	160 (100.0)	160 (100.0)	320 (100.0)
	Mustard	120 (75.0)	100 (62.5)	220 (68.8)
	Soybean	75 (46.9)	65 (40.6)	140 (43.8)
	Bajra	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
2.	Buy agriculture input from hub			
	Fertilizer	109 (68.1)	98 (61.3)	207 (64.7)
	Seeds	104 (65.0)	110 (68.8)	214 (66.9)
	Herbicides	35 (21.9)	18 (11.3)	53 (16.6)
	Insecticide	103 (64.4)	95 (59.4)	198 (61.9)

and maize to show production potentialities of improved agricultural technologies to the farmers. After Choupal Pradarshan Khet productivity increased upto 20 per cent.

- Transparent Trading: e-Choupal created a direct marketing channel for the farmers' produce, eliminated intermediation and multiple handling, thus they are getting better prices for their crops.
- Solution of problems: Farmers got timely solution for their problems related to agriculture through FAQs that helped farmers to improve their agriculture yield.

Thus, it can be concluded that e-Choupal has helped in socio-economic development of rural people in terms of increase in agriculture production, adoption of improved technologies, marketing of agriculture produce and timely access to agriculture inputs. Similar work related to the present topic was also done by Anderson *et al.* (2003); Block and Crain (2007); Ferguson (2007); Freedman (1984) and Olson (2004).

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■ WEBLOGGRAPHY

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