

Non-Conventional MARCOM Strategy For Rural India

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RURAL MARKET - A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

The villages and small towns of India, which were once considered inconsequential from the marketing point of view, are now getting the attention of the marketers and rural markets are proving to be vital for the growth of most of the FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) companies. Rural India accounts for more than 30 – 60 per cent of the total sales of consumer goods like biscuits, toothpastes, shampoos, washing machines etc. Because of saturation in the urban markets, marketing strategy should shift its attention towards the rural markets, which are no longer seen as the dumping grounds of the consumer products popular in urban areas. Rural consumers have a distinct preference of their own. But due to perceptible changes seen in the improvement of infrastructure, rising level of income, explosion of media and wide coverage of TV, radio etc., the gap between the urban and rural divide is gradually narrowing. The rural consumer is more discrete, more cash-conscious and more utilitarian in outlook. The marketing communication i.e., MARCOM strategy for rural areas should be different from the urban areas because of inaccessibility of electricity and electronics media, thin population density and widely scattered villages, poor exposure, low disposable income and availability of counterfeit products.

As the rural environment is different from the urban setting, communicating to potential rural customers poses a major challenge. The majority of the marketing communication is mostly urban-centric; therefore, adopting those for rural market will not be successful. Rural communication is not a peripheral activity. It requires an entirely different mindset. Rural marketers have to frame suitable policies to communicate skillfully with a much larger but scattered audience characterised by variations in language, culture and lifestyles. With hardly any key influencer within the village and just a few sources of information, the rural consumer feels inadequately informed for buying things with confidence. The poor message comprehension and low media exposure further add to the problem of communication through mass media. To overcome this, the marketing communication strategy should reorient itself so as to:

1. Explore the availability of media at different locations,
2. Develop region-specific consumer profiles so as to understand the consumer preference,
3. Design right promotional and motivational strategies to attract target customers, and
4. Ensure that they have made the right purchase decision by giving dissonance reducing communication message.

IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION (MARCOM)

Modern market is growing by leaps and bounds. Many products are appearing on the shelves of the store with various brand names. A consumer, while entering a store, feels overwhelmed by seeing the plethora of stocks and fails to decide to buy which product. Marketing communication, which is a combination of various promotional tools steps in this predicament to help the consumer to make his choice as it knows about the quality of a product, its affordability, availability and utility. As marketing is predominately a selling process, marketing communication plays a central role in marketing. But due to poor literacy rate in rural areas (table-1), the sophisticated communication strategy adopted in metros and urban areas may not be suitable for rural folks.

Table-1 : The Literacy Rate In India – (Urban & Rural)

Year	Age Group	Literacy Rate- Urban Areas	Literacy Rate- Rural Areas	Difference in rural/urban areas (%age points)
1961	5 and over	54.43	22.46	31.97
1971	5 and over	60.22	27.89	32.33
1981*	5 and over	64.85	34.04	30.81
1981*	7 and over	67.20	36.00	31.20
1991**	7 and over	73.08	44.69	28.39
2001***	7 and over	79.92	58.74	21.18

*Excludes Assam **Excludes Jammu & Kashmir *** Census of India – 2001

Source: www.nlm.nic.in/tables/scenario.htm

The rural folks are fiercely brand loyal. Therefore, the purpose of marketing communication in rural areas should be to create brand awareness and to develop brand loyalty among consumers.

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A marketer has to develop different brands in order to cater to the requirement of different rural areas. For example, products of wheat may not find customers in southern region. As most of the rural folks do not have fixed monthly incomes like their urban counterparts, their purchasing power is not the same throughout the year. During the post-harvest period, they are able to buy goods of higher-priced-brands. Marketers should keep this fact in mind. They need to change the product content keeping in view the purchasing power of the rural folks. Most of the people of rural areas are not brand conscious. They recognize the product by its packaging, colour and visuals. For example, Nerolac paints sporting tiger brands are often called as 'Sher Chhap' paints in rural areas. Similarly, Lifebuoy soap is popularly called as 'Laal Sabun'. In interior areas, brand identification is mostly drawn through visual patterns, logo, symbol and colour. Semiotics primarily work best for FMCGs which have low involvement at the time of purchase but have very frequent usage. For example, Britannia's Tiger biscuit with its bright red pack captivated the rural consumers because this colour is associated with auspiciousness and festivity. Marketers can also offer the same product with a different brand name into different rural market segments to suit the cultural milieu of the community. Keeping in view the purchasing power of the rural folks, products sold in smaller packs or sachets have recently proved to be a great success for the manufacturers. The advantages of the small packs have affordability because large numbers of rural consumers are not financially well off. Babool toothpaste of Balsara hygiene products in 50 gms pack, Balsara's mosquito repellent Odomos in 3 gm sachets, J.K. Diary's whitener of 50 gm, Sunfill sachets, and Coca-cola's Kinley purified drinking water pouches are some of the success stories of small packets.

