

Rural Viewers' Perceptions and Their Changing Dimensions Towards Media Advertisements of FMCG Brands - An Empirical Study With Reference To Sivasagar District, Assam

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Abstract

The vigor of advertising gets in touch with every individual, living either in the urban areas or the rural parts of the country. Based on perceptual mapping and impact index pyramid; this study aims to observe the rural audiences' perceptions towards various advertising attributes, the impact of marketing communication and the changing dimensions on the understanding and acceptance of media advertisements of the FMCG brands by the rural viewers of the study area. The study revealed that the attitude of the rural population is progressively shifting towards urbanization and its way of life. They are incessantly on the threshold of changing their priorities, lifestyle, mind-set and approach towards varieties, in order to match with their urban counterparts, thus giving a benchmark to the advertisers' in designing and communicating the advertisements through various advertising mediums. Indian rural markets have thus gained importance and have acted as prospective markets in the field of Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), as along with the urban society, by and large the growth of the economy has been the result of considerable boost in the purchasing power of the people from the rural society as well.

Keywords: Marketing Communication, FMCG, Advertising, Rural Market

Introduction

The broad umbrella of the advertising sector endeavors to get in touch with every individual living either in the urban areas or, the rural areas. The primary intention of this sector revolves in persuading the audience and prompting them in their buying behavior. "Advertising is a highly

public mode of communication. Its public nature confers a kind of legitimacy on the product and also suggests a standardized offering. Advertising can be used to build and enhance a long-term image for a company/product."¹

From the competitive perspective, making a footprint of the brand in the FMCG market is one of the biggest challenges of the marketers. In this context, be it the urban customer or, the rural customer base; the marketers should perceive both the markets as big prospects. Exploring the rural customers' acceptance of the brand positioning initiatives', brand awareness, expectations and buying pattern, is looked forward to as an opportunity by the marketers.

Media played a key role in bringing awareness of different brands and their availability at an accessible price for the rural market and thus have made the organizations successful in making this segment their target customers (Bhattacharyya & Bhadra, 2011).

Shift in the mind set and the purchasing pattern of the FMCG varieties by the rural buyers' leaps an opportunity for the marketers to visualize this sector as a new horizon. TV advertising has an impact on the purchase behavior of the rural consumers than their urban counterparts and the decisions of the family members of the rural consumers in the final purchase, in relation to the TV advertisements, plays a collective role (Bishnoi & Sharma, 2009). In addition, FMCG companies adopt low price strategy

¹ Kashyap, P. Rural Marketing. Chennai, Tamil Nadu: Pearson India Education Services Pvt. Ltd , Third Edition, pp 209.

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in rural marketing, promote goods on price plank and FMCG in lines of rationality and thus concluded that special kind of marketing mix strategies are essential for rural marketing which lays emphasis on low price along with low cost phenomena (Sulekha & Mor, 2013).

There is huge potential in rural India for the FMCG companies and the companies entering rural market must do so for strategic reasons and not for tactical gains. To be a winner in the rural market, the FMCG companies should focus on various aspects such as, core competency, profile of the brand managers, proliferation of spurious products, proper sales and distribution network and use of traditional media in creating awareness of the products in the rural markets (Pareek & Pincha, 2013). Companies should customize the products and services and organize product awareness campaigns & advertising communications, in tune with the rural consumer's requirements and the products which are affordable and acceptable by the rural consumers should be available at the right time and place in the rural market (Laddha, 2012). In order to sustain in this changing marketing environment, the companies need to develop a tailor made marketing mix emphasizing more on product mix (Gautam & Gangal). Indian consumers are not price sensitive but rather they prefer more on the value of the brand in relation to the price they pay off, on behalf of the selected FMCG brands (Singaravelu & Durai, 2013). Brand awareness, brand preference and quality products are on the verge of an increasing trend in rural areas. Due to the attitude to spend more on highly priced branded products among high income groups in rural areas, there is an ample scope of FMCG products to capture the markets in these areas by increasing its supply and also by adopting effective marketing and awareness strategies (Daud, 2013).

Rural customers give preference to price, quality, performance, reliability, brand, packaging and similar critical factors while purchasing FMCG products. The marketers thus need to devise promotional strategies in accordance with Government's rural development programs and the advertisers' should use low cost advertising strategies by making use of celebrities and related communication tactics in order to cater the attention of the rural customers (Ali, Thumiki, & Khan, 2012).

