S. Afr. J. Agric. Ext. Mogashane & Loki
Vol. 53 No. 5, 2025: 22-44
10.17159/2413-3221/2025/v53n5a21092 (License: CC BY 4.0)

Farmer's Perception and Adoption of Digital Technologies as Information Sources for Farming Activities in the City of Tshwane, Gauteng

Mogashane, C.[1] and Loki, O.[2]

Corresponding Author: C. Mogashane. Correspondence Email: chantellemogashane2@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Smallholder farmers are challenged by limited resources, finances, and access to complex production technologies, which hinder the implementation of good production practices such as good seed selection, knowing when to plant and harvest, pest and disease control, and access to lucrative markets. Using quantitative research methods, this paper explored smallholder farmers' perceptions, adoptions, and differences in agricultural incomes between adopting and non-adopting farmers. This study reveals that smallholder farmers perceive access to real-time information as important; however, the adoption of digital technologies as information sources remains low. A binary regression analysis further revealed that the access to extension services variable positively correlated with the adoption of the internet (web pages), YouTube, and the Farmers Weekly website as information sources. Digital technologies were generally perceived to be reliable, time-effective, and easy to use; however, adopting these technologies had no significant impact on the farmer's agricultural income. The overall perception of digital technologies was that they are easy to use, reliable, easily accessible, and cost-effective. This paper concludes that digital technology adoption remains considerably low; however, more and more farmers are not only open to adopting this technology, but those who have adopted it also prefer incorporating it among the sources they use to acquire farming information. Using digital technologies did not cause differences in agricultural incomes for these farmers. This study recommends public-private partnerships

[1] Student: Department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa. chantellemogashane2@gmail.com, ORCID ID 0009-0005-8834-0304.

[2] Lecturer: Department of Agricultural Economics, Extension and Rural Development, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa. o.loki@up.ac.za, ORCID ID 0000-0003-4187-3345.

and community engagement through cooperatives to further drive technology adoption, thereby fostering market access and improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.

Keywords: Smallholder Farmer, Perception, Adoption, Digital Technology.

1. BACKGROUND

Smallholder farmers are challenged by limited resources, finances, and access to complex production technologies, which hinder the implementation of good production practices such as good seed selection, planting and harvesting timing, pest and disease control, as well as access to markets (Nwafor *et al*., 2020; Autio *et al.*, 2021). Accessing markets provides farmers with various opportunities, such as crop diversification, reasonable input costs, increased profits, and the ability to contribute to food security. Phiri *et al*. (2019) argue that accessing information that is accurate and reliable can assist in overcoming some of the above challenges. Studies by Mutero *et al*. (2016) and Abdulai and Fraser (2023) suggest that smallholder farmers in Africa continue to have limited access to digital technologies. There are further reports by Lwoga *et al*. (2011) and Ndilowe (2013) indicating that many farmers in developing countries still rely on traditional information sources, such as extension visits. Their primary digital sources include print media, television, and radio. Afful and Lategan (2014), Ghosh (2012), Hlatshwayo and Worth (2016), and World Bank (2010) report that in South Africa, the reduced government capital investment in extension services has negatively impacted service delivery, aggravated increases in the extension officer to farmer ratio, and limited the supply of inputs and relevant agricultural information. These factors directly contribute to the overall performance of smallholder farmers who rely significantly on these services. Akintude and Oladele (2019) further report that the problem with the extension services system is its failure to keep pace with new developments and technologies to acquire and disseminate information to farmers before it becomes outdated, leaving the farmers significantly disadvantaged.

There's progress in research (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2017; Muema *et al*., 2018) presenting opportunities for using digital technologies in agricultural production and marketing, as well as several studies that disseminate how smallholder farmers rely on agricultural information for reliable quality food production and access to lucrative markets however, smallholder farmers are still unable to make technical and informed marketing and production decisions, they are still challenged with accessing markets and the promising

