

Digital Information Habits and Content Preferences among Croatian Farmers: A Survey-Based Analysis

**Sanja Jelić Milković¹, Zdenko Lončarić¹, Vedran Stapić²,
Martina Pavlović², Ružica Lončarić¹**

¹ Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Vladimira Preloga 1, Osijek, Croatia (sajelic@fazos.hr)

² Agroklub Ltd., Agricultural Information System, Sv. Leopolda Bogdana Mandića 157, Osijek, Croatia

Abstract

This study examines the digital information habits and content preferences of 444 Croatian farmers surveyed online. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Kruskal-Wallis test. The results indicate that most farmers access the internet via smartphones (82%) and primarily use specialized agricultural portals, social networks, and messaging applications for agricultural information. Text articles and video content are the preferred formats, while podcasts are largely underutilized. Overall satisfaction with online agricultural information was moderately positive, with no significant differences across demographic subgroups. Age and education level were the most relevant predictors of platform preferences, with younger and more educated farmers demonstrating stronger engagement with visual and social media formats. These findings offer practical insights for developing targeted digital communication and education strategies in the agricultural sector.

Keywords: digital habits, farmers, agricultural information, content preferences, digital platforms

Introduction

The way information circulates in society has changed significantly with the rise of the Internet, which now enables real-time communication through websites, applications, and social media platforms (Colussi et al., 2022; Phiaaia and Panpakdee, 2025). This shift extends well beyond personal communication; digital connectivity has become a vehicle for widespread knowledge dissemination, providing users with unrestricted access to a broad range of infor-



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mation resources (Arangurí et al., 2025; Phiaaia and Panpakdee, 2025). For farmers, real-time access to digital information allows decisions to be based on current data, enables responses to external pressures, and supports the development of adaptive strategies when facing climate-related, economic, or political disruptions, all of which contribute to greater resilience in agricultural systems (Burbi and Hartless, 2016; Phiaaia and Panpakdee, 2025). There is now broad agreement in the literature that integrating digital technologies into agriculture accelerates innovation adoption and strengthens information flows, resulting in better-informed decisions, higher operational efficiency, and more effective knowledge sharing among agricultural stakeholders (Colussi et al., 2022; Jelić Milković et al., 2024). Both mobile and fixed Internet connections support this process by enabling diverse multimedia formats (text, graphics, and video) which lower barriers to learning and make educational content more engaging and accessible for farmers (Phiaaia and Panpakdee, 2025; Arangurí et al., 2025). Given these developments, reliable Internet access is now a basic requirement for participation in modern agricultural development (Phiaaia and Panpakdee, 2025).

In this context, the present study examines the digital information habits and content preferences of farmers in Croatia. It focuses on Internet access and connectivity, devices used, frequency of seeking agricultural information online, preferred content formats, and the digital platforms and sources most relied upon. Beyond describing these patterns, the study tests whether habits and preferences differ meaningfully across demographic and farm-level characteristics (including age, gender, education, years of farming experience, and farm size) with the broader aim of informing the design of more effective digital communication and education strategies in the agricultural sector. In doing so, the study addresses two gaps in the existing literature. First, much of the comparable evidence on farmers' digital behavior comes from other regions, for example Brazil (Colussi et al., 2022), India (Kumar, 2023), Thailand (Phiaaia and Panpakdee, 2025), and Ethiopia (Seid and Yizengaw, 2025), whereas systematic evidence for Croatian and, more broadly, Central and Eastern European farmers remains scarce. Second, prior studies have tended to examine platform adoption or content-format preferences in isolation; the present analysis instead profiles connectivity, device use, platform reliance, and content-format preferences within a single large sample and links each of these to demographic and farm-level characteristics. This integrated, segment-level analysis is the study's main contribution and is intended to provide advisory services and platform providers with a more actionable basis for tailoring digital content.

