

THE IMPACT OF UNCONVENTIONAL MEDIA ON RURAL MASSES

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the impact of unconventional media on the buying behavior of rural consumers. It also studies the problems and challenges of rural communication in rural Uttar Pradesh and highlights the relevance of non conventional media in rural markets. Non conventional media are effective tools for raising hype about new products or for re-launching existing products. This is particularly true in the case of FMCG products, where the hype generated can propel sales volumes, provided the advertising campaign is appealing and is backed by a good distribution system. The paper elucidates the fall outs of conventional media by highlighting some national advertisement campaigns carried out by corporate giants to communicate with the target audience in rural markets. The authors take up the empirical views in highlighting the relevance of non conventional media by analyzing the national campaigns from secondary data sources.

KEYWORDS: Rural Communication, Non Conventional Media Vehicle and Rural Consumer Buying Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Rural communication calls for understanding the key challenges at hand- rural heterogeneity and spread, low literacy and varying comprehension abilities of rural folks, and differences in media reach and the habits of people. Communicating the message to rural consumers has posed enormous challenges to rural marketers because of the large numbers of consumers scattered across the country. This problem is further compounded by the heterogeneous nature of consumers, in terms of their languages.

Around two-fifths of the rural population is illiterate and literacy levels vary hugely among different states. To communicate effectively with the less educated, it becomes necessary that the focus be on creating a simple communication message. The limited reach of mass media in rural areas and its regional and state variations also pose limitations on a universal approach to communication for rural consumers. In the light of these challenges, a rural marketer should identify the most suitable medium to ensure the maximum spatial reach across the country; develop region specific consumer profiles to understand the characteristics of the target market; and design the most effective and persuasive communication and promotional strategies to induce the target audiences buy his product or service.

FEATURES OF RURAL MARKETS

As far as features are concerned, the existing rural markets are large and scattered, low standard of living, traditional outlook, diverse socio-economic backwardness and poor infrastructure facilities. The major problems faced in the rural areas of the state are underdeveloped people and under developed markets, ethnic problems facing people,

many dialects, dispersed markets, low per capita income, low levels of literacy, prevalence of spurious brands and seasonal demand and a different way of thinking. These pose great challenge to rural markets.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROBLEMS IN RURAL COMMUNICATION ARE AS FOLLOWS

Cultural and Linguistic Heterogeneity: Communicating the message to rural consumers has posed enormous challenges to the rural marketer because of the large numbers of consumers scattered across the country. Due to the widespread geographical dispersion (638000 villages in India), many of them are still beyond the reach of conventional media. Even the use of unconventional media makes it almost unviable for the marketer to touch base with the widely scattered rural audience.

Low Literacy and Varying Comprehension Abilities: There are vast variations in the levels of literacy among rural citizens. Around two-fifths of the rural population is illiterate and only one fifth holds a matriculate and higher degree. To communicate effectively with the less educated, it becomes necessary to focus on creating a simple communication message using self explanatory visuals comprising storyboards, role plays and flip charts, rather than text.

Different Media Reach and Habits: The limited reach of mass media in rural areas and its regional and state variations pose limitations on a universal approach to communication for rural consumers. As per the readership survey 2011, television has the maximum reach in rural India with 45.4%, cable and satellite with 32.6%, radio with 15.9%, press with 13.2%, cinema with 2% and internet with 8%.

RURAL COMMUNICATION MEDIA

Rural media can be classified broadly into conventional mass media and non conventional rural centric media. Conventional media consist of radio, television, print, cinema, outdoor media, wall painting, hoarding and personalized media, point of purchase and direct mailers etc. on the other hand non conventional media includes rural centric media like video vans video raths haats melas mandies as the platforms for communication as well as the folk media India's multi lingual and multi cultural identity limits the role of mass media activities, particularly in rural areas. This gap is filled to a great extent through non conventional, rural centric media like video vans, haat / mela / mandi campaigns, folk media, puppet shows, folk theatre, contests, trolleys, hoardings, leaflets, animal parade and mobile display.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rural and Urban Responses to Television Advertisements: A study was undertaken jointly by MART and Anugrah Madison in south and north India, covering both urban and rural areas, to assess the comprehension, association, credibility and acceptability of television commercials for Babool (featuring a young man undertaking a series of activities, yet looking fresh throughout the day) and Navratan hair oil (featuring the film actors Govinda and Rambha in a group dance) in the FMCG category, and Samsung Plano Digital Flat TV (an estranged young couple being united because of the rays emanating from the TV) and Asian Paints exterior emulsion paint (featuring the average Joe Sunil Babu) in the consumer durables category.