impacts of integrating digital technologies in smallholder farming development have not materialised (Deichmann *et al*., 2016; Okello *et al*., 2020). According to Mushi *et al*. (2022), smallholder farmers still miss out on development and commercialising opportunities by not acquiring food production-related information and market information that plays a significant role in accessing competitive markets, scaling up, and being an active catalyst in ensuring food security. This is despite an increase in smallholder farmers owning ICT tools such as mobile phones and computers, and most smallholder farmers being aware of various digital technologies that can be used as sources of information from these tools (Phiri *et al*., 2019; Nwafor *et al*., 2020). Abdulai (2023) further reported that the adoption of these technologies is exponentially low among these farmers, especially in developing countries. The objectives of this paper are to:

a) Assess smallholder perceptions of digital technologies as sources of information for farming activities.
b) Determine the factors influencing the adoption of digital technologies as sources of information for farming activities.
c) Assess differences in agricultural incomes between digital technology adopting and non-adopting farmers.

2. SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING THE USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

There are varied factors that contribute to how an individual perceives an object or subject. These include the nature of the object, the subject, the environment, and the situation where the perceiver makes the perception. For the perceiver, the characteristics could be personal interests, expectations, self-concept, and attitudes. Rogers (2004) posited that five stages influence the adoption of new technologies in the theory of innovations. These stages are: economic profitability, compatibility, trialability, complexity, and observability. For the adoption of new technology by farmers, Bayih *et al.* (2022) note that factors such as cultural acceptability, the beneficial attributes of using the technology, farmers' perception of the technology after observation, the effectiveness of the technology after trial, and the economic status of the farmer influence technological adoption.

Singh *et al*. (2021) argued and concluded that infrastructural development, geography, type, and agro-climatic state of the land influence farmers' adoption of new technologies.

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Furthermore, he stated that the kind of farming systems farmers use also influences adoption. The conclusion was derived from surveys of 200 rural farmers in four different agro-climates in India. Aker *et al.* (2005) analysed the adoption of computers for farming practices using a Tobit model to establish factors influencing the rate of technology adoption among 449 farmers in the United States. The analyses depicted that the educational levels of farmers and the age group of 30-40 years influenced the rate at which digital agricultural technologies are adopted. In corroboration, Mdoda (2017) denotes that farmers' ability to process information from varied information sources relies greatly on their level of education. Several studies (Lawal *et al.,* 2017; Mtega *et al.*, 2016) also denote that the age of farmers has a paramount influence on farmers accessing agricultural information and depict that male farmers over 35 years have greater access to agricultural information when compared to younger farmers. When the adoption of digital technology by smallholder maize farmers was studied in Nigeria, it was shown that other factors, such as attributes of the technology to be adopted and the attributes of the farm, directly influence the adoption decision (Mwangi & Kariuki, 2015; Sennuga *et al*., 2020).

3. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

3.1. Description of Study Area

This study took place in the City of Tshwane district municipality in Pretoria, which is situated in the North of the Gauteng province of South Africa. This municipality consists of 107 wards and covers an area of 6 298 km^2. Compared to all the other municipalities in the province, this municipality accounts for the most smallholder farmers in the province. This is because this municipality is attributed by high agricultural areas in Region 7 (Bronkhorstspruit) and Region 5 (Cullinan), which exhibit the best soil qualities for thriving agricultural productions (Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, 2021; Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2020).

3.2. Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Smallholder farmers in the City of Tshwane municipality were targeted as the population of this study to achieve the intended objectives of this study effectively. A quantitative approach was used to collect and analyse data. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were employed to collect data. A multi-sampling method, consisting of systematic sampling and

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snowball sampling, was used with a sample size of 117, which was determined using Slovin's formula.

n= N/ [1 + N ×e^2]

Where:

n= represents the sample size

N= represents the total population size (462 smallholder farmers)

e= According to Altares *et al*. (2003), e signifies a probability acceptable for making a mistake in selecting a sample size. This study will use a probability of 80%

n= N/ [1 + N ×e^2]

n= 462/ [1+ 462 × 0.08^2]

n= 117

Because this study used a systematic sampling technique, a sampling interval of 4 was used.