Material and methods

Primary data were collected through a survey using an online questionnaire as the research instrument. The questionnaire was designed to cover several key areas of farmers' digital habits: internet availability, devices used, frequency of searching for agronomic information, types of digital services, social media usage, and online communication. It consisted of closed-ended and semi-open questions, with multiple-choice answers and 5-point Likert scales for assessing frequency and preferences. Before distribution, the questionnaire was tested on a smaller number of respondents to check for comprehensibility and functionality. The Survey on Digital Habits of Farmers in the Republic of Croatia was conducted online via the Google Forms platform from 3 July to 19 August 2025, with 444 respondents participating in the research. The dissemination of the survey was achieved through the Agroklub portal (by publishing an article with

a link to the survey), through posts on social networks (Facebook, Instagram), and by sending group messages to registered users of the portal. The research was conducted using a convenience sampling method through the Agrokлуб portal. This sampling approach allowed for the inclusion of a broader population of farmers who actively use digital channels, which was crucial for investigating their digital habits. It is important to note that this method of data collection carries methodological limitations, particularly regarding sample representativeness. Since the survey was exclusively available online, the sample predominantly included farmers who already have internet access and possess a certain level of digital literacy. This may result in a positive bias toward greater digital inclusion compared to the general population of farmers in Croatia. Therefore, the research results should not be generalized to the entire population of farmers but should be interpreted in the context of those who are already digitally active. In practical terms, this means that the levels of Internet access, device ownership, and platform engagement reported here almost certainly overstate those of the wider farming population, because farmers who are older, less digitally literate, or located in areas with weaker connectivity are systematically under-represented in an online sample. The estimates presented below should therefore be read as a characterization of the digitally active segment of Croatian farmers rather than of the sector as a whole; capturing the habits of less connected producers would require complementary offline or mixed-mode data collection. This boundary is reiterated when interpreting the results and framing the practical implications. Despite the mentioned limitations, a sample of 444 respondents enables a meaningful analysis of digital tool usage patterns among digitally connected farmers and provides valuable insights for the further development of digital educational and communication platforms in agriculture.

Data analysis was performed using the statistical software package IBM SPSS Statistics V26, applying methods of descriptive statistics and the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test.

Results and discussion

The sample comprised 68.9% male and 31.1% female respondents. Regarding age distribution, 23.4% of respondents were up to 34 years old, the majority (54.8%) were between 35 and 54 years, and 21.8% were 55 years or older. A significant portion of respondents had a high school education (61.5%), while 32.4% held a university degree. Furthermore, 75.5% of respondents resided in rural areas. In terms of agricultural experience, 18.5% of respondents had worked in agriculture for less than 5 years, 20.3% for 6 to 10 years, 23.7% for 11 to 20 years, and 37.6% for more than 20 years. The majority of respondents managed less than 1 hectare of agricultural land, while 31.1% had between 11 and 50 hectares, and 9.7% possessed more than 51 hectares.

To gain insight into the digital habits of farmers in Croatia, respondents were asked about internet availability on their farms, the types of devices used, the frequency of searching for agricultural information, preferred content formats, and the most commonly used sources of information. Analysis of the collected data provides an understanding not only of internet access and frequency of use, but also of farmers' preferences regarding digital formats and communication channels, which is essential for shaping effective information and education strategies in agriculture.

The survey results show that the majority of farmers have Internet access, most commonly via smartphones, and that they use their digital space primarily for information gathering, communication, and following specialized portals and social networks.

The majority of surveyed farmers (80.6%) have access to fixed broadband Internet on their farms, while 19.1% do not. These figures indicate a high availability of fixed Internet connections among farmers, facilitating the use of digital tools and services in agriculture. Most respondents (57.0%) use a combination of mobile and fixed connections, suggesting a need for multiple forms of connectivity. Mobile connections also play a significant independent role, as one third of respondents (33.8%) rely on them exclusively, while exclusive use of a fixed connection is considerably less common (8.6%).

