



Role of Communication Tools in Rural Marketing Strategies: A Study of Bhilwara Region

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Abstract

'Rural' defined with a 'deprivation' orientation, rural being a landmass without access to continuous electricity, water, the stock market. Rural Marketing is defined as a function that manages all activities involved in assessing, stimulating and converting the purchasing power of rural consumers into an effective demand for specific products & services and moving these products & services to the people in rural areas to create satisfaction and a better standard of living and thereby achieving organizational goals. The tools of communication in rural marketing are print media and electronic media. The role of communication tools in rural marketing, to a large extent is influenced by the media habits of the rural consumers. Though all types of media are being used in rural area, in view of low level of literacy, audiovisual media- radio, mobile, TV and films assume major importance. Mass media is preferred by most of the marketers to reach rural audiences, primarily because of shortage of electricity and language diversity. To communicate effectively with rural consumers, it is important to understand, the aspirations, fears and hopes of the rural customers, in relation to each product category, before developing a communication package to deliver the product message. This study is an attempt to understand the effects of communication tools, barriers in rural marketing and future prospects in rural area in Bhilwara District. The paper provides an empirical view of the range of communications and find out the most effective tools of communication for rural marketing in Bhilwara rural region.

Key Words:-Rural, mass media, electronic media, rural marketing

Introduction

The Indian market has extended in the last few decades. Earlier the manufacturers focused their efforts in fulfilling the requirements of urban consumers. But today marketers focus has to shift towards the rural India, which is the real and root level bazaar for the marketers. Big companies for increasing the profit are adopting new marketing strategies to reach this huge and largely untapped market. Rural market of India is emerging as a large market for a number of goods and services – be it consumer good and financial services. Different companies have adopted different strategies to reach the rural masses. Companies like HLL, P&G, Britannia, Coke and many more, have chosen rural India as the field for battle for enhance the area of own product. Companies are attracting by offering free gifts to increase the awareness of their products in the rural areas these marketing strategies were proved to be extremely effective in reaching to the rural market. The problem before the marketer is to find out a common way to interact with this huge magnitude of rural masses with varied social, cultural background and speaking a few hundred dialects. There was no direct interaction with the prospective consumer, only traditionally selected rural distributors and retailers had mark up the responsibility for the rural market. Penetration of Television and other tools had very limited alternatives form of advertising for promoting the new product so marketers mostly relied either on print media or radio as other tools of communication. Most of companies have accepted the challenges of educating the rural market and enhancing their profits. We have a basic national strategy - to act locally. This means that we have to develop and research special creative aimed at homogenous rural segments and these may be quite differ from urban market



communication approaches. In the rural area of communication, corporate marketers have perhaps failed to recognize the communication skills that a rural consumer may be buying a particular brand or even a product category (particularly durables) for the first time. With hardly any key influencer with in the village and few sources of information (since print/electronic media have limited reach) the rural consumer feels inhibited and ill equipped to buy confidently. Hence, there is a strong tools of communication needed to build reassurance and trust about the product quality, service support and company credentials in the mind of rural consumers. Rural consumers have evolved this system of selling and communicating that have served them well for centuries.

Rural Marketing and tools Of Communication

The function that manages all activities involved in assessing, stimulating and converting the purchasing power of rural consumers into an effective demand for specific products & services and moving these products & services to the people in rural areas to create satisfaction and a better standard of living and thereby achieving organizational goals is Rural Marketing. The rural consumer has the access to information, with the advent of the information age and the rapid development in rural communications systems. The lifestyle of a large number of rural consumers in India has witnessed for dramatic changes in recent times. The literacy level of the consumers, socioeconomic conditions, environmental conditions, cultural conditions, employment rate, geographical location, nature of occupation, efforts put by the sellers, media exposure etc. are several factors which influence the buying nature of the rural consumers. In present era, rural consumers have started using modern communication facilities through fixed telephone, mobile phone, TV etc. In which interactive process the knowledge and skills, information, relevant for development are exchanged between extension/advisory services, farmers, information providers and researchers either media or personally through such as print, radio and more recently the new "Information and Communication Technologies" (ICTs) is Rural communication. In this process all person may be work as innovators, intermediaries and receivers of knowledge and information. The aim of effective commutation is to provide necessary information for informed decision making and the relevant skills to improve their position and rural livelihoods. Effective Communication tools in rural area are:

Television: TV is the popular communication tools for rural population. Mostly person connect with this mode.

