

CONSTRAINTS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF E-CHOUPAL

Simple Jain*

ABSTRACT

e-Choupal aims to provide rural people ready access to specific real time information and customized knowledge to rural people in their native language. A constant feedback with respect to implementation of the programme is necessary to strengthen the programme and to provide more benefits to the rural people. Besides, it also helps in ensuring that work is being executed properly and that the means employed for its execution are adequate and appropriate. The present study was conducted in four districts of Rajasthan. The sample consisted of 160 women and 160 men users and personal interview technique was used for collecting data. The data were analyzed by using mean percent score. The findings of the study clearly indicated that technical constraints (37.3 MPS) were the major restraints faced by users of e-Choupal. This was followed by personal and family constraints (37.0 MPS), Resource constraint (29.4 MPS) and operational constraints (28.5 MPS). Men faced technical and resource constraints to more extent whereas women realized personal and family constraints mostly. Women lack the knowledge and utilized e-Choupal services to less extent, hence were less aware about technical aspects of e-Choupal.

INTRODUCTION

The rural people typically lack access to information vital to their lives and livelihoods. Thus information and communication activities are a fundamental element of any rural development activity (Patil, Jayawant and Ambedkar, 2006). For accelerating the development process there is a need to re-think about the alternate means of technology transfer. Information technology has the capability to bridge the gap between the have and have-nots. ITC (Indian Tobacco Company) initiated e-Choupal project to empower rural people of India in 2000. e-Choupal aims to provide rural people ready access to specific real time information and customized knowledge to rural people in their native language. By doing so, e-Choupal wants to improve the farmers' decision making ability, thereby helping them to better align their farm output to the projected demand in Indian and International markets. The e-Choupal system comes from bridging the information and service gap of rural India. Services which are provided under the umbrella of e-Choupal are agriculture, health, insurance, education and entertainment. The effectiveness of these services depends upon how well they are being utilized by rural people. The success and failure of e-Choupal can be

shown by assessing the reaction of the people involved in it. A constant feedback with respect to implementation of the programme is necessary to strengthen the programme and to provide more benefits to the rural people. Besides, it also helps in ensuring that work is being executed properly and that the means employed for its execution are adequate and appropriate.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in four purposively selected districts namely Ganga Nagar, Kota, Bharatpur, and Chittorgarh of Rajasthan where e-Choupal is in operation. Two panchayat samities from each district and two villages from each panchayat samiti were selected on random basis for the purpose of investigation. The sample consisted of 160 rural women and 160 rural men who are users of e-Choupal. Thus, the total sample was 320 rural people. Interview technique was used to collect data from the respondents. The data were analyzed by using mean percent score (MPS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The constraints perceived by the users in smooth functioning of the e-Choupal were grouped into four broad areas viz: personal and family, tech-

* Research Scholar, Faculty of Management Studies, Mohan Lal Sukhadia University, Udaipur (Rajasthan).

nical, resource and operational constraints. The results are presented under the following heads

Personal and family constraints

Perusal of the Table 1 reveals that users perceived the low level of education as the main problem in utilization of e-Choupal services with 59.7 MPS. This followed by lack of time (52.7 MPS) and excess family work (50.3 MPS) due to which they could not access information from e-Choupal. The other constraints like fatigue and debility, negligence of farm activities and lack of family support were reported to a lesser extent by users with 23.3, 20.3 and 17.2 MPS, respectively.

A close look at data of men and women users individually, lack of time (90.6 MPS), unable to get complete information due to low level of education (83.1 MPS) and excess of family work (78.1 MPS) were the most important constraints expressed by women in utilizing e-Choupal services. Whereas none of the personal and family constraints faced by men to high extent. The possible reason might be they have multiple responsibilities to bear and are not allowed for participating and availing services of any new programme.

Table 1: Mean percent scores of personal and family constraints faced by e-Choupal users **n =320**

S.No.	Constraints	MPS			Rank
		Men n =160	Women n=160	Pooled	
1.	Excess of family work	22.5	78.1	50.3	III
2.	Lack of Family support	0.0	34.4	17.2	VI
3.	Low level of education	33.8	83.1	59.7	I
4.	Lack of time	14.7	90.6	52.7	II
5.	Farm activities are not attended properly	12.5	28.1	20.3	V
6.	Due to fatigue and debility no extra work can be taken up.	9.1	37.5	23.3	IV

Technical constraints

It is evident from the data in table 2 that insufficient numbers of computers (93.8 MPS) was the major technical restraint in utilization of e-Choupal services expressed by the users. Respondents further reported that lack of proper computer training (47.8 MPS) and inefficient functioning of computers (37.5 MPS) due to various reasons were also major

hurdles to avail e-Choupal services.

With respect to the number of computers, users reported that as per the project mandate only one computer was installed at an e-Choupal centre at Sanchalak's house which was in-sufficient and many a times it did not function properly. They further stressed that training in use of computer was given to Sanchalak only thus they are unskilled in use of

Table 2: Mean percent scores of Technical constraints faced by e-Choupal users **n=320**

S.No.	Constraints	MPS			Rank
		Men (n =160)	Women(n=160)	Pooled	
1.	Inefficient functioning of computers	53.1	21.9	37.5	III
2.	Insufficient number of computers	100.0	87.5	93.8	I
3.	Lack of evaluation by company	33.8	6.3	20.1	VI
4.	Difficulty in viewing information by more number of persons at a time due to small size of screen of computer	37.8	6.9	22.4	IV
5.	Lack of training in use of computer	70.6	25.0	47.8	II
6.	Improper functioning of solar batteries due to inefficiency of sunlight	25.0	12.5	18.8	VII
7.	Lack of practical guidance by the company	32.2	9.4	20.8	V

computers. Thus, efforts need to be made to upgrade the skills of users for efficient use of computers and also increase the number of computers in the village for effective use of e-Choupal facilities.

