

Reaching the Unreached with Advertising

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Abstract

The article intends to focus on the factors that expose the new ways of communication strategies for Rural Advertising. Emphasis has been laid upon the marketing strategies of advertising agencies to venture into rural India. Rural markets have their own unique features, and the traditional advertising media generally proves to be unsuccessful in rural areas. The need of the hour is "Walk their walk, and talk their talk". Highlighting the importance of non-conventional and folk-medias, the article talks about the emergence of the wired Internet and mobile telecommunications networks which is creating opportunities for advertisers. The article also takes into account the regional disparity aspects of the hinterland and brings forward the need for customized communication strategy for advertising. It presents several things that marketers need to consider in establishing business in the region such as awareness, availability, and acceptability. It suggests that the products need to be customized to suit the locality as seventy per cent of the Indian population still resides in villages. Cost is considered a major deterrent to rural campaigns. MART's Kashyap argues that the expense is grossly exaggerated. A key step, he believes, is identifying prominent social occasions and using them to build brands. Market days (haats) are a critical part of rural strategy. Setting up a stall costs very little, and the average turnout at a haat could be around 5,000 people. With saturation in urban markets for the demand of products, most of the FMCGs have penetrated deep into rural markets and it is estimated that 53 per cent of their revenue comes from the rural markets alone.

Keywords : Rural Advertising, Urban Market Trends, Communication Strategies Advertising Trends.

1. Introduction

The rural marketplace in India is getting more attractive day by day and the stagnation of sales in the urban markets is forcing marketers to go rural. Today, Rural India is the buzzword for marketers. Organizations are shifting their focus towards this huge and largely untapped market. Rural India consists of about 6,38, 365 villages i.e. over seventy per cent of the Indian population still resides in villages. It consists of about 127 million households of which only 54 percent come in contact with any of the conventional media, like press, TV, satellite, radio or cinema. That means roughly 238 million are waiting to be tapped by the conventional media. No wonder, rural India is a marketer's and advertiser's El Dorado.

With economic development and trade liberalization in the country, rural India has also undergone tremendous change and it is contributing up to 60 per cent to the Indian GDP. With saturation in urban markets for the demand of products, most of the FMCGs have penetrated deep into rural markets and it is estimated that 53 per cent of their revenue comes from the rural markets alone. The communication technology revolution has reached the rural masses and India's largest public sector telecommunication giant BSNL caters to about 50 per cent of its total clientele in rural India itself. All major consumer durable industries prepare their products and marketing strategies

keeping in mind the rural markets as one of their largest consumer segments.

1.1 Strategies for Rural Advertising

Any media vehicle or advertisement in rural India will be successful if it is built around three strategies:

1. **Influencer strategy** : The advertisements that revolve around this very strategy actually depend on the influence of different influential people and/or events in the villages to put across the message powerfully with more effect and purchase intention. An example of this kind of advertisement may be brand endorsement by any influential person in the village like the 'Mukhiya' or the 'School master'.
2. **Participatory Strategy** : Events like different festivals and different games and sports competitions actually have a high participation level in the rural India as other sources of entertainment are very less in those areas. So, these events and shows offer great opportunity to reach rural India cost effectively. Different brands sponsor different events and shows in rural villages which is actually a cost-effective way to advertise with the participatory strategy.
3. **Show-n-tell strategy** : Many brands are venturing into different ways to educate their rural consumers about their brands and their usage through different shows and events. These kinds of initiatives actually create huge awareness about the brand among the interested people in the rural India. Different health related advertisements like Polio awareness and AIDS awareness programmes involve a 'show-n-tell' strategy of advertising.²

Although a rural consumer gets information on products or services through multiple sources of communication, when it comes to decision-making, he always consults others in the community. Opinion leaders continue to play a key role in the decision-making process of a rural consumer. But interestingly the composition of opinion leaders has undergone a change over the years. Instead of only the village elders, today the educated youth of the village also play an important role.

