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Empowering growth: Unravelling dynamics and strategies for effective rural marketing in the Indian context

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Abstract

This study explores the complex rural marketing environment within the special Indian market context. Given that a sizeable section of India's population lives in rural areas, it is essential to comprehend the dynamics and develop techniques that would effectively engage this group. The research examines the intricacies in rural marketplaces' economic, cultural, and infrastructural characteristics that set them apart from their urban counterparts. The study clarifies the fundamental variables influencing consumer choices and market trends by examining the changing consumer behaviour, tastes, and purchase patterns unique to rural India. This report addresses the main difficulties faced by marketers when addressing rural segments through a thorough analysis of recent literature and actual research. These difficulties include rural consumers' particular communication preferences and their restricted access to contemporary distribution networks. The study also emphasizes the potential opportunities that these difficulties offer for cutting-edge marketing techniques. The study also looks at case studies of brands that have successfully entered India's rural markets. It analyzes the tactics used by these companies, demonstrating how they handled the challenges of rural marketing and made the most of this group's untapped potential. The article also analyzes how digital platforms and technology are changing rural marketing. The study looks at how businesses might use these technology developments to build deep relationships with consumers in rural areas. It provides useful insights for companies looking to capitalize on the enormous potential of rural markets by examining the difficulties, possibilities, and effective techniques. Understanding the intricacies of rural India is essential for developing effective marketing strategies that connect with the distinctive ambitions and lifestyles of its citizens as the sector continues to develop and play a significant role in the nation's economy.

Keywords: Rural marketing, rural distribution, marketing, rural consumers, rural India

Introduction

The consumer market, particularly in rural India, is currently through a process of growth. The second phase of the consumer market commenced in the 1990s. The emergence of this phase can be attributed to the consistent changes implemented in the Indian economy. Modern marketing practices have subsequently emerged to cater to the demands of urban audiences. The current understanding of the attitude between urban and rural areas appears to be inadequate in addressing the requirements of India. The implementation of alternative marketing tactics to effectively target the rural market necessitates a level of assurance. The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry in rural India is experiencing significant growth due to the rise in rural incomes. FMCG companies operating in these sectors are actively striving to meet the increasing demand and expand their market penetration. The anticipated growth rate of the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry in rural regions is projected to be 40 percent, surpassing the growth rate of 25 percent forecast in metropolitan areas. The rural market in India presents both intriguing and complex dynamics. The rural market in India is experiencing a consistent growth trajectory, in contrast to the highly competitive metropolitan sector.

The development of rural marketing undoubtedly facilitates the integration of various sectors of the economy, including agriculture, industry, insurance, transport, banking, finance, and others. From a stringent marketing perspective, it can be observed that the market structure in India may be categorized into two distinct segments: rural and urban markets. The existence of diverse characteristic qualities necessitates the development of separate

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marketing strategies to effectively cater to the distinct market behaviors of rural and urban areas. Based on the findings of the third annual edition of Accenture Research titled "Masters of Rural Markets: From Touch points to Trust points - Winning over India's Aspiring Rural Consumers," it is evident that rural consumers exhibit a strong inclination towards acquiring branded and superior quality products. As a result, there is a prevailing sense of optimism among businesses in India over the expansion of the country's rural consumer markets, which are projected to exhibit a higher growth rate compared to their urban counterparts. The report emphasizes the enhanced networking capabilities of rural consumers and their proactive approach in seeking information from various sources to make informed purchase decisions. Notably, the expanded availability of media and telecommunication services has facilitated the dissemination of information to rural consumers in India, thereby influencing their purchasing choices. Consistent with prevailing patterns, rural consumers are undergoing a transformation towards a more comprehensive understanding of the value offered by products and services. This expanded perception encompasses not only price, but also encompasses utility, aesthetics, and features, rather than solely focusing on low pricing. The consumption patterns in rural areas are gradually becoming more similar to those in metropolitan areas, indicating a shift in consumption patterns. A significant proportion of India's major consumer enterprises cater to around one-third of their consumer base residing in rural areas. Due to a favorable shift in consumer patterns and the substantial market potential, rural India presents a significant and appealing investment prospect for private enterprises. Business firms are increasingly finding rural markets appealing due to the high level of competition and market saturation in urban areas, which in turn limits expansion opportunities. According to projections, the rural market of India is anticipated to surpass the combined consumer market of South Korea and Canada by the year 2025. Additionally, it is expected to be about four times larger than the current urban market in India. Marketers exhibit a significant level of enthusiasm with regard to venturing into the rural market. There exists a distinction between urban and rural consumers with regards to multiple variables that exert an influence on their purchasing behavior. The tactics that have demonstrated effectiveness in urban markets may have significant shortcomings when applied in rural markets.

