

SUSTAINABLE AND INNOVATIVE RURAL MARKETING STRATEGIES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES - A STUDY IN MANIPUR

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to study the current scenario of Rural Marketing in India, the sustainable and innovative rural marketing strategies with its various opportunities and challenges, with reference to the state of Manipur. The rural market consists of more than 83.3 crore people and this is what attracts marketers to enter in this market. To market in the territory of rural marketing corporations must understand the rural consumer. Many innovations in the strategy to market into the rural markets have been undertaken in the past years. This paper aims to understand these innovations and strategies and to understand the rural consumer of Manipur. The lifestyles of rural consumers have undergone wonderful changes due to growing incomes, increasing literacy rate, exposure, TV, mobile phones and interaction with the urban counterpart. Liberalization of trade, on one side, opened up new vistas to the marketers and on the other side, posed stiff competition. As due to the competition in the urban market, the market is more or so saturated as most of the capacity of the purchasers has been targeted by the marketers. So the marketers are looking for extending their product categories to an unexplored market i.e. the rural market. They entered rural markets with the proper understanding with the help of smart selling techniques.

Key words: Rural Marketing, Innovations and strategies, Liberalization of trade, Smart selling techniques

INTRODUCTION

Innovation is the main reason behind the growth of a country. The economic growth of a country depends largely on how that country innovates itself in the competitive environment. Innovation helps in managing uncertain business environment. Therefore it becomes very important to study the cause and benefits of innovation in rural region. Companies can initiate in sustainable rural development with health and hygiene, agro and allied activities and infrastructure development and creating income generating opportunities for the rural population. The population of the rural consumers in India is more than 83.3 crores according to the Census of India 2011. This is a large market for marketers in terms of numbers.

MOTIVATION

Villages constitute the integral part of any nation. Rural India is the backbone of Indian economy and it contributes significantly to the economy. More than 70% of the Indian population lives in rural areas and depends directly or indirectly on agriculture and allied activities and with more than the half of the FMCG and durables sales coming from these areas. Rural products and produces are in great demand in the cities and urban areas and even globally due to changing preferences of the urban consumers. These changing preferences for rural products have a significant impact on the Indian economy. Companies and corporate need to focus on the rural producers to reach their products to the urban and to export with quality.

LITERATURE SURVEY

A lot of studies are available in India with reference to Indian markets in rural that has disclosed serious reverse of the unpredictable perspective of low value to a possible supply such as rural India marketing.

Kumar & Dangi, 2013: Research scholars Pawan Kumar and Neha Dangi in the research done by them on rural marketing in India give an insight into the phases of rural marketing in the years before 1960s, 1960 to 1990 and after mid 1990s, including how rural marketing was known as agricultural marketing, then the green revolution took place, and how eventually rural marketing was known differently from agricultural marketing. We got to understand what is that the rural India buys is small units but of good quality. The challenges faced while trying to penetrate the rural market is transporting the products to these remote areas, secondly about underdeveloped areas and thirdly because the storage of production.

Rani & Shrivastav, 2014: In the study the researchers it is found that when communicating with the consumers of the rural segment we need to generate awareness and demonstrate to them for their better understanding. For resolving the transportation distribution challenges companies need to make vans as a medium of transportation, and need sales people willing to work in areas which are remote for better penetration.

Naidu, 2017: The 4As model of rural marketing has been a more consumer-oriented approach towards understanding the rural consumer, the 4As of Rural Marketing are an effort for sustainability in the rural markets, this model is more suitable

and successful for rural markets. For acceptance the products need to be of good quality, high value and of maximum utility in a rural environment.

Kale & Chobe, 2016: In the paper of the review of the changing scenario in rural marketing they present a profile of the rural consumer which is that these people are aware and rural children are found to be much aware about branded products of daily use, rural women tend to purchase products of low price and good durability in which those who work on the fields have less purchasing power.