The other constraints were difficulty in viewing information by more number of persons at a time due to small computer screen size (22.4 MPS), lack of practical guidance (20.8 MPS) and evaluation (20.1 MPS) by company and improper functioning of solar batteries (used for computer power) due to insufficient sunlight (18.8 MPS). The respondents emphasized that due to frequent problem of electricity company has used solar battery for proper functioning of computers but sunlight posed a problem where solar batteries are placed. Regarding respondent wise data, men realized technical constraints to a high extent than women as women utilized e-Choupal services very less thus they even did not possess any awareness about these constraints.

Resource Constraints

The important resource constraints as expressed by the users were unavailability of area specific information (40.9 MPS), inadequate information

in certain areas (32.9 MPS), lack of confidence (27.4 MPS), lack of timely information (26.8 MPS) and lack of need based information (18.8 MPS). (Table 3) The users emphasized that few farming practices recommended by e-Choupal on website is not suitable for them. They further expressed that sometimes market price of grains was not updated on website, thus, they faced problems in selling of their product.

With regard to the individual responses, men expressed that unavailability of area specific information in agriculture (75.6 MPS) and inadequate information in certain areas (59.4 MPS) were the main constraints whereas women reported lack of confidence (45.3 MPS) was main resource constraints which hinder the proper utilization of e-Choupal services. (Table 3)

Operational Constraints

Under the operational constraints, No direct access to e-Choupal website (96.9 MPS) was emerged as the most important constraints realized by the respondents. They reported that only *Sanchalak* has direct access to website thus they were fully dependent

Table 3: Mean percent scores of Resource constraints faced by e-Choupal users n=320

S.No.	Constraints	MPS			Rank
		Men(n=160)	Women(n=160)	Pooled	
1.	Inadequate information in certain area	59.4	6.3	32.9	II
2.	Lack of need based information	21.9	15.6	18.8	V
3.	Lack of confidence of users	9.4	45.3	27.4	III
4.	Information is not given in time	44.1	9.4	26.8	IV
5.	Unavailability of area specific information in agriculture	75.6	6.3	40.9	I

Table 4: Mean percent scores of operational constraints faced by e-Choupal users n=320

S.No.	Constraints	MPS			Rank
		Men(n=160)	Women(n=160)	Pooled	
1.	No cooperation from Sanchalak	6.3	8.8	7.6	VI
2.	Inefficiency of sanchalak in handling computers	18.1	12.5	15.3	III
3.	Lack of technical knowledge of computers	53.8	96.9	75.4	II
4.	Bad rapport of Sanchalak in village	0.0	0.0	0.0	
5.	Biased behavior of Sanchalak	12.5	15.6	14.1	IV
6.	Lack of coordination between Sanchalak and ITC	9.4	0.0	4.7	VII
7.	No direct access of users to e-Choupal website	100.0	93.8	96.9	I
8.	Inadequate numbers of Sanchalak.	15.0	12.5	13.8	V

dent on him to get information from e-Choupal website. The users also faced the problem of lack of technical knowledge of computers (75.4 MPS) and expressed that they could not utilize e-Choupal services. The other problems faced by users were inefficiency of *Sanchalak* (14.1 MPS), inadequate numbers of *Sanchalak* (13.8 MPS), no cooperation from *Sanchalak* (7.6 MPS) and lack of coordination between *Sanchalak* and ITC (4.7 MPS). The users expressed that *Sanchalak* was looking after the project (e-Choupal) at village level, but due to lack of adequate knowledge about e-Choupal and inefficiency in handling of computers, he was unable to provide the required consultancy. The users also expressed that the *Sanchalak's* behaviour was biased sometimes, they thus faced difficulty in getting timely assistance from him as and when needed. They further

stated that one *Sanchalak* has to supervise 5-6 villages and it was difficult for him to pay required attention to all the villages.

Overall constraints faced by rural people

A close look at over all data reveal that technical constraint was the major constraint with 37.3 MPS, followed by personal and family constraints where 37.0 MPS was assigned by users. Resource constraints stood at the third rank (29.4 MPS) which was followed by operational constraints (28.5 MPS). The table further shows that men faced technical and resource constraints to more extent whereas women realized personal and family constraints mostly. Women lack the knowledge and utilized e-Choupal services to less extent, hence were less aware about technical aspects of e-Choupal.

Table: 5 Rank wise distribution of the constraints realized by the e-Choupal users. n=320

S.No.	Constraints	MPS			Rank
		Men (n=160)	Women (n=160)	Pooled	
1.	Personal and family	15.4	58.6	37.0	II
2.	Technical	50.4	24.2	37.3	I
3.	Resource	42.1	16.6	29.4	III
4.	Operational	26.9	30.0	28.5	IV

The major constraints faced by e-Choupal users were insufficient number of computers, lack of technical knowledge of computers, no direct access to e-Choupal website and low level of education. Thus there is a need to incorporate modification and alteration in existing project to make it more viable for rural community.

CONCLUSION

e-Choupal was implemented to cater the needs of farmers in rural India. Based on the investigation, it was found that there were some deficiencies which hindered in effective implementation of the project. To overcome these deficiencies and to make the project more effective and worthwhile, some of the recommendations have been worked out to make the required amendments in the e-Choupal so that the objective of rural development could be achieved in better way.

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