EFFECTIVENESS OF WHATSAPP IN FACILITATING FARMER GROUP COMMUNICATION IN NORTH SUMATRA'S WONOSARI VILLAGE

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis efektivitas penggunaan media sosial WhatsApp dalam komunikasi kelompok tani di Desa Wonosari, Kecamatan Tanjung Morawa, Sumatera Utara. Dalam era digital, penggunaan media baru telah mengubah cara berkomunikasi, termasuk dalam sektor pertanian. Kelompok tani sebagai komunitas berbasis agraris mulai memanfaatkan WhatsApp untuk koordinasi, berbagi informasi pertanian, serta mempermudah komunikasi dengan Penyuluh Pertanian Lapangan (PPL). Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan kajian pustaka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa WhatsApp memberikan efektivitas yang signifikan dalam komunikasi kelompok tani, terutama dalam penyebaran informasi yang lebih cepat, koordinasi yang lebih efisien, serta peningkatan keterlibatan anggota. Namun, terdapat kendala dalam adopsi teknologi, khususnya bagi anggota kelompok tani yang lebih tua dan kurang terbiasa dengan media digital. Selain itu, tantangan lain adalah adanya penyebaran konten yang kurang relevan dalam grup WhatsApp. Untuk mengatasi hambatan tersebut, diperlukan pelatihan penggunaan media sosial bagi anggota yang belum terbiasa serta pengelolaan grup yang lebih sistematis, Dengan adanya dukungan dari pemerintah dan PPL. Studi ini memberikan wawasan mengenai perubahan perilaku komunikasi di sektor pertanian akibat adopsi teknologi baru dan implikasinya dalam pengembangan kelompok tani di era digital.

Kata kunci: WhatsApp, komunikasi kelompok tani, difusi inovasi, media sosial, pertanian digital.

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the use of WhatsApp social media in farmer group communication in Wonosari Village, Tanjung Morawa District, North Sumatra. In the digital era, the use of new media has changed the way we communicate, including in the agricultural sector. Farmer groups as agrarian-based communities have begun to use WhatsApp to coordinate, share agricultural information, and facilitate communication with Field Agricultural Extension Workers (PPL). This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with in-depth interviews, observations, and literature review methods. The results show that WhatsApp provides significant effectiveness in farmer group communication, especially in faster information dissemination, more efficient coordination, and increased member engagement. However, there are obstacles in the adoption of technology, especially for members of farmer groups who are older and less familiar with digital media. In addition, another challenge is the spread of less relevant content in WhatsApp groups. To overcome these obstacles, training in the use of social media for members who are not used to it is needed as well as more systematic group management, with support from the government and PPL. This study provides insight into the changes in communication behavior in the agricultural sector due to the adoption of new technologies and their implications in the development of farmer groups in the digital era.

Keywords: WhatsApp, farmer group communication, innovation diffusion, social media, digital agriculture.

INTRODUCTION

Wonosari Village, Tanjung Morawa District is known as a village for farmers because the majority of the community's income comes from the agricultural sector. This makes this village attract attention, especially in seeing how farmers there are developing in utilizing new communication technology or new media (Simamora et al., 2024). In the context of the current digital era, changes in people's behavior, especially in the way of communication, determine whether or not a village develops in realizing a better quality of life. Therefore, this study focuses on farmer groups in Wonosari Village to explore changes in their communication behavior in the agricultural sector due to the use of new media (Mahasiswa & Kpi, 2024). Moreover, in the current condition, WhatsApp has become the most frequently used communication media by the community, especially

farmers in Wonosari village. WhatsApp is used as an internal communication tool by farmers because it is easy to use and can also expand communication through WhatsApp groups to disseminate important information related to agriculture.

Social change, including changes in communication behavior, is a process that includes "changes in social norms, social values, social interactions, patterns of behavior, social organizations, societal institutions, power structures, responsibilities, and authority." In a community, such as a farmer group, social change can have an impact on how individuals and groups interact, share information, and utilize new technologies to support their activities (Fitria et al., 2021). Public communication in da'wah that utilizes social media in its delivery can provide opportunities for communicators and communicators to interact with each other directly, reach a wider audience, and the process of delivering da'wah messages is fast and efficient (Hanifah et al., 2024).

