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## Digital Extension Services: Revolutionizing Farmer Advisory Systems

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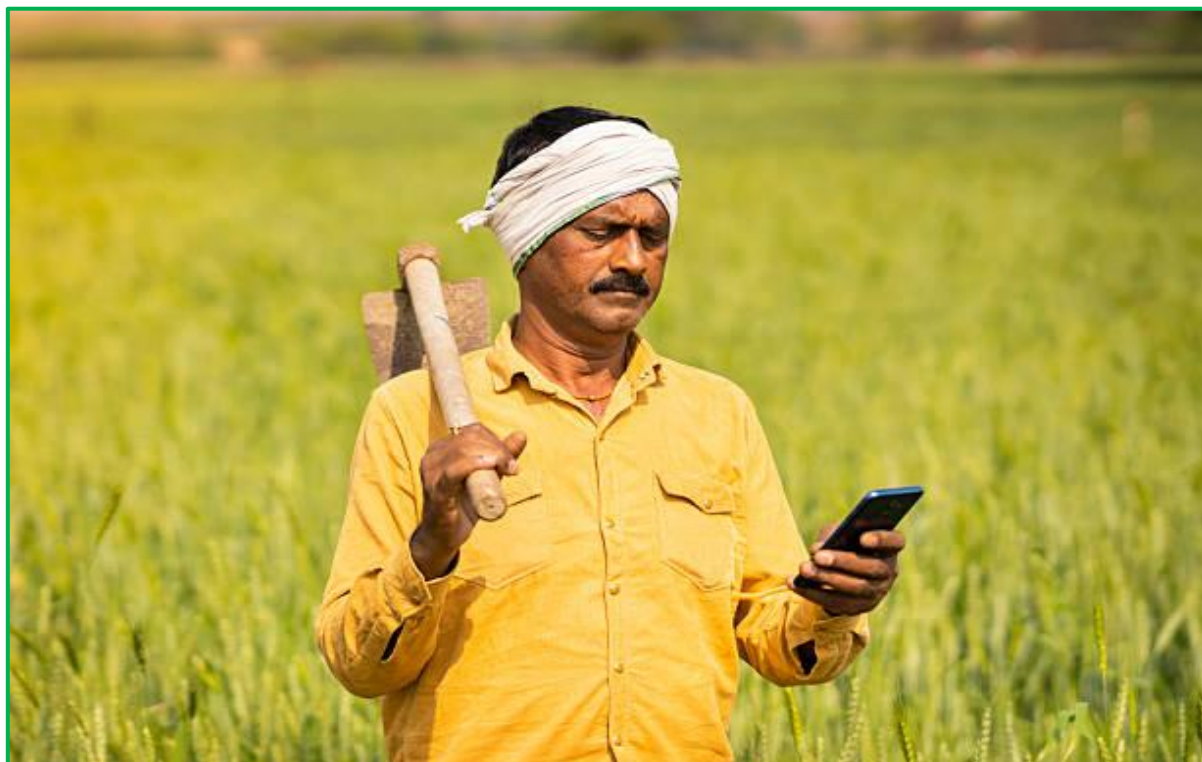
Agriculture has always been a cornerstone of economic development and food security across the world. In many developing countries, including India, agriculture provides employment and livelihood opportunities to a large segment of the population. However, modern agriculture faces numerous challenges such as climate change, declining natural resources, pest and disease outbreaks, fluctuating market prices, and increasing production costs. These challenges require farmers to make informed decisions based on accurate and timely information. Consequently, agricultural advisory services have become an essential component of sustainable agricultural development.

Traditionally, agricultural extension services acted as the primary mechanism for transferring knowledge and technologies from research institutions to farmers. Extension personnel conducted field visits, organized demonstrations, arranged training programs, and interacted directly with farming communities. While these methods significantly contributed to agricultural development, they were often constrained by inadequate manpower, limited resources, and poor outreach in remote areas. As farming systems became increasingly complex, traditional extension approaches struggled to meet the growing information needs of farmers.

The rapid advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has transformed the agricultural landscape and created new opportunities for knowledge dissemination. Digital Extension Services (DES) have emerged as innovative platforms that use digital technologies to provide farmers with timely, relevant, and location-specific information. These services utilize mobile phones, internet-based applications, artificial intelligence, remote sensing, cloud computing, social media platforms, and data analytics to deliver agricultural advisories directly to farmers.

