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A STUDY ON UNDERSTANDING OF RURAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN INDIA

SUCHI K. PATEL
ASST. PROFESSOR
ANAND INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT
ANAND

ZARNA M. PATEL
ASST. PROFESSOR
ANAND INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT
ANAND

ABSTRACT

The paper describes the buying behaviour of rural consumer in India. The Indian rural market with its vast size offers a huge opportunity with 128 million households and the rural population is nearly three times the urban. India today has about 6.4 lakh villages. All except about 15,000, have a population below 5000. Looking at marketer defined classification, most companies in the FMCG sector would define any area with primarily agriculture based occupation and with a population of less than 20,000 as rural. Rural areas exhibit several distinctive characteristics that are different from the urban areas. Literacy levels, family structure, occupational patterns, social customs and norms, and several other features are unique to rural India. A complex set of factors influence rural consumer's behavior. Social norms, traditions, castes, and social customs have greater influence on the consumer behavior in rural areas than in urban areas. The seasonality of agricultural production influences the seasonality of rural consumers' demand. Although rural areas offer attractive opportunities to marketers at an aggregate level, about 68 percent of these markets remain untapped mainly due to inaccessibility. Thus, the absolute size of rural India is expected to be double that of urban India.

KEYWORDS

buying behaviour, consumer behaviour, rural consumer.

INTRODUCTION

Rural market is dynamic and has stood for centuries on its own. Nobody can ignore rural India which comprises one tenth of the world population. A revolution is sweeping the Indian countryside which has compelled companies to go rural. The rural consumer is discerning and rural markets are vibrant. The Indian rural market with its vast size offers a huge opportunity with 128 million households and the rural population is nearly three times the urban. Rural India has a large consuming class with 41 percent of India's middle-class and 58 percent of the total disposable income. According to a study by Chennai based Francis Kanai Marketing Planning Services Pvt. Ltd. the rural market for FMCG is Rs 65000 crore, for durable Rs 5000 crore, for tractors and agri-inputs Rs 45000 crore and two and four – wheelers Rs 8000 crore. In total a whopping Rs. 123000 crore.

DEFINITION

There is no official definition of what constitutes a rural area. However, an urban area is defined as per the census of India as "all places with a municipality, corporation, cantonment or a notified town area" and "all other places satisfying the following criteria:

1. Minimum population of 5000,
2. At least 75 percent of male working population in non-agricultural pursuit, and
3. Density of population of at least 400 persons per square kilometer. Therefore, an area that does not satisfy the criteria specified above can be considered a rural area.

Taking on from the above, a habitation is defined as rural if

- It has a population density of less than 400 per sq. Km.
- At least 75 percent of male working population is engaged in agriculture related activities, and
- There is, in the location, no municipality or municipal board.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RURAL CONSUMER

- Rural areas generally have less pollution, less crime, and less stress than urban areas.
- People in rural areas have poor job opportunities than urban.
- Rural life is generally less exciting than urban life.
- The rural consumer is very conscious about getting value for money.
- He understands symbols and colours better, and looks for endorsement by local leaders or icons.
- He doesn't like to pay extra for frills he cannot use.
- He has his daily routine, and there is no sense of urgency in his lifestyle.
- He has a very high involvement in any product purchased.
- Divisions based on caste, community and other hierarchical factors exist in rural areas.
- The rural market of India is a geographically scattered market.
- Rural consumers continue to be marked by low purchasing power.
- Rural market is culturally a diverse and Heterogeneous
- There is also a great deal of difference between different states in extent of development.
- The rural consumers are marked by a conservative and tradition-bound lifestyle.
- The lifestyle of a sizeable segment of rural is currently going through the process of change.

BUYING BEHAVIOR OF RURAL CONSUMERS

To understand the buying behavior of rural consumers, we must go to the factors that influence their buying behavior. The factors include:

1. **Influence of culture:** Culture and tradition influence perception and buying behavior. For example, the preference in respect of color, size and shape is often the result of cultural factors. Rural consumers perception of products is strongly influenced by cultural factors.
2. **Geographic locations:** Rural consumer behavior is also influenced by the geographic location of the consumers. For example, nearness to feeder towns and industrial projects influence the buying behavior of consumers in the respective clusters of villages.

3. **Exposure to urban lifestyles:** Extent of exposure of rural consumers to urban lifestyles also influences their buying behavior. An increased exposure and interaction with urban communities has been the trend in recent years.
4. **The way the consumer uses the products:** The situation in which the consumers utilize the product also influences their buying. The example of lack of electricity affecting buying behavior illustrates this point as well. Lack of electricity automatically increases the purchase of batteries by rural consumers.
5. **Places of purchase:** Buying behavior of rural consumer also varies depending on the place of purchase. Different segments of rural buyers buy their requirements from different places/outlets. Some buy from the village shopkeepers; some from village markets/fairs; others buy from the town that serves as the feeder to the rural area.
6. **Involvement of others in the purchase** In the past, the head of the family used to make the purchase decision all by himself. In contrast, the involvement of the other members of the family in the purchase decision has been growing in recent years. An increase in literacy coupled with greater access to information has resulted in this development. The marketer has to reckon the role of the influencers while sizing up the buying behavior of rural consumers.

All the above factors influence the buying behavior of rural consumer and hence their responses to the marketing mix variables, and the reference points they use for purchase decisions.

HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE RURAL?

The first step in the development of any communication package is the in-depth study of the mindset of consumers of each region for each product category.

- A rural consumer is not in a hurry and you can take your time to communicate a message.
- The importance of simple analogies that can help in understanding the brand promise better.
- The communication must address the specific problems, needs, aspirations and hopes of rural folks in each region.
- The total understanding of the main message was only 30-60 per cent among the rural audience.
- Rural folks do not understand clever, gimmicky, quick, suggestive and hi-tech films.

CONCLUSION

Economic reforms in India have brought about major changes in the whole market environment. With those changes rural marketing has become an important concern to marketers. Successful rural marketing calls for review of rural marketing. Environment, proper understanding of the nature and profile of the rural consumers, designing the right products to appeal to them, and suitable media for communication and distribution. The Indian marketers, therefore, needs to change their traditional view about the rural India's rural consumer that settles for less.

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