In this case, the success of societies to adapt to social change is highly dependent on their ability to create harmonious, mutually supportive, and innovative environments (Marysca et al., 2021). Islamic Broadcasting Communication (KPI) is a discipline that studies how the delivery of da'wah messages and Islamic information is carried out through various media. In the context of farmer groups, KPI has a role in supporting the dissemination of Islamic-based agricultural information, using social media such as WhatsApp to strengthen communication and coordination (Zaimasuri, Wulan Sucika, Anna Gustina, 2024).

In the case of the people of Wonosari Village, the use of new media by farmer groups still needs further research. The use of WhatsApp is not rare among farmers in Wonosari village, but the challenge is that many elderly residents do not understand how to use smartphones, let alone the WhatsApp application. Does this technology bring significant benefits in improving communication and farming effectiveness, or does it not have a significant impact? This study aims to analyze how new media affects changes in communication behavior of farmer groups in Wonosari Village, as well as identify benefits and challenges that arise in the context of agriculture. Thus, this research is expected to provide new

insights into the role of communication technology in supporting the agricultural sector in the digital era (Atmodjo, 2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory was first popularized by Everett Rogers in 1964 through his book entitled "*Diffusion of Innovations*". In this theory, Rogers explained that diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through a specific channel within a certain period of time within a social system (Muntaha & Amin, 2023). This process involves disseminating information about new ideas that were initially considered subjective, but through social construction, the meaning of the innovation evolves to be more objective (Nisrokha, 2020).

In general, innovation diffusion can be interpreted as a social process in which new ideas are disseminated and adopted by society. This innovation was initially seen as subjective, but with the passage of time and through social interaction, the innovation becomes part of the norm or habit in society, therefore this research is very suitable to strengthen the theory of Everett Rogers in which this research can help farmers out there who still do not want any changes or technological innovations, especially communication through social media whatsapp which tends to be used a lot or various such as activities, organizations, and also among the community (Yusri, 2020).

The main components in the diffusion of innovation include several aspects. Innovation refers to new ideas, practices, or objects that are considered useful, such as the use of WhatsApp as a social communication medium. Communication channels are ways of communicating innovations to community members, such as through social media, training, or group discussions (Ahmadi, 2020). Time is also an important factor in the innovation decision process which includes the stages of awareness, interest, evaluation, experimentation, and adoption. Adoption rates vary between groups, with early adopters tending to be quick to embrace innovation, while laggards are typically the slowest to embrace change. The social system includes a group of individuals or communities with a common goal, such as a group of farmers in Wonosari Village who utilize social communication technology (Rahartri, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research when viewed in its type includes qualitative descriptive research, which is research that only describes the phenomenon that occurs in detail which aims to explain aspects that are related to the observed phenomenon and explain the existing problems, both natural and man-made phenomena (Rahmadani & Azhar, 2021). These phenomena can be in the form of forms, activities, characteristics, changes, similarities, and differences between each other. This method focuses on the natural state of the research object, focusing on in-depth interviews, observations, documentation and also literature review to strengthen this research where data is collected without engineering, with the aim of obtaining thorough and in-depth information. In this study, the researcher applied a mentality of non-statistical data analysis techniques by using qualitative descriptive analysis, especially describing the symptoms and events of an event (Marysca et al., 2021). This research aims to explain and describe problems in a systematic, factual, and accurate manner. This approach is used to understand the nature, facts, and dynamics that occur in Wonosari Village, Tanjung Morawa District.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

The farmer group in Wonosari Village was initially formed to make it easier for farmers to get subsidized fertilizers and as an extension of the government. Currently, farmer groups have collaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture and are under the auspices of the government (Yosia Yigibalom et al., 2020). Farmer group activities include daily activities such as farming and scheduled weekly inspections (Damayanti et al., 2024). The media has only begun to be actively used in the last three years under the direction of PPL (Field Agricultural Extension Officer). This study aims to understand changes in the communication behavior of farmer groups in Wonosari Village, Tanjung Morawa District, in the new media era. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with the heads of farmer groups and direct observation in hamlet 4. This farmer group consists of 68 members who have taken advantage of new media for communication, although they still face some obstacles.

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Gambar 1.1 Koordinasi Lapangan Antara PPL (Penyuluh Pertanian Lapangan) dengan
Kelompok Tani Desa Wonosari
(Sumber: Ketua Kelompok Tani Dusun 4)

Before using new media, communication was traditionally carried out door-to-door, word of mouth, or at village events such as wirid. After using new media, information is now faster and more efficient conveyed through WhatsApp groups, although direct communication is still carried out for older members. The media used include WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube to share information and tutorials (Rosmilawati, 2024). There are several major obstacles in the use of new media. Many older members find it difficult to use social media such as WhatsApp, and irrelevant content is often sent to the group, causing inconvenience. To overcome this, the head of the farmer group continues to visit members who have not been able to use new media to convey information directly (Dionesius et al., 2024).