Respondents included 60 regular TV viewers (40 from rural areas and 20 from rural areas, equally distributed over both regions) in the age group of 18-50 years both male and female from urban and rural areas. The following were the primary findings (Mart Knowledge Centre):

Babool: Rural people had a problem comprehending the message as they perceived it to be too quick. In the north, some respondents thought the advertisement was for a tooth brush/shaving cream.

Navratan: Rural people questioned why Govinda was dancing in the advertisement despite the so called headache. Most rural respondents from the south could not recognize Govinda. Similarly, in the north the recognition of Rambha was very low.

Samsung: The advertisement went over the heads of rural respondents and most of them felt that the ad was meant only for the educated and rich people. Urban viewers seemed to have comprehended the message of the advertisement. People in the south loved the mood and the graphics, but urbanites in the north found it boring.

Asian Paints: the advertisement scored very well on the believability factor among the urban audience. Rural consumers were skeptical as they thought the paint would last for only a couple of years, which, according to them, was not value for money. Some rural respondents thought it was an advertisement for a housing company.

The advertisements of babool, navratna, samsang asian paints were designed as so complicated to the rural people that they could not comprehend the message literally due to low literacy and varying comprehension abilities.

Religion: A Key for Designing Communication: Religion and its associated customs have been used as key profiling factors for the target audience of Life Buoy, one of the leading brands of HUL, for designing its rural communication programme. Realizing that conventional media could not effectively communicate the underlying hygiene issues and create brand awareness among rural consumers, HUL wanted to use a cost effective and powerful medium to promote this programme. It chose religion one of the strongest emotional platforms- to stress the need to use soap each time people washed their hands, to this end, it segmented and profiled people based on their religion, analysed their rituals and customs, and designed a suitable awareness programme.

HUL initiated the programme in Gurdwaras, an important place for congregation. Upon entering a Gurdwara, devotees are required to take off their shoes, and wash their hands and feet at designated locations before they can go inside the prayer room. Conducting this activity within Gurdwaras enabled HUL to capture the moment of truth (washing hands before offerings prayer) and subtly work on creating brand awareness among rural consumers. The format was standardized for replication elsewhere during the course of this programme.

With the permission of the governing bodies of gurdwaras, relevant hygiene messages were created and integrated with the religious sentiment and environment. Messages were placed alongside soap dishes containing lifebuoy soap cakes at the water points, and tokens handed out in exchange for placing shoes in safe custody carried messages on the importance of washing hands. Lifebuoy soaps were also distributed as gifts. HUL covered 156 gurdwaras across 138 small towns in Punjab, and reached out to over 35000 people with the lifebuoy health and hygiene message.

Similarly, in the southern part of the country, devotees have to make a bath before entering the temple or doing darshan. Most devotees go barefoot to famous temples, many of which are situated on the top of hills. Lifebuoy has found an apt opportunity here and has placed its branded mobile bathing units for devotees to take a bath with lifebuoy for free. This has created a huge visibility for the brand among rural folks.

LG's Batteria Campaign: Low battery back up is the primary concern of rural consumers, due to their habit of listening to music on their mobile phones. To tackle this complaint, LG launched All Rounder with improved battery life,

which they promoted using battery campaign designed by RC7M. The aim of this campaign was to make rural consumers aware of the practices that reduced the overall battery life. While designing the message content, the rural communicator can look at three kinds of appeals – rational, emotional and moral.

Doctors as Opinion Leaders: Glaxo Smithkline promoted a range of its over-the-counter brands through a pilot in the top five haats in western U.P. it employed the services of two doctors-one from the city and one from the local haat village-while organizing health checkup campus at the haats. Company products were prescribed and free samples were also given out to a select few. Despite not being paid for participating in the campaign, the doctors participated with a view to practicing medicine in the long run. The company presented each of them with a token of appreciation for their services as opinion leaders, and enrolled them on the company panel.

Designing the right message for rural markets involves five essential elements – message content, message structure, message format, context association and message source.