Radio and Mobile: Listening to Radio for a long time has been for news, commentary (sports) and category songs. In present era Mobile is the necessary as well as food for persons. The entire consumer handles the smart phone invariably.

Print Media: Due to low literacy rate and poor reading habits, this is not a popular communication tools in rural part. However, some advertisements are made through the local language low priced dailies. Rural people normally read newspapers on Fridays and Sundays Hoardings: Hoardings on village entry junctions, writing and painting on walls of public buildings in villages, compound walls of private people will be more appealing and readable. The picture of product and catchy slogans are considered to be the best promoters.

Village Congregations/ Gatherings: Certain places have specific market days which can be used for mass communication to speed awareness of products. Similarly particular places have local deities and Jathra or fairs along the festival type celebrations. These occasions help to promote sales, explanation or product awareness.

Communication Barriers In Rural Marketing

Communication is starting step of rural marketing. The situation concerning communication in rural areas of developing countries especially in the case of our country - India is characterized by the following :



- A lack of well developed ICT infrastructure and low levels of ICT skills pose threats against effective and advanced modes of communication.
- A scarcity of information (absence of providers and of local communication content) leading to lack of local knowledge, local floor and local connection.
- A fragmented market for information with many individual clients or client groups
- Conflicting messages - difficult to know what relevant/correct information for a specific for rural area as same message can be interpreted differently in different regions
- Relatively few clients scattered over a large area makes the task of rural communication hectic and costly.
- Different regions need different communication strategies as one suit does not fit all due to the vast heterogeneity of rural areas.
- A skill for communication is a major challenge for structural transformations leading to constantly changing channels and content.

Review Of Literature

According to media release by HMC Communications, the wide and comprehensive study provides a full picture of farmers' media habits. "It's the largest study of its kind to be conducted and provides some extremely valuable and desirable information, along with some fresh insights", says King St CEO, Chris Williams.

Goswami (2009). The huge untapped needs of the rural mass, the growing rural economy and the increasing media penetration and brand awareness make this market extremely attractive to marketers.

Sirs, K.M. (2012) There certainly is a place for premium products, but customers in rural market for those products are scattered and difficult to reach. Therefore, such commodities can be left to be bought from the nearest urban centre. The attraction of rural area market is in their size as mass markets. Those who design products for such big markets will prosper and grow rapidly. "If you think farmers are behind the times as an audience, you need to think again. Radio, TV and print media are still going strong but it's in digital media where we saw some big moves, particularly with the under 40s," says Williams. "And rather than being behind, they are ahead in some instances." The big three traditional areas of TV, radio and print media are still very highly used across all segments: - 87% read the newspaper daily, 95% watch TV daily - - They all read the rural publications timely; all have a weekly repertoire - 82% listen to the radio daily but a secure look at the findings reveals a changing landscape and the emergence of a smart, digitally confident, connected audience with a wide media repertoire and hunger for knowledge and new information.

Saravanan, K.S. (2012) The result of the research has revealed that the rural people were highly preferred only a few advertisements like fast moving consumer goods, textile showrooms, jewellery showrooms, home appliances, two wheelers and mobile phone services because they are the products largely aired in Television. The rural people are scattered in many areas, and differ in their languages, behaviour and cultural values. Therefore, before framing the advertisement, the advertiser should concentrate on the 10 geographical features of the areas of the viewers in a particular state. The factors in TV advertisements are classified as relevancy of information, truthfulness of information, accuracy of information, creativity and presence of celebrities. These factors equally influenced the buying decision of the rural people.

Mehir Baidya, Bipasha Maity, Kamal Ghose, (2012) Results reveal that all the marketing mix variables have significant relative contributions to sales in both the cases. It is also found that advertising does have significant short term and long-term effects on adjusted sales for both the brands.