New media has created a platform to increase familiarity between members through digital communication. Minor conflicts, such as inconvenience due to irrelevant content, indicate the need for better group management (Sugihono et al., 2024). The use of WhatsApp and YouTube reflects the concept of "mediated social interaction" in new media theory, where technology becomes a bridge for faster and more efficient social interaction (Widyastuti et al., 2024). New media make it easier to disseminate information and supervision carried out by PPL. Evidence such as screenshots of chats on WhatsApp shows this effectiveness. New

media also increases familiarity between members by providing a space to share stories. But sometimes there are misunderstandings or inconveniences due to irrelevant content in the group.
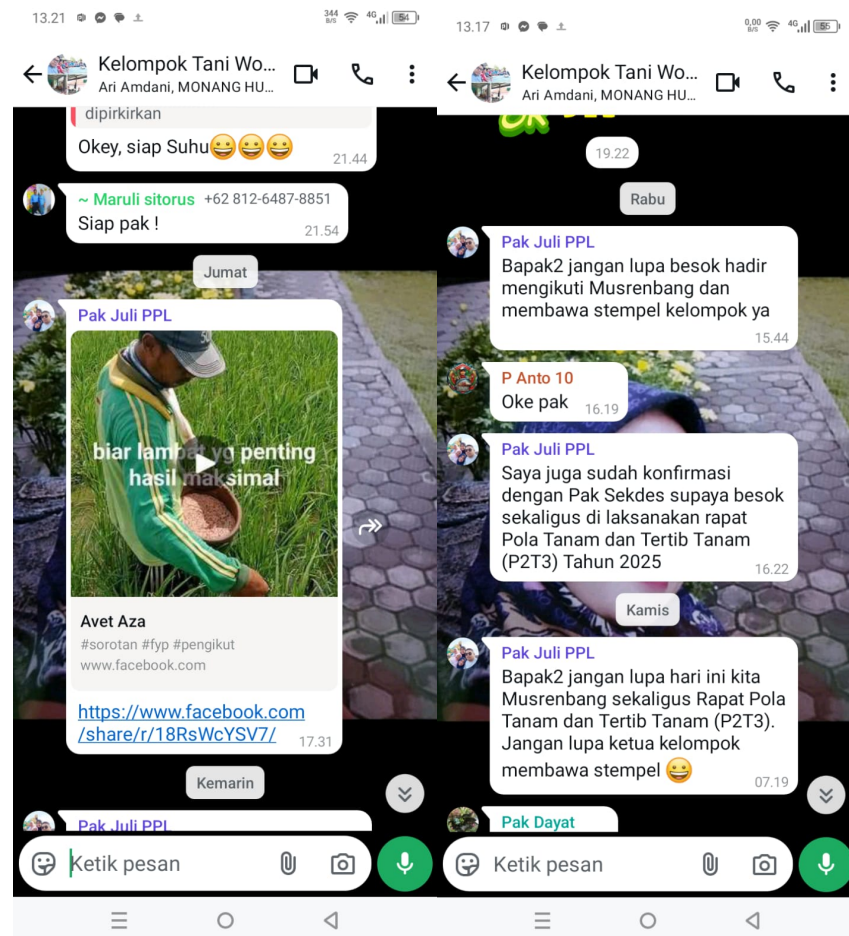
Gambar 1.2 Screenshoot Room Chat Grup Kelompok Tani Desa Wonosari
(Sumber: Ketua Kelompok Tani Dusun 4 Desa Wonosari)

To overcome barriers in the adoption of new media, the government and PPL can play an important role in providing technology use training for older members. Better group management, such as relevant content guides, can improve communication effectiveness (Yusri, 2020). This research provides an overview of the communication dynamics of farmer groups in the new media era. With the right support, new media have great potential to improve coordination and efficiency in farmer groups.

