

Development of Opinion Leadership Among Farmers as a Result of Adaptive Research

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ABSTRACT

Adaptive research helped the farmer either to develop or to improve their opinion leadership. A great majority of the farmers who were involved in AR were found to give opinion to their neighbours and friends on various aspects of agriculture like plant protection, seeds and sowing, fertilizers and their application and the like in the order mentioned above. It was concluded that the AR polts had served as the media of communication and the farmers who had laid AR trials had acted as opinion leaders. This situation can therefore be taken advantage of in developing opinion leaders and utilise them in the diffusion of innovations.

INTRODUCTION

Adaptive research is a recent introduction in the field of agricultural extension in this country and more so in Tamil Nadu which gives new dimensions to extension activity. This study was under taken to study the development of opinion leadership among farmers who had direct experience with AR trials. Opinion leadership is the characteristic of a person to influence his peers in the adoption of farm innovations. The concept of opinion leadership or the two-step flow of communication was first formulated by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948). In the course of their analysis of 1940 election, they discovered that personal contacts appear to be more effective than the mass media

in influencing voting decisions. From special study conducted as to how farmers came to adopt new farming practices, it was found that many people appear to be more crucially influenced by influentials' or opinion leaders. Katz (1957) stated that opinion leaders and people whom they influence are very much alike and typically belong to some primary groups of family, friends and co-workers. He also concluded that influence is related, among other things, to the personification of certain values of the group to which the leader and his followers belong.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out in Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu. A sample of 69 farmers who were randomly selected formed the subjects of the

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investigation. Pretested structured interview schedule was administered for this study. There are three main methods of measuring opinion leadership *v/z.*, (i) sociometric technique (ii) key informants method and (iii) self designating technique. In the present study the 'Self Designating opinion leadership scale' designed by Rogers (1962) was used to evaluate the opinion leadership of the farmers. In this method, the individual's estimate for his influence on others is deemed sufficient to designate him as influential. The efficiency of this method depends on the accuracy with which a respondent can assess and report his self image on opinion leadership. The scale dealt with two components (i) the respondent's self image as an opinion leader and (ii) the respondent's perception of his past behaviour when interacting with others. The available evidence indicated that the six items self designating opinion leadership scale is reliable, valid and unidimensional.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The farmers who have laid out the trials may be a leader or not. The experience gained through AR trials would have helped the farmers to become opinion leaders or increased the quality of their opinion leadership. To know whether AR trials have any influence on opinion leadership it has been included in the present study. The farmer's responses were obtained as prior to and after the trial to identify the difference in opinion leadership as perceived by them. The scores were summated both

for 'before' and 'after' separately. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean opinion leadership score before and after adaptive research

No. of respondents	Total score		Mean Score		't' value
	Before	After	Before	After	
69	317	406	4.59	5.88	3.176**

** Significant at 0.01 level

The 't' value being highly significant, clearly denotes that there was tangible difference between the scores obtained prior to and after AR experience as perceived by farmers. This in turn reveals that AR had influenced the opinion leadership of the farmers.

Percentage of increase in scores between 'after' and 'prior' to AR was computed into different categories. The details are furnished in the Table 2.

Table 2. Development of opinion leadership

Percentage increase in opinion leadership	Frequency	Per cent
Nil increase	21	30.43
16.33	16	23.19
32.66	10	14.49
50.00	7	10.14
65.33	6	8.71
81.33	5	7.24
100.00	4	5.80
	69	100.00

It is seen that more than 67 per cent of the farmers did not enhance their opinion leadership by their involvement in AR, even though the percentage of increase ranged from 16 to cent per cent. There was no increase in opinion leadership among 30.43 per cent of the farmers in spite of their involvement in AR programme. This can be due to the fact that these farmers were already established opinion leaders.

Opinion leaders and their followers: Opinion leaders are farmers who receive message and in turn pass it on to other fellow farmers. To know whether there is any two step flow of

Table 3. Categories of farmers to whom opinions were given by respondent farmers

Categories	No. of farmers said to have given opinion (N=69)	Percentage
Neighbours	66	95.65
Friends	57	82.61
Relatives	49	71.01
Others	35	50.72

information and if so the audience to whom it is communicated, this aspect was taken up. The data are presented in Table 3.

It is found that 95.65 per cent of opinion leaders had passed on the information to the neighbours followed by 82.61 per cent to friends, 71.01 per cent to their relatives and 50.72 per cent to the farmers of other villages.

Opinion leaders and message :

Through AR, the influentials would have known about the cultivation and technical aspects of new varieties of rice. But the message passed on to the followers may vary according to the needs of the followers. Subjects on which opinions were given are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Subjects on which opinions were offered by farmers in the order of magnitude

Subject	No. of farmers said to have given opinion (n=69)	Percentage
Plant Protection	65	94.20
Seeds and sowing	63	91.30
Fertilizers and its application	61	81.41
Season	38	55.07
Marketing aspects	31	44.93
Loans and advances	25	36.23
Harvesting	17	24.64
Cultural practices	13	18.84
Irrigation	9	13.04
Soils	7	10.14

The percentage analysis showed that the subjects on which opinion was given by more number of opinion leaders were in the order of plant protection, seeds and sowing, fertilizer application and seasons. AR trials though laid out with an idea of taking the suitability of the new varieties or practices had attracted other farmers also

to visit their lands. Thus AR trial plots had acted as good media of communication and consequently the farmers who were involved in this had acted as good opinion leaders.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors are thankful to the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University for having accorded permission to publish this article.

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