ABSTRACT

Farm communication and extension programs are vital part of the farm development attempts. Electronic media plays a major role in farm extension activities. Kerala, the consumer state, which was a complete agricultural state in pre-independence period, is the sprouting land of agricultural extension and publication activities in print media. Later AIR (All India Radio) farm programs and farm broadcasting of Doordarshan enriched the role of electronic media in farm extension activities. The media saturated southern state of India received this new electronic media farm communication revolution whole heartedly.

However, after 1990, Kerala witnessed a flood of private TV channels and currently there are 24 channels in this regional language, named Malayalam. All major news and entertainment channels are broadcasting farm programs. Farm programs of AIR and Doordarshan, broadcasted in Malayalam language, have been well accepted to the farmers’ in Kerala.

However, post-independence period, witnessed the formation of Kerala state in Indian Union and the first ballot-elected communist Government started its administration. After the land reform bills, the state witnessed a gradual decrease in agricultural production. Even if it is not reflected much in the attitude and practices of farm community and farm broadcast of traditional electronic broadcasting, a change is observable after the post-liberalization era of India. Private Television channels, which were focused on entertainment value of programs, started broadcasting farm programs and the parameters of program production went through certain changes.

In this situation, there is ample relevance for a study about the farm programs of electronic media in terms of a comparative study of audience perception. The study is limited in the state of Kerala as it is the most media saturated state in India.

The study analyzes the rate, nature and scope of adoption of farming methods transmitted through electronic media (T.V. and Radio) in Malayalam language.
All kinds of Farm programs including comprehensive program serials, success stories, seasonal cropping methods, experts opinion, been analyzed on the basis of the following objectives.

- To find whether propagating new farm methods through farm programs in electronic media or the availability of adequate infrastructure and economic factors make a farmer to adopt a new farming method.
- To find which electronic media has more influence on farmers to adopt agricultural programs.
- To find which form of electronic media gets better feedback from farmers.
- To find out whether the programs of T.V. or Radio is more acceptable to farmers than the print media.
- To find whether farmers gets the message through their preferred medium for the message.

The researcher recorded opinions from a panel of agricultural officers, farm Information officers, agro extension researchers and experts. According to their opinions and guidelines, a pilot study is designed and conducted in Kanjikuzhy Panchayath, in Alappuzha district, Kerala. The Panchayath is selected by considering its ideal nature of being the sample for a social Science research. Besides, the nature of farming in the Panchayath, which devoid of the cultivation of cash crops also supported its sample value.

As per the observations from the pilot study, researcher confirmed the Triangulation method as the methodology of research. The questionnaire survey, being the primary part contained 42 Questions with 6 independent and 32 dependent variables. The survey is conducted among 400 respondents in Idukki, Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta districts considering geographical differences and distribution of different types of crops. The response from a total of 360 respondents, 120 from each district, finally selected for tabulation and data analysis.
The data analysis, based on percentage analysis, along with the results from focus group discussion among a selected group of 20 farmers, together produced the results as follows.

Farmers, who are the audience of farm programs, have a very serious approach towards the medium. They are maintaining a critical point of view towards the content of the programs. Farmers are reasonably aware about the financial side of the programs and the monitory aspirations of both private and Government owned Television channels.

Even though, the farmers are not aware on the technical terminology and jargons, they have ideas about success stories, program serials and they are even informed about channels are not maintaining an audience research section like AIR.

Though the farmers accept Doordarshan as the credential source of farm information and methods, they are inclined to the entertainment value of programs too. They prefer to have more entertainment value for the programs of Doordarshan. Surprisingly, they have very solid suggestions on even about the shots which add entertainment value to the farm broadcasting methods of Doordarshan.

Farmers are very much aware about the fact that media is just an instrument for inspiration and persuasion. They strongly believe that the source of information and new methods is agricultural research and an effective change happens only when there are adequate infrastructure and marketing facilities, along with the proper support from Government agricultural guideline and support systems like Krishi Bhavans. They strongly believe that media alone cannot create any magic in increasing agricultural production.

Farmers are pointing out the lack of response to the feedback and queries of farmers on farming methods, as an evidence for the difference in levels of commitment of Government and private owned Television channels.
Farmers are still perceiving AIR farm programs are far more committed to farmers and farming than any other electronic medium. However, they are seriously lacking Radio receivers with medium wave reception facility.

Farmers perceive that the farming methods on new crops are more adoptable than the farming methods of traditional crops in both private and Government owned Television channels. There are multiple factors behind this observation from farmers.

Farmers changed in terms of viewing habits and they prefer success stories, which are totally irrelevant and they even think that such stories encourage people to go for farming and they opined that such stories are good sources of inspiration. However, they are all very much sure about the importance and particular about the presence of entertainment factor even in farm programs.

Farmers expect direct interaction of any expert of the new farming method to implement the method in their agriculture practices. Though introduction of a new idea in the T.V. is acceptable, farmers need the direct instruction of expert on field to start implementing the new farming practices.

Farmers still have an affinity towards print media reports and agricultural pages and they have complaints to print media on the removal of agricultural information pages from newspapers. They prefer the reports in print media as it facilitates them to collect and refer articles when they need it.

Farmers are having an eye of doubt about the credibility of farm programs by private T.V. channels. Even if they prefer private Television channels for listening and adopting new farming methods and other farm information, they scrutinize programs to know whether they are sponsored programs by agro-chemical or agro-fertilizer manufacturer.