3.3. Data Analysis

This section of the paper gives insights into the quantitative tools used to analyse the collected data. Firstly, descriptive statistics in frequencies, percentages and mean values were used to characterise smallholder farmers demographically and socioeconomically. Descriptive statistics were also used to explore perceptions of digital technologies. The predictive modelling tool of a binary regression was used to model the relationship between the set of independent variables, which are the socioeconomic factors of smallholder farmers and the dependent variable which is diverse and is modelled as a logit of $\boldsymbol{p}$ that represents a probability of the dependant variable which are perceptions and adoption taking a value of 1 (Harrell & Harrell, 2015). An exploratory analysis was conducted, and a statistical model was used, followed by a likelihood test and an analysis using R Studio to test the hypotheses of this study. The following equation was used for the regression model:

$$\log\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = b_o + b_1X_1 + \cdots + b_kX_K \quad (1)$$

Where p represents the probability that $y = 1$ given x, the y represents the dependent variable, which is the various digital technologies. x_1, x_2,…x_k represent independent variables which are the farmers' characteristics, such as age, gender, level of education, farming years, type of farm, access to extension services, and government support. b_0,b_1,…b_k are the parameters of the model.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section reports findings and explains demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of smallholder farmers in the City of Tshwane municipality regions and empirical results that address this study's objectives.

4.1. Characteristics of Smallholder Farmers

This section explains characteristics such as farmer age, gender, educational level, marital status, household size, and farming purpose, represented as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Characteristics of Smallholder Farmers in Tshwane

Variables	**Frequencies**	
Demographic	**N**	**%**
Age group		
18-25	4	3.4
26-35	21	28.1
36-45	42	36.2
45-55	28	24.0
56+	21	28.1
Gender		
Male	54	46.2
Female	63	53.8
Educational level		
No formal education	6	5.2
Primary	16	13.9
Secondary	66	57.4
Tertiary	27	23.5
Purpose of farming		
Commercial	31	26.5
Household consumption only	33	28.2
Both	53	45.3
Commodity		
Crop	64	56.6
Livestock	40	35.4
Mixed	9	8.0

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Smallholder farming in these regions is accounted for by females with a dispersion of 53.8% to 46% of female to male ratio; this finding corroborates various socioeconomic-centric surveys, such as the General Household Survey (2016) (DAFF, 2016; StatsSA, 2017), which delineate that the South African smallholder farming sector is predominantly female-dominated. This sector is dominated by middle-aged farmers, with the 35-45 age group accounting for the largest proportion (36%) of smallholders. The majority (95%) of these smallholder farmers are considered literate, as they have some level of education. This suggests that farmers can comprehend information related to their farming activities, which aligns with the sentiments of Oyewole and Sennunga (2020) that education is a crucial factor in adopting innovative farming techniques. The average household size is six members, which also serves as the source of labour on their farms (Yusuf, 2018). The smallholder farming sector in these regions is predominantly composed of crop farmers (57%), with only 35% of livestock farmers and 8% of mixed farmers. This evidently supports characterising statements that the regions in the municipality of Tshwane display exceptional soil qualities that are excellent for crop production (DALRRD, 2021; Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2020). These farmers also stated that they do not have any income outside of their agricultural income. This contradicts the WRC report by Manona *et al*. (2023), which states that smallholder farmers rely on other income streams independent of their farming activities. When asked about the challenges encountered in their farming activities, 33% of the smallholder farmers state that finances pose the biggest constraints in their farming activities. These findings are consistent with Loki *et al.* (2023), who state that financial support was among the biggest challenges encountered by smallholder farmers.

4.2. Extension Services and Technology Use

This section reports on the exploration of technology use, government support, and extension services in the City of Tshwane regions, focusing on their availability, utilisation, and general perceptions of them by smallholder farmers in these regions.

TABLE 2: Interrelations Between Extension Services and Smallholder Farmers in Tshwane

Variables	Frequencies	
Extension services	**N**	**%**
Government support		
Yes	31	27.7
No	81	72.3
Awareness of extension services		
Yes	66	60.0
No	44	40.0
Access to extension services		
Yes	41	38.3
No	66	61.7
Helpfulness of extension officers in info sharing		
Yes	37	91.1
No	9	8.9
Can reach extension officers for information needs		
Yes	22	20.0
No	14	25.5
Sometimes	19	36.2
Quality of extension services in relation to info sharing		
Poor	6	12.8
Neutral	12	25.5
Good	17	36.2
Very good	12	25.5