Objectives of The Study

There are various kinds of communication tools and tactics prevalent in the rural areas. Some of these are like TV, Radio, Movies, Poster, Mobile, New papers, Door to Door communication, Point of Sale communication, Word of Mouth communication etc. The main objectives of the research are :

- a) To find out the preference of communication tools by rural consumers
- b) To find out the buying behaviour of rural consumer on which companies can design their communication strategy.
- c) To find out the parameters of communication for increasing the effectiveness of communication.

Research Methodology

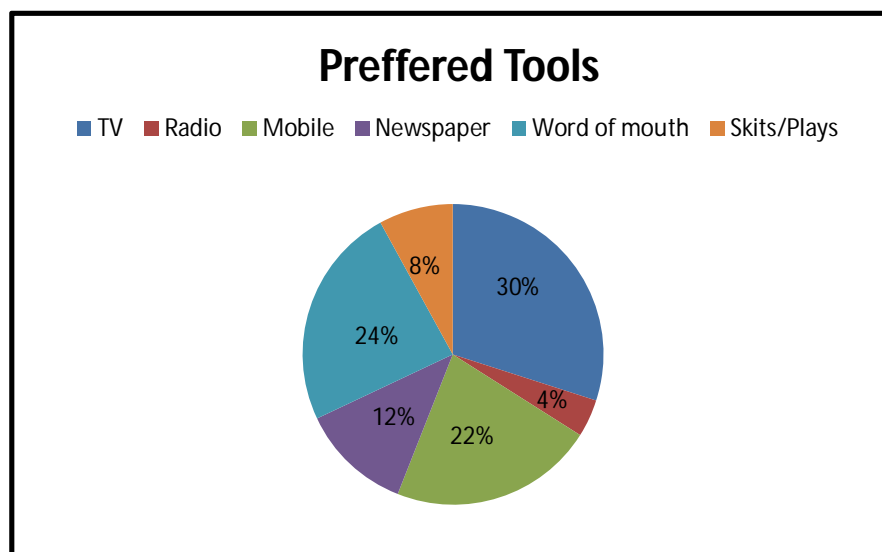
The paper is based on the exploratory cum descriptive research and almost relied on primary data, which has been collected, by the designing a schedule. Total numbers of respondents were 50 which is based on random sampling method residing in the nearby villages of Bhilwara. Five villages were selected in Bhilwara district and 10 respondents were selected from each village. The simple percentage analysis has been used to analyze the data.

The analyses of each aspects of communication which effect of rural marketing strategy are:

1 Tools Preferred for Communication:-

Communication tools are used by profit making companies for penetration in rural area. Electronic media, the mode of communication preferred is changing the rapid pace. As per this study, the preference of the different tools is described in the figure below.

S.No.	Preferred Tools	No. Of respondents	Percentage
1	TV	15	30%
2	Radio	02	4%
3	Mobile	11	22%
4	Newspaper	06	12%
5	Word of mouth	12	24%
6	Skits/Plays	04	8%



Analysis

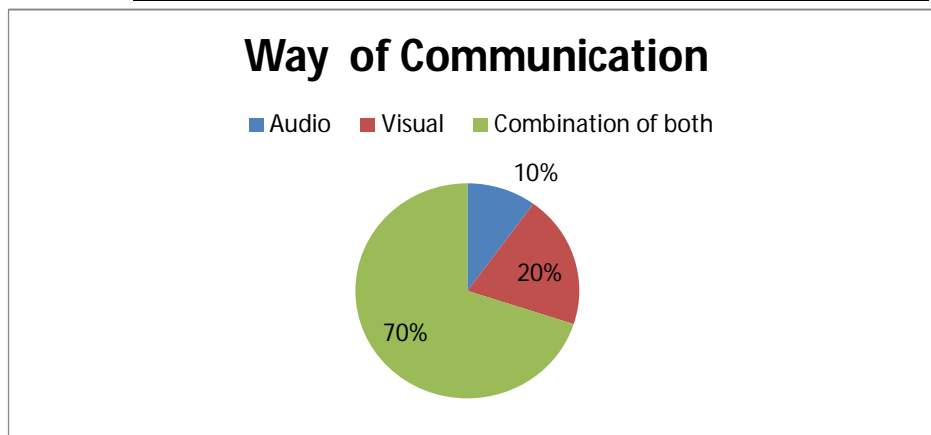
As per the survey, TV comes out to be the preferred tool of communication. This indicates the increased penetration of television media in rural region areas. Hence the communication through television is expected to have the maximum reach amongst rural population. The other important aspect that the effect of the word of mouth communication plays a vital role in rural areas, people generally trust the experience of another person.