The survey shows that smartphones are the dominant device for Internet access among farmers (82.0%), confirming their key role in the digital landscape of rural areas. Laptops and desktop computers are used to a lesser but still notable extent (17.1%), while tablets are almost negligibly represented (0.9%). This distribution highlights the importance of mobile technology in farmers' daily lives, particularly due to its practicality and accessibility.

The largest share of respondents use the Internet to stay informed through Web portals and blogs (83.8%) and for communication via applications such as Viber, WhatsApp, and Meta Messenger (83.6%). Furthermore, 76.6% of respondents use digital public services (e-Građani, Agronet, ARKOD), while 71.2% use the Internet for social networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.). Streaming platforms for watching and listening to content are used by 47.3% of respondents, while 29.1% of farmers use artificial intelligence-based tools. Only 11.5% of respondents indicated using the Internet for other purposes, confirming that the main patterns of Internet use are clearly oriented toward information gathering, communication, and digital services.

This is broadly consistent with the findings of Colussi et al. (2022), who also identified communication platforms and web-based content as the most influential digital channels among Brazilian soybean producers, with WhatsApp (3.65) and YouTube (3.17) ranking as the most used social media tools, and websites and blogs leading in the mass media category. Overall, these findings suggest that across different agricultural contexts, farmers consistently prefer interactive, easily accessible digital formats for information and communication. A plausible explanation for this convergence is that such channels impose low barriers to use: they are accessible directly from the smartphones that dominate device ownership in this sample (82.0%), require little specialized skill, and integrate easily into farmers' daily routines, whereas more formal or institutional sources typically require greater effort and digital confidence. The same logic helps explain the comparatively limited uptake of public-service and advisory platforms relative to portals and messaging applications, and anticipates the marginal role of podcasts reported below, since audio competes poorly for attention with content that can be scanned and consumed selectively. The data show that the Internet is the primary source of agricultural information for most respondents, with more than half (51.5%) using it daily for this purpose. A further third of farmers (30.2%) do so several times a week, while a smaller proportion seek information once a week (12.4%) or rarely (5.9%). This distribution confirms that the Internet has become an essential tool for the continuous monitoring of agricultural information and practices. Similar patterns have been reported elsewhere among Indian farmers. Digital tools such as WhatsApp and YouTube were commonly used to access agricultural information, though a considerable number of users continued to face practical barriers, including language difficulties and limited mobile network coverage (Kumar, 2023).

Respondents were asked to rate their preference for three types of online content (text articles, audio content, and video content) on a scale from 1 (“I do not prefer at all”) to 5 (“I strongly prefer”). The results indicate that text articles are the most preferred format, followed closely by video content, while audio content received significantly lower ratings. All three formats have a median and mode of 3 or 4, although audio content displays the greatest variability in responses, indicating more divided opinions among farmers (Table 1). These patterns align with evidence that visual media represent a valuable source of information for farmers (Arangurí et al., 2025).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of preferred online content formats among farmers

	M	Me	Mo	SD
Text articles	3.98	4	4	0.886
Audio content	2.99	3	4	1.184
Video content	3.86	4	4	1.021

Note: M = arithmetic mean, Me = median, Mo = mode, SD = standard deviation

Respondents were also asked to rate how frequently they use six types of online sources related to agricultural technologies on a scale from 1 (“never”) to 5 (“very often”) (Table 2). Specialized portals such as Agrokлуб received the highest average rating, followed by social networks and YouTube. Advisory Service’s and Ministry of Agriculture’s websites were rated at a moderate level, as were agricultural groups and forums, while podcasts were the least used source by a considerable margin.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of the frequency of use of online sources on agricultural technologies among farmers

	M	Me	Mo	SD
Advisory Service’s and Ministry of Agriculture’s websites	3.13	3	3	1.113
Social networks	3.52	4	4	1.176
Specialized portals (Agrokлуб)	3.72	4	4	1.032
YouTube	3.25	3	3	1.158
Agricultural groups and forums	3.18	3	3	1.168
Podcasts	2.21	2	1	1.126

