

## IMPACT OF FOLK MEDIA COMMUNICATION IN MARKETING IN RURAL SPECTRUM

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### Abstract

The major marketing challenge in rural areas is rural reach and heterogeneity. The geographical spread of rural populace in more than 6, 38,000 villages with diversity of cultures and languages limit the scope of conventional communication in rural areas. Innovations in communication hasten marketing reach of many companies for mutual advantage. India, with its rich cultural heritage presents unity in diversity. The apparent diversities in the nature of region, language etc confluence at the bed rock of common legacy, scriptures, tales and parables. The marketing management aiming at forging these common points yield immense results. Though the folk media attracts a small audience, the impact on them is at a much deeper level inviting the audience participation. There are many organizations all over the country which perform folk arts on topics relevant to the society with the purpose of generating awareness for change. Even political parties use this medium to impress upon the people. When social organizations could make use of the folk media, why not marketing organizations? A few FMCG companies and insurance companies are making use of the Folk media, of course in a limited way. Organizing puppet shows, *burra kathas*, narrating parables etc are in the ambit of marketing organizations. The ambit needs to be expanded for the coverage of rural and urban masses. The traditional folk arts can be effectively used as media for rural development combined with marketing strategies. Any marketing management aiming at the use of folk media at an optimum level is sure to be benefited in the long run.

**Key Words:** Innovation, Rural Spectrum, Folk Media, Non-official organizations

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## 1. Introduction

The urge to express, communicate, and share something beautiful gave birth to performing arts such as folk and traditional media. In the process, the living progressive impulse to the timeless universal got a coherent shape in creative designs. Folk performing arts have changed structure continuously over centuries, modifying to the needs of changing situations, yet continuing to be functionally relevant to society. "Tradition" suggests a process of the transmission of age-old values and the contextual manifestation and interpretation of the universal. Tradition is not only a repetitive behavioral pattern or some persistent symbol or motif in community culture; it is also an assertion of an identity, a revival and regeneration of the life-force of the community. Traditional media rely on this cultural support and context.

90% of the world's population lives in developing countries and 70% of them live in rural areas. Mass media such as newspapers, television, and the internet do not effectively reach these people, or as many research studies show, these media do not have the required impact in terms of motivating change and development. The high rate of illiteracy added to the inadequate reach of mass media impedes almost 80% of India's population who reside in the rural areas. Folk arts and traditional media are the aesthetic components of the concepts of belonging and affinity in a cultural context. In traditional societies, art is an integral part of the process of living in the community.

For social change and development, what is required is a change in the beliefs and the value systems of individuals, thus making them more adaptive and responsive to organic evolution and growth. The role of the development communicator is to find communicative ways to influence these beliefs and value systems. The communication potential of Indian traditional performing arts has been proven time and again throughout history: *Alha*, the popular ballad of Uttar Pradesh, and its counterparts like *Laavani* of Maharashtra, *Gee-gee* of Karnataka, *Villupaattu* of Tamil Nadu, and *Kabigan* of Bengal (which changed their content and focus depending on the contemporary need), were effective in arousing the conscience of the people against the colonial rule of the British; traditional media became effective in the many political and social campaigns launched by Mahatma Gandhi; and, after independence, the Union government continued to utilize these traditional performing arts to convey messages and generate awareness of development programs in the rural areas.

Unlike Western theatre, folk performance is a composite art in India; it is a fusion of elements from music, dance, pantomimes, versification, spic and ballad recitation, graphic and plastic arts, and religious and festival pageantry. It encompasses ceremonial rituals, beliefs and social value systems. It has deep religious and ritualistic overtones and it can project social life, secular themes, and universal values. One type of folk art, puppetry, is indigenous to India; from time immemorial, it has been a popular and appreciated form of entertainment throughout India. The stylized vocabulary of puppet theatre in India carries relevant messages of social awareness, historical and traditional identity, and moral value systems. Puppet theatre is fully integrated in the ritual observances and the social milieu of the rural people in India. Puppet theatre has shown remarkable staying power as societies have changed.

Folk media should be an integral part of any communication program for rural development. Wherever possible, these should be integrated with mass media but in all cases, integration with ongoing extension work is vital. The prerequisites to the use of folk media are:

1. An understanding of the rural audience; and
2. The use of these media to provide rural people with entertainment in order to attract their attention and to ensure their participation in developmental activities.

