

Rural Communications

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Abstract

The effectiveness of rural marketing communications, to a large extent is influenced by the media habits of the rural consumers. Though all types of media is being used in rural area, in view of low level of literacy, audiovisual media- radio, TV and films assume major importance. For this reason most of the marketers prefer mass media to reach rural audiences, however, Mass media, which might work wonders in urban areas, cannot be that effective in the rural masses. This is primarily because of shortage of electricity, language diversity. To communicate effectively with rural audiences, it is important to understand, the aspirations, fears and hopes of the rural customers, in relation to each product category, before developing a communication package to deliver the product message. This study is an attempt to understand current trends in rural communications in India and thereby identify related prospects and problems. For a conceptual overview, relevant literature in this area was studied. To gain an insight into current practices, communication strategies employed by various manufacturers and service providers through secondary sources were compiled. The paper provides an empirical view of the range of communications employed by the various corporates in the Indian rural market place from 1990 to 2006. Some differences in trends are found across FMCG, Consumer Durable and Service sectors. A detailed description of each type of communications is provided along with a suitable package of communication strategies are suggested for various sectors to communicate effectively to reach the rural audiences. The paper ends with the broad conclusions and implications of this research. Keywords: 3PL (Third Party

Logistics), Joint sales promotion, collaborative partnership, downtrading.

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Introduction

Modern marketing calls for more than developing a good product, pricing it attractively, and making it accessible. Companies must also communicate with present and potential stake holders and the general public (Kotler 2001). Basically, promotion is an attempt to influence (Stanton 1994). Promotion is the element in the organisational marketing mix (George 1994) that serves to inform, persuade and remind the market of a product and or the organisation selling it, in hopes of influencing the recipient's feelings, beliefs or behaviour.

Rinku Pegu (1999) in her research based article raises a million dollar question to marketers that, what has made the rural consumers so attractive to Indian companies now?

In order to answer the above question an intensive literature survey has been carried out and in the following paragraphs the findings have been narrated:

To begin with it all about the sheer size of the market, the Indian rural market with its vast size and demand base offers a huge opportunity that MNCs cannot afford to ignore. With 128 million households, the rural population is nearly three times the urban. (Richa Mishra), (Balakrishna 2004). That means rural India can bring in the much needed volumes and help FMCG

companies to log in volume-driven growth. Over 70% of India's 1 billion plus population lives in around 627,000 villages in rural areas. This simply shows the great potentiality rural India has to bring the much-needed volumes and help the FMCG companies to bank upon the volume-driven growth. Also, the rural market has been growing steadily over the years and is now bigger than the urban market for FMCG's (53% share of the total market) .(Pradeep Kashyap 2003) with an annual size in value terms currently estimated at around 50,000 crores. It is a definite boon in disguise for the FMCG majors who have already reached the plateau of their business curve in urban India and are desperately seeking new ways to increase sales. The annual size of the rural market, in value terms, is currently estimated at around Rs50,000 crore for FMCGs, Rs 5,000 crore for durables, Rs45,000 crore for agri-inputs and implements and another Rs8,000 crore for automobiles.(Pradeep Kashyap 2003)

The rate of growth of the rural market segment is however not the only factor that has driven marketing managers to go rural. The other compelling factor is the fact that the urban markets are becoming increasingly complex, competitive and saturated, (Mirchandani 1999), (V Sarvani) , (Koda 2002) .Further, the vast untapped potential of the rural markets is growing at a rapid pace (Shashidhar) . The policies of the government largely favour rural development programmes. This is clearly

highlighted by the fact that the outlay for rural development has risen from Rs 14,000 crore in the 7th plan to Rs 30,000 crore in the 8th plan period. These figures also prove that the rural market is emerging stronger with a gradual increase in disposable income of the rural folk (Rinku Pegu 1999), (Mirchandani 1999). Not just the rural population is numerically large; it is growing richer by the day. Of late, there has been a phenomenal improvement in rural incomes and rural spending power. Successive good monsoon has led to dramatic boost in crop yields (Neeraj Jha 2000), (Shuchi Bansal 1999). Consider this statistics: food grain production touched 200 million tonnes during fiscal 1999 against 176 million tonnes logged during fiscal 1991. Not just improved crop yields, tax-exemption on rural income too has been responsible for this enhanced rural purchasing power. (Neeraj Jha 2000), (Balakrishna 2004). Tax exemptions for agricultural income also contributed to the enhanced rural purchasing power (V Sarvani). Rural India has a large consuming class with 41 per cent of India's middle-class and 58 per cent of the total disposable income. (Balakrishna 2004)

In addition, better procurement prices fixed for the various crops and better yields due to many research programmes have also contributed to the strengthening of the rural markets (Mirchandani 1999) (Bhandari and Iyer 1994). Increasing

enrolment in primary education, and high penetration of television and other mass media have induced propensity to consume branded and value-added products in rural areas.