Note: M = arithmetic mean, Me = median, Mo = mode, SD = standard deviation

Respondents were asked in the survey to rate their satisfaction with the quantity and quality of agricultural information available online on a scale from 1 (“not at all satisfied”) to 5 (“very satisfied”). The results indicate a generally positive level of satisfaction, with a mean score of 3.77 and both the median and mode at 4, suggesting that most farmers tend to be satisfied with the online agricultural content they encounter. Further analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in satisfaction levels by age ($H = 0.275$, $p = 0.991$), education level ($H = 2.487$, $p = 0.647$),

years of farming experience ($H = 7.629$, $p = 0.054$), or farm size ($H = 2.100$, $p = 0.350$), indicating that this moderate level of satisfaction is shared across all demographic and structural subgroups of the farming population.

Given that demographic and farm-related characteristics such as age, education, gender, and farming experience can significantly influence farmers' digital behavior (Triatmojo et al., 2024), a series of non-parametric tests were conducted to examine differences in content preferences and platform usage across these groups, as presented in Tables 3–5.

Table 3 Kruskal-Wallis test results for content format preferences and digital platform usage by frequency of Internet use, age, and education level (mean ranks)

	Mean rank					H	p
	<25 (N=21)	26–34 (N=83)	35–44 (N=129)	45–54 (N=114)	55+ (N=97)		
Text articles	236.57	233.71	219.59	229.07	206.01	3.414	.491
Audio content	250.55	231.96	220.92	215.18	219.04	2.050	.727
Video content	292.45	259.39	213.12	214.25	197.96	20.046	.000
Advisory Service's/ Ministry's websites	176.79	226.07	223.84	228.04	221.05	3.217	.522
Social networks	312.67	249.23	212.34	228.84	186.16	24.445	.000
Specialized portals (Agroklub)	220.02	248.04	220.38	215.93	211.72	4.688	.321
YouTube	293.19	248.08	228.36	216.05	185.09	19.650	.001
Agricultural groups and forums	196.10	257.57	231.98	210.33	199.91	12.579	.014
Podcasts	207.43	220.74	223.68	230.15	216.71	.996	.910
	≤Primary (N=13)	Secondary (N=273)	Vocational (N=57)	University (N=87)	Postgrad (N=14)	H	p
Text articles	175.46	215.65	220.46	256.11	199.11	10.739	.030
Audio content	215.04	225.25	201.88	224.38	248.07	2.371	.668
Video content	198.38	218.36	194.65	253.86	244.14	10.155	.038
Advisory Service's/ Ministry's websites	209.77	230.95	225.65	200.18	195.46	4.984	.289
Social networks	200.65	222.93	211.46	235.32	199.75	2.259	.688
Specialized portals (Agroklub)	207.69	221.42	246.70	214.16	210.71	2.940	.568
YouTube	193.73	221.89	216.63	230.13	237.64	1.363	.851
Agricultural groups and forums	228.23	235.65	214.71	191.49	185.21	9.962	.041
Podcasts	216.92	222.45	230.39	223.55	190.14	1.230	.873

Regarding age (Table 3), significant differences were observed for video content ($H = 20.046$, $p = 0.000$), social networks ($H = 24.445$, $p = 0.000$), YouTube ($H = 19.650$, $p = 0.001$), and agricultural groups and forums ($H = 12.579$, $p = 0.014$). In all cases, younger farmers (under 25) demonstrated the highest engagement, with mean ranks consistently declining with age, confirming a generational preference for visual and social media formats among younger farmers. This is consistent with evidence that younger farmers with higher education are more likely to adopt smart communication tools such as cell phones and the Internet, whereas older farmers with less education tend to prefer more conventional information channels (Khan, 2022).