Digital extension services represent a paradigm shift from conventional top-down information delivery models to interactive, data-driven, and farmer-centric advisory systems. By facilitating real-time communication and personalized recommendations, these services help farmers improve productivity, optimize resource use, reduce risks, and enhance farm

profitability. As countries increasingly embrace digital transformation, digital extension services are playing a crucial role in strengthening agricultural innovation systems and supporting sustainable rural development.



**Farmer Accessing Digital Advisory Services through a Smartphone**

### **Evolution of Agricultural Extension Systems**

Agricultural extension systems have evolved significantly over the years in response to changing agricultural needs and technological developments. In the early stages of agricultural development, knowledge transfer primarily relied on interpersonal communication between extension officers and farmers. Agricultural experts visited villages, conducted demonstrations, distributed educational materials, and provided technical guidance regarding crop cultivation, pest management, and resource utilization.

The traditional extension model played a crucial role during the Green Revolution by promoting the adoption of high-yielding varieties, fertilizers, and improved farming practices. However, the effectiveness of this model gradually declined due to increasing farmer populations, shrinking extension budgets, and a shortage of extension personnel. In many developing countries, a single extension worker was often responsible for serving hundreds or even thousands of farmers, making personalized advisory services difficult to provide.

The emergence of radio and television introduced new channels for agricultural communication. Farmers gained access to agricultural information through educational broadcasts and specialized farming programs. Although these technologies expanded outreach, communication remained largely one-way, limiting interaction between farmers and experts.

The proliferation of mobile phones and internet connectivity marked the beginning of a new era in agricultural extension. Mobile-based advisory systems enabled the delivery of weather forecasts, market information, and farming recommendations directly to farmers. The adoption of smartphones further enhanced access to multimedia content, mobile applications, and online advisory platforms.

Today, digital extension systems integrate advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Remote Sensing, Big Data Analytics, and the Internet of Things (IoT). These technologies enable the provision of real-time, location-specific, and personalized recommendations. Consequently,

agricultural advisory services have become more responsive, efficient, and capable of addressing the diverse needs of modern farmers.

**Table 1: Comparison between Traditional and Digital Extension Services**

Parameter	Traditional Extension	Digital Extension
Mode of Delivery	Face-to-face interactions	Digital platforms and mobile applications
Information Speed	Slow	Real-time
Geographical Coverage	Limited	Wide-scale coverage
Cost of Delivery	High	Relatively low
Personalization	Limited	Highly personalized
Accessibility	Restricted by location	Accessible anywhere
Feedback Mechanism	Delayed	Instant and interactive

### Concept of Digital Extension Services

Digital Extension Services refer to the use of digital technologies and communication platforms for delivering agricultural information, advisory services, and technical support to farmers. These services aim to improve the accessibility, quality, and effectiveness of agricultural extension by leveraging digital tools to facilitate knowledge sharing and decision-making.

The primary objective of digital extension services is to empower farmers with timely and accurate information that enables them to improve productivity and profitability while minimizing risks. Unlike traditional extension systems that depend largely on physical interactions, digital extension services provide continuous access to information through multiple channels such as mobile phones, web portals, social media platforms, chatbots, voice-based systems, and mobile applications.

Digital extension services are characterized by their ability to deliver location-specific recommendations. By integrating data from weather stations, satellites, soil sensors, and farm records, these systems generate customized advisories tailored to individual farm conditions. Farmers can receive guidance regarding crop selection, planting schedules, irrigation management, nutrient application, pest control, and market opportunities.

Another important feature of digital extension services is interactivity. Farmers can communicate directly with experts, seek clarifications, share field observations, and provide feedback. This two-way communication enhances learning and promotes greater adoption of recommended practices. As a result, digital extension services contribute to the development of more inclusive, participatory, and effective agricultural knowledge systems.

### Components of Digital Extension Services

The effectiveness of digital extension services depends on several interconnected components that facilitate the collection, processing, dissemination, and utilization of agricultural information. These components work together to create a comprehensive advisory ecosystem capable of supporting informed decision-making among farmers.