The rural market in India remains something of a wild frontier – one that few marketers and even fewer marketing communication companies have ventured into. The reasons are well known. The rural market is typically a seasonal market. The consumption level goes high in post monsoon and dries up during non-crop period. The distributed settlement and high transportation cost also makes it potentially less feasible for many companies to launch products for rural consumption. Yet few success stories in Indian marketing history make it a point to enter into the rural market. Companies like *HLL*, *Titan* and *Colgate Palmolive* use festivals like *Rathyatra*, *Kumbhmela*, and *Onam* for brand promotion. The recent example of adopting a railway station by Titan during *Kumbha mela* helped them to generate a high brand recall as for each arrival of the train the announcement was made "Welcome to Sonata-Naini". The puppet shows in Punjab, Folk media like *Ragini* in *Haryana* for communicating qualities of *Virat* cement, *Pala* and *Daskathia* in *Orissa* for promoting safe electricity consumption and tooth pastes of *Colgate Palmolive*, *Baul* songs in West Bengal for advertising insecticides are some of the examples. *Britannia* has entered into the rural market by participating in rural *melas* and displaying its down market brand *Britannia Tiger Biscuits*. These

rural *melas* and weekly *haats* have become more popular medium of rural advertising by the media planners. Once this innovation of reaching through alternative cost effective media starts, the rural consumption will go high, making it potentially more attractive than the urban market.³

Sector-wise details of the recent attempts/strategies followed in India:

1. **Telecom Sector** : Recently Airtel and Samsung have tied up with IFFCO to sell their mobiles and services. IFFCO is (the world's largest) Indian farmers co-operative of fertilizers. It has about 37,000 member units spanning all-over India. Some of the other telecom giants & DTH service providers are looking at dying PCOs as a channel of distribution.
2. **Automotive sector** : Hero Honda wants to change the rural market dynamics which is hovering around 10% (of households owing two-wheelers). Its strategies include selling during festive seasons, tying up with new dealers, providing finance with local co-operative institutions. Meanwhile, Bajaj is launching a Bike, specifically to suit rural Indian youth needs. It is setting up 20 outlets in affluent, but severely under penetrated, rural districts. Moreover, it has created specialist dealerships for rural markets, called 'Rural Dealerships'. Bajaj wishes to train the sons and daughters of village VIPs, who are also the opinion makers and thought leaders of their respective villages. Bajaj's non-banking financial arm, Bajaj Auto Financial Ltd (BAFL), is trying to involve the rural self-help groups (along with specific controls, on this micro-financing, to avoid the end-buyer not to use the credit amount for other purposes).
3. **FMCG Sector** : Indian part of Unilever, HLL*, sells its goods through rural women who become its sales-representatives. These women are trained by HLL and usually supported by Microfinance or local self-help groups. ITC has created a supply chain infrastructure something called "E-Choupal" system. E-Choupal is run by an agent, typically covers about surrounding 10 villages (within 5 KM radius).
4. **Financial Services Sector** : More or less, all the banks are using in agent-based model as the typical branch-based model does not work here due to cost economics. Some of these banks including ICICI are looking at tying up with micro-finance institutions and local self-help groups (or creating them if already do not exist). Many banks have solutions for Mobile-based services to reach rural consumers directly into their hand. ICICI has gone further in tying up with large corporate majors having significant presence in rural India and providing loans/banking services to their distributors/traders and also it is working in tandem with postal department.
5. **Soft Drinks** : Pepsi and Coke have mastered something called "Hub and Spoke" model. Using this system, initially the goods are transported to hubs (towns) from the plant and later the stock is transported to spokes (using all types of transport vehicles: Cycle, Rickshaw, Auto, hand-cart, camel-cart, etc). They also use annual haat and village fairs.
6. **Pharma Sector** : Nicholas Piramal has focused on general practitioners or to cater to rural markets to increase its penetration with a field-force of 800 people. Most of the pharma companies are looking at post-office as their distribution platform. Some of these companies conduct health-care workshops in the rural areas by tapping the local doctors.