In contemporary times, numerous business enterprises are venturing into the rural marketplaces of India as part of their marketing plans, with the aim of reaping substantial benefits from these regions. Several firms have made progress in this area, including Hindustan Lever, ITC, HPCL, Coca-Cola, LG Electronics, Britannia, LIC, HDFC Standard Life, ICICI, Philips, Colgate Palmolive, and numerous telecom companies. The current conditions prevailing in urban markets can also be examined within this framework. Initially, it can be observed that the urban markets have nearly attained a state of saturation, hence presenting challenges in effectively capitalizing on them to generate substantial profits. Additionally, the urban market is seeing increased competitiveness, leading many enterprises to allocate significant resources towards advertising expenses.

Objectives of the study

The primary objective of the present study is to investigate

the following concerns:

1. The purpose of this study is to analyze the existing state of rural marketing.
2. The objective is to identify potential prospects for marketing in rural areas.
3. This study aims to investigate the problems encountered by marketers in rural settings.
4. The goal is to propose viable solutions for effective marketing in rural regions.

Research Methodology

This study aims to evaluate the potential and dynamics of rural markets in India. Various sources of information, including journals, books, secondary data from sources such as the Census of India, government publications, and websites, have been utilized to substantiate the arguments. The primary aim of this study is to assess the various factors that impact the demand for goods and services in rural areas of India, as well as to analyze the potential for growth within this sector. Additionally, it evaluates the potential prospects inside the rural market among shifting paradigms.

Review of literature

The rural consumer market in India has experienced significant growth in recent years. The consumption mix has experienced a notable improvement. The consumption basket of rural consumers has witnessed the inclusion of numerous new products, resulting in a notable shift in the relative shares of various categories. According to Ramaswamy (2010), the higher socioeconomic strata have exhibited a propensity for purchasing and utilizing a diverse range of contemporary goods. According to Kumar (2011)^[9], the rural market is experiencing a growth rate of 25 percent, whereas the urban market is only developing at a rate of 7 to 10 percent. The population of rural India is three times greater than that of urban India, with 810 million individuals residing in rural areas compared to 280 million in metropolitan areas. According to Bijapurkar (2007), it can be observed that the rural market surpasses the urban market in various categories. There has been a notable transition in the attention of marketers, with a shift from metropolitan markets to rural areas. According to Gupta (2009), a significant proportion, over 70%, of India's population resides in rural areas. Furthermore, rural assets constitute over 50% of the physical wealth in the country, presenting substantial opportunities for enterprises to access this market.

Market size

The Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of India's per capita GDP in rural areas has seen a growth of 6.2 percent since the year 2000. It is anticipated that the Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry in rural and semi-urban regions of India will surpass the US\$ 20 billion threshold by 2018 and subsequently achieve a value of US\$ 100 billion by 2025.

Significance of rural markets

The growth rate of rural markets is projected to outpace that of urban markets. The rural market's potential is sometimes likened to that of an awakened dormant force. The veracity of these statistics is supported by a comprehensive study on market expansion completed by multiple researchers. In recent times, rural markets have gained considerable importance in nations such as China and India due to the

overall economic growth, which has led to a significant rise in the purchasing power of rural communities. Due to the implementation of the green revolution in India, there has been a notable increase in the consumption of industrial and urban manufactured products in rural areas. In the present situation, a distinct marketing strategy, specifically referred to as rural marketing, has emerged. There is occasionally confusion between rural marketing and agricultural marketing. The latter refers to the selling of rural area produce to urban or industrial consumers, whereas rural marketing pertains to the provision of manufactured or processed inputs or services to rural producers or consumers.