**Table 2: Major Components of Digital Extension Services**

Component	Function
Data Collection	Gathering field-level information through sensors, surveys, and satellites
Data Processing	Analysis and interpretation of agricultural data
Knowledge Repository	Storage of technical information and recommendations
Communication Platform	Dissemination of advisories through digital channels
Feedback System	Collection of farmer responses and field observations
Monitoring and Evaluation	Assessment of service effectiveness

Data collection forms the foundation of digital extension systems. Information is gathered from multiple sources, including weather stations, remote sensing platforms, soil sensors, field surveys, and farmer-generated data. This information is then processed using advanced analytical tools and algorithms to generate meaningful insights.

The processed information is stored in digital knowledge repositories that contain scientific recommendations, best management practices, and localized agricultural content. Communication platforms such as mobile applications, SMS services, social media channels, and web portals facilitate the delivery of advisories to farmers. Feedback mechanisms allow farmers to interact with experts, report field conditions, and seek additional support, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of advisory services.

### **Technologies Driving Digital Extension Services**

The success of digital extension services is largely attributed to the integration of advanced digital technologies. These technologies have significantly enhanced the speed, accuracy, and reach of agricultural advisory systems.

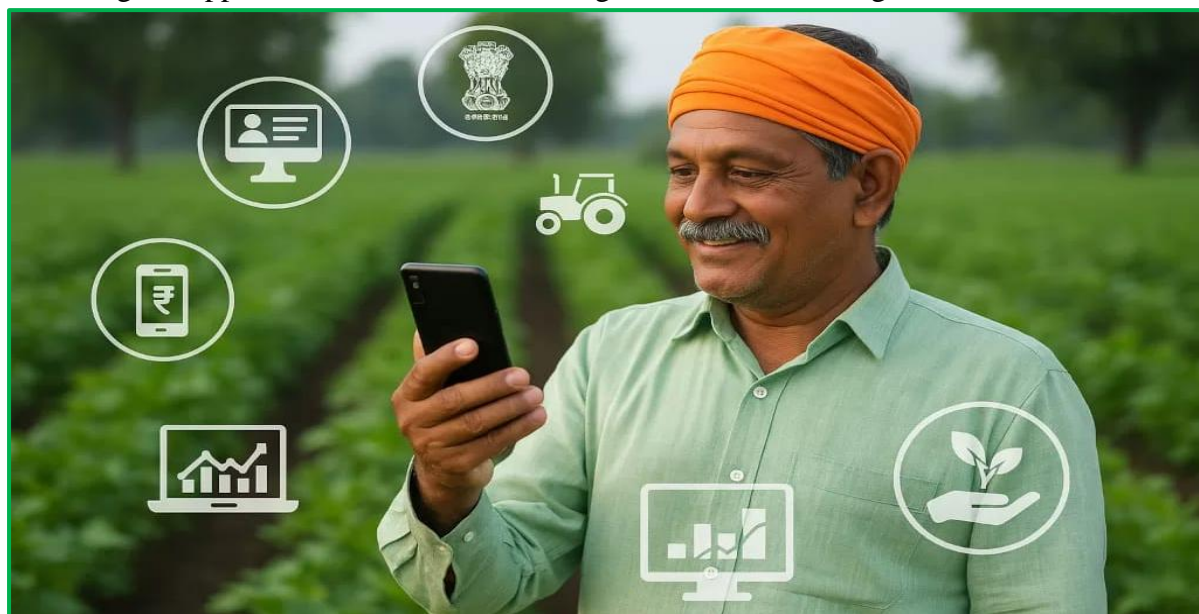
Mobile phones are among the most widely used technologies in digital agriculture. Through SMS alerts, voice messages, and mobile applications, farmers can access weather forecasts, pest warnings, crop advisories, and market information. The widespread availability of mobile devices has enabled extension agencies to reach large numbers of farmers efficiently and cost-effectively.

Artificial Intelligence has emerged as a transformative technology in agricultural advisory systems. AI-powered platforms can analyze large volumes of agricultural data and generate predictive recommendations. For example, machine learning algorithms can identify crop diseases from images, forecast pest outbreaks, estimate crop yields, and recommend appropriate management practices.

The Internet of Things (IoT) enables the collection of real-time farm data through interconnected devices such as soil moisture sensors, weather stations, and smart irrigation systems. These devices provide valuable information that supports precision agriculture and informed decision-making.

