

# 4 'A's The Key Drivers of Rural Marketing

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## Abstract

In the recent times, the rural market has grown in leaps and bounds in terms of size, demand, change in lifestyle of rural consumers, change in consumer preferences, and higher income. As the sales in the urban markets have reached a saturation point, MNCs are looking to penetrate deeper into the rural markets to serve the consumers. The strategies adopted in urban markets vary drastically to the strategies used in the rural markets. Marketers have to conduct a thorough research before entering the rural markets so that they are able to design the right marketing mix. This paper attempts to study the 4 'A's of the rural marketing mix as a model to be successful in the rural markets. The 4 'A's model includes all the elements of the 4 'P's model. However the 4 'A's model is customer oriented as to the 4 'P's model that is seen from an organization's point of view but cannot be ignored. The 4 'P's are tools that have to be fine-tuned to the rural market and used along with the 4 'A's model to be successful in the rural markets.

**Keywords:** Acceptability, Affordability, Availability, Awareness, Rural Market

## Introduction

“The future lies with companies who see the poor as their customers.”

— C K Prahalad

In the recent times, the rural market has grown in leaps and bounds in terms of size, demand, change in lifestyle of rural consumers, change in consumer preferences, and higher income. The rural consumers no longer lag behind their urban counterparts. Earlier, the rural markets, as a segment, remained untouched as marketers viewed the market unprofitable due to the various challenges they posed in terms of literacy levels, low income, and connectivity to remote villages. However, over the years rural markets have changed drastically. Today, companies view rural markets as a bright opportunity that can be

tapped to serve the rural consumers profitably. As the sales in the urban markets have reached a saturation point, MNCs are looking to penetrate deeper into the rural markets to serve the consumers. The companies are shifting to rural markets as they see a great potential that has remained unexplored and untapped. There is a great demand for branded products in rural areas. The rural consumer durable market has grown manifolds over the years. Rural consumers are purchasing products ranging from small sachets of shampoos to durables like washing machines.

As companies see better prospects, they are fine tuning their strategies and customising their products to meet the requirements of rural consumers. “GO RURAL” is the tagline of every marketer. Marketers who are able to discern the dynamics of the rural markets can take advantage of it and reap profits.

Most companies are looking forward to grow not only by sustaining in the urban markets, but also by entering into the rural market. Companies like HUL and ITC have become successful in the rural markets by understanding the rural consumer's needs and ensuring that products are available for consumption. They have been able to develop strategies for rural areas that are drastically different from their urban counterparts.

One such difference can be observed in the marketing mix. Marketing mix is a set of tools that the firm uses to pursue its marketing objectives in the target market.

## Literature Review

Chintan Shah and Rency Desai (2013) focused on the 4 'A's of rural marketing mix. The study discusses about the changes that have taken place in the recent times like the increase in incomes and purchasing power of people is on arise. The companies are entering the rural markets as they are attractive in terms of assuring sales. The MNCs

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have to ascertain the needs and wants of people and then develop strategies. The findings revealed over the years the rural market has seen a surge in the purchasing power and income. However, the rural market also suffers with challenges like transportation and inefficient communication medium, which have become a barrier for some companies. Companies can take into account the 4 'A's.

Patrik Mardh and Teresa Correia (2013) aimed to study the marketing mix strategies towards the bottom of the pyramid. The study was conducted in the Brazilian telecom market. The objective of the study was to identify the marketing strategies adopted by companies to target Bottom of Pyramid (BOP) segment. The findings of the study revealed that companies adopt marketing strategies like price, place, product, and promotion along with Prahalad's proposed concept of 4 'A's, i.e., affordability, accessibility, availability, and awareness; however, awareness was not adopted. It was found that affordability is an important criteria when companies want to adapt to innovations. Price plays an important role as customers are price conscious and the pricing strategy was the most significant factor that has to be adopted in order to target the BOP segment.

Companies have to adopt price to affordability, as this was a significant component. Accessibility and availability were closely linked to affordability. Companies have to become more innovative to tap the BOP segment and also improve the standard of living of the BOP segment.