7. **Medical Care** : Telemedicine is the direction all the top hospitals in India are headed to. ISRO, Narayana Hrudayalaya, SRMC -Chennai, AIMS -Kochi, Apollo hospitals, Aravind Eye hospital, etc have championed this telemedicine system using VSAT/WiFi/BroadBand/etc for the past 6 years.
8. **Consumer Electronics** : LG has set up 45 area offices and 59 rural/remote area offices. Samsung rolled out its 'Dream Home' road show which was to visit 48 towns in 100 days in an effort to increase brand awareness of its products.
9. **Media** : Newspapers are sold using auto-drivers, boat-drivers in Kerala.⁴

The more daring MNCs are meeting the consequent challenges of availability, affordability, acceptability and awareness (the so-called 4 A's)⁵

1.2 Availability

The first challenge is to ensure availability of the products or services. India's 627,000 villages are spread over 3.2 million sq km; 700 million Indians may live in rural areas, finding them is not easy. However, given the poor state of roads, it is an even greater challenge to regularly reach products to the far-flung villages. Any serious marketer must strive to reach at least 13,113 villages with a population of more than 5,000. Marketers must trade off the distribution cost with incremental market penetration. Over the years, India's largest MNC, Hindustan Lever, a subsidiary of Unilever, has built a strong distribution system which helps its brands reach the interiors of the rural market. To service remote village, stockists use autorickshaws, bullock-carts and even boats in the backwaters of Kerala. Coca-Cola, which considers rural India as a future growth driver, has evolved a hub and spoke distribution model to reach the villages. To ensure full loads, the company depot supplies, twice a week, large distributors who act as hubs. These distributors appoint and supply, once a week, smaller distributors in adjoining areas. LG Electronics defines all cities and towns other than the seven metro cities as rural and semi-urban market. To tap these unexplored country markets, LG has set up 45 area offices and 59 rural/remote area offices.

1.3 Affordability

The second challenge is to ensure affordability of the product or service. With low disposable incomes, products need to be affordable to the rural consumer, most of who are on daily wages. Some companies have addressed the affordability problem by introducing small unit packs. Godrej recently introduced three brands of Cinthol, Fair Glow and Godrej in 50-gm packs, priced at Rs 4-5 meant specifically for Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh — the so-called 'Bimaru' States.

Hindustan Lever, among the first MNCs to realise the potential of India's rural market, has launched a variant of its largest selling soap brand, Lifebuoy at Rs 2 for 50 gm. The move is mainly targeted at the rural market. Coca-Cola has addressed the affordability issue by introducing the returnable 200-ml glass bottle priced at Rs 5. The initiative has paid off: Eighty per cent of new drinkers now come from the rural markets. Coca-Cola has also introduced Sunfill, a powdered soft-drink concentrate. The instant and ready-to-mix Sunfill is available in a single-serve sachet of 25 gm priced at Rs 2 and multiserve sachet of 200 gm priced at Rs 15.

1.4 Acceptability

The third challenge is to gain acceptability for the product or service. Therefore, there is a need to offer products that suit the rural market. One company which has reaped rich dividends by doing so is LG Electronics. In 1998, it developed a customised TV for the rural market and christened it Sampoorna. It was a runaway hit selling 100,000 sets in the very first year. Because of the lack of electricity and refrigerators in the rural areas, Coca-Cola provides low-cost ice boxes — a tin box for new outlets and thermocol box for seasonal outlets.

1.5 Awareness

The insurance companies that have tailor-made products for the rural market have performed well. HDFC Standard Life topped private insurers by selling policies worth Rs 3.5 crore in total premia. The company tied up with non-governmental organizations and offered reasonably-priced policies in the nature of group insurance covers. With large parts of rural India inaccessible to conventional advertising media — only 41 per cent rural households have access to TV — building awareness is another challenge. Fortunately, however, the rural consumer has the same likes as the urban consumer — movies and music — and for both the urban and rural consumer, the family is the key unit of identity. However, the rural consumer expressions differ from his urban counterpart. Outing for the former is confined to local fairs and festivals and TV viewing is confined to the state-owned Doordarshan. Consumption of branded products is treated as a special treat or indulgence.

Hindustan Lever relies heavily on its own company-organized media. These are promotional events organized by stockists. Godrej Consumer Products, which is trying to push its soap brands into the interior areas, uses radio to reach the local people in their language.