Thus, with the rural markets bulging in both size and volume, any marketing manager

Obstacles to rural marketing or Barriers to rural marketing

The Rural market is not only large, but highly scattered geographically. It should also be recognised that it is not that easy to operate in rural market because of several daunting problems that adversely effect the growth of the rural market are also to be enlisted. According to Bose, the rural markets remain untapped because of three Ds: distance, diversity and dispersion. (Vivek Pareek)

There are problems with distribution, with language, the products themselves may not be in the right sizes and at the right process, there is not much infrastructure, literacy levels are low, so is per capita income, the number of rural retail outlets are low, rural credit is lacking, banking facilities are inadequate, spurious brands flourish, demands are seasonal and villagers are highly suspicious of the big city types, they feel exploited - all these factors make the rural markets a bitter pill to swallow (R.V.Rajan) Poor roads (Sarvani), (Suhit Anantula);

power problems; and inaccessibility to conventional advertising media

It exhibit linguistic, regional and cultural diversities, and it can easily be considered as more complex than the market of a continent as a whole. (Ramana Rao) (Nabi, K.C. Raut). Inability of the small retailer to carry stocks without adequate credit facility (Ramana Rao)

Product promotion is the biggest challenge facing rural marketers today and only those who can overcome it will emerge successful. (Narasimha Rao). According to Rajan, "A problem advertisers face is the lack of a single agency to provide rural marketing services under one roof, resulting in a fragmented approach that's not conducive to effective brand-building in rural markets." (Arathoon 2002). There's no surprise in learning that over 70%, (roughly 670 million) of India's teeming masses live in rural areas. Of these, some 260 million live in almost complete media darkness, without access to TV, radio, and beyond the reach of newspapers and magazines. Widespread illiteracy allied with the multitude of languages and dialects puts the most of these people beyond the reach of conventional media planning (Kilburn 2000).

Challenges in rural communications

There are many challenges to

communication in rural areas. Several constrains like illiteracy, poor communication facilities, infrastructural inadequacies, poor media reach and exposure and vast, heterogeneous and diversely spread rural audiences characterised by variations in language, culture and lifestyle, traditional – bound behaviour of the rural consumers, unwillingness of the sales people to serve in the rural areas etc, all these factors pose challenges to marketers looking to take their messages to the largely media-dark areas, of rural markets

Understanding the rural audience

It is not sufficient to understand rural communication challenges as stated above; rather, what is equally crucial is the need to understand the behavioral and psychographic characteristics of the rural audiences. An important tool to reach out to the rural audience is through effective communication. 'A rural consumer is brand loyal and understands symbols better. This also makes it easy to sell look - alike". Inorder to develop an effective rural communication strategy the following are the most suggested strategies.

The rural audience has matured enough to understand the communication developed for the urban markets, especially with reference to FMCG products. Television has been a major effective communication system for rural mass and,

as a result, companies should identify themselves with their advertisements. Advertisements touching the emotions of the rural folks, it is argued, could drive a quantum jump in sales.

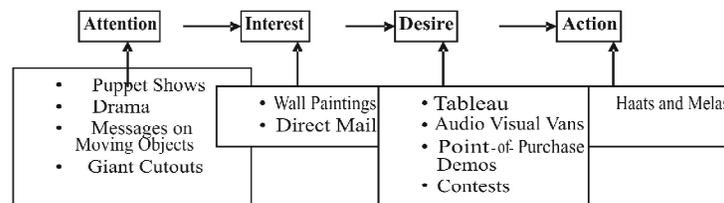
Marketing communications, in rural context includes both personal and impersonal methods promotion like advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and other methods. The effectiveness of rural marketing communications, to a large extent is influenced by the media habits of the rural consumers. Though all types of media is being used in rural area, in view of low level of literacy, audiovisual media- radio, TV and films assume major importance. Conventional media such as television and radio still does not have a good reach in the rural areas when compared to the urban areas. Besides this, press and

media reach ends. Most of them pay lip service to rural marketing and run only on promotions and vans in village squares and weekly markets.