Government Initiatives

The Government of India has formulated a range of initiatives aimed at enhancing and expanding rural infrastructure, with the objective of generating a multiplier impact on the movement of products and services. This, in turn, is expected to enhance the earning capacity of rural areas, thus leading to an improvement in consumption patterns. E-commerce companies such as Flipkart, Snapdeal, Infibeam, and Paytm, a prominent mobile wallet provider, have entered into Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with the government. The objective of these agreements is to extend their services to rural regions by establishing connections with the government's common service centres (CSCs). This initiative is in line with the 'Digital India' campaign, which aims to promote digital connectivity in villages. In response to the growing need for a proficient workforce, the Indian government has formulated a strategy to provide training to a staggering 500 million individuals by the year 2022. To accomplish this ambitious goal, the government is actively seeking collaboration with corporate entities and entrepreneurs to contribute to this endeavor. The objective of the initiative is to ensure the provision of irrigation facilities to all villages in India by consolidating multiple existing irrigation schemes into a unified and targeted irrigation program. The Government of India has set a target to allocate Rs 75,600 crore (Equivalent to US\$ 11.34 billion) towards the provision of electricity through distinct feeders, specifically catering to agricultural and home usage in rural regions. The objective of this program is to enhance the efficacy of energy distribution with the ultimate goal of ensuring uninterrupted power supply to rural areas in India. The Government of India has initiated a program called 'A Scheme for Promotion of Innovation, Rural Industry and Entrepreneurship' (ASPIRE) with the aim of fostering agricultural-based enterprises. The Government of India endeavors to foster innovation and facilitate the advancement of technology in geographically isolated rural and tribal regions. The initiative known as the 'Nav Kalpana Kosh' endeavors to enhance multiple aspects of rural communities, including government, agriculture, and hygiene. Financial institutions are currently engaged in efforts to establish automated teller machines (ATMs) in rural areas, with the specific objective of distributing currency notes of lower denominations. According to Mr. R Gandhi, Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), there has been an encouragement for banks to seek a resolution in the establishment of ATMs in rural areas. Banks will need to identify a suitable technological solution for a distinct form of ATM that can effectively cater to the requirements of the rural population. The Indian marketplaces exhibit a consumer-centric orientation, with a

clear distinction between urban and rural segments. Although India's rural population comprises 70 percent of the overall population, its contribution to the country's total consumption stands at a mere 40 percent. The retail industry has faced challenges in entering local markets due to inefficiencies in the supply chain and limited connectivity in rural areas. This finding holds significance due to the fact that 53 percent of household sector spending originates from rural India. The FMCG industry in rural and semi-urban India has been projected to have significant market potential, as indicated by a report conducted by AC Nielsen. The analysis suggests that by the year 2018, the sector might surpass the US \$20 billion milestone, and by 2025, it has the potential to reach an impressive US \$100 billion. Prominent e-commerce enterprises such as Flipkart, Snapdeal, Infibeam, and mobile wallet company Paytm have already entered into memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with the government in order to extend their services to remote and rural regions. The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology has implemented a comprehensive infrastructure support system by establishing a total of 100,000 common service centres (CSCs) in rural areas. These centres serve as a means to build connections with e-commerce companies. Furthermore, the ministry has set a target to increase the number of CSCs by an additional 90,000 before the conclusion of March 2016. Moreover, the current rural electrification initiative has been making significant progress and is poised to further enhance and broaden the potential of the rural market.