2 Type of Communication: -

The way of communication can be audio, visual or both. Audio communication likes radio or announcements. Visual communications are newspapers and posters and hoarding. Television, skits, plays uses both audio and visual forms.

The preference is illustrated below.

S.No.	Way of Communication	No. Of respondents	Percentage
1	Audio	05	10%
2	Visual	10	20%
3	Combination of both	35	70%



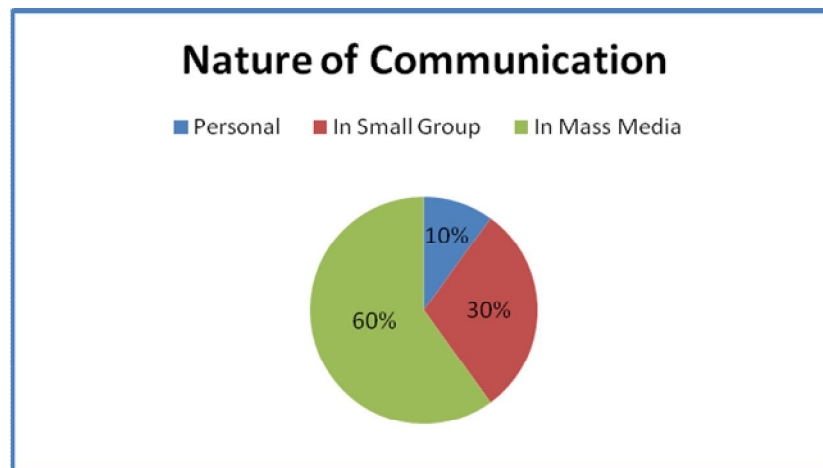
Analysis

Rural consumers mostly prefer audio-visual way of communication over others.

3. Nature of Communication:-

Personal, In Small Groups and Mass are the nature of communication is perceived to be of three major types in rural areas. Door-to-door communication is personal, announcements through vans or use of skits or plays or “nautankis” to influence the rural consumers are generally take place in small groups and increase in electronic penetration is mass media. As per this study the preference is illustrated in the figure below.

S.No.	Nature of Communication	No. Of respondents	Percentage
1	Personal	05	10%
2	In Small Group	15	30%
3	In Mass Media	30	60%



