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Agriculture and social media: A study of whatsapp use by livestock value chain actors in Nigeria

LINDA ISUYI, THOMAS DAUM, REGINA BIRNER

University of Hohenheim, Inst. of Agric. Sci. in the Tropics (Hans-Ruthenberg-Institute), Germany

Abstract

Agricultural development plays a key role in achieving the SDGs in sub-Saharan Africa, but farmers and other value chain actors often struggle with missing and/or missing information and missing market linkages in rural value chains. Social media – WhatsApp in particular – can enable cheaper and better ways of disseminating information and new ways of integrating stakeholders into agricultural value chains. The study has two main goals. First, based on 196 interviews with actors in the dairy, pig and broiler value chains, we examine the use of social media platforms by actors in the livestock value chain in relation to other smart technologies. Second, we analyse the potential of WhatsApp to overcome some information and marketing bottlenecks in the abovementioned value chain. To do this, we analysed unique data from seven WhatsApp groups created by actors in the livestock value chain in Oyo State, Nigeria using content analytics. The results show that social media is already being used in agricultural value chains, but the usage rate is relatively low compared to other smart technologies due to a lack of courage to post online and a lack of understanding of how the platform works. Findings also showed that WhatsApp groups provided a safe space to show support and solidarity, connect, discuss, learn and share knowledge, information and experiences about farm animals with each other and with experts. However, there are concerns about the credibility, reliability and applicability of the information shared on this platform. The study concludes that social media platforms can play an important role in overcoming information asymmetries and missing market linkage pitfalls among others but have not yet been fully integrated into public agriculture extension. It is therefore imperative to prioritise social media platforms like WhatsApp in agriculture, especially in livestock value chains, by including them in the public extension portfolio, while considering the barriers to social media usage.

Keywords: Agriculture, livestock value chains, Nigeria, social media, WhatsApp