Non-Conventional Media

The non-conventional media in the rural marketplace maybe classified according

Figure 2: AIDA Model



Source Adapted from "Rural Marketing: Targeting the Non - Urban Consumer." By Sanal K Velayudhan

satellite television also have a poor reach because of lack of infrastructural facilities although among all the conventional media, television has the widest reach and around 50% of the rural consumers can be reached through television. However, with the increasing rate of literacy, newspaper media is also gaining considerable importance in rural context. Most people is exposed to a newspaper coverage happened to be opinion leaders who spread the information to the rural masses. The Problem with Conventional Media

Country roads are crowded with tactical promotion-led efforts, everyone wants results now instead of making any emotional connect with their prospects.

For 90% of the marketers, rural begins where their controllable, distribution and

to the Attention-Interest-Desire-Action (AIDA) model through the compartmentalization may not be very tight. The diagram given in Figure 2 illustrates the media associated with each step.

Media that Arouse Interest

In rural India, particularly in the North, puppet shows are very popular. The idea of promoting a product through puppet shows was taken by BASF to make rural consumers aware about its fertilizers. Giant cutouts of particular products may be able to create the interest of the consumers, provided it is placed in a proper place.

Media that Generate Action

Lastly, there are some media which can be effectively used to generate one spot action, i.e., purchase. These are the haats and melas. Haats are temporary markets which are held periodically (mostly once in week) in a place which is accessible to a large number of villages. Thus, haats act as a meeting point of people from a large number of villages. Many companies have tried to utilize the haat as a place for live demonstration of the benefits of a product. Because of the high-level of interaction with the consumers, haats can be very effective media for rural advertising. Melas are similar to haats but they are held less frequently and generally have a theme. A mela also has a large number of visitors than a haat. FMCG Companies have effectively utilized melas and haats to

reach out to rural consumers.

No other country exists on earth, which offers such a dazzling array of entertainment choices as India does.

In India, entertainment encompasses a wide plethora of options. Right from cinema (the largest of its kind in the world) to television (amongst the fastest growing in the world) to soothing music (the most diverse in the world) to awesome festivals (richest in culture) and richest-possible food and finally its fanatical devotion to sports like cricket.

The Indian society is a complex social system with different castes, classes, creeds and tribes. The high rate of illiteracy added to the inadequacy of mass media impedes reach almost to 80% of India's population who reside in village. Mass media is too glamorous, interpersonal and unreliable in contrast with the familiar performance of traditional artist whom the villager could not only see and hear, but even touch. Besides this villagers are more conservative buyers than their urban counterparts. Their desire to innovate with new product is restricted.

Traditional media can be used to reach these people in the marketing of new concept. The traditional media with its effective reach, powerful input and personalized communication system will help in realizing the goal. Besides this when the advertisement is couched in entertainment it goes down easily with the villager.

Few of the available options in the traditional media are Puppetry, Folk Theater & Song, Wall Painting, Demonstration, Posters, Agricultural Games, and Post Cards etc.

Puppetry Puppetry is the indigenous theatre of India. From time immortal it has been the most popular form and well-appreciated form of entertainment available to the village people. It is an inexpensive activity. The manipulator uses the puppets as a medium to express and communicate ideas, values and social messages.

Types of Puppet theatre in India

1. String puppets or Kathputlis of Rajasthan -Contents - Heroic deeds of Vikramaditya, Prithviraj Chouhan, and Amar Singh Rathore
2. String puppets of Orissa - Contents - Radha-Krishna
3. Rod puppets from Bengal: -Contents - Mahabharat, Manas, Radha-Krishna
4. String and Rod puppets of the south (Tanjavur, Madras and Andhra): - Contents - Kathakali
5. Shadow puppets of (a) Orissa (b) Kerala (c) Andhra (d) Karnataka: - Contents - Ramayana.

Thus in rural India puppetry is a source of livelihood, avenue for entertainment and creative expression which is ritually sacred and meaningful as a means of social communication and

vehicle of social transformation.

Folk Theater

Folk theaters are mainly short and rhythmic in form. The simple tunes help in informing and educating the people in informal and interesting manner.

Andhra Pradesh : Veethi Natakam, Kuchupudi, Burratatha

Assam : Ankiya Nat, Kirtania Natak, Ojapali Bihar: Bidesia, Serikela Chhau, Jat-Jatni Bidpada, Ramkhelia

Gujarat : Bhavai

Haryana : Swang, Naqqal

Himachal Pradesh : Kariyala, Bhagat, Ras, Jhanki, Harnatra Haran or Harin.

Jammu & Kashmir: Bhand Pathar or Bhand Jashna, Vetal Dhamali

Karnataka : Yakshagan, Sanata, Dodddata-Bayalata, Tala Maddle or Prasang, Dasarata, Radhna.