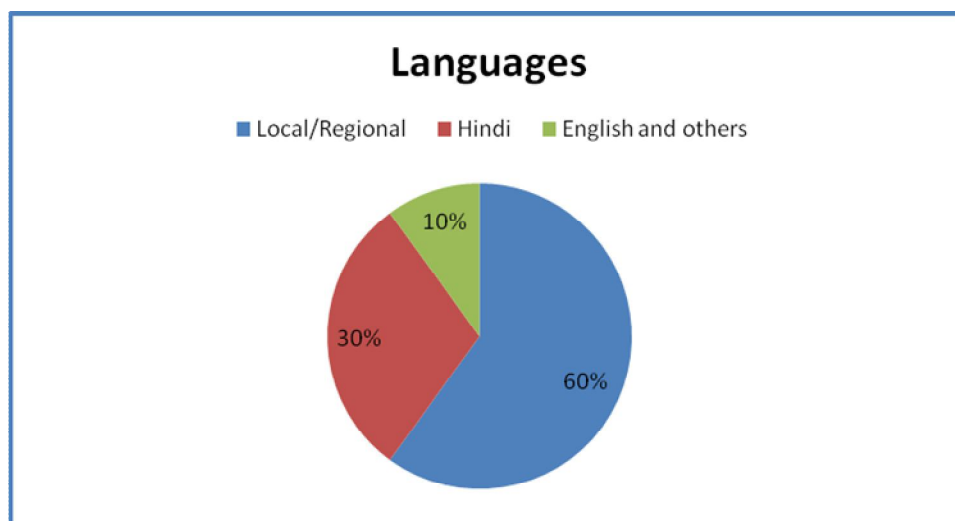
Analysis

The effect of mass media TV, Radio, Newspaper is evident here. This indicates the enormous effect of television and other mass media in the rural areas. However communications in the form of skits plays and announcements are also preferred by rural area.

4. Languages in Communication:-

Languages play a vital role in the rural communication due to their limitation in understanding different languages. The preference of languages is illustrated below.

S.No.	Languages	No. Of respondents	Percentage
1	Local/Regional	30	60%
2	Hindi	15	30%
3	English and others	05	10%



Analysis

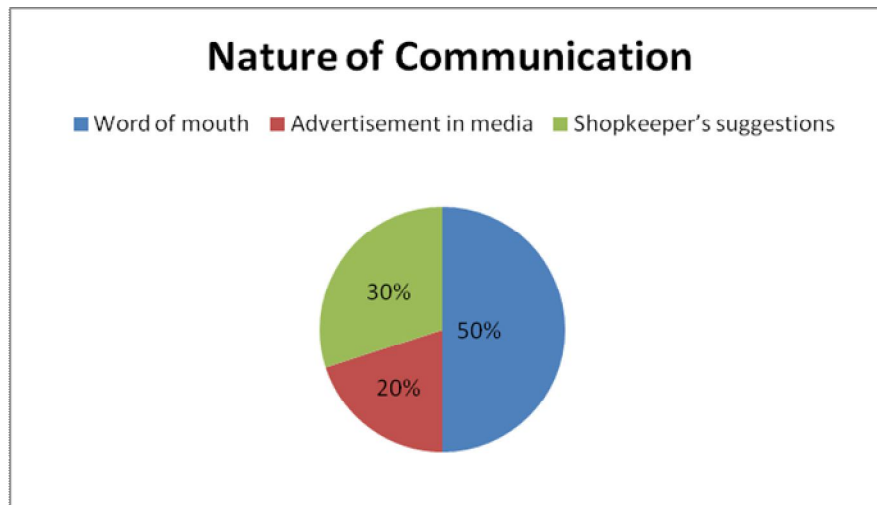
Regional languages are mostly preferred by the rural population. This indicates that regional language is valuable tools for companies to penetration in rural marketing.

5. Different Sources of Information on Purchase Decision:-

This is the most important question in front of companies that what source is suitable for penetration in rural market.

The different factors that are found to influence the rural population in making purchase decisions are illustrated below.

S.No.	Nature of Communication	No. Of respondents	Percentage
1	Word of mouth	25	50%
2	Advertisement in media	10	20%
3	Shopkeeper's suggestions	15	30%



Analysis

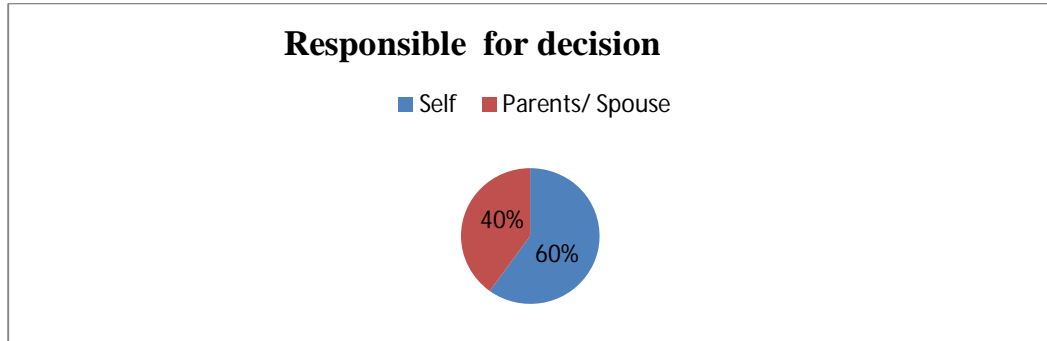
Majority of the rural consumers go by the word of mouth while making purchase decisions. Rural consumers have low education and they faith on shopkeeper's suggestions.