Discussion

In Islam, communication plays a very important role in conveying correct and useful information (Anggraini, 2024). This study highlights the use of WhatsApp by farmer groups, which is in line with the principles of Islamic Broadcasting Communication (KPI). This illustrates how the media can be used to convey positive messages and support the benefit of the people. In the Qur'an Surah Al-Hujurat verse 6, Allah SWT says:

$$\text{يٰٓاَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوْٓا اِنْ جَاۤءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَاٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوْٓا اَنْ تُصِيْبُوْا قَوْمًا ۢبِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُوْا عَلٰى مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نٰدِمِيْنَ (٦)}$$

"O you who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with news, then examine (the truth), so that you do not bring a calamity upon a people without knowing the true circumstances, which will make you regret your deeds."

This verse teaches that in disseminating information, it is important to clarify and verify. In the context of this research, farmer groups must ensure that the agricultural information they receive through WhatsApp is accurate and trustworthy. In addition, in Surah An-Nahl verse 125, Allah SWT says:

$$\text{اُدْعُ اِلٰى سَبِيْلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِيْ هِيَ اَحْسَنُۗ اِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ اَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيْلِهٖ وَهُوَ اَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِيْنَ (١٢٥)}$$

"Call (people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and refute them in a better way."

This verse shows that the delivery of information, including among farmer groups, must be done with wisdom and wise methods. In this study, WhatsApp is used as a means to share useful agricultural information, facilitate productive discussions, and strengthen communication networks between farmers and agricultural extension workers (Azizah, 2024). From a KPI perspective, the use of WhatsApp by farmer groups reflects the theory of innovation diffusion, where new technologies are gradually adopted by the community (Aisyah et al., 2024). The role of agricultural extension

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workers in guiding farmers in the use of social media can be likened to the concept of tabligh (conveying the truth) in Islam.

Thus, this study not only views WhatsApp as an ordinary communication tool, but also as a da'wah medium in the agricultural realm. The dissemination of correct, educative, and useful information in accordance with the principles of Islamic communication is the main focus of this study (Amelia & Nasrulloh, 2024). The internet is one of the results of advances in man-made science and technology, various functions of the internet such as a place for cyber social media communities, social media is a service that has an internet software system that allows users to interact and share data with other users on a large scale (Rahmadani & Azhar, 2021).

Social media has become a very popular platform among Indonesians, providing various ways to communicate, express themselves, and access information quickly. The word behavior in the English dictionary is called "*behave*" and "*conduct*". *Behave* means behavior, while *conduct* means behavior, behavior, attitude, character, leading, and demanding (Fifi Asmawati, 2023). So according to the review above, behavior change is the scope that relates actions to the behavior of a person in behaving, whether it is in the social environment of society or a certain group that causes someone to assess ourselves personally to get value in the community environment. Communication technology has developed with the times, making communication innovation easier and more practical (Makhfuziyah et al., 2024).

In the classification of adopters, PPL plays a role in assisting farmers in understanding and utilizing the use of new media. Young members who are more open to technology become early adopters, while new members who adopt after seeing the success of other users fall into the late majority category (Nasution & Marlina, 2024). Older members who still rely on traditional communication fall into the category of laggards. Age factors and traditional habits are significant barriers to technology adoption, according to this theory . It was adopted by changes in communication in the farmer group of Wonosari Village following the stage of innovation diffusion, which started from awareness after directions from PPL about the use of new media. Young members are starting to show interest in new media and compare the benefits to traditional means. WhatsApp groups are

used as a test in conveying information before most of the members end up (Lubis et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the use of WhatsApp social media in communication of farmer groups in Wonosari Village has a positive impact on increasing the effectiveness of communication and coordination. Prior to the use of social media, communication within farmer groups was traditionally done through face-to-face meetings and verbal methods, which were often time-consuming and inefficient. However, after the adoption of WhatsApp and other social media, the dissemination of information became faster, accessibility increased, and coordination between members was more effective.

However, this study also found several obstacles in the implementation of social media. Key challenges include the digital divide between young and old, a lack of technological understanding among senior members, and potential communication disruptions due to less relevant content in WhatsApp groups. To overcome this obstacle, education and training efforts are needed from the government or related parties to increase the digital literacy of farmers so that the use of technology can be more optimal.

The results of this study confirm the relevance of the Innovation Diffusion theory in the context of farmer group communication. The social media adoption process follows a pattern of awareness, interest, evaluation, experimentation, and adoption stages, where farmers gradually begin to embrace new technologies after seeing the benefits firsthand. With better management and support from other parties, social media can become a more effective tool in supporting communication and development of the agricultural sector in the digital era.

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