Lifebuoy Swastha Chetna: HUL's popular brand, lifebuoy an innovative communication package called the Swastha Chetna for rural India to facilitate behavioral change in favor of soap usage among school going children. They targeted children in the age group of 5-13 years, studying in primary and middle schools. A range of activities for children-quizzes, games, songs, pictorial storytelling through flip charts, and the popular GLO-GERM demonstration kit, which showed the germs present when they rinsed their hands only with water- was organized as part of the programme. This was a multi-phased activity during which lifebuoy representatives initiated contact with students and influencers in the rural community, like the panchayat bodies, anganwadi workers, medical practitioners and school teachers, to further promote this initiative and gain a larger acceptance within the community. This campaign helped in long term brand image- building for lifebuoy in rural India.

RESEARCH STATEMENT

The main aim of this research work is to study the impact of unconventional media on the rural masses in rural Uttar Pradesh and highlight the relevance of non-conventional media in rural markets.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research work are stated as follows-

- To study the problems and challenges in rural communication in the rural areas of the state
- To study the effectiveness of unconventional media in case of FMCG products.
- To study the pattern of responses of the customers to different unconventional media in the rural areas of the state.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The entire research work is a two pronged study. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data have been collected through a set of interview schedule. The schedule was designed in English language and administered in the period of January 2013 to May 2013 in the rural areas of district Faizabad, one of the central districts of Uttar Pradesh. The major rural markets considered are Maya Bazar, Darshan Nagar, Pura Bazar and Masaudha, the near by rural markets of Faizabad district.

The district Faizabad gives a fair blend of rural population mix for the purpose of the research work. It will be easier and economically and administratively viable to determining the sample size and drawing the samples from the rural population of Faizabad, which is comparatively smaller, but spread in an administratively well defined large geographical area giving desired inputs for analysis. This is why the scope of the research work is decided to be Faizabad, a model district for the study purposes in central Uttar Pradesh encompassing a total area of 2,643sq.km with a population of 2,087,914, where agriculture is the main stay of the district. The samples from the rural areas of the district Faizabad are true representative of the population of the study i.e. central Uttar Pradesh.

Respondents aging between 10 to 40 years, both males and females were considered as contact persons for collecting the primary data. The contact persons were interviewed physically by the researcher.

SAMPLE SIZE

The respondents for the study are the mixture of villagers and town dwellers as customers and shopkeepers in the town markets. 500 respondents in all were contacted from the four major markets.

FINDINGS BASED ON PRIMARY DATA SOURCES

Table 1: Promotional Source Attracting the Customers

Factors / Responses	Mobile Van Promotion		Paintings on the Walls		Commercials in Halls		Road Shows		News Papers and Periodicals		Commercials Pasted on Public Transport	
	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age
Not at all effective	13	2.6	18	3.6	298	59.6	293	58.6	15	3	17	3.4
Not very effective	34	6.8	29	5.8	124	24.8	127	25.4	18	3.6	35	7
Somewhat effective	98	19.6	94	19	54	10.8	53	10.6	68	13.6	78	15.6
Very effective	128	25.6	123	25	14	2.8	18	3.6	223	44.6	148	29.6
Extremely effective	227	45.4	236	47	10	2	9	1.8	176	35.2	222	44.4
Total	500	100	500	100	500	100	500	100	500	100	500	100

From the table 1 of promotional sources attracting the customers, it is evident that mobile van promotion with 45.4% response, paintings on the walls with a response of 47%, commercials pasted on public transport with a response of 44.4% and News papers and periodicals with 35.2% are the most effective promotional sources. The responses in these four categories are much higher than the mean score 146.67 of all the six factors in the category of extremely effective. Mobile van promotion, paintings on the walls, commercials pasted on public transport and News papers and periodicals are also high with their response score of 25.6%, 25%, 44.6% and 29.6% respectively in very effective category.

These figures are much higher than the mean score 109 of all the six factors in the category of very effective. Commercials in the halls with a score of 59.6% and road shows with a score of 58.6% fall in the category of not at all effective. These figures are much higher than the mean score 109 of all the six factors in the category of not at all effective. This infers that mobile van promotion; paintings on the walls, commercials pasted on public transport and News papers and periodicals are most appropriate tools to attract the customers in rural markets of the state.