In the 1940s, the traditional theatre of Bengal became a symbol for the anti-colonial struggle, and the Bengali elite who had previously ignored or denigrated traditional theatre began to give importance to these performing arts. Rabindranath Tagore and others advocated the use of traditional theatre in programs of cultural revival and anti-colonial protest in the context of rural fairs and festivals. In the 1920s the playwright Mukunda Das transformed the rural folk form of *Jatra*, which had earlier dealt with historical or mythological themes, and created a new form of *Swadeshi* or Nationalist *Jatra* which dealt with contemporary themes of colonial injustice, caste oppression and feudal exploitation. The colonial government sent him to prison. The Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) was formed at this same time. This operated all over India but its strongest contingent was in Bengal. In 1943, during the Bengal famine in which five million people starved to death, the Bengal IPTA troupe traveled all over India performing a play exposing hoarders and black-marketers and launching a campaign to save food.

The *Ramalila* of Ramnagar near Varanasi is one theatrical genre which currently provides an opportunity for the young and old, rich and poor to come together for 16 to 20 days preceding

the *Dussehra* to witness a vast pageant of human life. Each section of the city constructs raised platforms or transforms streets, terraces, or gardens into palaces, woods, and streams. The whole city is the stage, the arena, of the performance. The play moves sequentially day after day and the audience moves with it from locale to locale.

Puppets are increasingly being used as a strategy for addressing varied development issues such as educating children, encouraging scientific methods of farming, promoting the use of fertilizers, etc. The Song and Drama Division of the Government of India makes wide use of puppets in its campaigns to promote various government projects, and Life Insurance Corporation of India used puppets to educate the rural masses about life insurance, enlisting the help of the Literacy House in Lucknow.

During the general elections, members of the various political parties used folk songs for campaigning and presented humorous skits to ridicule the opposition's candidates and win support for their own candidates. *Swang* and *Ragini* have been effectively utilized by political parties in Haryana. *Kabigaan* and *Tarza* have been used by IPTA groups to support candidates of the communist parties in Bengal. *Tamasha* and *Lavani* in Maharashtra have been extensively used for political propaganda in the State.

The utilization of folk media in communication programs should be viewed not only from the perspectives of political and socio-economic development but also from that of cultural development. Folklore needs to retain social authenticity. The folk forms have evolved gradually, and wherever they are flexible they retain their appeal to the rural people. Not all folk forms can be used for development communication purposes; thus, they should be carefully studied from the points of view of content and characterization for their possible adaptation for development purposes. Folk media productions should be consistent with the needs of the social context and related to the customs and beliefs of the local communities. Since folk media have sociological roots, their utilization should be related to local events and their function in the local communication strategy should be properly assigned.

Efforts should be made to preserve the originality of each folk form; adaptation need not alter nor destroy the form. For effective community-level communication strategies, the integrated and planned use of both folk and mass media is necessary for achieving optimum impact and for obtaining desired feedback. Collaboration between the folk artistes and the media

producers is absolutely essential for the successful integration of folk media and mass media communication strategies for development purposes.

Peasants, agricultural laborers, bonded laborers; women, tribal, and other oppressed groups are rediscovering the potential of folk and traditional performing arts as a weapon in their struggle for land, better health status, better working and living conditions, and human rights. Many development planners in the Third World are beginning to appreciate the use of folk media as a mode of communication to explain development programs. Government agencies, international organizations, and donor agencies should progressively use this important and powerful communication tool as a means for mobilizing people for economic and social development.

## 2. Folk media is most effective in rural India

To crack that right marketing strategy to reach your rural consumers, a recent study by Marketing and Research Team (MART) sheds some light on how folk media is an effective vehicle to communicate and advertise in the rural markets. People are drawn to this because it is a source of entertainment and information, especially in places where the exposure to mass media is negligible, and the level of literacy is low. However, this suggestion comes with a note of caution that folk media can be effective provided the campaign is designed meticulously. Special care should be taken to ensure that the campaign provides 'edutainment' and is not used for preaching. The folk media campaign should reach out and touch the hearts of the rural masses, not just their minds.

In the process of surveying folk media campaigns, it is found that it was being used in conjunction with other below-the-line activities to leave an impact in the rural markets. These activities usually consisted of video-van campaigns, which included showing of product commercials and Hindi films. This was supported by interactive games like Wheel of Fortune, Pick the Ball and other activities like product demonstrations and influencer and retailer contact.