Dev Narayan Sarkar and Gagan Pareek (2013) studied rural marketing mix from an Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) perspective. The study was conducted in Bhutan. It was found that the availability factor in terms of retail intensity and spoke availability was ranked first, awareness factor in terms of newspaper circulation was ranked second, acceptability factor in terms of per capita household consumption was ranked third, and the affordability factor in terms of UNDP HDI was ranked fourth. It was also found that to market effectively, marketers have to focus on the highest ranked factor before going to the highest ranked district.

The purpose of the study by B K Suthar, T Latha Chakravathi, and Shamal Pradhan (2013) was to assess the effectiveness of rural marketing mix in the context to Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited. The findings revealed factors like affordability, acceptability, awareness, and

availability. The marketing mix has a positive relationship among the dimensions of rural marketing mix and points out that rural marketing mix has to be considered to suit a particular business at a particular time and place.

Dr. Kavaldeep Dixit (2011) aimed to study the competitive and innovative strategies for tapping vast rural potential. According to the researcher, to be successful in the rural markets, for developing the marketing strategies innovation and sensitiveness are important for companies.

Ms. Himani Joshi and Dr. R K Srivastava (2011) focused on capturing rural market with customization of marketing mix. It was found that although rural region varies from its urban counterpart, a thorough research before entering the rural areas enables the marketers to develop the right marketing mix for a product and become successful.

Dr. Narendranath Menon and Suresh K (2008) examined the customization of marketing mix for rural markets. The findings revealed that the marketer entering rural markets requires to surpass barriers one after the other. Some of the barriers include 4 'A's of the marketing mix to adapt themselves to the rural environment.

## Objectives

1. To understand the characteristics of the rural market in India.
2. To know the importance of 4 'A's in rural marketing context.

## Methodology

This study uses secondary data obtained from books, journals, articles, and web sources.

## Characteristics of Rural Market

**Large and widely spread markets:** The rural market in India is huge comprising of 6,40,867 villages (approx.). Based on the census data of 2011, approximately there are 9,11,552 villages having a population size of less than 200. The villages are widely spread causing transportation problems for companies to penetrate deep into the rural markets. It also increases the cost of the company that wants to transport products to remote villages.

**Heterogeneous:** India is a land of different cultures, languages, and dialects that vary from state to state, region to region, or even place to place. India has 24

official languages and around 1,600 dialects which make it strenuous for the marketers to plan promotional and marketing strategies to cater to the various segments of the market. Heterogeneity is a trademark of rural markets. In addition to this, the different castes, religions, values, and beliefs that exist in a country like India add to the woes of marketers to be able to understand the different lifestyles and customize their products and services to serve the rural segment effectively.

The customer preferences are influenced by cultures, lifestyle, values, and beliefs. This brings about a major distinction between the rural and urban markets in accepting new products.

**Agricultural income:** Over 50% of the rural population is dependent on agriculture as an occupation for their income. Agriculture depends on climatic conditions resulting in seasonal income for the farmers. However, in the recent past there has been a slight reduction on the dependence on agriculture and increase in role of allied activities.

**Media reach:** The penetration of media reach is low in rural areas. The literacy levels, widely spread consumers, varied lifestyles, culture, values, and beliefs are various characteristics that marketers have to consider before entering into the rural markets. Marketers have to understand the dynamics of the various regions and consider various forms of mass media and non-conventional media to reach out to the rural markets to be successful in creating awareness of new products and increase the consumers purchase intentions.

**Communication and transportation facilities:** In rural areas, the communication facilities are backward. The telephone facilities in states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha are down and out. In Maharashtra, around 12,000 villages have poor telephone facilities while states like Odisha are not benefited by telephone facilities. Transportation is a problem as most villages are widely spread across the country. They are situated in remote areas that are not connected by roads and the roads are *kuccha*; they become inoperative during rainy seasons. This makes it difficult for companies to distribute their products.

**Slow to adopt brands, slow to give up:** In contrast to the urban consumers, the rural consumers are slow to

adopt brands as well as give up on them. Therefore, the marketers need to plan before they make investments.