In recent years, the constant shift in the scenario of the Indian rural markets has made it a prospective sector especially in the FMCG segment. This sector requires frequent replenishment and the availability of the ample varieties enhance the purchasing pattern of the people of the rural society. "The factors contributing to the growth of rural market are: growing rural population, increase in rural incomes, and government's investment in rural development programs."²

Statement of the Problem

The communication medium, all the way through television has been acknowledged as the most influential technique of advertising and it covers a wide range of customers. Television advertisements can strongly present product attributes, features and characteristics and convincingly enlighten the benefits that the consumers expect from its usage. With the growing popularity of consumer goods among the rural customer segments, this market holds enough potential to bring remarkable success for the marketers of consumer products in India.

In the Indian context, "Rural market comprises 74% of the country's population, 41% of its middle class, 58% of its disposable income and a large consuming class. Around 700 million people, or 70% of India's population, live in 6, 27,000 villages in rural areas. 90% of the rural population concentrated in villages with a population of less than 2000. For manufacturer of consumer goods, these markets are certainly hot cakes."³

From the television viewers' perspective, the region-wise⁴ number of people watching television can be summarized as below:

² Gopaldaswamy, T . P . Rural Marketing Environment, Problems and Strategies. Noida, India: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd , Third Edition, pp 95.

³ Upadhyaya, M . Marketing in Rural India: The Innovative Selling Mantra. Abhinav, National Monthly Refereed Journal of Research in Commerce and Management. Volume. 1, Issue. 10, 77. Retrieved from http://www.abhinavjournal.com/images/Commerce_&_Management/Oct12/9.pdf , (accessed February 20, 2018).

⁴ Gopaldaswamy, T . P . Rural Marketing Environment, Problems and Strategies. Noida, India: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd , Third Edition, pp 181.

Region-Wise Television Viewers in Millions

Sl. No.	Regions	Urban	Rural	Total
1	Northern region	50.67	58.65	109.32
2	Western region	65.76	46.24	112.0
3	Southern region	59.60	70.20	120.80
4	Eastern region	31.27	33.42	64.69
5	All India	207.51	208.51	415.81

Source: Prasar Bharati Broadcasting Corporation **Exhibit: 2.1**

From the above exhibit, it can be observed that in India, the number of rural television viewers' in the Northern, Southern and Eastern region is higher as compared to the Western region. Considering India as a whole, the total quantum of both urban and rural viewers' has been found to be nearly equal. This clearly depicts the changing attitudes of the rural population and growing urge in viewing broadcasting media in order to remain updated as compared to their urban counterparts. As the number of rural television viewers' of Northern and Eastern region (refer Exhibit: 2.1) is more as compared to urban viewers', there exists an ample scope to study the acceptance and the impact of television advertisements of FMCG brands of North East region of India.

Scope of the Study

For the study, the researcher has limited the scope towards understanding the perception, acceptance and the impact of television advertisements of FMCG brands of North East India. In addition, as Sivasagar is a place of historic origin with a prospective tourist destination in the coming years, the study focuses on understanding the purchasing attitudes of the rural television viewers' of this region.

The primary responses from the rural population of Sivasagar district, Assam have formed the basis of the research. The analysis has been based on the Television advertisements of few selected FMCG brands which do have an existence in the rural market of the selected geographical region.

Objective of the Study

This study aims to fulfill the following objectives:

1. To observe the perception of the rural audience towards various attributes used by the advertisers' in designing the media advertisements of FMCG brands, in general.

2. To observe the impact of marketing communication through media advertisements of the FMCG brands on the rural viewers'.
3. To observe the changing dimensions on the understanding and acceptance of media advertisements of the FMCG brands on the rural viewers'.

Methodology

Sampling Plan:

At first, various attributes that the advertisers' make use off while designing advertisements were considered by the researcher in order to understand the viewers' perception towards those advertising attributes. These attributes were namely the appeals⁵; Personal, Social, Fear, Humour, Celebrity endorsement, Sex, Romantic, Youth, Adventure, Popularity, Music, Brand, Beauty and Natural.

Second, the media advertisements of six (6) FMCG brands were selected. The selected FMCG brands were namely; Pepsi, Thums Up, Surf Excel, Cadbury Dairy Milk Silk, Fevicol and Sona Chandi Chyawanprash.