Talwar, Popli, & Gupta, 2014: The rural market in India is similar in behaviour and sociological factors of the nation we live in the status of rural marketing has been changing as the population of rural consumers is shifting from low literacy rates because of which they were less aware of brands, now the people are more aware of these brands and expect value for their money, also the income of these households is expected to increase along with developing infrastructure.

Pradhan & Misra, 2012: For the behaviour of rural consumers towards FMCG the consumers get to know about the FMCGs most through electronic media, and the penetration of FMCGs as an example reveals that most of the people go to weekly haats to purchase their products and family members have a huge influence in the buying of a particular brand. Most of the consumers consider the price before purchasing a FMCG, and most of these consumers pay through cash, because people in these areas do have seasonal incomes. The rural market will develop immensely in the future, the availability of the products is a key significant role, and hence the FMCGs should make products available in small units with a small price range which is affordable by the rural consumer.

Nadarajan & Rangith, 2018: The authors of a study on SWOT in Rural Marketing state how the rural market has changed in the past decades, it was not a target market area earlier but today it has a consumption growth rate higher than the urban market; Rural market is expecting an increase in demands.

Kalotra, 2013: Market research would help the company to know more about the market as well as Promotion in the rural market will make the target market aware of the brand. The Project Shakti used assist teams all over the country to sell HUL goods more to boondocks. It is a programmer that produces income-producing opportunities just for the below privileged women in rural areas; by improving their standard of living which they do by increasing awareness about health as well as hygiene; gives power to the Indian rural areas by making available the important information with the help of several platforms while conjointly associate with NGOs to unfold accomplishment. Mahindra's Krishi Vihar project is helping the farmers to increase their groundnut yield in places of Rajasthan with the help of a replacement seed brought from another place of geographic region with its conjointly announced the replacement type of grapes within a geographic region.

RESEARCH GAP

Many scholars have done their research in rural marketing in India. Here my research is focused on the sustainability and innovative ways of rural marketing with reference to Manipur.

The main occupation of most of the villagers of Manipur is agriculture. Surplus products are brought to market to sell and to buy their basic needs. Surplus seasonal produces which cannot sold out in that season are lost. Their primitive ways of preservation could not be done in the large scale. Most of the rural producers have no skills of preservation scientifically and produce them in another alternative forms. National Skill Development Council (NSDC) has been providing different free and paid skill training in different sectors like Retailer, IT-ITes, Financial, Agriculture, Food processing, etc. through many Skill Knowledge Provider (SKP) centres like of AISECT. Such training should be targeted mainly to empower the youths and women of rural India. Most of the villagers are farmers with traditional and primitive methods. It is necessary to give the awareness of scientific method of agro and allied activities and supply of inputs. Corporate and companies may take up co-branding production in the local name with their produces as raw material. They may conduct awareness on the process of Import Export activities to the rural youths of the villagers and taking part on it as Manipur is in the international boarder of Myanmar.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are:

- (1) To understand the challenges and opportunities in the rural market.
- (2) Market strategies taken by companies and local producers.
- (3) To understand the sustainable and innovative ways of rural marketing.

SCOPE

Marketing is not only about the matter selling but also of buying, capacity and consumer behaviour. To increase the buying capacity of the rural people, economy and financial status of the rural consumers should be good. It is necessary to maintain the sustainable marketing strategies among the marketers and the consumers. Companies and corporate should sell their products and at the same time, to rise the employability and empowerment of youths and women by giving awareness and skill training shall be taken up. Selling of skills and knowledge to the right customers is also one of the main factors of sustainability of the rural marketing.