Table 2: Responses of Customers to Different Sales Promotion Schemes

Factors / Responses	Coupons		Free Trials		Free Samples		Smaller Packs		Lucky Draws		Contests	
	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age
Not at all effective	23	4.6	12	2.4	12	2.4	87	17.4	36	7.2	311	62.2

Table 2: Contd.,

Not very effective	48	9.6	56	11	55	11	98	19.6	72	14.4	129	25.8
Somewhat effective	67	13.4	78	16	71	14.2	36	7.2	89	17.8	32	6.4
Very effective	232	46.4	269	54	224	44.8	167	33.4	189	37.8	20	4
Extremely effective	130	26	85	17	138	27.6	112	22.4	114	22.8	8	1.6
Total	500	100	500	100	500	100	500	100	500	100	500	100

From the table 2 of responses of customers to different sales promotion schemes, it is clear that coupons with 46.4%, free trials with a response of 54%, free samples with a response of 44.8%, smaller packs with 33.4% and lucky draws with a response of 37.8% are very effective sales promotion schemes. The responses in these five categories are much higher than the mean score 183.5 of all the six factors in the category of very effective. Coupons, free trials, free samples, smaller packs and lucky draws are also high with their response score of 26%, 17%, 27.6%, 22.4%, and 22.8% respectively in extremely effective category.

These figures are much higher than the mean score 97.83 of all the six factors in the category of extremely effective. Contest with a score of 62.2% falls in the category of not at all effective. These figure is much higher than the mean score 80.7 of all the six factors in the category of not at all effective. This infers that Coupons, free trials, free samples, smaller packs and lucky draws are most appropriate sales promotion schemes to make the customers exhibiting purchase behavior in rural markets of the state.

Table 3: Effectiveness of Different Media Sources

Factors / Responses	Periodicals		Tv		Radio		News Paper		Cinema		Hoardings	
	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age
Not at all effective	121	24.2	28	5.6	13	2.6	78	15.6	285	57	7	1.4
Not very effective	168	33.6	54	11	41	8.2	121	24.2	126	25.2	34	6.8
Somewhat effective	156	31.2	98	20	67	13.4	63	12.6	47	9.4	99	19.8
Very effective	34	6.8	126	25	198	39.6	161	32.2	34	6.8	224	44.8
Extremely effective	21	4.2	194	39	181	36.2	77	15.4	8	1.6	136	27.2
Total	500	100	500	100	500	100	500	100	500	100	500	100

From the table 3 of effectiveness of different media sources, it is clear that TV with 39% response, radio with a response of 36.2%, and hoardings with a response of 27.2% are extremely effective media sources. The responses in TV, Radio and Hoardings are much higher than the mean response of 102.83 in the category of extremely effective. The responses of TV with 25%, Radio with 39.6%, News paper with 32.2% and Hoarding with 44.8% are much higher than their mean response of 129.5 in very effective category. As for as Periodicals and Cinema are concerned, they are not effective at all or not very effective with a combined response of 57.8% and 82.2% respectively.

These values are higher than their mean responses. F-test shows that calculated value – 0.32 is less than tabulated value – 2.75, hence, the hypothesis that there is no difference in the effectiveness of different media sources under consideration, is accepted. This interprets that all the media sources under consideration as per table 3 are effective with respect to their responses. This infers that TV, Radio, News Paper and Hoardings are highly effective media sources in order to communicate with customers in the rural markets. From the analysis, it is also advised that companies should not rely on periodicals and cinema, as they are not effective at all.

Table 4: Dailies as Promotional Source of Creating Brand Awareness

Factors / Responses	National Daily in English		National Daily in Hindi		Local Daily in English		Local Daily in Hindi		The Regional Daily	
	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age	Responses	%Age
Not at all effective	388	77.6	89	18	372	74.4	59	11.8	48	9.6
Not very effective	54	10.8	78	16	59	11.8	65	13	58	11.6
Somewhat effective	24	4.8	56	11	28	5.6	39	7.8	41	8.2
Very effective	19	3.8	78	16	23	4.6	92	18.4	98	19.6
Extremely effective	15	3	199	40	18	3.6	245	49	255	51
Total	500	100	500	100	500	100	500	100	500	100

From the table 4 of dailies as promotional source of creating brand awareness, it is clear that national daily in Hindi with 40% response, local daily in Hindi with a response of 49%, and the regional daily with a response of 51% are extremely effective media sources. The responses in national daily in Hindi, local daily in Hindi and the regional daily are much higher than the mean response of 146 in the category of extremely effective. As for as national and local dailies in English are concerned, they are not effective at all or not very effective with a combined response of 88.4% and 86.2% respectively. These values are higher than their mean responses. F-test shows that calculated value – 2.32 is less than tabulated value – 2.86, hence, the hypothesis that there is no difference in the dailies as promotional sources of creating brand awareness under consideration, is accepted. This interprets that all dailies as promotional source of creating brand awareness under consideration as per table 4 are effective with respect to their responses. This infers that national daily in Hindi, local daily in Hindi and the regional daily are highly effective dailies as promotional source of creating brand awareness in order to communicate with customers in the rural markets. From the analysis, it is also advised that companies may not rely on national and local dailies as source of creating brand awareness in rural markets.