The motto of the study has been to understand the cognitive behavior influencing the purchasing decisions of the rural people of Sivasagar district, Assam. For the research, the rural plots of Sivasagar district has been considered as Case study because within the proximity of the researcher's venturing into the topic it has been found that the study of the rural customer's cognitive behavior influencing their purchasing decisions in real-life situations of Sivasagar district has not yet been explored.

For the study, the rural area covered, Gaurisagar,

⁵ Retrieved from <http://blog.visme.co/types-of-advertising-appeals/> (accessed June 07, 2018).

Sapekhathi, Lakowa and Demow”⁶. Out of the total four (4) rural areas of Sivasagar district, forty (40) cases were selected from each area, which resulted in a total sample size of one hundred sixty (160) Television viewers. The nature and type of the samples has been determined based on certain judgments’ like; the respondents should be Television advertisement viewers and the respondents should possess’ minimum understanding on the English and Hindi language as the advertisements selected were based on national platform.

As the respondents were based on frequent Television viewers, it indicated that undefined Judgmental sampling has been adopted for the research.

Collection of Data

One structured questionnaire cum schedule was given to each respondent (rural Television viewer) of Sivasagar district.

In the first part of the schedule, to undergo the analysis on the viewers’ perception, the advertising appeals/attributes were placed in Semantic differential scale. In the second part of the schedule, to understand the buying decisions of the rural respondents, twenty two (22) statements was being served to the rural respondents, i.e. television viewers, and the same has been briefed under three (3) conditions.

The sub factors like; advertising appeal, customization and simplicity has been considered under the first condition, i.e., advertising and its impact. Factors like; marketing & advertising message, creativity, frequency, advertising medium and message flow & content have been combined in order to suffice the second condition, i.e., “marketing communication”. On the basis of the first two conditions, a third condition has been framed in order to complete the cycle starting from creation of advertisements till buying attitudes of the rural buyer. Factors like; understanding, interpretation and loyalty were merged in order to obtain a complete understanding on the buying behavior of the viewers’ towards the selected FMCG advertisements for the study.

⁶ Retrieved from http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/dchb/1812_PART_B_DCHB_SIVASAGAR.pdf, pp 4 (accessed June 20, 2017).

Analysis Technique

Rural audience’ perception towards various attributes used by the advertisers’ in designing media advertisements of FMCG brands, in general were analyzed using the concept of Perceptual mapping with semantic differential scale. Perceptual mapping is a “Marketing research technique in which consumer’s views about a product are traced or plotted (mapped) on a chart. Respondents are asked questions about their experience with the product in terms of its performance, packaging, price, size, etc. These qualitative answers are transferred to a chart (called a perceptual map) using a suitable scale, and the results are employed in improving the product or in developing a new one.”⁷

In order to analyze the impact of marketing communication through media advertisements of the FMCG brands on the rural respondents, the adapted methodology of using Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) was considered. Formerly, this technique was adopted by American Marketing Association with the help of 10 points Likert’s Scale. But for this current study, the responses of each Statement were measured through Impact index with 5 points Likert scale.

For the study, the results were presented in percentage. The research was analytical / descriptive in nature. The formula for Impact Index is as below:

$$a. \text{ Impact Index} = (\text{Weighted Score/Maximum Score}) * 100$$

$$b. \text{ Weighted Score} = w_1 * n_1 + w_2 * n_2 + \dots + w_5 * n_5,$$

Where,

- w_1 to w_5 = weightage given to each responses per statement ranging from 1 to 5. The highest being 5 and 1 being the lowest.
- n_1 to n_5 = no. of respondents responding to a statement with respective weightage
- c. Maximum Score = Highest rate * N

Where,

- N = Total no. of respondents

⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/perceptual-mapping.html> (accessed June 01, 2018).