Coca-Cola uses a combination of TV, cinema and radio to reach 53.6 per cent of rural households. It doubled its spend on advertising on Doordarshan, which alone reached 41 per cent of rural households. It has also used banners, posters and tapped all the local forms of entertainment. Since price is a key issue in the rural areas, Coca-Cola advertising stressed its 'magical' price point of Rs 5 per bottle in all media. LG Electronics uses vans and road shows to reach rural customers. The company uses local language advertising. Philips India uses wall writing and radio advertising to drive its growth in rural areas.⁶

2. Communication Strategies in Rural Market

The ability to communicate is essential to the success of any undertaking and an important factor in the achievement of its objectives. A good communications strategy allows you to exercise better control over your work and to frame the issues in a perspective other than research. A communication strategy removes doubt, emphasizes planning, and involves all the project participants in raising the visibility of the research. The strategy can be developed in several stages:

- A preliminary outline is prepared by the research team and close collaborators.
- The outline is submitted to various partners for comments and revisions. These partners can be consulted individually, in groups, or in a brainstorming session that includes anyone you think could make a contribution.

- The team meets to finalize the strategy. The input of a communications expert is highly desirable at this stage.
- Once the strategy has been established, it must be communicated to the partners and groups you want to reach. This will make it easier to integrate them into the process of developing the various tools intended for their use.⁷

In communicating with rural India today, one should remember that we are dealing with two distinct audiences:

1. The rural rich, as well as the growing breed of educated, upwardly mobile, middle class with aspirations, exposure to mass media and with a lot of purchasing power almost akin to his urban counterpart.
2. A vast majority of illiterate and poor masses which cannot be easily reached through mass media.

Another fact which is often overlooked is that television does not distinguish between urban and rural.

The following factors should be kept in mind while adopting communication strategy for advertising:

- 1) Rural consumer environment must be understood before the creation of ad.
- 2) Rural mindset accepts the brands easily, which are close to their culture. This point must be reflected in ad for rural markets.
- 3) Sponsorships to the Melas and Hats must be considered in a significant manner.
- 4) In selection of brand ambassadors, lyrics must not be ignored in this regard. They have a special liking for folk culture so this can be taken in an effective utilization of brand promotions.
- 5) The Language and content must be according to the suitability of rural environment.
- 6) Background figures are also a deterministic factor.
- 7) Admissibility of brand ambassadors plays an important role in this regard.
- 8) Special promotion measures are the strong applicable factors in this regard.

Some efforts to reach the unreached :

1. **Dabur** uses Astra to boost rural sales. Dabur has a distribution reach of 25 lakh retail outlets across the country. About 75 per cent of the company's sales come from rural areas, hence, it has created the Astra training consultancy module in five vernacular languages, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. Shopkeepers selling Dabur India's consumer products would now learn marketing through role-plays staged by professional actors at their shops. As part of a recent initiative titled Astra, advanced sales training for retail ascendance, FMCG major has recruited 75 sales and HR managers across the country who would educate over 2,000 distribution channel partners of the firm about the complexities of sales and distribution through the audio-visual medium.
2. **Brooke Bond Lipton India Ltd** (BBLIL) markets its rural brands through magic shows and skits. Reckitt and Coleman uses NGO's in rural areas to educate customers about product benefits which establishes one to one communication channels.
3. **HLL's 'Operation Bharat'** was launched to tap the rural

markets. Under this operation it passed out low-priced sample packets of its toothpaste, fairness cream, Clinic Plus shampoo, and Ponds cream to twenty million households. Today, these brands have a flourishing market in rural India.