6. Responsible For Decision:-

Purchasing household items of daily usage, they do not depend on anyone else for decision making. However for purchase of durable products, they generally take opinions from parents, spouse and sometimes children.

The influence of the decision makers is illustrated below.

S.No	Responsible for decision	No. Of respondents	Percentage
1	Self	30	60%
2	Parents/ Spouse	20	40%



Analysis

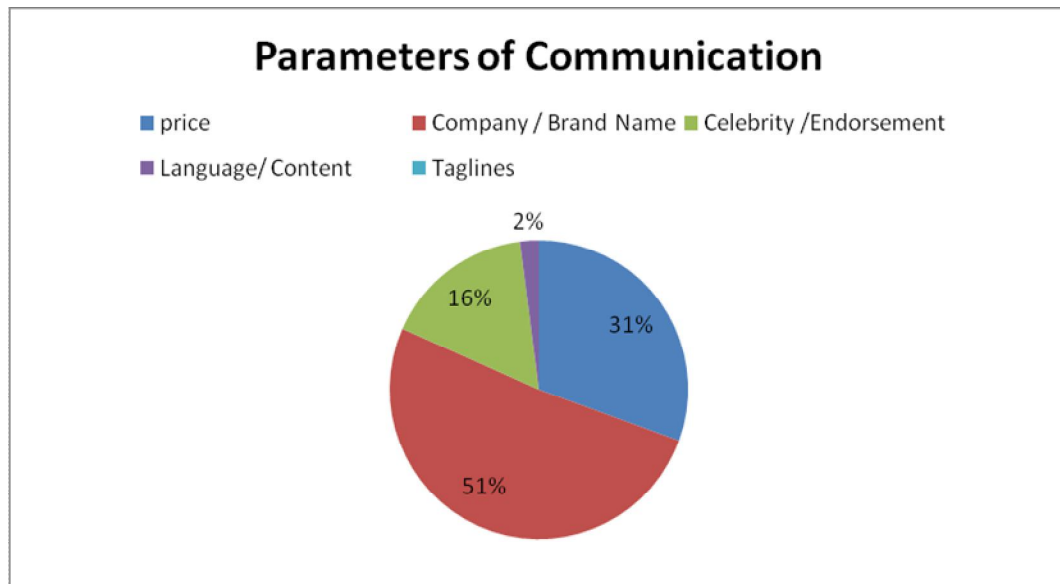
After the survey the purchasing decisions are usually self made by the rural consumers, but there are situations where the others also play a part in decision making.

7. Communication Parameters

There are different parameters in any communication that influences the purchase intention like : price or discounts, brand or company name, presence of celebrity in any advertisement, language, content and tagline of the advertisement.

The importance of the various factors is illustrated below.

S.No.	Parameters of Communication	No. Of respondents	Percentage
1	Price	15	30%
2	Company / Brand Name	25	50%
3	Celebrity /Endorsement	08	16%
4	Language/ Content	01	2%
5	Taglines	01	2%