It is important to know the reason why conventional media has not made sufficient inroads into rural India. It is largely due to the lack of infrastructure. This media, wherever available, is not accessible to all the people, either due to time constraints or due to gender inequality. For example, India has 46 million TV homes and out of this, only 15.7 million televisions are in rural areas. Again, movies are frequented mostly by young males in rural India.

Women and young girls are not allowed to go out and watch cinema, as observed across the entire sample. On the other hand, the problem with print is the low level of literacy. Women, either due to illiteracy or social compulsions, do not read newspapers. The low penetration of mainline publications and their erratic availability in rural areas add to the low reach of print.

Based on various studies, following recommendations are raised:

1. Non-conventional media forms are very suitable for regions in rural India where the reach of conventional media is limited. Besides the reach, the socio-cultural composition of the rural market and their preferences need to be considered to decide the choice of media.
2. Folk are a good media to generate hype about a new product or to re-launch an existing one. Campaigns with this objective should also ensure proper distribution of the product so that the audience's interest in the product is converted into sales.
3. While designing a folk campaign, the client needs to consider several factors like the time of the year, the time of the performance, venue, the regional preference for a particular form of media, suitability of the script etc.
4. While conducting a folk campaign, it would be a good strategy to provide extra information about the product at the venue itself. This is specially required in case of products like tractors, fertilizers etc.
5. Folk campaigns are a good opportunity to get feedback about the product, its distribution etc from the customers as well as the retailers and wholesalers. This opportunity should be tapped to gain the maximum benefit from the campaign.

### 3. Folk Media

The traditional folk-based themes of advertising can go a long way in strategic marketing in rural areas. Marico for instance tied up with Kolkata-based folk theatre group called Gram to travel to interiors of West Bengal for promoting Parachute *Uttam*. Marico issues pamphlets to the rural folks during the shows to increase its visibility.

Folk media consist of folk songs, folk dances and other theatrical forms, including puppetry, street theatre and magic shows, which are an intrinsic part of the culture and heritage of the land. They are capable of communicating message about contemporary issues, topics and concerns as per the needs and demands of a changing society. They are a face-to-face and

personal form of communication. The essential characteristics of folk media are that are interactive, repetitive and narrative. Kinds of Folk Media:

- \* Folk theatre
- \* Magic show
- \* Puppet shows
- \* Interactive games

### **Folk Theatre**

Folk theatre, interspersed with folk song and dance, is a simple and entertaining form of communication. It can also be informative and educational. In the past, folk theatre has been used to arise public opinion against the British Raj, to draw attention to atrocities against the girl child and raise public consciousness about other socially relevant issues.

### **Folk Songs**

Folk songs are basically simple and direct compositions that are usually transmitted orally from one generation to the next and not through the written word. The structure of the folk song is characterized by simplicity and uniformity in rhythm. The songs consist of many stanzas sung in more or less the same tune. Each region and state has its own particular traditions of folk songs and ballads.

### **Folk Dances**

Folk dances are basically simple and rhythmic and mostly religious in nature. Communication takes place through dramatic gestures and the accompanying music. Folk dances are visually very arresting, attracting audiences with their elaborate costumes and stage settings.

### **Magic Shows**

Magic shows are another very entertaining form of folk entertainment and draw large crowds, particularly because of the curiosity factor and the use of hypnotic effects.

### **Puppet Shows**

The *kathputli* puppet performance is the most common form of this folk tradition. The origin of puppet theatre is closely linked to the performance of religious ceremonies. The connection between rituals and the use of puppets is found in almost all the states in India. Traditional puppeteers were mostly itinerant performers who depended on royal patronage for their survival. Even today tales of chivalrous kings like Prithviraj Chauhan and Amar Singh Rathor are narrated through puppet performances in the villages and towns of Rajasthan. The different forms of traditional puppetry are glove, rod, string-rod and shadow puppets. The differences exist not only in name but also in form, structure, manipulation techniques and geographical origin spread.

### **Wall paintings**

Companies often paint the walls of homes and shops in villages with the picture of their products. This is generally welcomed by common people as it is often considered a status symbol. This is also an intelligent way of advertising products for a long time without paying any fee at all. Dabur uses this tactic to advertise its products in villages.