**Literacy level:** The literacy level in rural areas is 69% as to the urban literacy level of 85%. Education plays a vital role in creating awareness among consumers.

**Higher receptivity to advertising with lower persuasion:** Demonstrations and touch and feel experiences play an important role in persuading rural consumers to make purchases in contrast to their urban counterparts who make purchases on online websites. In rural markets, it is important for the marketers to compliment mass media communication with live demonstrations.

Retailers are not only a part of the distribution channel, but also play a vital role in endorsing brands, demonstrating products, and influencing the consumers to make purchases. It is therefore important for marketers to be able to convince the retailers to stock their products on shelves as well as provide training to the retailers about the products and their features.

**Unexploited and untapped rural markets:** The rural markets are developing and have a huge potential for MNCs to market their products. With the introduction of various rural development programmes, there is unprecedented rise in the employment opportunities. The rural households not only depend on agriculture as an occupation but are also engaged in allied activities. This has led to an increase in their income, encouraging them to make purchases of products ranging from shampoos to durables like washing machines.

**Information hungry but entertainment starved:** In rural areas, entertainment is limited. This gives an opportunity for the marketers to market their products by altering their communications to be more entertaining. It helps to draw the attention of consumers. Companies can consider packaging their product information through entertainment. This increases the inquisitiveness of consumers to be able to understand and absorb information. It becomes easier for companies to promote their products and increase the effectiveness of consumers' understanding the features of the product as well as their awareness of new products launched in the market.

The 4 'P's model is applicable for the rural markets. However, it has to be seen in a different dimension as rural

consumers are very different from their urban counterparts. Although the rural consumers are characterized by low income, low literacy levels, and varied preferences and perceptions, this does not mean they should be left behind. The strategies used to market products in rural areas are different.

### The Marketing Mix (4 'P's)

1. **Product:** Product is anything that satisfies a need or a want. A product consists of various factors like brand name, logo, colour, and additional features. However, in the rural context, the product should be acceptable. Hence, along with these aspects, rural marketers have to conduct market research to identify if a newly launched product will be accepted by them to be successful.

2. **Price:** Price is the amount an individual is willing to pay for a product. Price includes various factors like the manufacturing cost, price of the competitors, pricing objectives of the company, and the willingness of consumers to pay for the product. In marketing in rural areas, other factors have to be considered due to their income patterns.

3. **Place:** Place is the point of sales. Products have to be distributed in various outlets in such a manner that cost is not transferred to customer in the form of higher price for their purchases and products are available at the retail outlets. For companies to be successful, "location" is very important.

4. **Promotion:** Promotion is the set of various activities undertaken by companies to create awareness among people. The various forms are word of mouth, advertising, direct marketing, contests, games, etc. To market products in rural villages, marketers are required to develop different methods of promotion due to their understanding levels as well as their lifestyles.

Therefore, it can be seen that 4 'P's play an important role in marketing but the 4 'A's are more streamlined and have been adopted along with 4 'P's to be successful.

### 4 'A's of Rural Marketing

The 4 'A's model—acceptability, affordability, availability, and awareness—incorporates all the elements of 4 'P's marketing mix model that are from an organization's

point of view. Marketers prefer the 4 'A's model as they are more customer centric. Therefore, the 4 'A's are seen as benchmark for success in rural markets as to the 4 'P's.

When a company is able to develop strategies to meet customer needs along with the 4 'A's model then it will be able to deliver the right products at right time with right promotion, to create awareness, and at right place, where the customers are able to purchase the product.

**1. Acceptability-** The first important component of the marketing mix is acceptability for the product. Marketing products in rural areas requires companies to customize their offerings to meet the requirements of the rural consumers. In the rural markets, consumers look for the functionality of the product and value for their money, whereas their urban counterparts are considered to be mindful of the design, size, and additional features of the product. It is imperative for companies to customize their products as per the needs of the consumers and provide solution for the same. The rural consumers should be able to see that there is a value for the product and it delivers a purpose. As a result, they will go an extra mile and spend excess amount for the product.

