

Problems in Using Agricultural Information from Television among Farmers in Malaysia

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Received: November 4, 2012 Accepted: May 16, 2013 Online Published: June 28, 2013

doi:10.5539/ass.v9n9p70

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v9n9p70>

The research is financed by Research University Grant Scheme (Scheme 2) sponsored by Universiti Putra Malaysia.

Abstract

Agriculture today must meet the demands of modernization, which include creating productive and innovative products. The success of this sector is aided by the evolution of technologies such as Information Communication Technology (ICT). Though television is categorized as traditional media, it is still considered an essential component of ICT and has been proven to play a crucial role in agricultural development, particularly on its extension process. This paper focuses on the problems faced by the agriculture community in receiving relevant information through television. This is a quantitative study which uses a questionnaire to obtain the data needed. A total of 400 respondents among farmers from four selected states in Peninsular Malaysia were surveyed. The data reveals that the main problems faced are few opportunities to watch television, short air times, and the fact that agriculture programs are not the farmers' main preference in terms of what to watch. Based on the results, a related discussion is conducted and recommendations highlighted; these can assist concerned parties in strengthening their extension strategies.

Keywords: farmers, agricultural information, mass media, television

1. Introduction

The agricultural sector is developing with the assistance of technology tools. This "association" with such technology helps to maximize agriculture outcomes. To further advance this sector, the government has taken an initiative with the tagline "Agriculture is a Business", which aims to attract more people, particularly young people, to become part of the agriculture community. As the number of people involved in the agriculture community increases, it is essential for them to be exposed to relevant and important information, and therefore the government has placed its efforts into providing adequate agriculture information through the media, particularly television. Television remains the most effective traditional medium for disseminating information to the masses (Hassan et al. 2011; Obidike, 2011; Chhachhar et al, 2012). Several factors have contributed to this, and one of these is that most Malaysians possess a television at their home. This statement is proven by statistics provided by the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) (2008), which revealed that 95.2% of the Malaysian population own a television. Furthermore, the ability of television to accelerate the dissemination and sharing of information is undeniable. However, despite its advantages in terms of disseminating information, in order to further strengthen its role it is crucial to identify the problems related to viewing television programs. In tandem with the main attempt of this study, the focus is placed on identifying the various problems faced by farmers in receiving agriculture information through programs aired on television.

1.1 Agriculture Programs on Television

There are a number of television agriculture programs in Malaysia. Most of these, such as *Agrotech*, *Agro*

Journal and *Our Earth* are aired by government television stations (RTM1 & RTM2); one program by Media Prima (TV3) provides the program *Agro-Xplorasi*, which consists of 10 episodes aired over 10 weeks. To produce these programs, their editors cooperated with the Department of Agriculture (DOA). Discussions between the editors and the DOA are conducted prior to the production of the programs so as to ensure that the objectives and vision of each episode are clear and concrete. After these discussions, further collaborations between the editors and the DOA are conducted when the editors need to collect germane information from Agriculture Officers (AO). Typically, all of these programs are aired on Saturday and Sunday for 30 minutes, between 6.00 pm to 6.30 pm or 6.30 pm to 7.00 pm.

2. Methodology

For this research, a quantitative technique was applied by using a questionnaire completed by 400 respondents from agricultural communities in Peninsular Malaysia in the North (Kedah), South (Negeri Sembilan), Central (Selangor) and East (Pahang) regions. Simple random sampling was used to cover four states within the four districts. These four states are Kedah (Sungai Petani), Selangor (Sabak Bernam), Negeri Sembilan (Seremban) and Pahang (Cameron Highlands). The questionnaire was developed by the research team based on previous research, in order to ensure its validity. The data collection was conducted by trained and experienced enumerators, and the average time taken to complete the questionnaire was 20 to 25 minutes. To find suitable respondents for this research, the research team was assisted by agricultural officers and village leaders. Only respondents who have viewed the programs in question were chosen. The data were analyzed using SPSS software to measure descriptive statistics such as percentage and mean.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings reveal that farmers feel they miss the opportunity to watch agriculture programs ($M = 4.16$). As a result, the agriculture information aired becomes useless because it does not reach the target viewers. Some of the farmers also claim that they do not know the exact schedule of agriculture programs. The second highest problem is that the air times of the agricultural programs are too short ($M = 3.50$). The majority of respondents expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the duration of the agriculture programs, as the program lengths offer limited time for viewers to learn and gain something from them. The findings demonstrate a contradiction in relation to the findings of Ali et al. (2011), who found that a short air time duration (30 minutes) is suitable as it will avoid tedium among viewers. The next problem is competition from other genres of program, such as news, entertainment and sport ($M = 3.44$). This problem is a particular challenge in terms of attracting younger age groups to become interested in the agriculture sector as most of them are not using television as a source of information but rather than entertainment media (Kari, 2007).