### **Melas and Haats**

This is a cheaper option for marketer because it only involves setting up of tents rather than go for a brick and mortar store. Use of a simple handheld megaphone can attract a lot of attention, instead of hiring a video van for 20-25 days. LG attends all popular religious gatherings starting from *Kumbh Mela* to right up to the stalls at *Sabarimalai* by putting up stall offering free first aid and clean drinking water.

### **Rural Games**

Sponsored sports tournaments are mega events with mega exposure. As games provide a lot of chances for participation, they are ideal for rural consumers for whom involvement increases the chances of recall. Hero Cycles sponsored the *Killa Raipur Rural Olympics* in Punjab that has been a hallmark in rural sports.

### **Audio-Visual Van**

A van carrying a Video Cassette Recorder (VCR) linked to a television monitor is popularly known as an Audio-Visual Van. It is more than a single medium as it uses a combination of audio-visual and print (banners and posters). Side and rear panels of this van bear visuals and messages to serve as a mobile hoarding. Dabur selected a cluster of 300 villages in Banda district and sent in three mobile bowling alleys (each specially fabricated for Rs 30,000). The bowling pins represented various germs that *Chyawanprash* protects against diseases.

#### 4. Rural Marketing

Rural Marketing is defined as any marketing activity in which one dominant participant is from a rural area. This implies that rural marketing consists of marketing of inputs (products or services) to the rural as well as marketing of outputs from the rural markets to other geographical areas. Rural areas of the country or countryside are areas that are not urbanized, though when large areas are described country towns and smaller cities will be included. They have a low population density, and typically much of the land is devoted to agriculture.

Marketing strategies that worked for urban markets do not necessarily work for the rural ones. There are 7 differentiators identified in:

1. Intra community influences are relatively more important than inter-community ones. Word-of-mouth in close knit communities is more powerful.
2. Scarcity of media bandwidth. Rural individual's access to media channels is limited and in the case of broadband the comparable upload and download speed may be slower. Online shopping is seen as a solution by many but will be dependent on broadband speed.
3. Slow to adopt brands. Slow to give them up. Rural consumers will be slower to pick up trends or brands but will remain loyal when accepted.
4. Expenses are yearlong; income is seasonal. Many rural areas rely on seasonal tourism peaks when income will be high and to a lesser extent agricultural incomes from seasonal crops. This means there will be more disposable income at certain times with rural businesses and employees.
5. Information hungry; but entertainment starved. Isolation from entertainment centers has led to companies trying edutainment to get their message across.
6. Higher receptivity to experience advertising. Retail outlets in rural areas have many demonstration areas along with markets for tasting.

7. Commercially profitable; and socially acceptable. Brands with demonstrable local, rural, environmental and/or social credibility stand a better chance.

Rural Marketing meant different in 3 different periods. Part1 (before 1960): It was a completely an unorganized market, where “*baniyas* and *mahajans*” dominated the market. Rural marketing was another word for agricultural marketing because agricultural produces like food grains and industrial like food grains and industrial like cotton, oil seeds, sugarcane etc occupied primary attention and the supply chain activities of firm supplying agricultural inputs and of artisans in the rural areas received secondary attention. Part 2 (1960 to 1990): The greatest thing which happened in this period was green revolution which led to farming involving scientific and technological methods and many poor villages became prosperous business centers. With better irrigation facilities, soil testing, use of high yield variety seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and deployment of machines like power tillers, harvesters, threshers etc, and the output increased especially wheat and paddies. Due to this marketing of agricultural inputs was also now there a new potential market. Now marketing of rural marketing meant “marketing of agricultural inputs” and “agricultural marketing”. Agencies like *Khadi* and Village Industries Commission, Girijan Cooperative Societies, APCO Fabrics, IFFCO, KRIBHCO Company bloomed and government paid special attention to promote these products. Sale of handicrafts, handloom textiles, soaps, safety matches and crackers increased on large scale in urban areas. Part 3 (after mid 1990): Since 1990, India’s industrial sector had gained strength and maturity. Its contribution to GNP increased substantially. There was metamorphosis of agricultural society to industrial society. With support and development programs of central and state governments, service organizations and socially responsible business groups like Mafatlal, Tatas, Birla, Goenkas and others the rural areas progressed socially and economically.

The economic reforms further increased competition in the market, the rural market grew steadily for household consumables and durables. A few other companies known for their marketing orientation – Hindustan Lever, Philip India, Asian Paints, Singer and Larsen and Turbo have also taken great efforts in this direction.