4. **Philips India Ltd.** - Electronic Entertainment Equipment, the objective is to promote Phillips Electronic Entertainment products, viz., Stereos and CTVs, among the rural population of Tamil Nadu. The strategy is based on information regarding buyer's behavior. 'Philips Super Shows' were conducted in five district headquarters with the intention of motivating dealers as well as opinion leaders to generate word-of mouth publicity, as a first step. This was followed by extensive van operation in 5000+ population areas with audience participation techniques for mouthing the brand, supported by mass media campaign in regional press (district wise edition), rural cinemas, radio, wall painting and intensive merchandising activities.
5. **Marico Industries** - Parachute Coconut Oil Pouches, with the objective of creating awareness for Parachute Coconut Oil pouches in towns with less than 20,000 population in Tamil Nadu, and in order to convert loose oil buyers into Parachute pouch customers, Marico Industries launched a van campaign. The communication Strategy focused on getting women out of their homes to participate in the van campaign, which was aimed exclusively for them and for the first time conducted by women. Result - A study by Marico showed a 25per cent conversion from loose coconut oil usage to Parachute Pouch Pack, post van campaign and a substantial increase in sales from the campaign areas
6. **ACC Limited** - ACC Suraksha Cement. In a market dominated by graded cements in the semi urban/rural areas of Karnataka, ACC Cement ventured out to establish the superiority of ACC Suraksha blended cement and build an image of a Premium Cement for the brand. To reach the opinion leaders viz. Architects, Engineers, Contractors, etc., the assistance of the regional local press was sought and other Direct Marketing efforts such as field meetings with small groups of masons & customers were used.
7. **Asian Paints** launched Utsav Range by painting Mukhiya's house or post office to demonstrate that paint does not peel off.⁹
8. Parachut Oil, Nirma washing powder and tiger brand biscuits have been promoted through haats. About 40,000 Haats are held in rural areas in our country, highest number haats in U.P (10,000).
9. Nippo promotes batteries through specially designed vans called melavans. The vans are equipped with TV/VCR for showing products awareness films.
10. Colgate India makes extensive use of vans.
11. ITC's mobile vans take the message of e-choupal to new village. 10

3. Initiatives by Advertising Agencies in India

Advertising agency upbeat as rural advertising becomes mantra for Corporates. Advertising agencies like Lowe Lintas and O&M are making the most out of the opportunit, with several FMCG clients looking towards Indian Villages to market their products.¹¹

- Established in 1986 **Anugrah Marketing & Advertising Services (P) Ltd.**, with headquarters in Chennai have been

operating as a fully accredited Advertising Agency catering to the communication needs of a variety of clients ranging from Agri-inputs, Consumer Durables, FMCG to Service in 1998, it tie-up with Madison Communications as their Rural Division

Task for the Agency - Agency had been asked to promote their Electronic Entertainment products, viz., Stereos, CTVs, & MTVs among the rural population of Tamil Nadu.

Communication Strategy - Based on information regarding buyer behaviour 'Philips Super Shows' were conducted in five district headquarters with the intention of motivating dealers as well as opinion leaders to generate word-of-mouth publicity, as a first step This was followed by extensive van operation in 5000+ population areas with audience participation techniques for mouthing the brand, supported by mass media campaign in regional press (district wise edition), rural cinemas, radio, wall painting and intensive merchandising activities The positioning of Philips as "The Super Star of my Home" was created to appeal to the rural audience's pride to communicate that if TV buying is a status symbol, then why not buy Philips and become a Super Star of your neighborhood.

Result - Between October '97 and January '98, Philips achieved a 61% growth in Audios, 28% in Color TVs and a 7% growth in B&W TV over sales of the corresponding period in 1996-97, in Tamil Nadu, in a sluggish consumer electronics market. They were able to sustain the growth rate in the following year too.

3.1 Task for the Agency

Cibaca – a low-priced brand in the Colgate stable.

Well accepted in the rest of the country, except Karnataka. Ajantha – a direct competitor making in-roads

Need to create awareness in small towns and villages and generate trials.

Campaign Theme - Why buy any low-priced toothpaste when you can get international quality toothpaste from the house of Colgate, at the same price point.

Campaign Delivery - Delivered through a well planned van campaign which included product placement, sampling and sales and interactive product oriented games. A video film using well-known TV stars of Karnataka to drive home the product story.

Result - Awareness for the brand increased multifold and reflected in spontaneous increase in sales.¹²

- N&D offers a wide range of services in the areas of branding, Technology, Rural Marketing, Market Research and Events. It brings together the right combination of technology, marketing and creativity to power communication campaigns that succeed. N&D develops specialized communication campaigns targeted at the rural market. Temple, festivals, melas, film shows and other events where the villagers come together are ideal for promotional campaigns. N&D also uses rural art forms like folk music, dance and art. This makes rural denizens more receptive to the message.¹³

