

**CHANGING CUSTOMER ATTITUDES IN RURAL
MARKETS
(A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE IN CHANGING INDIAN
ECONOMIC SCENARIO)**

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Abstract

Attitude is considered as a relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object predisposing one to respond to some preferential manner. Indian consumers are also associated with values of nurturing, care and affection. These values are far more dominant than values of ambition and achievement. Product which communicate feelings and emotions gel with the Indian consumers. Rural market is large and diverse in nature. Rural consumers check for the price tag. The product has to satisfy rural need and should offer value for money. It is not true that only cheap brands sell in rural markets. Marketers can use product and package design to influence their attitude. This paper conceptually explores how the rural customer attitude is changing and how companies are catering to their needs/wants.

Key words: rural consumers, markets, attitude, product, change, companies

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INTRODUCTION

Most marketers realize that India is on the rim of significant transformation. The economy is vibrant, incomes are rising & the habits, preferences & attitude are changing rapidly. But nowhere is it more evident than in rural India. There is, thus an emerging need to build expertise in rural marketing. In the present perspective customer is considered as spouse because he/she is the person whose wants/desires must be appropriately delighted else will divorce and whose decision have severe influence on the demand of any product or service. Consumer goods are most penetrated in rural India. Food products like biscuits, personal hygiene like bathing soap or shampoo, skincare products like face creams have high penetration. However, brand awareness and choices are still limited as not many companies have been able to reach these markets. Often mass media reach has exposed the rural population to some of the consumer product brands but non-availability often influences consumption opportunities of these consumers. Present day rural populations have enough knowledge to know update information in the society. The demographic factors like age group, qualification and income levels of rural customers are always disturbing their purchasing decision but it will not influence their perception and satisfaction towards purchase of products/services. The attitude of consumer in rural markets decides how demand will emerge for a new product & service & how existing goods and services would survive in future and in which manner.

The marketer must identify the factors that influence their Attitude and purchase behaviour. The factors include:

1. Socio-economic environment of the consumer
2. Cultural environment
3. Geographic location
4. Education/literacy level
5. Occupation
6. Exposure to urban lifestyles
7. Exposure to media and enlarged media reach.
8. The points of purchase of products.
9. The way the consumer uses the products
10. Involvement of others in the purchase.

11. Marketers effort to reach out the rural markets

Some of these points are discussed in some detail below:

Influence of Culture: culture and tradition influence perception and buying behavior. for example, the preference in respect of color, size and shape is often the result of cultural factors. rural consumers' perception of products is strongly influenced by cultural factors.

Geographic Locations: rural consumer behavior is also influenced by the geographic location of the consumers. For example, nearness to feeder towns and industrial projects influence the buying behavior of consumers in the respective clusters of villages. We are discussing this aspect in detail in the section on market segmentation in rural markets. To cite one more example of how geographic location affects buying behavior, we can point out the fact that the lack of electricity in many rural households acts as a barrier to the purchase of certain consumer durables.

Exposure to urban lifestyles: extent of exposure of rural consumers to urban lifestyles also influences their buying behavior. An increased exposure and interaction with urban communities has been the trend in recent years.

Consumer usage of the products/services: the situation in which the consumers utilize the product also influences their buying. The example of lack of electricity affecting buying behavior illustrates this point as well. Lack of electricity automatically increases the purchase of batteries by rural consumers. Similarly, since rural consumers cannot use washing powders/detergent powders that much, as they wash their clothes in streams or ponds, they go in more for washing bars and detergent cakes.

Places of purchase: buying behavior of rural consumer also varies depending on the place of purchase. Different segments of rural buyers buy their requirements from different places/outlets. Some buy from the village shopkeepers, some from village markets/fairs; others buy from the **town** that serves as the feeder to the rural area. It is also seen that the same buyer buys different requirements from different laces.

For understanding the buying behavior of the rural consumer correctly, the marketer must Ask the question: where from do they buy the products and why.

Involvement of others in the purchase: involvement of others in the purchase in the purchase decision is yet another relevant factor in this regard. There has been a change here in recent years. In the past, the head of the family used to make the purchase decision all by himself. In contrast, the involvement of the other members of the family in the purchase decision has been growing in recent years.

An increase in literacy tied with greater access to information has resulted in this development. The marketer has to reckon the role of the influencers while sizing up the buying behavior of rural consumers.

Large and diverse market: The Indian rural market is large and diverse in nature. Therefore, the density of shops to market the products is less.

Traditional Outlook: People in rural areas are traditional in their thinking they are superstitious in their belief. This trend too is gradually changing because of increasing literacy levels among the rural youth.

Diver socio economic background: Rural consumers are spread across different states in distinct parts of India. Thus their social norms and economic status differ widely from each other.

Conclusions:

- Marketers essentially conduct market research to understand the rural consumer for their consumption pattern and attitude towards purchase of products/services.
- develop strategies based on research to segment and target, design low cost 'last mile' distribution models and design effective communication models; pilots the strategic implementation to take the strategies from the drawing board to the market and then for sustainability and scalability.

- The emergence of a rural market as a viable proposition has sparked a new interest among marketers to explore and understand them on a continuous basis so as to reach and delight the rural consumer with care and sophistication as C.K. Prahalad said in their book bottom of pyramid that there is high potential in rural India.
- Rural Consumers demand effective distribution and communication models as these are purchased repeatedly at a regular frequency. Marketers must establish time tested sustainable and scalable models for 'last mile distribution' and has effectively used 'existing traditional rural events' to communicate.
- There has to be comprehensive framework to integrate the strategies which fits for rural markets in a meaningful manner. Marketers must recognize that rural consumers are quite sensitive about their choices and customize products and services accordingly.
- The attitudes of rural consumers, as those of any other consumer, are based on sociological and psychological factors. Marketers and advertisers take these into account when developing packaging and publicity. A promotional strategy will leave the consumer convinced that they "need" the product.

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