Hindustan Unilever (HUL) started successful rural marketing projects like “Project Shakti” and “Operation Bharat” in India. Hindustan Unilever began the first home to home operation in rural areas in personal products in 1998 which was known as “Operation Bharat”.

By 1999 “Bharat Operation” covered 13 million rural household. During the course of operation, there were HUL vans which visited villages across the country distributing sample packs comprising a low unit price pack each of shampoo, talcum powder, toothpaste and skin cream priced at Rs. 15. This was to create awareness of the company’s product categories and of the affordability of the product. Coca Cola also explored the market by introducing bottles at Rs.5, backed with Aamir Khan’s advertisement. Amul is another case in point of aggressive rural marketing. In 2000, ITC tried developing direct contact with farmers in remote villages in Madhya Pradesh. ITC E-*choupal* was a result of this initiative.

Rural Marketing is growing at a far greater speed than its urban counterpart. Multinationals have realized the potential and are ready to tap rural markets .To name a few Colgate, Everyday batteries, LG Electronics, Phillips, BSNL, Life Insurance Corporation, Britannia and Hero Honda are trying to seep in rural markets.

## 5. Problems in Rural Marketing Communication

The literacy rate among rural consumers is very low there print media has very little scope in the rural areas .In India there are 18 languages which are recognized, these languages and many dialects are spoken in rural India. English and Hindi are not understood by many people. Due to this rural consumers do not get exposure to new products. Transportation: The transportation infrastructure is extremely poor in rural India. In India there are six Lac villages. Almost 50 per cent of them are not connected by road also. India has second largest railway system in the world, many parts in India are not connected through railways. Availability of appropriate media: The radio network in theory covers 90 per cent, but people who actually listen is less. T.V is not available in every house in rural areas. Therefore opportunities are very low in rural areas. Warehousing: There are many agricultural products which are produced in a particular season but are demanded throughout. Due to lack of adequate and scientific storage facilities in rural areas, stocks are being maintained in towns only.

All those who usually visualize rural India as purely an agrarian economy without much purchasing power will be in for a surprise when they come to know that size of the Indian rural economy stands at a whopping \$1 trillion – almost that of the Canadian economy. Speaking about the opportunities provided by rural India, 50 per cent of India’s income comes from rural India, while small towns contribute to 25 per cent of India’s GDP. Yet the irony is that 100 per

cent of the marketers are in urban India. All over the world there is recession and every country is looking at new markets. In India, we have two back-up markets which we haven't even looked at. The reason is lack of understanding. There are a lot of myths around rural India.

One of these myths is that rural India is considered to be a homogeneous mass and hence, it is targeted through mass campaign. What needs to be kept in mind is that India is made up of 28 states, there are 16 official languages, 432 official dialects, and four major religions, thus rural India is the most heterogeneous market in the world. The second myth is that rural is all about agriculture, whereas the reality is that agriculture accounts for just one-third of rural India. The remaining two-third comes from the services sector and the manufacturing sector. Mass migration is the third myth and people feel that it's a bad idea to go to rural areas. However, rural is the place to grow, even if growth has been gradual. By 2020, 60 per cent of the population will continue to stay in rural India. Reinstating Mahatma Gandhi's statement, "India will continue to live in villages and that's where the myths have to be broken."

Research and studies indicate that people in rural India do not necessarily settle for cheaper products. They buy the most expensive things. But still companies and agencies are not willing to set up their business there. The only reason for this was lack of adequate knowledge about rural India. Most of the consultancy firms in India focus only on the urban market because they have no knowledge about the rural market. This situation is somewhat similar to the healthcare situation in the country. 70 per cent of the population is in rural India, while 80 per cent of the doctors practice in urban India. This is the bias that we have.

Post the economic slowdown, policymakers and companies are busy designing strategies to sell products and services to larger markets. While boosting profits quickly is no longer the essential parameter, Atmanand, Dean of Executive Post Graduate Programs, MDI, Gurgaon believes that revisiting age-old management theories and sticking to basics is the most cost-effective marketing tactic.

## 6. The Rural Focus

The strategy taken by Hindustan Unilever Ltd. (HUL) to enter the rural sector, which has remained insulated so far, is a good one, says Atmanand. In states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi and Haryana, the company is expanding steadily by expanding their network of dealers and making themselves household names.