The unsuitable air time of the television agriculture programs ($M = 3.17$) is another issue identified. The programs will be useless if the information cannot be delivered to the target viewers. According to Ali et al. (2011) and Hassan et al. (2010), viewer ratings significantly increase when programs are aired during prime time, at 9.00 pm. Nazari and Hassan (2011) claim that the issue of appropriate air time is always raised as a major problem faced by farmers. Some television stations use entertainment as a base to attract their viewers; consequently, agriculture programs are aired at unsuitable times and are not in line with farmers' needs and desires.

Another issue faced by farmers is that they rely more on print media such as newspapers, pamphlets, books, magazines, etc. for agriculture information, compared to television ($M = 2.96$). Also highlighted by the results is the fact that agriculture programs are not regularly updated ($M = 2.93$). Furthermore, they emphasize the fact that agriculture programs aired on television do not provide adequate information relevant to agriculture activities ($M = 2.82$). One of the drivers of this problem is that most agriculture programs in Malaysia are diverse in their episode topics, which denotes that the programs do not have any specific focus. Paddy farmers, for example, are expected to have less interest in viewing episodes related to mangoes. Some of the farmers have highlighted the fact that agriculture programs aired on television do not promote them and their colleagues in agriculture sector ($M = 2.57$).

Das (2012) has accentuated on the importance of simple words and proper directions to be included in the television agriculture program. In tandem with this study, most of the television stations, such as RTM, currently present their information using simple and informal language. Therefore, problems regarding understanding the language/terms used do not seem to be relevant for the farmers ($M = 2.10$). The language problem faced in agriculture has been emphasized by Ugboma (2010) and Oladele (2006). Usage of foreign languages will limit their understanding of and interest in pursuing programs. However, the language barrier can be overcome by understanding the ability, education level and needs of farmers.

From the results, it seems that some respondents were also not aware that such agriculture programs are shown on television ($M = 1.60$), which reflects the need for intensive promotion.

Table 1. Problems regarding agriculture programs aired on television

Problems	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Sd
I am aware that agriculture television programs are available, but I always miss the opportunity to watch them.	1.5	4.8	13.8	37.0	43.0	4.16	0.93
The air times of the agriculture television programs are too short.	6.0	16.5	17.0	42.3	18.3	3.50	1.14
I prefer to watch to other programs (news, entertainment, sports) compared to agriculture programs aired on television.	2.3	18.5	25.8	39.8	13.8	3.44	1.01
The air time of the current television agriculture programs is unsuitable.	5.3	22.5	32.3	30.3	9.8	3.17	1.05
I rely more on print media (such as newspapers, pamphlets, etc.) for agriculture information, rather than television.	14.3	21.8	24.5	33.0	6.5	2.96	1.17
Agriculture programs on television usually do not present current information.	6.3	25.8	41.5	21.5	5.0	2.93	0.96
Agriculture programs aired on television do not provide adequate information that is relevant to my agriculture activities.	4.8	37.0	35.3	17.3	5.8	2.82	0.97
Agriculture programs aired on television do not promote me and my friends in agriculture sector.	7.5	48.0	26.3	16.3	2.0	2.57	0.92
I don't understand the language/terms used in the television agriculture programs.	34.8	35.5	17.8	9.8	2.3	2.10	1.05
I was not aware that agriculture programs are aired on television.	56.3	36.3	3.0	3.0	1.5	1.60	0.82

*1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Somewhat Agree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

4. Conclusion

Television is a powerful channel for distributing information to mass viewers. This is an effective way for the government to create knowledgeable farmers. Agricultural information that are disseminated via television can transform the agricultural sector into one which exhibits high levels of productivity. As a conclusion from the data collected in this research, several suggestions can be made, as follows:

4.1 Involvement by Private Parties

Private television stations also need to show initiative by producing and airing more agriculture programs, as these stations already have a good number of viewers. Collaborations between them will increase interest in agriculture among the community, particularly the youths.

Agriculture programs should be diverse in the languages they are presented in. As stations such as NTV7 and TV8 are mainly targeted at Chinese, it is wise for these channels to produce agriculture programs in Mandarin or Cantonese as this will help the Chinese community, who have less understanding of the Malay language, to learn about agriculture. This is important, as this research has found that the majority of people who are successful in the agricultural sector come from the Chinese community.

4.2 Special Channels

Besides maintaining agriculture programs on the current channels, the Malaysian government should consider creating a specific channel that focuses on agricultural information. As unsuitable air times and irrelevant information were raised as primary problems, such programs would offer more flexibility in terms of scheduling

the programs.

4.3 Free CDs

Free CDs relating to the agriculture programs could be disseminated to farmers. In order to do this, agriculture officers should cooperate with television producers to distribute free CDs to farming communities. These CDs could be played and shown at every *warung* (Note 1) within the villages.

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Note

Note 1. Local people refer to coffee stalls as *warung*.

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