Pattern of spending by the Indian consumer

Indian expenditure can be categorized into two distinct classifications, namely essential expenditures and discretionary expenditures. Necessities encompass fundamental commodities such as sustenance and apparel, whereas discretionary spending encompasses all other expenditures. Over the course of time, there has been a gradual increase in the trend of discretionary expenditure within India's consumer market, with projections indicating that it will account for approximately 55 percent of overall consumption by the year 2021. In general, the industries that derive the greatest consumer spending gains are food, housing, consumer durables, transport, and communication. The Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry plays a significant role in contributing to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This sector encompasses consumer goods such as domestic items, personal care products, and food and beverages. Currently, the industry holds the position of being the fourth largest in the Indian economy. The growth of the smartphone market in India has experienced a significant surge, resulting in its current position as the second largest market globally, trailing only the United States. Prominent companies such as Samsung and Apple have a strong interest in penetrating the Indian market, whilst Lenovo and Xiaomi have effectively entered this thriving industry by using cost reduction strategies through local manufacture. According to the Associated Chambers of Commerce of India (ASSOCHAM), there has been an observed steady transition in consumer expenditure patterns, with a notable movement from essential commodities to more extravagant goods. It is projected that the luxury market in India may surpass a value of US \$18.6 billion by the year 2016. According to projections made by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), India's proportion of global

consumption is expected to reach 5.8 percent by the year 2020. This is a significant increase, more than double the current share.

Exploring niche marketing for rural markets

Niche markets are a compact yet lucrative set of niches that products and brands can target. Given the surge in consumer demand, marketers are actively seeking strategies to use the potential of niche markets. The presence of "Dove" soap by Hindustan Lever and "Colgate Total" by Colgate Palmolive exemplify the significance of employing specialized techniques inside the Indian market. In order to effectively target the rural market in India, it is possible to develop niche tactics by creatively integrating various aspects of the marketing mix. In a nation such as India, where there has been a significant expansion of consumer demand in rural areas, the implementation of specialized marketing strategies may provide a distinct and exceptional undertaking. Considering the extensive cultural heterogeneity prevalent throughout the nation, the use of specialized marketing strategies has the potential to yield significant opportunities within the rural market. The majority of products and services have the potential to be restructured using a marketing-mix approach, wherein the significance assigned to each aspect may differ according to the demographic and psychographic characteristics of rural consumers. A coffee brand may necessitate the adoption of a distinct advertising motif. The organism may exploit the stimulating properties of caffeine in order to establish its position. Enfield has exemplified the utilization of advertising as a means to target a certain market segment, as has Coca Cola through their collaboration with renowned cinema personality Amir Khan. The aforementioned statement depicted the durability of a motorcycle in order to endure rural and adverse environments. High-end products that have established a distinct market segment in urban regions may undergo adaptations in order to target the rural markets. Beverages, convenience meals, and culinary tools, among other items, may develop a "distinctive flavor" as a means of securing a unique position within the rural market segment.

The growing opportunity one main driver

The increasing potential in rural markets is undoubtedly the primary cause. In recent years, there has been a notable surge in rural demand, accompanied by a positive shift in its composition. The augmented income and purchasing power of rural consumers, coupled with improved income distribution, have resulted in an amplification of rural demand for various products. Enhanced accessibility to several contemporary products and brands has contributed to this expansion.

Rural marketing developments in India

Given the competitive landscape in rural markets, which has witnessed the presence of prominent national competitors such as HUL and Dabur, as well as regional players like Ghari, P&G faces a significant challenge in expanding its market share. According to Sumeet Vohra, the marketing director of P&G India, the company's primary objective is to enhance the quality of life for individuals and extend its impact to a wider audience. According to Vohra, our economy is primarily driven by consumption, and we acknowledge the significance of the expanding rural sector within this framework. Vohra further asserts that P&G