Table 2 shows that 28% of smallholder farmers in this region receive support from the government in their farming activities, which is in line with the report by Aliber and Hall (2012), which displayed limited government support for smallholder farmers. Nyaga *et al.* (2021) and FAO (2022) state that the lack of government support contributes to the uneven access and adoption of digital technologies. As shown in Table 2, 60% of the farmers are aware of the extension services to be utilised for their farming needs. Awareness positions these farmers at a better chance of accessing extension services. Mgbenka *et al.* (2015) report a

general lack of awareness about extension services among smallholder farmers, which stems from the illiterate nature of the farmers and causes a lag in the adoption of technologies. Despite the raging awareness, only 38% of the smallholder farmers have access to these services. This contradicts Loki and Mdoda's (2023) survey, which showed that 78% of smallholder farmers in the Eastern Cape had access to extension services. Extension services delivery was negatively impacted in South Africa during and after the COVID-19 outbreak due to its face-to-face communication, which compromised smallholder farmers' access to information (Karubanga *et al*., 2016; Yusuf *et al.,* 2022). When it comes to sharing farming information, 91% of smallholder farmers found extension officers to be helpful, which concurs with the findings of Loki and Mdoda (2023) that extension officers are very helpful in disseminating information relevant to their farming activities, thereby keeping them informed.

Regarding technology use, Table 4 shows that most smallholder farmers (76%) do not own computers, and 54% do not have access to one. However, 73% of smallholder farmers own a smartphone, and 72% of these farmers have access to a smartphone. This finding evidently supports the results of Abdulai (2023), which indicate that these types of farmers have access to digital devices that are generally considered simple, such as mobile phones, serving as a bridge to accessing digital resources. The results of this study show that 44% of the farmers prefer to acquire information from other farmers. These farmers stated that this preference stems from the people they know and trust. In line with this finding, a European study by Kernecker *et al.* (2020) shows that peer-to-peer communication is the preferred source of information for smallholder farmers. 22% prefer digital technologies due to their readily available and time-effective characteristics, while 21% of the farmers prefer acquiring information from extension officers because they are experienced, trained, and qualified to disseminate agricultural information effectively.

TABLE 3: Technology and Information Access by Smallholder Farmers in Tshwane

Variables	**Frequencies**	
Technology use	**N**	**%**
Own a computer		
Yes	23	24.5
No	71	75.5

Access to a computer		
Yes	43	45.7
No	51	54.3
Own a smartphone		
Yes	73	73.0
No	27	23.0
Access to a smartphone		
Yes	43	45.7
No	51	54.3
Preferred source of information		
Extension officers	16	20.5
Digital technologies	17	21.8
Other farmers	34	43.6
All of the above	11	41.1
Is it important to access real-time information		
Yes	69	95.8
No	3	4.2

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which represents a positive change in the use of these technologies for information acquisition. This finding is consistent with the views of Mavhunduse and Holmner (2019), who suggest that adopting digital technologies can enhance traditional methods of disseminating agricultural information. 96% of smallholder farmers state that it is important to access real-time farming information, which is a positive perception for smallholder farmers, as their development relies greatly on access to real-time agricultural information.

4.3. Perceptions of Digital Technologies as Information Sources

Smallholder farmers were asked to state their perceptions of digital technologies as information users using a Likert-scale questionnaire. The tool ranged from 1 being "Strongly agree" to 5 being "Strongly disagree".

TABLE 4: Farmers' Perceptions of Digital Technologies as Information Sources for Farming Activities

Farmers' Perceptions of digital technologies as information sources	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Complicated to use	15.1	4.1	32.9	27.4	20.5
Costly	19.7	23.9	33.8	16.9	5.6
Easily accessible	28.6	24.3	38.6	5.7	2.9
Time effective	36.8	18.9	44.6	-	-
Reliable	31.5	19.2	49.3	-	-
Up-to-date information	36.6	21.1	40.8	1.4	-
Information is helpful	32.4	24.3	41.9	1.9	
Better than traditional sources	20.3	9.5	50.0	13.5	6.8
Easy to use	37.7	19.5	37.7	5.2	