Remote sensing and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) facilitate the monitoring of crop health, soil conditions, and environmental changes. Satellite imagery and aerial surveys provide critical information for drought assessment, pest surveillance, yield estimation, and land-use planning.

Big Data Analytics allows agricultural organizations to process and interpret vast amounts of information from multiple sources. By identifying patterns and trends, big data technologies support more accurate forecasting and decision-making.



**Technologies Driving Digital Extension Services**

## Benefits and Impact of Digital Extension Services on Farmers

Digital extension services have transformed agricultural advisory systems by making information more accessible, timely, and relevant. One of the most significant advantages of these services is their ability to provide real-time information to farmers. Traditional extension systems often involve delays in information dissemination due to logistical constraints and limited manpower. In contrast, digital platforms can instantly deliver weather forecasts, pest alerts, market updates, and management recommendations directly to farmers through mobile phones and internet-based applications.

Another major benefit is improved decision-making. Farmers can access scientific information regarding crop selection, irrigation scheduling, nutrient management, pest control, and harvesting practices. This enables them to make informed decisions that improve productivity and profitability. Digital extension services also reduce uncertainty by providing accurate weather forecasts and early warning systems for pests, diseases, floods, and droughts.

The use of digital advisory systems contributes significantly to resource-use efficiency. Farmers can optimize the application of fertilizers, pesticides, water, and other inputs based on data-driven recommendations. This not only reduces production costs but also minimizes environmental impacts associated with excessive input use.

Furthermore, digital extension services facilitate market access and price transparency. Farmers can obtain real-time information about market prices, demand trends, and buyer requirements. Such information strengthens farmers' bargaining power and helps them make better marketing decisions. In many cases, digital platforms also connect farmers directly with buyers, processors, and agribusiness companies, reducing dependence on intermediaries.

Digital technologies promote inclusiveness by reaching farmers in remote and underserved regions. Through mobile-based advisory systems, farmers can access agricultural expertise regardless of geographical location. Consequently, digital extension services contribute to agricultural modernization, rural development, and poverty reduction.

## Digital Extension Services in India

India has emerged as one of the leading countries in the adoption of digital technologies for agricultural extension. Recognizing the importance of timely and accessible information, the Government of India and various private organizations have launched numerous initiatives aimed at strengthening farmer advisory systems through digital platforms.

One of the most successful initiatives is e-Choupal, launched by ITC Limited. This initiative utilizes internet-enabled kiosks operated by trained local farmers to provide agricultural information, market prices, weather forecasts, and procurement services. e-Choupal has significantly improved market transparency and reduced transaction costs for farmers.

The mKisan Portal is another important initiative that enables farmers to receive personalized advisories through SMS and voice messages. The platform disseminates information related to crop production, pest management, weather forecasts, and government schemes. By leveraging mobile technology, the mKisan Portal has enhanced the reach and effectiveness of agricultural extension services.

Kisan Suvidha is a mobile application developed by the Government of India to provide comprehensive agricultural information. Farmers can access weather forecasts, market prices, input dealer information, plant protection measures, and advisory services through a single platform. The application has improved information accessibility and supported informed decision-making among farmers.

Kisan Call Centers (KCCs) represent another innovative approach to agricultural extension. Through toll-free telephone services, farmers can interact directly with agricultural experts and obtain solutions to their farming problems. The multilingual nature of KCC services ensures wider accessibility across diverse linguistic regions.

Digital Green has introduced a video-based extension model that emphasizes farmer-to-farmer learning. The organization produces locally relevant videos featuring successful farmers and agricultural practices. These videos are screened in rural communities, encouraging knowledge sharing and enhancing adoption rates.

**Table 3: Major Digital Extension Initiatives in India**

Initiative	Organization	Key Services
e-Choupal	ITC Ltd.	Market information and procurement
mKisan	Government of India	Mobile-based advisories
Kisan Suvidha	Government of India	Weather and market information
Kisan Call Center	Government of India	Expert advisory support
Digital Green	NGO	Video-based agricultural extension

These initiatives demonstrate how digital technologies can strengthen agricultural advisory systems and support rural transformation.