The scale of Impact Index that was taken into consideration is as follows:

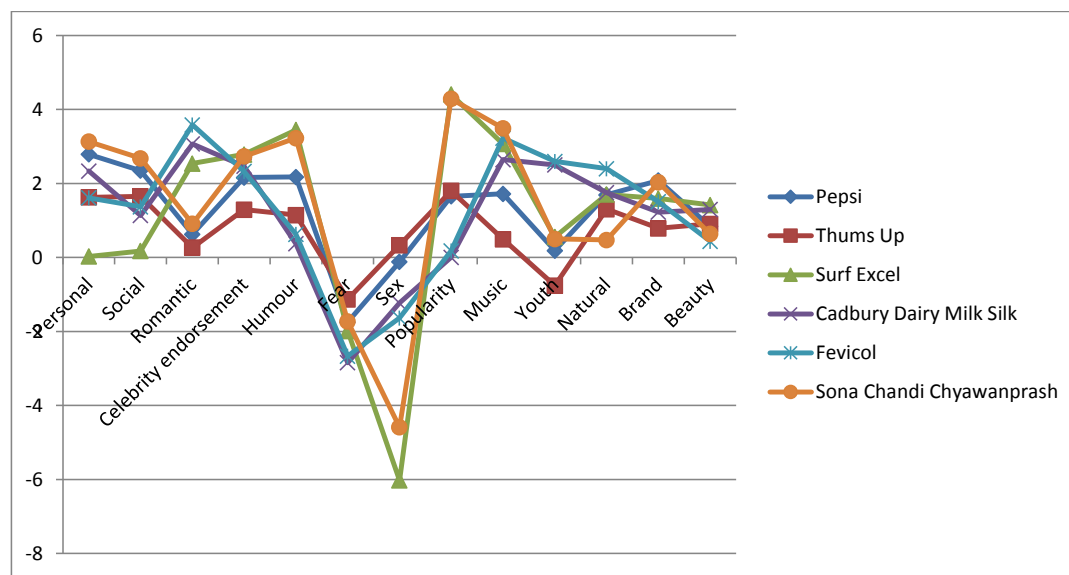
Scale of Impact Index

RANGE (%)	IMPACT WITH RESPECT TO THE STATEMENT
0-25	No Impact
25-50	Some Impact
50-75	Moderate Impact
75-100	High Impact

(Source: Self-generated for analysis) **Exhibit 7.1**

Observations

Rural Audience' Perception Towards Various Attributes Used by the Advertisers' in Designing Media Advertisements of FMCG Brands:



(Source: Data collection through survey) **Exhibit: 8.1**

From the exhibit, it has been observed that the rural audience of the study area prioritized the usage of various advertising appeals in the media advertisements of FMCG brands. For all the six (6) brands under consideration, the rural audience had a negative perception towards the appeals like; fear, sex and youth. Even though for all the 6 brands, the appeals like fear, sex and the concept of youth were not been used by the advertisers', still these people were of the opinion that on the event of the usage of these appeals in general, the advertisement turns out to be unethical and uncomfortable to watch in an open platform. The appeals like; personal, social, celebrity endorsement, humor, romantic, popularity and music were most preferred by the rural audience and they

showed an affirmative perception towards these appeals. Although, the plots showed a varied positive response for all the six (6) brands, it can be said that the viewers' were fond of these appeals and were inclined towards watching the advertisements focusing on such attributes in the ad concept. The remaining appeals like; natural, brand and beauty showed a clustered positive perception for all the six (6) brands under consideration. This signifies that these three appeals were perceived by the rural audience on the same platform. The usage of natural, brand and beauty appeals in the advertisements was given similar significance by the audience while viewing and accepting the concept of any advertisement of FMCG brand.

Impact of Marketing Communication through Media Advertisements of the FMCG Products on the Rural Viewers:

Conditions	Brands	Pepsi	Thums Up	Surf Excel	Cadbury Dairy Milk Silk	Fevicol	Sona Chandi Chyawanprash
Advertising and its Impact	71 MI	53 MI	75.5 HI	70 MI	76 HI	70 MI	
Marketing Communication	73 MI	56 MI	74 MI	71.5 MI	74 MI	72 MI	
Buyer Behavior	72.5 MI	43 LI	71 MI	70.5 MI	66.5 MI	68 MI	

(Source: Data collection through survey)

Exhibit: 8.2

Here, LI = Low Impact, MI = Medium Impact, HI = High Impact

From the exhibit, it has been observed that, when a comprehensive view of all the selected six (6) brands has been considered, most of the brands had a reasonable impact on the rural viewers. When all the three conditions of the framework have been analyzed in accordance with the impact scores of the rural location of the mentioned district, it has been found that these brands were moderately accepted by the rural viewers. The advertisements of these brands as well as its marketing communication content through the advertisements had a moderate impact on the rural viewers. In addition, the audience also showed a modest buying behavior towards these brands under consideration. There might not be frequent replenishment of the brands, but as the “buying behavior” impact scores (refer Exhibit: 8.2) were within the moderate range of 50-75, it can be interpreted that, the rural people of this geographical region, were somewhat inclined towards purchasing these brands.