It becomes very important to study the cause and benefits of innovation in rural region. Companies can initiate in sustainable rural development with skill training, health & hygiene, agro and allied activities such as green revolution, blue revolution, yellow revolution, red revolution, round

revolution and infrastructure development and create income generating opportunities for the rural populations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Area of the Study

Thoubal district has been selected for the sample study because this district occupies the larger part of the eastern half of the Manipur Valley and this district has comparatively better infrastructure and a wide rural area, which is very essential for the development of rural market. The markets are much near to the rural areas of the district and the markets are main place from where rural consumers use to buy the Durable Products and the local producers bring their produces to sell to the nearest market. The selection of sample villages has done by stratified sampling methods, although, selection is random. Out of the 82 of villages, 20 villages and 3 main markets have been selected.

Thoubal district is one of the 16 districts of Manipur state in north-eastern India which is a boarder state to Myanmar. Agriculture is the most important source of livelihood for the people of this district. Thoubal District occupies an area of 324 sq.kms. According to the 2011 census the district has 286687 populations with density of 821 inhabitants per square kilometre. Thoubal has a sex ratio of 1006 females for every 1000 males, and a literacy rate of 76.66%. There are 6 Municipalities, 27 Gram Panchayats and 82 villages under Thoubal District.

Data Collection

The present study is descriptive in nature. The majority of the data used is secondary in nature and has been collected from various websites and reputed journals and some are primary.

Questionnaire

RETAILER:

Date of Interview and Location:

1. Name of Shop/enterprise:
2. Name of the Owner :
Age and Sex:
3. Type of shop/enterprise:
Sell/Service/Manufacturing/Service Provider
4. Name of Products & Company:
5. Is the owner got any additional training related to the product? Yes/No
If Yes, what and from where?
6. Year of establishment and Location:
7. Is shop/enterprise registered: Yes/No
If Yes, Name of registering body:
8. Average sell per day:
9. No. of staffs employed:

Skill	Non-skill	Total
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10. Is company give any scheme for pushing their products? Yes/No
11. Is retailer do any effort to push particular company's product? Yes/No

12. Challenges faced by retailer:
13. Customer category: Local/others
14. Customer's grievances/complain, if any:

LOCAL VENDOR:

Date of Interview and Location:

1. Name of vendor:
Age and Sex:
2. Items sold:
3. Types of items sold: dry/fresh/durable products
If fresh, nature of preservation:
4. Source of the items: Self product/nearby whole seller/collection from producers
5. Is the vendor got any additional training related to the product or preservation? Yes/No
If Yes, what and from where?
6. Year of starting and Location:
7. Is vendor registered: Yes/No
If Yes, Name of registering body:
8. Average Sells per day:
9. Challenges faced by vendor:
10. Customer category: Local/others
11. Customer's grievances/complain:

CUSTOMER:

Date of Interview and Location:

1. Product bought from the retailer/vendor:
2. Reason/purpose to buy:
3. Frequency:
4. Buying capacity: High/Low
If Low, give the reason:
5. Suggestion to increase buying capacity:
6. Challenges the customer found:
7. Any Suggestion:

EXPECTED OUTCOME AND LIMITATION

Sustainable and innovative strategies

Sustainability, in simple words, is the ability to continue over a long period of time fulfilling the needs of the current generation while ensuring a balance between economic growth, environmental care and social well-being. Among the four pillars of sustainability - Human sustainability, Social sustainability, Economic sustainability and Environmental sustainability - this paper is focused on the human and the economic sustainability.

Most of the villagers in the rural area are farmers and daily earners. Agriculture and horticulture activities are done in a small area for their daily needs and some produces are brought to the market to buy their other needs only. They cannot produce their produces in large scale. To develop the financial condition of the villagers thereby increasing the buying capacities, the companies and corporate need to supply the suitable inputs to the rural farmers. The levels of unemployment are very high in the rural areas. Hence, any marketing strategy which involves the scope of income

generation would be more preferable. Youths are to be focused to provide suitable skill training for their self-employment and self-sustainable. Self Help Groups, which helps in generating income is a reflection of this viewpoint. As we know, that India has large geography and weak infrastructure; it is often difficult to reach out to the rural areas. In such situation corporate initiative can play important role to promote livelihood opportunities and increase in living standards of rural communities. Innovative strategies in agriculture and horticulture sector, cold chain logistics, food processing, supply chain and in telecom sector, and training on skill development will play a major role in the sustainable development of both rural villagers and marketers. It demands that companies should work on public private partnerships to address these challenges. This will be helpful in finding innovative solutions and build on the opportunities, this opportunity may lead to the sustainable rural development. The retail salesperson shall have the smart selling techniques which includes presentation, active listening, understanding the customer, knowledge of the product, awareness of the competition, follow-up, needs and solution, social selling and being smarter than the customer.