To be successful in rural areas, marketing communication should be geared to inform the prospective buyers about the advantages and uniqueness of a product as compared to other items available in rural areas. In this connection, communication plays an important role in building of the customers' loyalty and changing the brand affiliation. Rural folks are mostly conservative in their approach, hence, to change their mindset and to build up a new brand loyalty is a Herculean task. To design one central message for the entire rural India may not be successful because of difference of religion, living conditions, level of literacy, prosperity, climate, language, culture and ethos. Again, effective utilization of mass communication is not possible because of low penetration of media in inaccessible areas. For instance, it is very difficult to reach 6, 27,000 villages across the country, which roughly account for 70.9% of India's population (The Media Guide 2008, released by the Lintas Media Group). It is a Herculean task to communicate with rural consumers because 2 out of 5 Indians are unreachable by any media – TV, Press, Radio and Cinema put together.

Table-2: The Rural Reach of Various Media

Forms of Media	% of Rural Reach	% of Male Reach	% of Female Reach	Max. Reach in State	Min. reach in State
TV	38	39	35	Goa (83%)	Bihar (11%)
Radio	18	22	13	Tamil Nadu (40%)	Andhra Pradesh (3%)
Print	15	20	7	Kerala (62%)	Madhya Pradesh (4%)
Cinema	5	4	1	Andhra Pradesh (20%)	Bihar, Gujarat, Haryana, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, U.P. and W.B. (1%)
TOTAL	76	85	56		

Source: The Media Guide 2008, released by the Lintas Media Group

Therefore, to communicate effectively with rural audiences, it is important to understand the aspirations, literacy level, language, fears and needs of rural consumers. This emphasises that marketers have to think of some innovative ways of reaching the rural consumer through a combination of different MARCOM strategies.

From table-2 it is clear that 24 % of rural areas are not reachable by electronics or print media and the proportion of unreachability is 44% in case of females and 15% for males. To put it otherwise, the total population lying outside the purview of the media is roughly 17.22 crores. Further, the states like Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Bihar, Haryana, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, U.P. and W.B. are lagging much behind in respect of reachability. Thus, there is a huge scope for the companies if they can address this problem by devising appropriate communication strategies. Srinivasan Raman, the ex-VP of AC Nielsen ORG-MARG Pvt. Ltd. and the present Executive Director of Hansa Research has rightly pointed out the role of new approaches of rural communication in these words "The challenge is to create communication that would help the rural consumer recognizing brands, logos, visuals and colours."

CONVENTIONAL VS NON-CONVENTIONAL RURAL COMMUNICATION

Marketing communication is broadly classified into two types viz., conventional and non-conventional. TV, radio, cinema, newspapers, pamphlets, word of mouth, and video on wheels are included under conventional category. These conventional media which have been so successful in Indian urban settings in creating awareness do not sometimes give the desired result in rural settings. TV, the most powerful of all communication media, has a large number of direct and indirect viewership touching 61 million in 2007 and is still beyond the reach of large mass of

rural consumers. Moreover, communication through TV sometimes becomes unintelligible because of difference of language, ethics and values. Radio offers limited programmes and the broadcasting is mostly controlled by the Government. One of its basic drawbacks is its lack of visual content. Cinema is another powerful mode of advertising but it mostly caters to the young mass and viewing cinema is not free. Thus, except TV and radio, there is hardly any involvement of the viewer with advertising messages. Print media becomes successful, where there is high literacy and easy availability. Moreover, those who matter in purchasing hardly get time to go through the advertisements because they are occupied in agriculture or other allied activities. Illiterate mass who are generally poor and predominant in number do not understand the subtle nuances of advertising. Apart from this, rural buyers unlike their urban counterparts are not prone to impetuous purchase decisions. Unless he is convinced about a product's utility and suitability for himself, he will not pull out cash from his pocket to pay for it. Therefore, brands do not have any attraction for him. The interpersonal communication i.e., the word of mouth is given more importance than glossy advertising in rural settings.

