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Seminar I
Mobile Technologies and Indian Rural Upliftment

Synopsis

In recent years, the mobile phone has emerged as an important development tool. It is seen as a device that has the potential to break the rural–urban developmental gap by delivering information on a variety of economic and social issues. Mobile phones can facilitate need-based and user-centric information and services at an affordable cost to India’s rural population, which was hitherto unreachable.

India is riding the wave of digitisation, with the delivery of services to citizens rapidly shifting to digital platforms. With widespread adoption of smartphones running on open operating systems like Android, there are currently more than 300 government applications, which are facilitating essential citizen services, including information dissemination, direct benefit transfers, education and healthcare. In this context, the present seminar explores the impact of mobile phone usage on livelihood of rural people in India through following objectives.

1. To explore the prospects of mobile for rural communities
2. To understand the mobile utilization pattern of rural communities & challenges.
3. To review the impact of mobile utilization on up-gradation of health, education & social skills.

National Mobile usage scenario

According to a report jointly released by Indian Cellular and Electronics Association and consulting firm KPMG, rural India witnessed a year-on-year growth of 35% in 2018 as opposed to 7% growth in urban India in the same period in terms of internet users. Smartphone penetration in rural India has risen from 9% in 2015 to 25% in 2018. As a result of increased digital inclusion there are currently more than 300 government apps, which are facilitating essential citizen services, including information dissemination, direct benefit transfers, education and healthcare.

Prospects of Mobile usage for rural community

Agriculture continues to be the most important sector of the Indian economy. There is a non-negotiable need of complementary advisory service in this area. In this existing scenario and with impressive mobile penetration in rural areas, integration of ICTs in agricultural extension will provide much needed impetus to agricultural sector and ICTs can complement the traditional extension system. Various mobile advisory services are also provided by ICAR institutes and KVKs to provide improved package of practices in agriculture. Some of the popular Advisory services and apps include, Kisan Call Center, Mandi on Mobile Kisan Suvidha, Pusa Krishi, eSAP, eNAM, RiceXpert, Pashu Poshan, Crop Insurance etc. Some of the popular services provided and apps developed by private agencies are mKRISHI, Lifelines india, Fisher Friend, Nokia life tools, Plantix, IFFCO Kisan, Digital mandi india, Loop, FEMA etc.

There are many services and apps for social development and change in rural area by both public and private sector. Some of them include, Gramsamvad, Janmanrega, Aawas app, Meri Sadak, ArogyaSakhi, mDemand etc. There are Mobile helplines for every govt. department and private helpline are also there to help farmers as well as rural citizens.

Mobile utilization pattern

Mostly in rural context, the mobile phone is used for keeping in touch with friends and family members (social networking). It’s also found useful for economic purposes like securing information on agriculture, employment and credit in some areas. Rural youths and few of the progressive rural citizens used mobile phones for improving their livelihood skills through education and securing information on healthcare. It’s also revealed that they used mobile phones for entertainment and contacting others during emergencies. (Balwant Singh Mehta, 2018)

Impact on health, education and social skills of rural people

Given their low costs and increasing ubiquity, even in very poor communities, there is a great potential for mobile phones to aid in the delivery of 'anytime, anywhere' education. In developing country like India where more than 50% of the population lives in rural parts, rural education is an important part that leads to the betterment of the society and country. Mobile education without doubt, will bring a positive change towards the enhancement of the rural education in India.

Given the ubiquity of mobile phones, their use to support healthcare in the Indian context is inevitable. Healthcare communication directed at rural people via mobile phones, could empower them with the necessary knowledge to promote not only their own health but also the health of their families.

Growing use of mobile phones has also helped in bridging the digital divide in rural-urban areas and has fundamentally changed the way of economy. It has brought people closer not only through network and communications but also through political, economic and social inclusion.

Research studies

Jagan (2017) concluded that cent per cent of farmers have favourable attitude towards use of mobile phone for obtaining information regarding animal husbandry and agriculture.

Eldagi (2014) reported that majority (67%) of farmers perceived SMS services provided by KVK and APMC useful and have fully adopted package of practices provided through mobile phone with respect to their crop.

DeSouza et al (2014), elucidated that majority of respondents (99%) were open to receiving health information on mobile phones. Voice call was preferred mode of communication.

Bhatt (2019), investigated that most of the respondents used internet (94%) and smartphone (93%). More than half respondents perceived mobile learning useful in exams, provides answer to each and every query.

Conclusion

There are numerous usages of mobile phones by rural people. There has been improved access to knowledge in agriculture, including non-grain products, such as vegetables and milk production. It has added personal touch to the machines through voice calls, IVRS and Interactive made understanding easier through pictures and videos and instant communication with agricultural experts anytime anywhere a reality through mobile communications. Other aspect of rural development such as m-Education and m-Health can be a boon for people living in remote areas. This dynamic growth of mobile communications technology is creating opportunities for economic growth, social empowerment, and grassroots innovation.

References

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