Regarding educational level (Table 3), significant differences were found only for text article preference ($H = 10.739$, $p = 0.030$), video content ($H = 10.155$, $p = 0.038$), and agricultural groups and forums ($H = 9.962$, $p = 0.041$). University-educated farmers showed the strongest preference for text and video formats, while respondents with lower education were more active in forums, suggesting a greater reliance on informal, peer-based knowledge exchange. These findings further support the idea that education level influences the types of digital tools and content formats farmers prefer, with higher education linked to engagement with more diverse and text-heavy digital formats (Khan, 2022). No significant differences by education were found for the other platforms.

The dominant role of smartphones in accessing agricultural information identified in this study aligns with broader evidence on cell phone prevalence among farmers (Seid and Yizengaw, 2025; Singh et al. 2025). Additionally, the negative relationship between age and digital technology adoption reported by Singh et al. (2025) is consistent with the age-related differences observed in the present study, particularly in relation to video content and social media use. These results are in line with the research by Phiaaia and Panpakdee (2025), who found that age and education levels exhibit significant correlations with online engagement; more educated and younger farmers demonstrate a higher propensity for seeking online information. According to the authors, key barriers to Internet adoption include inadequate rural broadband infrastructure, unavailability of localized content, and insufficient training.

Table 4 Kruskal-Wallis test results for content format preferences and digital platform usage by years of farming experience (mean ranks)

	Mean rank				H	p
	<5 years (N=82)	6–10 (N=90)	11–20 (N=105)	>20 (N=167)		
Text articles	230.96	227.26	224.92	214.26	1.442	.696
Audio content	231.41	229.36	221.51	215.04	1.308	.727
Video content	245.37	232.21	219.92	207.66	6.071	.108
Advisory Service's/ Ministry's websites	183.28	220.76	245.86	228.01	12.422	.006
Social networks	248.66	215.69	245.69	198.74	13.718	.003
Specialized portals (Agroklub)	223.88	223.02	227.99	218.09	.434	.933
YouTube	256.46	223.60	233.48	198.33	13.241	.004
Agricultural groups and forums	201.14	230.22	244.46	215.02	6.636	.084
Podcasts	224.87	216.25	231.99	218.74	1.039	.792

Significant differences by years of farming experience were found for three platforms (Table 4). Newer farmers (under five years) show the highest YouTube engagement, which declines steadily with experience, indicating that less experienced farmers rely more on video-based informal learning. In contrast, use of Advisory Service's and Ministry's websites is evident among farmers with 11–20 years of experience, reflecting their greater involvement with institutional and regulatory processes. Social network usage is highest among both the newest farmers and those with 11–20 years of experience, while the most experienced group shows the lowest engagement across these channels. No significant differences were found for content format preferences, Agroklub, forums, or podcasts.

Table 5 Kruskal-Wallis test results for content format preferences and digital platform usage by farm size (mean ranks)

	Mean rank			H	p
	<10 ha (N=263)	11–50 ha (N=138)	>51 ha (N=43)		
Text articles	223.47	223.18	214.40	.228	.892
Audio content	218.88	237.46	196.65	4.098	.129
Video content	222.05	224.39	219.19	.070	.966
Advisory Service's/ Ministry's websites	205.71	248.09	243.06	12.019	.002
Social networks	214.16	237.77	224.51	3.292	.193
Specialized portals (Agroklub)	213.55	239.20	223.67	3.933	.140
YouTube	218.44	233.73	211.31	1.753	.416
Agricultural groups and forums	211.11	254.79	188.57	14.696	.001
Podcasts	213.43	241.06	218.40	4.597	.100