- Since its inception in 2004, "Renown Advertising" is working for Rural Brand Promotion and Marketing Solutions in Eastern India. At present it is covering 05 States of India, especially Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, including Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh. Think Rural, Act Rural and the Vision is Rural. "Renown Advertising" is promoting the brands in Rural societies through rural villagers by their own traditional acts. The agency prefers all traditional media for advertising in rural areas like Mobile Video Van, Nukkad Natak, Folk Dance, Rural School Activity, Panchayat Awareness, Rural Fair Participation and Gramin Mela.¹⁴
- Association of Advertising Agencies of India AAAI was commissioned by high powered Family Planning Commission Board to evolve suitable communication strategies and develop media materials. Multi media campaign was launched on the basis of materials developed by AAAI. Information kits were directly mailed to workers. At the same time specific audience groups such as teachers, doctors and writers were approached with publicity materials. It was during this period that the famous slogan "hum do, hamare do", reducing the ideal family size from three to two, was evolved.¹⁵

4. Media Penetration and the Need Gap in Rural India

The growth in conventional media has been quite significant; however, it has not been substantial. Rural India consists of about 127 million households of which only 54% comes in contact with any of the conventional media, like press, TV, satellite, radio or cinema. That means roughly 238 million are waiting to be tapped by the conventional media. It should be acknowledged that different media mix is needed to convey messages to rural consumers. There is a need to understand what appeals to urban customers may not be appropriate for their rural counterparts owing to their different lifestyle. The entire communication and also the vehicles for the communicated message thus have to be different. It has been noticed that below-the-line communication like alternative and innovative ways of communication played a key role in building reassurance and trust, and so it is vital.

5. Changing Attitude of the Rural Consumers

Due to the increase in literacy rates and the penetration of conventional media, the perception and attitude of the rural consumer are changing, moving towards proper consumerism. Not only this, attitude and consumption habits of rural consumers are also changing and becoming more modern in an urban sense.

The villages and small towns, which were once inconsequential dots on maps, are now getting the attention of global marketing giants and media planners. Thanks to globalization, economic liberalization, IT revolution, Indian diasporas, female power, and improving infrastructure, middle class rural India today has more disposable income than urban India. Rural marketing is gaining new heights in addition to rural advertising. Rural India represents the heart of India. Approximately 80% of India lives in over half a million villages (627,000) and generate more than half of the national income. Some successful rural programmes have involved hiring local youths to sell brands across a beat of 10 to 15

villages on bicycles. Colgate, Heinz, Eveready and mosquito repellent Good Knight have all built this into their strategy. A recent campaign to introduce LPG-based cylinders saw Hindustan Petroleum introduced communal kitchens styled after laundrettes in Western markets. Consumers were invited to try them at a minimal charge.¹⁶

6. Conclusion

To conclude one must understand that while communicating to rural masses one must think and act locally. Except the original rural marketing giants such as Hindustan Lever Ltd (HLL) and ITC, who continue to dominate the scene with their constant innovations in this area (Project Shakti of HLL and e-Choupal of ITC), most corporate pay only lip service to the subject. The emphasis for the present seems to be on distribution, which is to ensure availability of their brands even in smaller markets. But when it comes to promotions in rural markets, most companies are only engaging in short-term sales-oriented below-the-line activities, without any emphasis on how the core message of the brand is to be communicated to the rural masses. Most use the same communication package that is being employed to target urban audiences. There is often the need for thinking over the advertising concepts and the brand image in the local language itself. In the absence of shortage of professionals advertising in the local language makes success of rural advertising campaigns difficult.¹⁷ Doing just a van campaign, once in a blue moon, is not rural marketing. For sustained results, it is important to plan an integrated campaign covering both mass media and below-the-line activities. To be successful in rural India, one must go with a clear long-term strategy. They should be willing to invest as much energy in rural markets as one can to build brands in the urban ones. As rural efforts take longer to give sustained results, we must be prepared for a long haul. It is important to know some ground realities in rural India. ¹⁸ Advertising media must focus on local language, color and modes of communication to make it relevant to the rural market¹⁹. If the Indian Advertising industry is to reach out to rural India in an effective and efficient manner, it has to be grounded firmly in rural perceptions, values and traditions. It has to immerse itself in local colors, customs, and modes of communication in order to make itself relevant to the needs and desires of rural society. The fact that multinational giants like Coca-Cola and Pepsi have recognized the need for regionalizing their advertising, by featuring locally popular heroes and personality in their television commercials, is a step in the right direction.²⁰

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