Of course, replicating the HUL model may be difficult for a startup, but it does serve as a valuable lesson in marketing: Don't put all your eggs in one basket. The entire gamut of white and brown goods has found a place in the rural market, driving several industries to actively explore it. In the current scenario, companies should change their strategies for marketing. For market sustainability, we have to look at the rural markets. This would include products that have been especially designed for these markets at prices that will suit the sector, says Atmanand.

### **Tailor-made Products for Rural India**

The company should provide rural folk with products and services that would meet their requirements. Take Cavin Care, for instance, which launched its shampoo in sachets. Also consider Britannia, which packaged its Tiger brand biscuits at a low price tag. Such companies obtained an understanding of the rural customers needs and provided them with the desired products.

Emphasis is clearly on parameters that change the dynamics of marketing a product. Rural markets offer a great potential to help India Inc. (which has reached the plateau of its business curve in urban India) bank on volume-driven growth. With a larger market to play with, virtually any marketing initiative can be cost effective. Aspects that are seldom ignored are also key drivers in marketing. Some do not cost a penny, and the benefits are huge. Consumer satisfaction is very important. Gone are the days when products were sold solely on their brand name. Today, people want value for their money; they want the product to meet their expectations and utility. The company should focus more on quality and the consumer satisfaction index. A consumer with a high level of satisfaction and a good image of your product is likely to be your best brand ambassador and proponent of your product.

### **Changing the Profile of Managers**

Philip Kotler's theory of a short lifecycle of a product does not really hold good, as most products in India have a lifecycle of 2-3 years. Take, for example, a Maruti 800; one drives it for about three years before switching to a new car. A consumer wants a product that has resale value.

Understanding the preferences of the rural masses is crucial, and your company manager could be the answer. Companies should hire managers who are familiar with rural India and are in sync with the demands and preferences of people in these regions. While management

graduates are conversant with strategies applicable for the western countries, their mindset and training may not allow them to understand the requirements of rural consumers.

### **Marketing with the Help of Traditional Media**

Traditional media would serve as a great driver to generate awareness among rural consumers. Skits, magic shows and educational drives by NGOs are among the preferred traditional media that marketers can use to good effect. These engage the interest of rural consumers and go a long way in establishing your brand in their minds.

Things are certainly changing. Consumer financing schemes, insurance schemes and promotion associated with delivering products to consumers will be preferred. Understanding the needs and desires of the Indian consumer, price competitiveness, innovation and R&D form the key to unlocking the potential of this vast market.

### **Problems in Rural India**

Electricity shortage, Acute water shortage, Poor availability of transport, Inadequate consumer finance options

### **Opportunities to be explored by Companies**

Can you make energy-saving products? Can you provide a washing machine that consumes less water? Can you provide easy access to the product?

## **7. Marketing to Rural India: Making the Ends Meet**

On one side are the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and the consumer durables companies. On the other are consumers in rural India, potentially the largest segment of the market. Finally, the two are coming together. The fact that this has not happened in the past is not for want of trying. In Mumbai and New Delhi corner offices, executives have long recognized that to build real sales volumes they will have to reach outside the big cities. In several categories, rural India already accounts for the lion's share. According to MART, a New Delhi-based research organization that offers rural solutions to the corporate world, rural India buys 46% of all soft drinks sold, 49% of motorcycles and 59% of cigarettes. This trend is not limited to utilitarian products only: 11% of rural women use lipstick.

Other numbers are equally revealing. According to the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), an independent, non-profit research institution, rural households form 71.7% of the total households in the country. Spending in this segment is growing rapidly and consumption patterns are closing in on those of urban India. Jagmohan Singh Raju, a professor of marketing at Wharton, says: "No consumer goods company today can afford to forget that the rural market is a very big part of the Indian consumer market. You can't build a presence for a brand in India unless you have a strategy for reaching the villages."

Several European multinational firms -- and a few U.S. firms -- have been making inroads into rural India for years. Companies such as Unilever, Phillips and Nestle have long been known to India's rustic *dukaandaars*, or merchants. Among U.S. firms, companies such as Colgate and Gillette have made considerable headway. Marketing to rural customers often involves building categories by persuading them to try and adopt products they may not have used before. "A company like Colgate has to build toothpaste as a category, which means convincing people to change to toothpaste instead of using *neem* twigs to clean their teeth, which was the traditional practice," researchers say, "This is difficult to do and requires patience and investment by companies. It's not like getting someone to switch brands."