Table 5: TV Programmes Attracting the Attention of the Customers

Factors / Responses	Films	
	Responses	%Age
Not at all effective	22	4.4
Not very effective	42	8.4
Somewhat effective	51	10.2
Very effective	146	29.2
Extremely effective	239	47.8
Total	500	100
Factors / Responses	Saas Bahu Serials	
	Responses	%Age
Not at all effective	125	25
Not very effective	247	49.4
Somewhat effective	95	19
Very effective	20	4
Extremely effective	13	2.6
Total	500	100
Factors / Responses	Krishi Jeevan	
	Responses	%Age
Not at all effective	9	1.8
Not very effective	25	5
Somewhat effective	58	11.6
Very effective	99	19.8
Extremely effective	309	61.8
Total	500	100
Factors / Responses	Filmi Songs	
	Responses	%Age
Not at all effective	21	4.2
Not very effective	98	19.6
Somewhat effective	68	13.6
Very effective	102	20.4
Extremely effective	211	42.2
Total	500	100

Table 5: Contd.,

Factors / Responses	Cartoon Films	
	Responses	%Age
Not at all effective	311	62.2
Not very effective	112	22.4
Somewhat effective	36	7.2
Very effective	25	5
Extremely effective	16	3.2
Total	500	100
Factors / Responses	Tele Shopping	
	Responses	%Age
Not at all effective	291	58.2
Not very effective	116	23.2
Somewhat effective	41	8.2
Very effective	31	6.2
Extremely effective	21	4.2
Total	500	100
Factors / Responses	Environment Related Programmes	
	Responses	%Age
Not at all effective	125	25
Not very effective	147	29.4
Somewhat effective	95	19
Very effective	98	19.6
Extremely effective	35	7
Total	500	100
Factors / Responses	Games/ Contests	
	Responses	%Age
Not at all effective	132	26.4
Not very effective	156	31.2
Somewhat effective	86	17.2
Very effective	85	17
Extremely effective	41	8.2
Total	500	100
Factors / Responses	Detective Serials	
	Responses	%Age
Not at all effective	46	9.2
Not very effective	68	13.6
Somewhat effective	64	12.8
Very effective	108	21.6
Extremely effective	214	42.8
Total	500	100

From the table 5 of TV programmes attracting the attention of the customers, it is opined that films, krishi jeevan, filmy songs, and detective serials with their combined responses – 77%, 81.6%, 62.6% and 64.4% respectively in the categories of very and extremely effective are highly effective TV programs attracting the attention of the customers. As for as Saas Bahu Serials, cartoon films, teleshopping, environment related programmes and games and contests are concerned, they are not effective at all or not very effective with a combined response of 74.4%, 84.6%, 81.4%, 54.4% and 57.6% respectively. These values are higher than their mean responses.

F-test shows that calculated value – 0.87 is less than tabulated value – 2.6, hence, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the in the TV programmes attracting the attention of the customers under consideration, is accepted. This interprets that all the TV programmes under consideration as per table 5 are effective with respect to their responses. This infers that films, krishi jeevan, filmy songs, and detective serials are effective serials in attracting the attention of the customers in order to communicate with customers in the rural markets. From the analysis, it is evident that companies may not rely on Saas Bahu Serials, cartoon films, teleshopping, environment related programmes and games and contests for the purposes. However, environment related programmes are somewhat very effective with a response of 38.6%.

CONCLUSIONS

Communicating with the customers in rural areas is quite a challenging task. Marketers should carefully identify such challenges; devise appropriate strategies to counter them. For communication and promotion to be effective, it is important that marketers understand the socio cultural, demographic, and economic make up of the rural sector, because majority of problems arise out of these element. With a focused approach and commitment towards understanding the rural markets, marketers can devise appropriate strategies best suiting to the rural markets for meeting their unmet needs profitably.

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