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A Study on Farmers' Attitude towards E Choupal: A Critical Investigation in Madhya Pradesh

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Abstract

Farmers in India have long faced poor productivity and economic hardships due to a lack of awareness about technological agricultural inputs, poor information, and the use of traditional methods. Middlemen remained an unavoidable burden that inflated costs, resulting in poor margins and drained profitability and resources.

The entry of e-Choupal empowered farmers through the use of information technology. It pioneered the availability of internet kiosks and accessibility of expert advice, enabling direct market linkage, which improved income levels

ITC e-Choupal has eliminated the role of middlemen and shifted the farming approach. The paper empirically evaluates the role of e-Choupal in initiatives and farmers' attitudes towards services rendered. The hypothesized results (N=1080), Chi-Square test reveals a significant association between e-Choupal initiatives and farmers' profitability and satisfaction in Madhya Pradesh.

Keywords: Agricultural Farming, Farming Income, Techno Farming

Introduction

Agriculture is vital to India. It feeds billions of people, employs 66% of the population, and contributes 23% of the GDP. India's agricultural productivity has improved, making it self-sufficient and a net exporter of various food products. However, the agricultural system is characterized by small, marginal, and inefficient landholdings, which is unfair to farmers.

To address these challenges, ITC initiated the e-Choupal initiative, placing computers and internet access in rural areas to serve as information exchange platforms. This initiative has transformed rural farmers into informed farmers, reducing their isolation in terms of agricultural practices in modern villages. The system is more transparent for farmers and improves both their productivity and income. The changing scenario necessitates the study of farmers' attitude and understanding their perspectives.

Literature Review

Business Model

Farmers do not require any capital investment to access the information provided by e-Choupal. ITC has made significant investments and maintains its IT hub. Through this information center, farmers receive accurate information about market demand, crop choices, and rates. Farmers can also buy seeds, fertilizers,

and farm equipment from ITC processing centers at competitive rates.

Developmental Benefits

The e-System provided by ITC gives farmers greater control over their choices, ensures higher margins on crops, and empowers villagers through knowledge of crop management, accurate weather conditions, and proper use of hormones and pesticides. This makes the agricultural system more profitable for the community.

Agricultural Practices

ITC enhances the efficiency of agricultural practices and ensures transparency in crop rates. It provides extensive reports on crop production, valuable knowledge about fertilizers and farm products, protection of crops from weeds, and equal treatment for small and marginalized farmers.

While the available literature provides useful insights about the services of e-Choupal, still, the services remain unpenetrated to many farmers. This prompts the need to study their opinion in the current dynamic and fast-changing scenario. The paper seeks to relook at the farmers' opinions and satisfaction levels and strives to understand the scope of further improvement, if any, in service delivery of the e-Choupal system.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyze the role of ITC Choupal E-Services in increasing the profitability of farmers.
2. To assess the farmer's satisfaction level with respect to ITC Choupal E-Services.

Research Methodology:

The study explores the key services provided by e-Choupal and its relationship with farmers' Profitability and Satisfaction.

Primary data was collected from Sehore, Rajgarh, and Vidisha districts of Madhya Pradesh. The sample size of the study was 1080. Farmers who are associated with the e-Choupal program were included as respondents. A structured questionnaire was designed to collect data from respondents. A stratified sampling method was adopted, where strata were included according to the land used by farmers. Strata were divided in proportion to land holding of farmers in order to maximise equitable representation of economically diversified farming population .The Chi-square test was performed to test hypotheses using IBM SPSS software 22. Descriptive statistics like Mode and Percentage were applied.

Hypothesis:

H0: There is no significant association between overall usefulness of e-Choupal services and farmers' profitability.

H1: There is a significant association between overall usefulness of e-Choupal services and farmers' profitability.

H0: There is no significant association between overall usefulness of e-Choupal services and farmers' satisfaction.

H1: There is no significant association between overall usefulness of e-Choupal services and farmers'.

Results and Discussion

There were total of 1080 respondents out of which 254 belonged to age group of 18-30years, 288 belonged to 31 to 40 years, 384 were from 31 to 40 years and 216 were above 50 years.

237 farmers were having land holding of less than 1 acre , 280 farmers had 1acre to 2 acres, 318 had the land holing of 3 to 5 acres and 245 above 5 acres . 97 farmers were Intermediate , 140 undergraduate, and 583 were Graduate and 260 post graduate. 1022 were the male and 58 female respondents .

Results of Hypéthesis 1

Chi-Square Statistic (χ^2): 254.5

Degrees of Freedom (df): df = 1

The p-value is less than.0001 the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$); therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The test result shows that e-Choupal services and farmers' profitability are not independent of each other, inferring a significant association between them. The result reveals that farmers associate the usefulness of e-Choupal services with their profitability and contribution to net income. The useful information provided about profitable crop choices by e-Choupal, scientific and expert opinions provided about good-quality seeds by e-Choupal, is a valuable contribution to the realization of better proceeds from agricultural crops in the market. Real-time information, better market access, and productivity have led to growth in net income. By adopting superior farming techniques and quality inputs, farmers increase yields and income.

Results of Hypothesis 2

Chi-Square Statistic $\chi 2$: 35.30

Degrees of Freedom (df): df = 1

$p < .00001$

The p-value is less than .00001 at significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$); therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The test result shows that e-Choupal services and farmers' satisfaction are not independent of each other, indicating a significant association between them. The test indicated association between usefulness of e-Choupal services and overall farmer satisfaction. This implies that various services of e choupal is associated with farmers' profitability. The e choupal services emphasised on satisfaction level of farmer. The e choupal service played vital role in livelihoods and empowering farmers across all strata. E-Choupal services allow farmers to sell their produce directly to ITC, removing layers of intermediaries and ensuring fair prices. Additionally, various CSR initiatives, such as Sunehara Kal, benefit farmers through long-term community impact and women's empowerment.

Programs like Choupal Pradarshan Khet promote sustainable agricultural practices. e-Choupal insurance and credit through the e-Choupal platform have made financial services accessible to farmers.

Conclusion:

The study reveals the significant role of e-Choupal in farmers' lives, making them more empowered. However, despite e-Choupal's success, it needs to increase scalability and reach to maximize its impact. Rural infrastructure and digital literacy among farmers have been some of the challenges for e-Choupal. The e-Choupal program can become more beneficial and inclusive if the government also streamlines and focuses more on rural infrastructure, roads, power supply, and telecom connectivity. This would incentivize other private players also to venture in this area which promise a win win situation for farmers, pvt corporate sector and govt.

Limitations of the Study:

1. The sample size was limited to 1,080 farmers.
2. The study was restricted to Madhya Pradesh.
3. Not all farmers have access to e-Services due to internet connectivity issues.
4. Many villages lack electricity.

Future Research:

The study is open for further research, as it is limited to the regions of Madhya Pradesh. Future researchers can explore the impact of e-Choupal in other geographical areas, as ITC has expanded its operations across India.

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