Conventional media fails to understand the mindset of local customers, their likings, beliefs, language and culture. The message may be very good and the media may have a good reach, but the rural consumer may not be able to identify himself / herself with the advertisement. So, there is an urgent need to build assurance and trust about product quality, service support and company credentials in the minds of rural consumers. For this, marketers are turning their attention towards the non-conventional mode of communication and are taking resort to the face-to-face "below the line" touch, feel and talk mode at various touch-points like haats, and mandis. Puppetry, folk theaters, demonstrations, melas, post cards & posters, video net, booklets & calendars come under non-conventional communication. Recently, the scope of non-conventional communication is seen expanding rapidly. Stencils, bus panels / shelters, bills (back of water and electricity bills), ration cards, match boxes, plastic and jute bags, posters, handbills, post office materials (cards, envelopes), bank passbooks, school walls and programmes, and bus and train tickets have been used to propagate the intended message to the targeted rural mass.

The utmost importance before selling a product in rural setting is to create awareness. For this, marketers sometimes take advantage of fairs, festivals and melas which take place in Indian rural settings very often with large number of rural folks participating in them and use these occasions for brand communication by using folk media, or using audiocassettes in tea stalls. Cinema vans, shop-fronts, walls and wells are other vehicles that are used to create awareness regarding brand and pack visibility. Hindustan Unilever Limited has been successful in creating awareness for its soap and detergent brands Lux, Lifebuoy and Wheel by putting stickers on hand pumps, walls of wells, fixing tin plates on the trees surrounding ponds where men and women folk in villages come to bathe and wash their clothes.

TYPES OF NON-CONVENTIONAL MEDIA

Non-conventional media have been discharging multifarious functions. Some of them like puppet shows, magic shows, drama and one act plays, giant cutouts, messages on moving vehicles etc. are primarily used for drawing attention of rural consumers. Some of them create interest. Wall paintings, hoardings, direct mail, animator and word-of-mouth come under these types. While appreciating the colour and texture of wall paintings and hoardings, a curiosity to read the message imprinted is generated. Direct mail appeals to the ego of the receiver and adds to the prestige among his neighbours. Animator arrests the interest because of its humorous appeal, whereas word-of-mouth creates a sensation about the product. At this stage, sometimes the customer wavers in his decision if the competitor firms offer better choice. So there is possibility of leakage in this stage. When the customer is fully convinced, then only desire arises in his mind to have the product. Tableau, audio-visual vans, point-of-purchase demonstrations and contests help in enkindling the desire to have the object in the mind. Haats, melas, mandis, yatra, and local baniya shop (mom-and-pop stores) give the opportunity to the buyers to purchase their desired object in the neighbourhood. These various types of non-conventional MARCOM will be clear from the AICDAS (Attention-Interest-Conviction-Desire-Action-Satisfaction) model depicted in figure-1.

Marketers resort to these modes with the aim of attracting rural consumers in order to,

- Bring about awareness among a certain percentage of the target audience.
- Improve knowledge to generate interest.
- Strengthen the liking or preference for the product.
- Exercise mental persuasion to buy the product.

Marketing communication (to be successful) should be able to draw the prospective customer attention, generate interest, and build a strong desire for the product so that the consumer will ultimately run for the product. Marketers