AISECT MODEL

About AISECT

AISECT is India's leading Social Enterprise that is working in the areas of Skill Development, Higher Education, Financial Inclusion, e-Governance and other ICT-based services to bring about an inclusive change in the semi-urban and rural areas of the country. Established in 1985, the Bhopal-headquartered organization has been untiringly reaching out to the remotest corners of the country to empower people, generate employment for the youth and unfold entrepreneurial initiatives.

AISECT has partnered with the National Skill Development Corporation to offer skills-based training. AISECT is also executing a number of Central and State Government skill development projects including the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), has partnered with 12 State Skill Development Missions and has joined hands with 13 Sector Skill Councils to develop relevant training modules in association with industry experts for 100+ Job Roles as per QP-NOS based curriculum.

AISECTMOOCS.com is India's largest free online open learning platform while RojgarMantra.com addresses the entry level manpower requirements of private and public sector enterprises at the small town, district and block levels. AISECTOnline.com is a one-stop window that makes various digital services accessible to the common man in the semi-urban and rural population.

Under financial inclusion scheme, AISECT works as a National Business Correspondent for three nationalized banks and two Regional Rural Banks. The AISECT Banking Kiosks also offer a host of services under Government schemes such

as the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Atal Pension Yojana, etc.

Government Skilling Projects of AISECT

AISECT is successfully executing a number of skill development projects of the Central and State Governments, including Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendras (PMKKs), Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM), National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF), Agriculture Technology Management Agency (ATMA) Project, etc.

Under the State Government Department Skilling Initiatives, AISECT has executed employment-based skill development training for youth belonging to SC, ST, OBC & Minorities categories. Under various schemes, 81,870 people have been trained across 9 states, namely Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Tripura and Bihar. It has also partnered with 12 State Skill Development Missions (SDMs) in states like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Gujarat. The organization is providing capacity building training for Sarpanch, Sachivs, Gram Rojgar Sahayaks and other PRI members across Madhya Pradesh. AISECT has joined hands with 13 Sector Skill Councils for developing relevant training modules in association with industry experts for 100+ Job Roles as per QP-NOS based curriculum.

The AISECT Model is a multi-purpose, self-sustainable, scalable and entrepreneurial model that addresses the demand of local communities for various skills and ICT-based services required in the unorganized sector. The organization has a strong presence in 475 Districts, 1500 Blocks and 7200 Panchayats across 29 States and 3 Union Territories through over 20,000 Centres, 12 State Offices and 28 Regional Offices. Till date, it has imparted skills-based training to over 20 lakh people, created employment opportunities within the network for more than 75,000 people and empowered the lives of over 50 lakh people through various innovative products and services.

Such variety of skill development programs and the Government skilling projects of AISECT shall be needed to the rural youths of Northeast India, particularly in Manipur to ensure they become employable, successful entrepreneur and marketers. This model of AISECT shall rise up the financial condition of the rural masses and thereby increasing the purchasing capacities.

LIMITATION

Innovation of all forms takes time. People are still not familiar with the technology and hence will take time to adopt it for larger population. Sustainable and innovative strategies itself shall be a critical and a long term process for the companies and corporate. There will be questions of cost effective and manpower.

The three market barriers to sustainable products are (1) price, (2) performance, and (3) behavior change. Each of these market barriers must be considered by the marketing professional when developing a marketing strategy.

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