When the brand “Thums Up” has been considered individually, it has been observed that the advertising and the marketing communication through the campaign though had a moderate impact on the viewers’, the buying behavior of the rural viewers’ showed a lower impact. This meant that though the viewers’ were purchasing the brand; the frequency of purchase by the rural viewers’ was less, specifically for the mentioned brand.

For the brand Fevicol and Surf Excel (refer Exhibit: 8.2), the advertising campaigns highly influenced the rural audience. As far as marketing communication and buying behavior is concerned, all the three brands showed a moderate response.

Discussion

The study revealed that in today’s changing circumstance, the attitude of the rural population is constantly on the verge of change towards urbanization and its way of life. They are incessantly on the threshold of changing their priorities, lifestyle, mind-set and approach towards varieties, in order to match with their urban counterparts. The rural people possess an active knowledge and understanding towards various advertising appeals and their buying behavior do get influenced by the usage of appeals in media advertisements. Positive perception towards appeals likely leads to acceptance towards an advertisement and thus instigates the purchasing decisions. The same can be depicted from the previous literatures as studied by Sulekha & Mor. K.⁸ and Daud. M. A.⁹.

As FMCG brands are consumable items, the rural audience is very particular while choosing the right brand according to their preference, perception and requirement.

⁸ Sulekha, & Mor, K. (2013). An Investigation of Consumer Buying Behavior for FMCG: An Empirical Study of Rural Haryana. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research Marketing*. Volume. 13, Issue. 3, Version. 1.0, 44-49. Retrieved from https://globaljournals.org/GJMBR_Volume13/4-An-Investigation-of-Consumer-Buying.pdf (accessed December 10, 2017).

⁹ Daud, M. A. (2013). Awareness of Brand and Increasing Customer’s Demand for FMCG Products in Rural Market: The Rural Market of Uttar Pradesh. *International Journal of Engineering and Management Sciences*. Vol. 4, (1), 79-82. Retrieved from [http://scienceandnature.org/IJEMS-Vol4\(1\)-Jan2013/IJEMS_V4\(1\)15.pdf](http://scienceandnature.org/IJEMS-Vol4(1)-Jan2013/IJEMS_V4(1)15.pdf) (accessed July 27, 2017).

Thus, in order to build trust and commitment among the rural customers, companies should tap preferences, perceptions of retailers as well as consumers in the course of relationship marketing, and herald online shopping from home (Kumar & Joseph, 2014).

Thus, these studies open the doorway for the FMCG companies to perceive the rural market from a different perspective, i.e., growth. Only the company with the required resources like time and money and with the much needed innovative ideas is likely to be the winner and tap the rural markets (Raj & Selvaraj, 2007).

Along with the customers residing in urban areas, the rural customers are becoming informative and more brand conscious day by day. Products features, quality and its performance are certain factors, which these set of customers' from Sivasagar district, Assam prioritize while making a purchase decision.

In this changing environment, along with the urban people, rural customers prominently rule the FMCG market. As a result, while designing the advertisements there exists an opportunity for the advertisers', to equally prioritize the attitudes, perceptions, understanding and purchasing decisions of these set of uprising customer base. The previous studies in addition to the current study reveal that the rural market in parallel to the urban customers' acts as a potential to uplift the FMCG sector in India. Creation of brand awareness, transparency in marketing communication through effective media and specific advertising message with a strong execution strategy would create a platform for the advertisers' in influencing the cognitive behavior of the buyers' and thus in their purchasing decisions.

Future Scope of Study

From the current study, it has been apparent that the purchasing attitude of the rural audience of this part of North East India is constantly on the verge of urbanization. For most of the FMCG brands, it has been observed that the buying nature of this set of rural customers is at par with the urban people. Thus this acts as an opportunity for the advertising agencies to observe the rural market from the perspective of growth and accordingly design the promotional campaigns to suit the needs, requirements, perceptions, understanding and purchasing decisions

of the prospective rural market, along with the existing urban customer base.

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