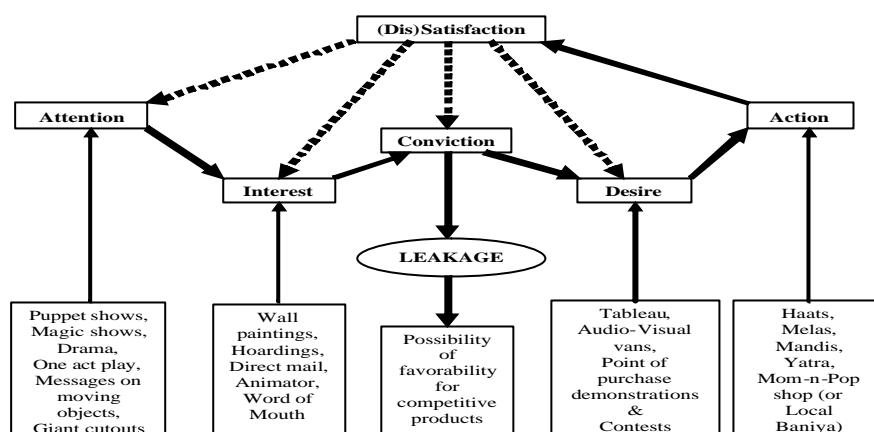


Figure-1: The AICDAS Model For Non-Conventional MARCOM

should, therefore, organize periodic dynamic market demonstrations in various parts to create awareness regarding their wares among the people, generate their interests, answer their questions, clarify their doubts and help in their identification. Farmer's meetings and village demonstrations serve this purpose. Short promotional campaigns are also undertaken with lure of discounts and free gifts to generate excitement and put the product in the TOMAS of consumers. Other such dynamic means are video shows, personal selling, creation of a pool of opinion leaders to have direct impact on the psyche of the rural folks. Handbills, wall paintings, dealer signboards, audio jingles, caps, t-shirts, bags and calendars with the message of the sponsored company printed on them are also seen to serve this purpose very well. These later groups are termed as static mode of communication.

Table-3: Types of Marketing Communication Along With Their Primary Purpose

Methods	Primary purpose / Objective
Market decision during and at the time of harvest	To identify potential consumers
Regularly conducting meetings at the village level	To educate the rural mass and to create awareness
Short campaigning	To create excitement about new arrivals
Video shows	To pass on information about the uses of products
Personal selling	To convince the prospect and remove doubt by answering queries
Meeting opinion leaders (Sarpanch, Mukhiya, Ward-member)	To bring the people under their clutch to the fold of the company
Displaying on caps, T-shirt, bags, calendar, bus railway ticket, and handbill	To increase the coverage
Wall painting	To have a lasting impression on the mind of prospects
Conducting sports at panchayat level and giving award	To popularize the product
Dealer signboards and tin-plating	To create awareness and disseminating information
Audio jingles	To create excitement

One of the most important things for the success of any mode of communication lies in the design of the message. The message content should be clear, short and catchy. Ramco asbestos advertising for asbestos sheets featuring a *pahelwan* (macho man) sitting on a roof top trying to break with all his might but failing ultimately impresses the rural mass regarding the sturdiness of the asbestos sheet is a classic example of clear and unambiguous message. Similarly, Babool toothpaste's caption "Babool Babool paise wasool" and Tata Shaktee's GC sheet punchline "Sardi garmi ya barsat, Tata Shaktee hardam saath" are the instances of the clear-cut messages of communication.

CHOOSING VEHICLES OF COMMUNICATION

Marketers, before taking the help of any media, consider its reach, frequency, cost to the company and the easy availability of the material of communication. These four standard features as outlined by A. Bhasin in Rural Asia Conference, New Delhi, 2005 play a crucial part in the employment of the media for communication. Depending on the degree of reach and frequency of the various media types, Balram Dogra & Karminder Ghuman in their book "Rural Marketing – concepts and practices" – TMH; have categorized the media vehicles into four types as depicted in the table-4.

Table-4 : Reach & Frequency Intensity

1.	High reach - High frequency
2.	Low reach – High frequency
3.	High reach - Low frequency
4.	Low reach - Low frequency

Jeep based advertising, Wall painting, Bus stand and bus panels, Haats, Hoardings and postal brandings belong to the first category. Co-operative Notice board, Shop front Painting, Tin Plating- House, Dealer boards, Village boards, Well Tiles, Calendars/Labels etc. belong to the second category. Van based Advertising, Melas, Direct to Home, Folklore Groups, Exhibitions / Created events belong to the third category. Tin-Plating, Leaflets, Posters & Banners, Streamers, Dangers belong to the last category. Various cost factors (High or Low) are also dealt at length and breadth in a tabular form as depicted in Table-5,

Table-5 : Reach vs. Frequency and Cost

		FREQUENCY		COST	
		HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW
REACH	HIGH	Jeep based Advertising	Van based Advertising	Jeep/Van based Advt	Postal Branding
		Wall painting/Hoarding	Melas	Melas	Wall painting
		Bus Stand & Bus Panel	Direct to Home	Hoardings	Bus Stand & Bus Panel
		Haats	Folklore Groups	Direct to Home	Haats
		Postal Branding	Exhibition / Created event	Exhibition/Created event	Folklore Groups
	LOW	Notice board/Labels	Tin-Plating	Shop front Painting	Dangers
		Shop front Painting	Leaflets	Posters	Tin-Plating House
		Tin Plating- House	Posters & Banners	Well Tiles	Dealer/ Village boards
		Dealer/ Village boards	Streamers	Banners	Leaflets/Streamers
		Well Tiles/Calendars	Dangers	Calendars/Labels	Notice board