According to NCAER, the low penetration rates can be attributed to three major factors: low income levels, inadequate infrastructure facilities and different lifestyles. But income levels are going up, infrastructure is improving and lifestyles are changing. Almost a third of the rural population now uses shampoo compared with 13% in 2000, according to Hansa Research.

FMCG and consumer durables companies have in the past tried tinkering with all the four P's -- product, pricing, promotion and place -- of the marketing mix. Hindustan Lever -- which is in the process of changing its name to Hindustan Unilever to reflect the fact that it is the Indian subsidiary of the Dutch conglomerate -- is among India's largest FMCG companies. It has been highly successful in marketing in rural India and has been a pioneer in reaching out to the smallest of villages with innovative products such as single-use packets of shampoo that sell for a penny. (The rural consumer uses shampoo on rare occasions; she does not want to invest in a bottle.) Independent agencies run media vans that show movies in distant villages. They have live promotions and demonstrations during breaks.

The area where innovation has moved to center stage is in the fourth P -- place (or distribution). Infrastructure has always been the bugbear of the Indian marketer. Distribution

channels can make or break a company's rural marketing efforts. To sell in villages, products must be priced low, profit margins must be kept to the minimum and the marketing message must be kept simple.

## 8. Room to All

Over the coming months, the battle for rural wallets will include not just European and U.S. multinationals but also fast-growing Indian companies. A retail initiative by the \$22.6 billion Reliance Industries is a case in point. The Mukesh Ambani-led group plans to pump in \$5.5 billion over the next few years to create a farm-to-storefront infrastructure for a pan-India retail network. (Only part of this money is for the rural component.) Brother Anil Ambani, who parted ways with him in 2005, is connecting rural India through Reliance Infocomm, a mobile services provider. Its network now encompasses 240,000 towns and villages, accounting for 42% of the rural population. It plans to double the rural coverage to 400,000 villages, making up 50% of the rural population.

There are many others. The rural initiative of the Mumbai-based \$1.3 billion House of Godrej -- Godrej Aadhaar -- plans to set up 1,000 stores across India in the next five years. Delhi-based telecom major Bharti Airtel chairman Sunil Mittal has tied up with Wal-Mart, which will need its supply chain. From the Goenkas to the Gulabchands, from the Tatas to the Thapars, every major Indian business group has plans to move into the hinterland.

## 9. Conclusion

Like Thoreau and Tolstoy, Gandhi, revered as the father of modern India, believed that the country's future lay in her villages. These days, every marketer would agree with this and the continued effort to highlight the folk media as effective forms to convey developmental messages resulted in a number of seminars and workshops around the world. The development of rural India is certainly associated with the dialogue or communication that we are providing them. Tradition plays an important role in a creative artistic process particularly in the field of folk performing arts. Integral to any rural development program is the need to devise simple, cheap technology and marketable items based on local system and geared to local needs. The traditional folk arts can be effectively used as media for rural development combined with marketing strategies. Folk art is a functional and spontaneous. Every village has its relevant

music, dance or theatre. The folk performing art is changing its structure continuously over centuries modifying itself to the needs of the changing situation making it functionally relevant to the society. Tradition is the process of the transmission of age old values and the contextual manifestation and interpretation of the universal.

Rural marketing in Indian economy has always played an influential role in the lives of people. In India, leaving out a few metropolitan cities, all the districts and industrial townships are connected with rural markets. India has a population that is large, heterogeneous, largely local language speaking and a cultural heritage that runs back to thousands of years. The major segmentation of mass population is located in rural area. The market potential is huge in rural areas. It is this market strength in rural area that needs to be tapped. Now-a-days, even the educational Institutions are concentrating on rural marketing, have developed special management programs to cater to rural marketing and are doing market research in rural places. Rural markets are rapidly growing in India but have often been ignored by marketers. The statistics shown in the paper is enough to throw light on the relevance of rural markets.

Traditional media would serve as a great driver to generate awareness among rural consumers. Skits, magic shows and educational drives by NGOs are among the preferred traditional media that marketers can use to good effect. These engage the interest of rural consumers and go a long way in establishing the brand in their minds. Being ancient forms of art, the folk media is very close to the heart of the people. Its appeal is universal and its understanding is direct and at personal level. So the folk media can effectively be used as mass communication for marketing in rural areas. Companies have to realize that rural is a long-haul market, as gains in the short term are neither immediate nor large.

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