The results in Table 4 show that the common and persistent perception rated on the scale by the farmers is "Neutral," which could indicate that these farmers have limited knowledge of

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these technologies, nor have they adopted them. Consistent with this finding, Kernecker *et al.* (2020) state that farmers' perceptions of technologies are primarily informed by their personal experiences with using those technologies. 15% of the farmers strongly agree that digital technologies are complicated to use, 33% were neutral, while 27% strongly disagree. Regarding the economic aspect, 24% of the farmers state that digital technologies are costly, while 17% disagree. This result is consistent with that of Hoang and Tran (2023), which depicts that most smallholder farmers in their study perceived the acquisition and utilisation of digital technologies to be costly. Similarly, a study in the Eastern Cape by Bontsa (2023) reported that most of the studied population perceived the adoption of digital technologies to be expensive compared to other technologies.

Table 4 shows that 29% of the farmers strongly agree that digital technologies are easily accessible, while 37% also strongly agree that these technologies are time-effective. Pishnyak and Khalina (2021) demonstrate that farmers' perceived effectiveness of digital technologies positions them better to adopt these technologies. Digital technologies are considered easy to use by 32% who strongly agree, and a reliable source of information by 38% of farmers. Caffaro *et al.* (2020) highlight that farmers who perceive digital technologies as helpful, reliable, and easy to use are more likely to adopt them. The information acquired from digital technologies is perceived to be up-to-date and helpful by 37% and 32% of smallholder farmers who strongly agree. When comparing digital technologies as information sources to traditional sources, 20% of the farmers strongly agree that there is a better option, a majority (50%) were neutral, and only 7% strongly disagree. Most farmers (38%) strongly agree that digital technologies are easy to use, with 20% stating that they agree with this phenomenon. Hoang and Tran (2023) found that most smallholder farmers in their study perceived digital technologies as difficult to use, largely due to a perceived lack of training on their use. These farmers' perceptions were generally positive, indicating a potential openness and willingness to adopt digital technologies as information sources. This finding contradicts that of Banga *et al.* (2020), which states that smallholder farmers in Africa perceive digital technologies as risky, resulting in hesitation and unwillingness to adopt. Because of this, exploring farmers' perceptions to establish their impact on adoption patterns is crucial.

4.4. Adoption of Digital Technologies as Information Sources

This section presents findings that assess farmers' adoption of digital technologies as information sources and the impact of these technologies on agricultural income.

TABLE 5: Adoption of Digital Technologies as Information Sources in Tshwane

Digital technologies adopted as information sources	% adopted
Internet	38
YouTube	24
Farming Solutions App	6
Farmers weekly website	16
GPS	4

When the adoption of digital technologies as information sources was assessed, only 26% of smallholder farmers reported having adopted some type of digital technology, such as social media, as a source of information. This finding evidently corroborates reporting by Abdulai (2023) that adoption of digital technologies by smallholder farmers in developing countries is exponentially low. Engås *et al*. (2023) state that the digital divide propels the low adoption levels of digital technologies. When the technologies were analysed independently, the most commonly adopted digital technology as an information source is the internet at 38%. A similar study in Vietnam by Hoang and Tran (2023) found that the internet and wireless connectivity accounted for most of the adoption, with 81% cases. In Rwanda, McCampbell *et al.* (2023) reported that this type of digital technology was only adopted by 10% of the banana farmers, which makes it contradictory to this study. Nie *et al.* (2021) highlighted a positive effect of using the internet on the general well-being of the farmers and their households. The adoption of YouTube was the second most adopted technology at 24%, followed by 16% of Farmers' Weekly adoption. YouTube is reported to be among the social platforms that can be used to disseminate agricultural information and promote extension services and activities to a broader clientele (Kipkurgat, Onyiego, & Chemwaina, 2016; Saravanan & Suchiradipta, 2017; Barau & Afrad, 2017). The Farming Solutions app and GPS were the least adopted technologies among farmers, at 6% and 4%, respectively. Hoang and Tran (2023) corroborate this finding by revealing that mobile applications and digital technologies are the second and third-most

commonly adopted digital technologies among farmers, respectively. An American study by Schimmelpfennig *et al.* (2020) found that GPS was the most widely adopted technology among farmers in this region, which is inconsistent with the result of this study.