Many companies have developed products specifically for the rural market. They have made improvements in the products. Companies like LG have been instrumental in reaping benefits, when they launched a television named Sampoorna, a customized television for the rural markets. It was a massive hit, selling 10,000 sets in the very first year, as they made rural consumers accept the product made by them. Coca-Cola supplied ice boxes for seasonal outlets, an alternative for refrigerators. Insurance companies like HDFC, LIC, and Bajaj Allianz have custom made their policies for villages to be successful.

A key area that Hyundai is focusing on is the rural markets. The company sees greater opportunities for increasing their profit margins, as the rural consumers' purchasing power has been increasing. The company is looking to penetrate deeper into the rural markets by customizing its automobiles to be accepted by rural consumers. Philips customized its products particularly for the rural and semi-urban consumers in India. The company launched a colour television range named "Vardaan" for the rural audience. These televisions worked on low voltage, thereby not needing voltage stabilizer.

Philips introduced “Free power radio” that was first of its kind and very popular in the rural markets.

The rural consumers are price sensitive; it therefore becomes vital for marketers to carry out a detailed research on the needs, wants, and desires of the rural consumers along with understanding their pattern of income. The pattern of income is important to ascertain for companies as the rural income is seasonal. Companies can then fine tune their products to meet their needs. It is also important to know that rural consumers do not compromise on the quality of the product. Products that are of low cost and good quality are likely to succeed in the rural areas.

**2. Affordability-** The second important component of the marketing mix is the affordability. Affordability refers to the purchasing power of the consumers. Rural consumers do not look for elegant and complicated features in products. They are interested in the functions of the products. They are willing to pay extra out of their pockets only when the product is worth the value for their hard-earned money. Although the disposable income of rural consumers is low, this doesn't mean that they will purchase products of low quality.

The pricing decision is important as companies need to consider not only the income of the consumers, but also the pattern of seasonal income, as farmers get considerable amount of their income during the harvest season. Marketers have to consider pricing their products by keeping in mind the affordability as well as ensure that they are within the buying capacity of the consumers.

Companies like Hindustan Lever were first among the MNCs to understand the potential of the rural consumers. The company launched Life Buoy soap at Rs. 2 for 50 g. Some of the products like Sunsilk, Head & Shoulders, and Colgate cost around Rs. 1 and Rs. 2 for sachets. Coco-Cola introduced returnable glass bottles at Rs. 5, following which the company launched refill in the form of powdered soft drink concentrate that is available in two variants single and multi-serve packets. Smokeless Chandu stove was introduced by Philips Company.

HUL launched Brooke Bond priced at Rs. 20 and Rs. 39 for 100 g; however, the prices were high in comparison to the loose packets sold in retail stores. HUL then launched smaller packets of Rs. 5 and Rs. 10.

HUL initiated Operation Bharat that included low-priced products like tooth paste, fairness creams, and shampoos into the rural market. Calvin Kare, a company of personal care manufacturers located in Chennai, is known for introducing small sachets so that they are affordable by consumers. The company introduced Nyle and Chik shampoos at Rs. 1 with such a pricing strategy the company's Chik shampoo aroused as the largest player in the category of shampoos in rural markets. Companies like Philips and Eveready launched low-cost lanterns to cater to the rural villages. LG launched a range of television that was not only customized to fit the needs of rural consumers, but also affordable. LG launched super-slim television for rural consumers who could not purchase expensive LCDs. Britannia Industries introduced good biscuits at Rs. 5 to address the affordability challenge. Idea Cellular, the mobile network, launched rural calling card for local calls. This was considered in line with the affordability component to reach out to people at low cost.

Majority of the rural consumers are engaged in agriculture as an occupation for income, which is solely dependent on monsoons which is seasonal. Hence, the rural consumers' income is seasonal. They look for products that are not only affordable, but also beneficial.