Kerala : Kodyattam, Mudiattam, Therayattam, Chavittu Natakam, Chakiyar Kooth, Kathakali

Madhya Pradesh : Maanch, Nacha

Maharashtra: Tamasha, Lalit Bharud, Gondha, Dashavatar

Orissa : Pala Jatra, Daskathia, Chhau Mayurbhanj, Mangal Ras, Sowang,

Punjab : Nautanki, Naqaal, Swang

Rajasthan : Khyal, Rasdhari, Rammat, Turra Kilangi, Gauri, Nautanki, Jhamtara

Tamilnadu : Therukuttu, Veethi Natakam, Bhagwat Mela Natakam, Kurvaanji, Pagal Vasham, Kavadi Chindu

Uttar Pradesh : Ram Leela, Ras Leela, Nautanki, Bhagat, Sang-Swang, Naqqual

Goa, Daman & Diu : Dashavatar, Tiyatra.

Folk songs have been effectively used during revolts of Telangana and Naxalbari and now a days it's best exploiters are Political Parties.

Government has used this media for popularizing improved variety of seeds, agricultural implements, fertilizer etc. Punjab Agricultural University produced Two Audio Cassettes.

A) Balliye Kanak Biye - Wheat Cultivation.

B) Khiran Kepah Narme - Cotton Cultivation.

Both were well received by farmers.

Demonstration: "Direct Contact" is a face-to-face relationship with people individually and with groups such as the Panchayats and other village groups. Such contact helps in arousing the villager's interest in their own problem and motivating them towards self-development. Demonstration may be

- A. i. Method demonstration
- ii. Result demonstration
- B. i. Simple Demonstration
- ii. Composite Demonstration

The five steps to make any demonstration effective are below:

- Information about people
- Objectives to be accomplished

Demonstration plan & Execution of the plan

Evaluation of the demonstration
Reconsideration after evaluation.

In result demonstration, help of audio-visual media can add value. Asian Paints launched Utsav range by painting Mukhiya's house or Post office to demonstrate that paint does not peel off.

Haats & Melas

The countries oldest tradition holds the key to solving these problems. They are also called as the mobile supermarkets of rural India.

Facts & Figures of Haats and Melas

Over 47,000 haats and 25,000 melas are held annually.

The average daily sale at a Haat is about Rs.2.25 Lacs

Annual sales at melas amount to Rs.3,500 crore.

Over half the shoppers at haats have shopping lists.

More than 10,000 melas draw visitors from all over India.

Nearly half the outlets at melas are for manufactured goods.

Haats is a better opportunity for promotion after brand building has been done at Mela.

Melas are organized after harvest season, so the villager has enough money, which he will be ready to spend.

Demonstration at Haat is essential to convert customers at haats since their attitude is far more utilitarian than that of visitors to a fair.

Wall Paintings

Wall Paintings are an effective and economical medium for advertising in rural areas. They are silent unlike traditional theatre. A speech or film comes to an end, but wall painting stays as long as the weather allows it to. Retailer normally welcomes paintings of their shops, walls, and name boards. Since it makes the shop look cleaner and better. Their shops look alluring and stand out among other outlets. Besides rural households shopkeepers and panchayats do not expect any payment, for their wall to be painted with product messages. To get one's wall painted with the product messages is seemed as a status symbol. The greatest advantage of the medium is the power of the picture completed with its local touch. The images used have a strong emotional association with the surrounding, a feat impossible for even a moving visual medium like television, which must use general image to cater to greatest number of viewers. A good wall painting must meet some criteria to generate awareness and remind consumer about the brand.

Caution before using the folk media

However, this suggestion comes with a note of caution. MART feels folk media can be effective provided the campaign is designed meticulously. Special care should be taken to ensure that the campaign

provides 'edutainment' and is not used for preaching. The folk media campaign should reach out and touch the hearts of the rural masses, not just their minds.

Suggestions

More Suitable for rural context: Non-conventional media forms are very suitable for regions in rural India where the reach of conventional media is limited. Besides the reach, the socio-cultural composition of the rural market and their preferences need to be considered to decide the choice of media.

Folk is a good media to generate hype about a new product or to relaunch an existing one. Campaigns with this objective should also ensure proper distribution of the product so that the audience's interest in the product is converted into sales.

Effective utilisation of below-the-line activities Non-conventional media should be used in conjunction with other below-the-line activities to leave an impact in the rural markets. These activities usually consisted of video-van campaigns, which included screening of product commercials and Hindi films. This was supported by interactive games like Wheel of Fortune, Pick the Ball and other activities like product demonstrations and influencer and retailer contact.