Analysis

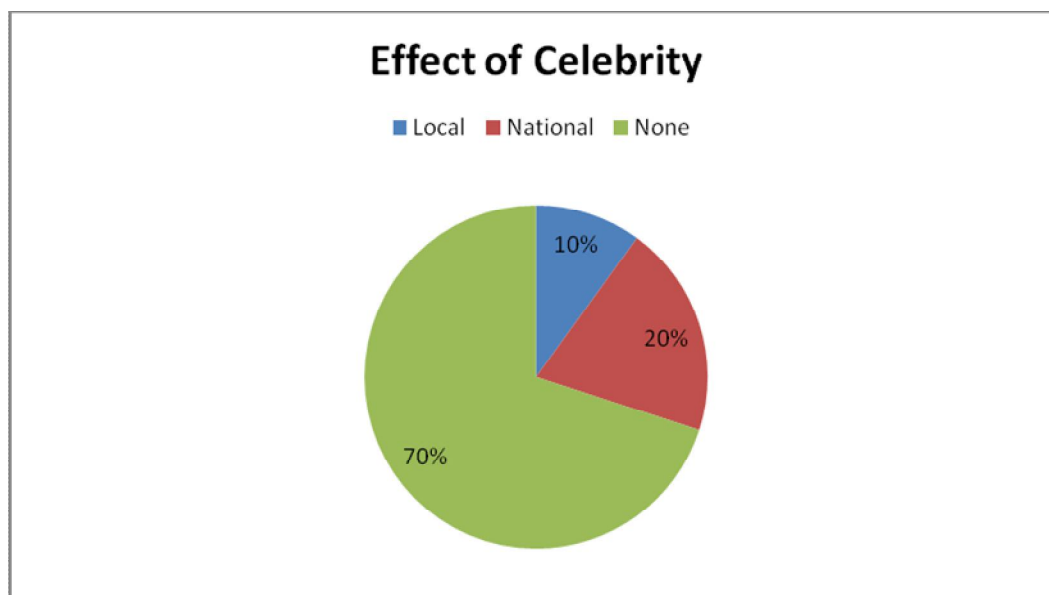
Brand name is the most affecting parameters while making any purchase. This clearly indicates that although the rural population is economically more challenged than their urban. They still

prefer good companies and brands over prices and discounts. The other factors are less impact on the rural consumers.

8. Role of Celebrities in Communication

Celebrity endorsements are a part of communication in rural area. This question tries to judge if there is a difference in purchase decision making when it comes to local celebrities and national celebrities. The effect is illustrated below.

S.No.	Effect of Celebrity	No. Of respondents	Percentage
1	Local	05	10%
2	National	10	20%
3	None	35	70%



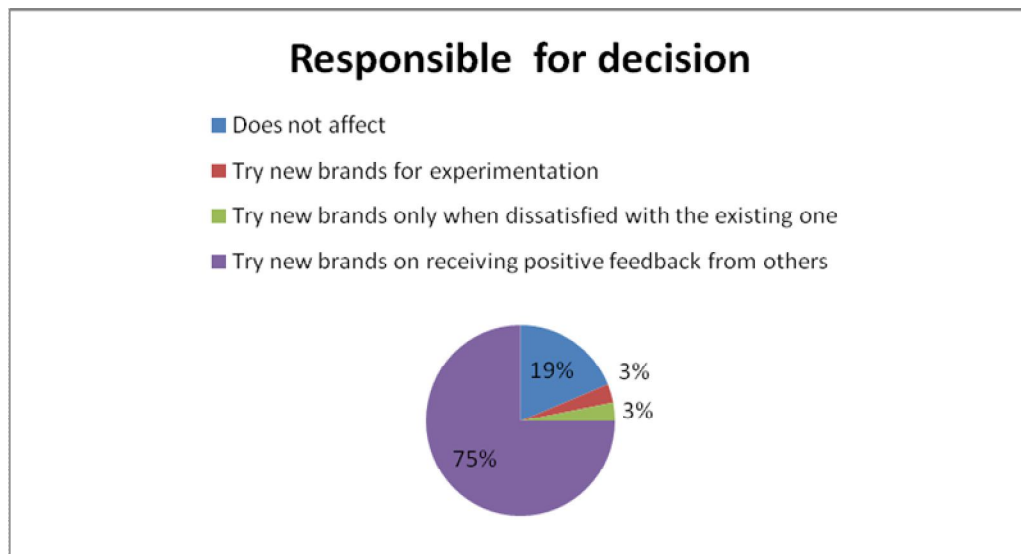
Analysis

A celebrity in advertisements does create brand awareness amongst rural consumers but they not affected for purchasing the products.