**3. Availability-** The third important component of the marketing mix is the availability of products and services. India is a land of villages with nearly 6, 40,867 villages that are spread across 3.3 million sq. km. 833.1 million Indians live in villages. People are spread across the length and breadth of the country and residing in remote villages that makes it difficult to find them. The marketer has to first target villages with a population size over 5000, as reaching remote villages is far reaching due to the poor conditions of roads. Some of them are *kuccha* and not usable during rainy seasons. To make products available to consumers, companies use various methods like hub and spoke system, direct selling, syndicated distribution, and setting up stalls in *melas*.

To service remote villages, stockists use auto rickshaws, bullock carts, and even boats in backwaters in Kerala. Coco-Cola has developed the hub-spoke distribution model to reach villages. Philips covered 540 districts across India by carrying out product-wise mapping to ensure availability of their products. Philips has one of the largest distribution networks to deliver its products in retail

outlets. Over the years, India's largest MNC like HUL has been able to build a strong distribution channel to ensure its brands reach remote villages and it is able to cater to the needs of the consumers. HUL has used the hub-and-spoke model to distribute products to interior of villages as well as introduced project Shakti. Project Shakti is a rural distribution enterprise of HUL that targets population size of more than 5000. HUL is linked to Self Help Groups (SHGs) for business opportunities. These groups often consist of 15-20 members that buy small items like soaps or detergents and sell them directly to consumers. This is a win-win situation as HUL is able to reach to the media-dark regions as well as provide employment opportunities to women thereby creating women empowerment. These women are called Shaktiammas. 'Shakti' means power and 'amma' means mother in the language spoken in Andhra Pradesh where the project was first initiated. In addition to Shaktiammas, HUL decided to make use of men folk from the Shaktiammas families. This will expand the market reach of products to 2,00,000 taking the total up to 5,00,000 villages. The Shaktimaans are provided with bicycle and products to be sold in a vicinity of 5-km radius. Top performing Shaktiammas, i.e., the top 20,000 of them, are given an option to work along with their men folk.

In addition to Shaktiammas, HUL's decision to expand its distribution makes use of geo tagging to understand how far villages are from the nearest highways and distributors who are located close by in order to make products available at retail outlets. With the help of these maps, HUL also came up with effective routes for their distributors to travel and service remote villages.

The two-wheeler automobile market in rural areas is growing at a faster pace. Hero Honda, the bike manufacturer company, has its presence in rural villages. The company follows hub-and-spoke system for distribution. The company has also started "servicing on wheels" that makes it easy for consumers to service their vehicles even though they reside in remote villages.

Consumer durables market is growing manifold and expected to outplay the urban market. Companies like LG and Samsung derive nearly 30% of their sales from rural markets owing to their availability in villages. LG electronics limited has 45 offices and 59 remote area offices as they consider all cities apart from metros as rural and semi-urban areas.

Companies have to build a strong distribution channels. Video vans play an important role in not only providing information, but also making products available. Co-operative societies, public distribution system, *haats*, and *mandis* in the distribution channel can help in strengthening the distribution process by making goods available at the right time and right place for the rural consumers. It is important for companies to ensure that products are available in the rural markets. A strong distribution and innovative channel helps in delivering products at various outlets. Retailer, as a part of the channel, is a critical factor. Once the products are stocked on the retailers' shelf, it ensures the sale of the product as the retailers stock fewer brands. The stock available at the retail store is then pushed and ensures sales. Therefore, the marketers have to be in good terms with the retailers and make sure that their products are sold. They can also give incentives to the retailers as and when their products are sold.

Although reaching the products to the remote villages and incorporating an extensive distribution channel adds cost to the company, the marketers have to realize the potential sales that can be derived in the rural markets. If the products are not available, this leads to gap in the distribution which increases the chances of spurious products being sold.

**4. Awareness-** The fourth important component is the awareness about products and services. Only 41% of the rural population has access to television. Therefore, it becomes a challenge to build a brand in the rural areas. It is imperative for marketers to build awareness by designing messages that are understood by the rural audiences in various parts of the country. There are many alternatives available for companies to create awareness like showcasing the products in *melas*, road shows as rural consumer's preferences, and activities vary from their urban counterparts. Rural consumers prefer going out, attending festivals, *melas*, fun fairs, etc. The television viewing of the rural audiences is limited to Doordarshan channel. The rural folks are information hungry but entertainment starved. In villages, entertainment is limited. This gives companies an upper hand in designing their messages that are eye catching and entertaining to help create awareness among people about the launch of the latest products. This also help in increasing the sales for the company. Messages can be customized to the local

languages of the people to be more effective in conveying details about the features of the product.