While designing a folk campaign, the client needs to consider several factors like the time of the year, the time of the performance, venue, the regional

preference for a particular form of media, suitability of the script etc.

Additional information: While conducting a folk campaign, it would be a good strategy to provide extra information about the product at the venue itself. This is specially required in case of products like tractors, fertilizers etc.

Feed back: Folk campaigns are a good opportunity to get feedback about the product, its distribution etc from the customers as well as the retailers and wholesalers. This opportunity should be tapped to gain the maximum benefit from the campaign.

Create rural specific messages Some television ads helped spark the mid eighties rural boom. But not all commercials go down well with rural folk. Like the products themselves, most ads are created for urban audiences, and often leave villagers cold, or worse. Social workers recount hilarious stories of ads that confuse rural viewers.

Think rural But perhaps more important than anything else, marketers need to get off their urban high horse and begin to think and behave like sons of the soil. Says a senior marketing executive at a Bombay based multinational that's tried repeatedly to break into the rural market. The reason we will lose out to the small scale and unorganized sector is that out filed executives wear trousers and speak with city accents, while their sales representatives wear dhotis and know the local direct.

Brand Ambassadors even brand ambassadors need to be picked judiciously, as urban success need not be replicated in rural settings the same way. That is one reason why Govinda in the mirinda and boosted sales of the drink in rural areas. The time has perhaps come for advertising agencies to look into issues specific to the regions and also at the products, to succeed in the large rural markets

Use of rural specific idioms and phrases Companies also need to go back to the first lesson in advertising; ensure that your consumer can identify with your ad. You also need to remember that you are dealing with a very different society.

Targeting Focus on women, youth and religious groups in addition to rural population.

Build Positive Word-of-Mouth We all know that most villages consist of distinct ethnic or caste groups to which the families belong, forming very strong homogenous rural communities. Here again, unlike the urban consumer who tends to be far more "individualistic" in his buying habits, the rural consumer is largely influenced by the reference groups within the family, community or the village. Depending on the type of product being sold, the nature of the individuals driving these reference groups (or opinion leaders) would vary. Marketers targeting the rural market would do well if they clearly identify these reference groups to build positive word-of-mouth for the brand.

Strong word-of-mouth for a brand can be built through executing customized events within the village, revolving around

the core message of a brand, appealing to the core target group.

Some tips to develop rural advertisements

1. The advertisements in rural context are to be designed according to the needs of the rural consumers. It will be more effective if advertisements could speak in the idiom of rural people.
2. Rural advertisements are often one-time visits, which create only awareness of brand proposition. The same principle of mass media must be adopted for conversion, so that instead of mere carpet-bombing across villages, marketers should go for strategic mining of the rural consumer.
3. One time exposure to advertisement of rural masses of no use, proper frequency should be planned.
4. Avoid tendency to stereotype the rural customer profile. The notion that the rural consumers are irrational, price conscious and that their impulses can be easily manipulated is absolutely wrong.
5. Still rural consumers are linked colours, logos and trademarks
6. **Build Empathy/Relevance** Building empathy for your brand begins with the brand name. It is important to seek out a brand name that is preferably vernacular, that is in tune with the ethos of the market and the social

milieu it will sell in. And the same logic applies for the color, the slogan and every aspect of communication. They must strike the right chord with the rural consumer and cannot be seen wearing urban glasses!

Conclusion

The field of rural marketing has been witnessing a lot off action from both the fast moving consumer goods [FMCG] sector and consumer products manufacturers but, there has been little success in the manner in which rural research is carried out. In spite of all the rural marketing initiatives, the fact still remains that 60% of the rural market is still untapped. One of the main reasons behind this is infrastructure, lack of which has made rural areas. An important tool to reach out to the rural audience is through effective communication. Media efforts for rural markets are usually never looked at seriously, ultimately, what matters is how well the medium is utilized and what innovations can be created to attract and retain brand attention. With the huge geographical spread of rural markets, decentralised promotion would also synergies with scrotal development of pockets of the rural consumer base. Also, the companies need to turn to innovative methods of advertising like Non-conventional or traditional media, fairs or haats to reach their potential customer base.

The most important element in rural communications is that you have to

integrate three things as companies communicate: communication (the exposure to a message), trial or demonstration (convincing) and final sale. If these three elements are integrated while communicating the messages to rural masses by effective utilisation of traditional media proved to be extremely effective in advertising to the rural market

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