### Challenges and Limitations of Digital Extension Services

Despite their numerous advantages, digital extension services face several challenges that limit their effectiveness and scalability. One of the most significant barriers is the digital divide. Many rural areas continue to experience inadequate internet connectivity, unreliable electricity supply, and limited access to digital devices. Such infrastructure constraints restrict the adoption and utilization of digital advisory platforms.

Digital literacy is another major concern. Many farmers, particularly elderly farmers and those with limited formal education, may find it difficult to use smartphones, mobile applications, and internet-based services. Training and capacity-building initiatives are therefore essential to ensure effective utilization of digital technologies.

Language and localization issues also pose challenges. Agricultural information must be presented in local languages and adapted to regional farming conditions. Generic recommendations often fail to address the diverse agro-climatic conditions and socio-economic realities faced by farmers.

Data privacy and security concerns have gained increasing attention as digital platforms collect large amounts of farmer data. Information related to farm locations, production practices, financial transactions, and personal details must be adequately protected. Governments and service providers need to establish clear policies regarding data ownership, privacy, and ethical use.

Furthermore, many digital extension platforms operate independently, resulting in fragmented information systems. Farmers often need to access multiple applications for weather information, market prices, pest diagnostics, and advisory services. Greater interoperability and integration among digital platforms can improve user experience and enhance service effectiveness.

**Table 4: Challenges and Possible Solutions in Digital Extension Services**

Challenge	Possible Solution
Poor Connectivity	Expansion of rural broadband networks
Digital Illiteracy	Farmer training and capacity building
Language Barriers	Development of local-language content
Data Privacy Concerns	Strong regulatory frameworks
Fragmented Platforms	Integrated digital ecosystems

Addressing these challenges is essential for realizing the full potential of digital extension services.

### Future Prospects and Emerging Trends

The future of digital extension services is closely linked to ongoing advancements in digital technologies. Artificial Intelligence is expected to play a transformative role in the

development of next-generation advisory systems. AI-powered platforms will provide predictive recommendations, diagnose crop diseases with greater accuracy, and support personalized farm management decisions.

Voice-based advisory systems are likely to become increasingly popular, particularly among farmers with limited literacy levels. By enabling farmers to interact with advisory platforms through voice commands and local languages, these systems can significantly enhance accessibility and inclusiveness.

The integration of drones into agricultural advisory systems represents another promising development. Drones equipped with advanced sensors can monitor crop health, identify pest infestations, assess nutrient deficiencies, and generate high-resolution field maps. Such information can support precision agriculture and improve advisory accuracy.

Blockchain technology also holds considerable potential for strengthening agricultural value chains. By enhancing transparency, traceability, and trust, blockchain can facilitate quality certification, supply chain management, and digital transactions. Farmers may benefit from improved market access and premium pricing opportunities.

Climate-smart digital advisory systems are expected to gain prominence as climate change continues to affect agricultural production. Future advisory platforms will provide location-specific recommendations related to climate adaptation, risk management, and sustainable resource utilization. Such systems will play a critical role in enhancing agricultural resilience and supporting sustainable development goals.

## Conclusion

Digital Extension Services have emerged as a transformative innovation in modern agriculture, fundamentally changing the way agricultural information is generated, disseminated, and utilized. By leveraging advanced technologies such as mobile communication, artificial intelligence, remote sensing, big data analytics, and cloud computing, these services provide farmers with timely, accurate, and location-specific advisory support. Unlike traditional extension systems that often struggle with limited outreach and delayed information delivery, digital extension services enable continuous communication and personalized recommendations.

The adoption of digital advisory systems has resulted in numerous benefits, including improved productivity, enhanced resource-use efficiency, increased profitability, better market access, and greater resilience to climate-related risks. Successful initiatives such as e-Choupal, mKisan, Kisan Suvidha, Digital Green, and Plantix demonstrate the significant potential of digital technologies in strengthening agricultural knowledge systems.

However, challenges related to infrastructure, digital literacy, data privacy, and localization must be addressed to ensure equitable access and sustainable implementation. Investments in rural connectivity, capacity building, policy development, and technological innovation will be essential for expanding the reach and effectiveness of digital extension services.

As agriculture continues to evolve in the digital age, digital extension services will play an increasingly important role in supporting sustainable agricultural development, enhancing food security, improving rural livelihoods, and achieving global development goals. Their integration into agricultural systems represents a critical step toward building resilient, productive, and knowledge-driven farming communities.

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