It becomes essential that elements like pictures, colours, logos, and taglines are designed as per the understanding of the rural consumers. As the literacy levels are low of people in rural areas, this will help those who do not understand English to easily identify the product by the pictures/symbols printed on the products while they make purchases at retail stores. The design on the products will make the products look attractive. In addition, the rural people will be able to differentiate between spurious products and original products.

Many companies are using different forms of mass media and non-conventional form of media to be more effective in creating awareness. Companies like Hero Honda have taken the initiative of establishing a vertical theme *Har Gaaon Har Angan* (every house, every village) to tap the potential rural markets. The company has sales executives who approach the village *sarpanch*, head masters, *aanganwadi* workers, and other opinion leaders to understand the rural markets and talk about Hero Honda bikes. The opinion leaders play an important role in influencing the purchase decisions of rural consumers. The rural initiative taken up by the company generated a sales of 16,000 additional bikes in one month. HUL in some of India's poorest rural areas adopted a pilot promotion for its Active Wheel detergent. The promotion required people to call a number that cut after two rings, so that it would cost nothing to people. An automatic free call back was given by the company which provided comic dialogues of Bollywood superstars like Salman Khan and advertisements of Wheel. In a matter of four months, HUL received around 16 million calls and the sales tripled in that particular region. Coco-Cola uses a blend of television, cinema, and radio to reach 53.6% of rural households. The company, in order to create brand awareness in North India, referred Coco-Cola as "thanda" and Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan was the brand ambassador. The company utilized progressive advertising and this made sure that people could recall the brand name as it was set in the back of their mind. They also advertise in Doordarshan that reaches 41% of the rural market. They have also used posters, banners, and touched all local forms of entertainment. LG Limited uses vans and road shows to reach out to the rural consumers. Samsung creates awareness of its products by hosting road

shows and conducting live demonstrations of products as well as circulates pamphlets in regional languages as a promotional strategy.

Colgate Palmolive distributed herbal toothpaste for free at Kumbh Mela where thousands of people gather over a period of one month.

Creating awareness is important among rural consumers. They prefer the products to be demonstrated and understand the functions of the products. The conventional media like radio, television, print media hold good as long as the consumers own these forms of media. However, in rural areas, non-conventional media like folk media, video vans, *melas*, and *mandis* can be more effective as the rural folks prefer visiting fun fairs, *melas* etc.

## Conclusion

Today "Go Rural" is the tagline of every marketer. Earlier, rural markets remained untapped and unexplored owing to the literacy levels of consumers, low income levels, low demand for branded products, etc. With the urban markets reaching their saturation point and the rural markets experiencing a profound change in terms of size of demand, higher incomes, and change in lifestyle and preferences, these markets are posing great opportunities for companies and marketers have understood that there is great potential to explore an untapped market. Marketers entering the rural market with strategies incorporated for the urban market will be highly unsuccessful for the simple reason that rural markets as a segment are a heterogeneous market. The rural markets vary drastically from the urban markets. It is crucial for companies to conduct a detailed research before entering the market to design the right marketing mix for the rural markets. The marketing mix is an important element in marketing. It requires to be planned in advance to reap benefits. The 4 'A's of the rural marketing mix are of paramount importance in rural markets. Companies have to understand each component of the mix to customize their offerings to suit the needs of rural consumers; this will come a long way for companies in helping themselves develop different strategies that have to be adopted by re-engineering and adjusting to the dynamics of rural markets. So that they are able to cater to the consumers by providing right products, at the right price, creating awareness through the right promotional strategy and ensuring the products are available at the

right place. The 4 'P's are tools that have to be fine-tuned to the rural market along with the 4 'A's model to be successful in the rural markets.

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