consistently assesses potential avenues for growth, not only within this particular segment, but throughout India as a whole. To achieve this, the company intends to leverage appropriate brand portfolios and employ effective marketing strategies. The aforementioned action highlights the significance of the rural market, since it is imperative to acknowledge that rural India accounts for 12.2% of the global population. P&G is implementing this effort with the aim of facilitating user trials for various SKU pack sizes and sachets. Although Vohra declined to provide insight into future plans, claiming adherence to business policy, it is apparent that the organization intends to expand the project based on the initial reaction to the pilot program. This expansion aims to encompass over 5,000 villages throughout the state of Uttar Pradesh. Furthermore, in order to capitalize on the demand produced by this initiative, P&G is concurrently enhancing its distribution network to guarantee widespread coverage and accessibility to its goods. However, P&G's expansion into rural areas presents a challenge to established competitors like as Hindustan Unilever. Over time, Hindustan Unilever has strengthened its distribution network in rural regions through initiatives like Project Shakti. In a similar vein, the prominent tobacco company ITC has effectively established a network known as echoupal to advance its fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) aspirations. This network has facilitated the promotion of ITC's trademarks, such as Superia soaps and shampoos, by offering them in smaller pack sizes. According to Anand Shah, an FMCG analyst at Angel Broking, Procter & Gamble (P&G) has entered the Indian market somewhat late, and it is only over the past two years that the business has shown an inclination to explore the market more extensively. According to Shah, the company is currently attempting to catch up with its competitors in the rural areas, as these regions have had significant development in categories such as shampoos. P&G is anticipating that Sangeeta Bhabhi would effectively navigate through the competitive landscape. Additionally, it is important to ensure that her head remains securely positioned on her shoulders.

Product strategies for rural market

In order for a corporation to establish a prominent presence in the rural market, it is imperative to meticulously evaluate existing deficiencies within this market and develop a suitable product offering that caters to the needs of rural consumers. Developing a product strategy for the rural market entails several distinct considerations in comparison to its urban counterparts. The needs and demands of rural consumers may differ significantly from those of urban consumers, highlighting the need of effectively targeting the rural market. The primary goal is to develop products that are tailored to meet the specific needs and preferences of rural communities. According to prevailing knowledge in the field of rural marketing, it is commonly believed that the demands and requirements of rural consumers bear resemblance to those of their urban counterparts. Therefore, it is imperative that the items designed to meet urban characteristics also align with the needs and preferences of rural consumers. Nevertheless, this assertion is often inaccurate as there exists a significant disparity between rural and urban settings in several instances. In urban areas, cooking is commonly facilitated by the use of controlled flame appliances such as kerosene or LPG gas stoves. Conversely, in rural regions, an open fire or traditional

cooking device known as a 'Chulha' is typically employed for this purpose. Pressure cookers equipped with single-sided handles are more suitable for urban consumers, as opposed to rural consumers who rely on open fires or traditional 'chulhas' for cooking purposes. A potentially suitable option for rural needs could be a spacious cooking appliance equipped with handles positioned on opposite sides. Hence, it is imperative to take into account the needs of rural consumers and build goods that are specifically tailored to their requirements during the design and development process. The introduction of shampoo in sachet packaging during the late 1980s led to a significant increase in sales, particularly among consumers belonging to low-income categories. Hindustan Motors (HM) introduced the RTV (Rural transport vehicle), a utility vehicle specifically targeted at the rural market. Therefore, it is imperative to engage in product creation specifically tailored for rural consumers. Although marketers continue to make efforts and conduct experiments to effectively penetrate the rural market, the following product strategies have been extensively embraced and demonstrated their efficacy in the rural environment:

The small unit packing method has been subjected to testing with various products such as shampoos, pickles, biscuits, Vicks cough drops in single tablets, toothpaste, and others. The adoption of compact packaging is likely to be well-received in rural markets. One advantage of the product is its affordability, making it accessible to rural consumers due to its low price.

Another illustrative instance is the Red Label tea pack priced at Rs. 3.00, which exhibits higher sales in comparison to the larger pack. This is attributed to its affordability, particularly for individuals belonging to the lower income bracket. Furthermore, its extensive market penetration facilitates convenient accessibility for end users, hence contributing to their satisfaction. The compact packaging of the product is expected to appeal to a significant portion of consumers residing in rural areas.