Table-6 : State-wise Top Melas of India

Top Melas of Each State

State	Mela/Fair	Location	District	Month	Duration(Days)	Visitors(In lakhs)
Assam	Raas mela	Bilaspur	Dhubri	November	30	NA
A.P.	Netaji mela	Karimganj	Karimganj	January	15	NA
Bihar	Sonepur Mela	Sonepur	Patna	November	30	10
Gujarat	Vautha fair	Vautha	Ahmedabad	November	6	2
Haryana	Surajkundmela	Surajkund	Faridabad	February	NA	15
H.P.	Dussehra	Kulu	Kulu	October	10	10
Karnataka	Sangameswara jatra	Harihar	Chitradurga	March	7	NA
Kerala	Onam	Thiruvananthapuram	Thiruvananthapuram	August	10	10
M.P.	Kartik mela	Ujjain	Ujjain	November	30	20
Maharashtra	Kumbh mela	Nasik	Nasik	Once in 12 years	NA	NA
Orissa	Ratha yatra	Puri	Puri	July	10	10
Punjab	Chappar mela	Chappar	Ludhiana	September	5	5
Rajasthan	Kaila devi	Kaila	Sawai madhopur	March	15	25
Tamil Nadu	Peria Kirthigal	Trupparankundram	Trupparankundram	Oct/Nov	NA	10
U.P.	Nauchandi mela	Meerut	Meerut	Mar/Apr	30	30
W.B.	Sankranti mela	Ganganagar	North 24 parganas	January	NA	4

Source: Traditional Haats and Melas of India, 1995

Of all these communication modes, seasonal melas and yatras are held almost in every month in different places throughout the length and breadth of India since time immemorial. Large congregations of people are seen in these places. Some of the famous melas are Kumbh Mela, Pushkar Mela, Rath Yatra, Amarnath Yatra etc. As people from different corners of the country come to see these melas and yatras, marketers take the advantage to propagate information regarding their wares in these places. Some of the famous melas and yatras are given in the table 6. The reach is high but the cost of communication is very low in these melas and yatras. Each region of the country boasts of highly developed regional art forms like singing, dancing, painting, and weaving. Ambitious marketers sometimes propagate the message through these forms, not only through exhibitions but also through TVs. For example, a newsreporter wearing saris of particular regions like Sambalpuri, Benarasi, Mysore silk, Rajasthani kota, unknowingly becomes the medium of communication. Similarly, players of football, cricket, hockey etc. wear logos of different companies for propagating products of the sponsored companies. Similarly, performance of various regional art forms like Swang; Nautanki, Pala, Jatra, Daskathia, Tamasha, Kuttiyattam, Yakshaganam, and lively performance of string puppets, shadow

puppets, rod puppets are quite popular with the rural folks. They flock to see their performances; as a result, marketers get an opportunity to showcase their products in these places with almost little cost.

CONCLUSION

It is often seen that people in one village go after one brand only because the brand image appeals to them most and fits well into their cultural milieu. Once they are convinced, they became brand sticky. So, a new entrant into their secluded surrounding has to be tactful, culture-sensitive, economical, and useful. The focus should be more on brand building and less on tactical or short term promotional campaigns. In this respect, campaigns through non-conventional means can play a crucial role. Therefore, the importance of designing the right communication strategy for rural target market is of utmost desideratum.

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(contd. from page 55)

occupational status and monthly income have an impact on the customer's perception towards branded products. In case of customers' preference towards television brand, all the demographic variables except nature of family have significant relationship in brand preference of the television set. In a family, the role of the spouse was considered to be the most important in seeking information about television brands and while selecting branded television set, technical features in the television set were considered to be the most important influencing factor. With a great story and a large enough investment, awareness can be attained rather quickly. Though it takes time, however, constant reevaluation of brands helps to build brand preference. Aristotle professed, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then is not an act, but a habit." Attaining and sustaining preference is an important step on the road to gain brand loyalty. This will help to generate more revenue, gain greater market share and beat off the competition.

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