The use of Advisory Service's and Ministry of Agriculture's websites varies significantly across farm size groups ($H = 12.019$, $p = 0.002$), with medium-sized farms (11–50 ha) and larger farms (>51 ha) exhibiting considerably higher mean ranks than the smallest farms (Table 5). This pattern reflects the greater administrative and regulatory demands placed on larger farms, which are more likely to engage with official online channels for subsidy applications, compliance information, and advisory services. The use of agricultural groups and forums also differs significantly by farm size ($H = 14.696$, $p = 0.001$), but with a less linear pattern. Medium-sized farms (11–50 ha) show the highest engagement, while the largest farms (> 51 ha) rank lowest. This suggests that medium-scale farmers may rely more heavily on peer-to-peer knowledge exchange through online communities, while very large operations may have access to more direct professional advisory networks, reducing their dependence on open forums. No significant differences by farm size were found for content format preferences, indicating that farm scale does not broadly influence how farmers consume digital content. The key distinctions are confined to institutional and community-based information channels.

Conclusion

The paper presents results of survey on habits of Croatian farmers how they search and select useful digital information as well as their preferences for different media content types. The findings confirm that smartphones are the dominant device for internet access in rural areas, and that farmers primarily use the Internet for information gathering, communication, and following specialized agricultural portals and social networks, with Agrokлуб and social networks the most frequently used sources. Text articles and video content are the preferred formats, suggesting that digital communication strategies targeting Croatian farmers should prioritize these. Satisfaction with the quantity and quality of online agricultural information is moderately positive and does not differ significantly across sociodemographic characteristics of respondents, indicating that the perceived adequacy of available digital content is a shared concern across the entire farming population rather than a challenge confined to specific groups. Age and education level are the most relevant demographic predictors of digital platform use, with younger and more educated farmers demonstrating stronger engagement with visual and social media channels. Farm size influences the use of institutional and community-based information channels, with larger farms showing greater reliance on official advisory websites.

Several practical implications follow. Advisory services should prioritize mobile-friendly, smartphone-optimized delivery. Institutional websites, used mainly by larger and more experienced farmers, could broaden their reach by directing farmers to their content within the portals, social networks, and messaging apps that farmers already use. For platform providers, the shared preference for text and video, alongside the marginal role of podcasts, favors concise written material and short instructional videos over audio. The age and education-related gradients mean no single channel suffices younger, more educated farmers are reachable through social media and video, whereas older or less-educated farmers may require established institutional channels, peer-based forums, and digital literacy support. Because satisfaction was only moderate and uniform across subgroups, the priority is to improve content relevance, credibility, and quality rather than volume. These recommendations apply mainly to the digitally active farmers sampled here; reaching less connected farmers will require complementary offline channels and future research using mixed-mode data collection.

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Navike pristupanja digitalnim informacijama i preferencije sadržaja među hrvatskim poljoprivrednicima: rezultati ankete

Sažetak

Ovo istraživanje proučava digitalne informacijske navike i sadržajne preferencije 444 hrvatska poljoprivrednika koji su sudjelovali u internetskoj anketi. Podaci su obrađeni deskriptivnom statistikom i Kruskal-Wallisovim testom. Rezultati pokazuju da većina poljoprivrednika internetu pristupa putem pametnih telefona (82 %), a poljoprivredne informacije najčešće pronalazi na specijaliziranim poljoprivrednim portalima, društvenim mrežama i u aplikacijama za razmjenu poruka. Tekstualni članci i videosadržaji najpoželjniji su formati, dok podcasti ostaju gotovo neiskorišteni. Ukupno zadovoljstvo internetskim poljoprivrednim informacijama bilo je umjereno pozitivno, bez značajnih razlika među demografskim skupinama. Dob i razina obrazovanja pokazale su se najvažnijim pokazateljima sklonosti pojedinim platformama, mlađi i obrazovaniji poljoprivrednici izraženije su posezali za vizualnim sadržajima i sadržajima na društvenim mrežama. Dobiveni nalazi nude praktične spoznaje za osmišljavanje ciljanih strategija digitalne komunikacije i edukacije u poljoprivrednom sektoru.

Ključne riječi: digitalne navike, poljoprivrednici, poljoprivredne informacije, sadržajne preferencije, digitalne platforme