4.5. Effect of Socioeconomic Factors on the Adoption of Digital Technologies

To examine the influence of socioeconomic factors, modelled as independent variables, on the adoption of digital technologies, presented as dependent variables, a regression analysis was conducted, and a chi-square test was used to assess the significance of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Table 6 indicates that only three of the five outcomes had a statistically significant variable relative to the choice of adopting digital technologies as information sources: access to extension services and age. Variables such as farming experience, type of farm, government support, gender, and educational level showed no statistical significance in relation to the adoption of digital technologies. The binary regression results are presented in the table below.

Table 6: Binary Regression of Adoption and Socioeconomic Factors

Variables	Coefficient.	Odds ratio	Marginal effects
Internet			
Farming years	0.018	0.962	0.505
Type of farm	0.594	.962	0.060
Government support	0.444	3.139	0.080
Access to extension	1.967***	5.927	0.202
Age group	1.231	10.973	-0.003
Gender	0.412	0.649	0.001
Own farming land	-0.263	0.688	0.050
Level of education	6.361	210.817	-0.237
YouTube			

Farming years	0.055	1.018	0.402
Type of farm	-0.138	0.437	0.016
Government support	0.666	1.559	0.063
Access to extension	2.154***	7.151	0.283
Age group	1.255	3.423	-0.007
Gender	0.396	1.510	0.052
Own farming land	-0.090	0.769	-0.071
Level of education	0.233	578.750	-0.221
Farmers weekly			
Farming years	-0.089	0.915	-0.301
Type of farm	2.335	1.271	0.068
Government support	-0.395	0.674	-0.007
Access to extension	2.348**	10.461	0.164
Age group	0.481	1.617	0.014
Gender	1.317	3.732	0.069
Own farming land	0.955	2.599	0.076
Level of education	-1.458	0.233	-0.199
Farming App			
Farming years	0.141	1.056	0.430
Type of farm	-0.732	0.354	-0.008
Government support	0.217	1.947	0.063
Access to extension	1.353	8.618	0.249
Age group	3.274	3.507	-0.034
Gender	2.038	1.486	0.045
Own landing land	1.732	0.914	-0.014
Level of education	1.565	295.655	-0.197
GPS			

Farming years	-1.252		1.152	-0.230	
Type of farms	-79.958		0.348	-0.006	
Government support	-76.655		1.242	0.025	
Access to extension	105.177		3.870	0.038	
Age group	117.581		26.426	0.066	
Gender	-174.694		7.678	0.065	
Own farming land	33.771		5.560	0.051	
Level of education	-110.736		4.781	0.016	
Constant	2.808	2.990	9.085	14.712	282.389
	(357.064)	(366.164)	(1,171.970)	(2,993.595)	(151,015.600)
Observations	116	116	116	116	116
Log likelihood	-45.501	-36.379	-29.728	-16.579	-0.000
Akaike Inf. Crit	121.002	102.757	89.457	63.158	30.000

Notes: ***, ** ,* means significant at 1%, 5% and 10% levels of significance, respectively

Table 6 shows that only one of the eight independent variables fits the binary model and has a statistical significance relative to the choice of adopting digital technologies as information sources, which is access to extension services. This variable was significant in the adoption of digital technologies, including the internet, YouTube, and the Farmers' Weekly website. Variables such as farming experience, type of farm, government support, gender, and educational level showed no statistical significance in relation to the adoption of digital technologies.

The adoption of digital technologies as information sources among smallholder farmers is significantly influenced by access to extension services, which showed a positive and statistically significant effect for the internet, YouTube, and Farmers Weekly website, with probabilities of adoption increasing by 85%, 88%, and 91%, respectively. Factors such as farming experience, age, gender, government support, and education also demonstrated positive correlations with the adoption of specific digital platforms. Conversely, ownership of farming land had a negative influence on the likelihood of internet and YouTube adoption, while variables such as education and farming years had mixed effects across the technologies.

This finding highlights the significance of extension services and individual farmer characteristics in influencing technology adoption.