New product designs: In consideration of the rural lifestyle, manufacturers and marketing professionals may contemplate the development of novel product designs. For example, PVC shoes and chappals can be deemed as suitable options for rural consumers due to the challenging working circumstances they often face. The cost of P.V.C items is comparatively inexpensive and within reach.

Durable commodities: The durability of a product is a significant consideration for consumers residing in rural areas. The experiences of manufacturers in the torch light dry battery cell industry provide support for this assertion, since rural consumers have shown a preference for heavier dry battery cells over lighter alternatives. The individuals in question saw a positive correlation between increased weight and enhanced robustness and durability. The durability of a product, whether it be in terms of its structural integrity or aesthetic appeal, holds significant importance for consumers residing in rural areas.

In the context of rural consumers, there is a heightened emphasis on the functionality and aesthetic appeal of products. Philips India Ltd. is a prominent multinational corporation operating in India. During the early 1970s, a low-cost medium wave receiver termed BAHADUR was developed and marketed. The sales saw an initial period of strength, followed by a subsequent fall. According to consumer research, it was discovered that rural consumers purchased radios not solely for the purpose of obtaining

information and news, but also for amusement purposes.

In order to establish identity, rural buyers may provide their own brand name to a particular item. Fertilizer firms typically include a logo on the packaging of their products, despite the requirement for fertilizers to be marketed solely under generic names. The significance of a brand name or logo for rural consumers lies in its ability to be quickly recalled.

The promotion of a direct agricultural marketing model through the establishment of retail stores operated by farmer's co-operatives in urban areas is imperative within the context of Kisan Mandi. The establishment of a direct connection between producers and consumers would provide two primary benefits: firstly, it would empower farmers to capitalize on the elevated price levels, and secondly, it would exert downward pressure on retail pricing. Similar to the prevailing pattern observed in metropolitan areas of India, it is anticipated that customers residing in rural regions will gradually adopt online shopping practices and contribute to digital consumption. Basic telecommunication services have already achieved significant coverage in rural regions, and there is already a growing presence of laptops and smartphones in these areas. Capitalizing on these advancements, internet portals are increasingly recognized as pivotal platforms for enterprises seeking to penetrate and build their presence in the rural market. The utilization of the Internet has emerged as a financially efficient strategy for organizations seeking to surmount geographical limitations and expand their market presence. According to market research firm Nielsen, it is anticipated that the rural fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) market in India will attain a valuation of US\$ 100 billion by the year 2025. According to a recent analysis published by the McKinsey Global Institute, it is projected that the annual real income per household in rural India will see a growth rate of 3.6 percent by the year 2025. This represents an increase from the previous growth rate of 2.8 percent observed during the past two decades. Rural markets possess latent potential inside any given economy. The endeavor to comprehensively study rural markets is faced with numerous challenges. The notion of rural markets in India, as well as in other nations such as China, is currently undergoing development. This sector presents a range of obstacles, including the comprehension of rural market dynamics and the formulation of strategies to effectively cater to and meet the demands of rural consumers.

Conclusion

Based on the aforementioned criteria, it is evident that the Indian rural market is increasingly being regarded as a preferred location by marketers aiming to generate high volume sales. Even enterprises that have challenges in sustaining themselves inside the urban market exhibit a faint indication of optimism. However, prior to engaging in these markets, it is imperative to do a comprehensive analysis of the rural dynamics, demography, and demand-influencing elements of the specific area of interest. This is essential since the rural market cannot be seen as a uniform entity. The rural market paradigms are undergoing transformation in the 21st century. Corporate entities should conduct a comprehensive analysis of the requirements, cultural dynamics, behavioral patterns, and other relevant factors pertaining to rural populations. Subsequently, they should develop a range of inventive approaches to effectively tap into the potential and favorable market conditions present in

these areas. The attainment of success is significantly contingent upon factors such as a comprehensive long-term vision, the cultivation of creativity, the implementation of creative methods, and the prompt execution of early entry tactics, which in turn leads to enhanced profitability.

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