8. Responsible for launch of new product/brand

In the present age of brand war and supreme competition, brands and products are launched every day. The reaction to new products or brands is illustrated below.

S.No	Responsible for decision	No. Of respondents	Percentage
1	Does not affect; stick to the existing brand	30	60%
2	Try new brands for experimentation	05	10%
3	Try new brands only when dissatisfied with the existing one	05	10%
4	Try new brands on receiving positive feedback from others	10	20%



Analysis

The study shows that the rural customers usually do not experiment with a new product unless something triggers them. They try new product in case of positive feedback about the product from others. The importance of viral marketing or communication through the word of mouth is of Paramount importance in rural marketing communication. Some of the customers try out the products only when they are dissatisfied with the older one. Hence the most convenient option for any communication to be successful in rural areas is to generate positive feedback and bank on the word of mouth.

Findings

1. Effective tools of communication are TV. Majority of the respondents (60%) preferred television rather than radio, newspaper and other means of communication. So Television is used as viral marketing mode for penetration in rural marketing.
2. Effect of mass media like TV, Radio and newspapers are influence of a rural consumer is very high. However the result can vary to some extent depending on the sample surveyed. Communication in small groups is also preferred in many situations. Personal communication is effective only when handled with care, else it might be looked down upon as unnecessarily forcing or convincing the consumers to buy the products. However door-to-door selling is highly effective when there is need to educate the consumers about specific products or services.
3. Marketers should focus on promotions and communication mechanisms to generate word of mouth recommendations and capitalize on that. Purchase decisions are also influenced by suggestions from known retailers with whom rural consumers tend to develop a bond of trust and relationship. However buying decisions are mostly taken after consulting the consumers (friends, relatives, neighbors and at times even strangers living in the same or nearby villages) who have the first hand experience of using the products. Hence word of mouth plays a vital role.
4. A combination of audio and video is most appealing to the rural customers. Rural communication requires innovation based on rural customs and values. That is why in addition to television media, other audio-visual communication modes like “Nukkad Natak”, folk plays, magic shows, “Nataunkis” are widely practiced in rural areas.



5. The result depicts the increasing trend of disposable income in rural areas. Prices and discounts are not the sole parameters that drive their purchases. Rural customers are increasingly becoming brand conscious. Celebrity endorsements just add to the creation of brand recall. Language is more important than content and tagline which is a testimony of the vast heterogeneity of the rural market.
6. The important point to note for marketers is that the use of celebrities in advertisements does create brand awareness amongst rural consumers in India. However this does not necessarily get converted into purchase decisions just because of the presence of celebrities. The reason is with increase in the level of education, the rural consumers do Expectedly regional languages are preferred in marketing communications. The success of rural communication depends on the appropriate localization of campaigns and regional language plays an important part in it.
7. Limited disposable household income often restricts the rural customers from trying out each and every newly launched product. In spite of increasing brand awareness, it is not easy to induce trial purchase by the rural consumers. This is not exactly due to brand loyalty but more due to brand stickiness. They need some recommendations or have to be dissatisfied with the existing one to go for experimentation. This further emphasizes the need for utilizing viral marketing by the marketers where one satisfied user can recommend the product and thereby initiating the chain.

Recommendations

From the study of the rural communication, it can be concluded that there exists major differences between the existing and the desirable levels of rural communication. Some recommendation for increasing the rural marketing -

1. An effective way to increase the emotional attachment with rural consumers is the use of local language in the communication designed for a specific target group.
2. Innovative medium of Communication and Use of Viral marketing as communication Strategy
In order to address the need for innovation in rural communication as well as the need to utilize viral marketing strategy, the recommendation to the marketers is the use of Brand Melas. Brand Melas can ensure a large participation of people and hence provides a perfect platform for the marketers to communicate with the rural consumers
3. Relationship Building with Rural Customers Innovative medium of Communication and Use of Viral marketing as communication Strategy
4. Focus on value creation and branding rather than only on Price & Discounts. Hence it can be concluded that if the Indian organizations want to reach out to the rural India in an effective and efficient manner, it has to be grounded firmly in rural perceptions, values and traditions.

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