However, the analysis of GPS adoption revealed no statistically significant effect from the independent variables, suggesting a limited influence of factors like gender, farming years, or government support. While access to extension services, age, and land ownership showed some positive correlations, their effects varied. The study highlights that, despite positive perceptions of digital technologies' ease of use, reliability, and efficiency, their adoption remains uneven, with demographic and contextual factors playing a crucial role. This calls for targeted interventions, such as improving extension services and addressing barriers to land ownership and resource access, to enhance technology adoption in smallholder agriculture.

4.6. Differences in Agricultural Income Between Adopting and Non-Adopting Farmers

Tables 7 and 8 represent the effect of digital technologies on agricultural income using results from an independent t-test.

Table 7: Means of adopting and non-adopting groups in relation to agricultural income

	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Agricultural income (R/A)				
Yes	25	1.16	,473	,095
No	59	1.22	,559	,073

Table 7 displays the distribution of agricultural income of adopting and non-adopting farmers. There is a difference in the mean value between the group that adopted digital technologies, with a mean of 1.16, and the non-adopting group, with a mean of 1.22. The difference in the means is considerably smaller, with the number of adopting groups considered average compared to the non-adopting group. Despite the low adoption rates reported in various literature (Nyaga *et al*., 2021; Abdulai, 2023), this finding suggests that an increasing number of smallholder farmers are adopting digital technologies as a source of information. Baumüller

et al. (2019) and Ndhlovu (2020) attribute this acceleration to the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted physical interactions, as well as climate change.

TABLE 8: Independent Samples Test

`	Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means				
	f	sig.	t	df	sig.	Mean dif	Std. error dif
Agricultural income (R/A)							
Equal variances assumed	,753	,388	-,472	82	,638	-,060	,128
Equal variances not assumed			-,506	53,178	,615	-,060	,119

The mean difference indicates a variance between the adopting and non-adopting groups. Levene's test for equality of variances showed that equal variances are assumed, with a p-value of 0.388, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis that the means of adopters and non-adopters are equal is accepted, as there is no statistical difference between the means of the two groups.

Table 8 shows that non-adopters have a higher mean relative to the distribution of agricultural income. This finding addresses the fourth objective, which reveals no difference in the agricultural incomes of smallholder farmers between those who have adopted digital technologies as information sources and those who have not. This finding aligns with Hoang and Tran (2023), who reported that smallholder farmers perceived a lack of real-life depiction of economic benefits from digital technologies, which would be reflected in an increase in agricultural income/productivity. Essentially, this states that smallholder farmers are still determining the economic benefits derived from incorporating digital technologies into their farming activities, which could make adopting these technologies a financial liability.

5. CONCLUSIONS

10.17159/2413-3221/2025/v53n5a21092 (License: CC BY 4.0)

This study investigated smallholder farmers' perceptions, adoption rates, and the impact of digital technologies as information sources for farming activities. Farmers generally found these technologies to be user-friendly, reliable, accessible, yet sometimes costly. Despite these positive perceptions, the actual adoption of digital tools among farmers remained low. Many farmers preferred obtaining information from fellow farmers, extension officers, and digital technologies. This preference suggests a growing willingness to adopt digital tools among those who have not yet done so. However, there was no significant difference in the agricultural incomes of farmers who had adopted and those who had not. The study concludes that factors beyond socioeconomic status influence technology adoption among smallholder farmers. Moreover, the adoption of digital technologies did not significantly affect agricultural income. Access to extension services was statistically significant in the adoption of digital tools, such as the internet, YouTube, and Farmers Weekly. While extension services remain crucial for disseminating information, farmers expressed dissatisfaction with the frequency of extension visits and the quality of the information shared.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends prioritising partnerships with tech companies and offering incentives to reduce costs and increase access to digital technologies for smallholder farmers. Peer-to-peer learning should be encouraged, allowing tech-savvy farmers to share knowledge with others. Extension officers must actively promote digital tools to bridge information gaps. Policy implications include creating supportive frameworks to improve digital infrastructure, enhance digital literacy, and provide financial support. Monitoring and evaluating the impact of technology on productivity and income should inform future policies. Public-private partnerships and community engagement through cooperatives can further drive technology adoption, thereby fostering market access and improving the livelihoods of smallholder farmers.

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