

## MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR RURAL WOMEN CONSUMERS IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Knowledge, intelligence, self-dependency and ability are the combined features of modern women. They are not dependent on husband or any other family members in terms of finance. They are independent and fulfilling their self-value. Today, women are playing vital role in the economic life of the family as well as individual. Economic freedom provides them interest in purchasing. This power enables them to buy for themselves and at the same time for the family members also. But in rural India situation is changing very fast. Even rural women are playing a vital role in the development of family. Now rural women in India have become aspirational and independent.*

*This study is designed to answer the following questions:*

- *What is the consumption pattern of the rural women consumers*
- *How rural consumers get information regarding various commodities?*
- *What marketing strategies companies are implementing to attract female consumers in rural India?*

*This paper discusses actual and anticipated changes in rural women & consumer behaviour on the basis of issues raised by studies of women roles in marketing disciplines. Challenges for rural marketing have also been discussed.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Rural Women, Rural Market, Rural Marketing, Rural Marketing Strategies.*

### Introduction

Knowledge, intelligence, self-dependency and ability are the combined features of modern women. They are not dependent on husband or any other family members in terms of finance. They are independent and fulfilling their self-value. Today, women are playing vital role in the economic life of the family as well as individual. Economic freedom provides them interest in purchasing. This power enables them to buy for themselves and at the same time for the family members also. In addition to differences in chromosomes, hormones and structure of brain between men and women; women also have different characteristics in attention and focusing, detailed thinking and skills. These differences create diverse consumer behaviour in terms of sex, and can be seen in human relations, reactions to the individual and social behaviours, giving importance to the details and extra knowledge, searching perfect solutions, conversation styles and creating relationships. Companies select appropriate target markets for their product and services according to related women consumer markets. Marketing mix strategies for women consumers are different when they are compared with male consumer markets, and are seen strategies such as product positioning, creating brand identity, product innovations, packaging, pricing, distribution, advertising and personal selling.

The paper mainly analyses how modern marketers develop their marketing strategy in terms of the four important elements (product, price communication and awareness). Firstly companies make careful observation then scientific research on women consumers' psychology and behaviour is done. In the guide of that information, marketers design the products which fully satisfy consumer's physical and emotional needs; set the suitable price that attract women, and then effectively communicate with women consumers to establish on-going and trusting relationship. The paper tries to combine the marketing theory and case analysis to conclude that the research of customer will be the trend of commercial strategy in the extremely competitive market.

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This paper discusses actual and anticipated changes in women's consumer behaviour on the basis of issues raised by studies of women's roles in non-marketing disciplines. Implications for research, marketing strategy, and public policy are discussed.

### **Consumption Pattern of the Rural Women Consumers**

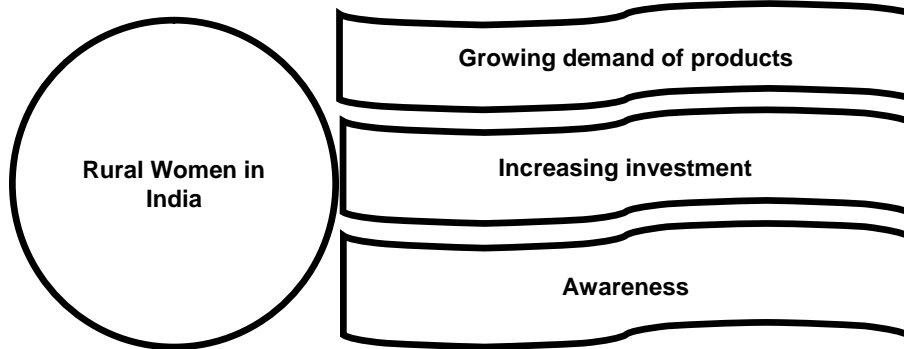
One thing is common in all states and regions of India are that consumption patterns are changing. The factors are the same for all states and regions. The major factors are change in income, exposure to media, availability of goods and services, spread of education, migration of people within the state and outside the state, globalization etc. The entire socio-cultural system is in transition. An interesting feature of all this is that there is a convergence emerging. The new female generation has liking for fast foods, music, and other branded items and are cosmopolitan in their outlook. Because of these factors the disparities in food, clothing and other items of expenditure are narrowing down day by day. The study of emerging consumption pattern and especially in rural sector is important for policy formulation for future. Such a study will reveal as how people are spending their income on various household items which include food, clothes, lighting and fuel, health and education and so on. Even in these items further details will be available. For example, in food the information can be obtained about the various items in the "food basket" relating to cereals, fruits, vegetables, milk and milk products, pulses, oilseeds and so on. Similarly, the information relating to clothing will reveal peoples' preferences about the type of clothing. Information with regard to education and health will show as what percentage of their income is being spent on these items. All these details are required for a realistic policy formulation. This will help in avoiding the mismatch what people require and what is available in the market.

Change is the essence of life. Society is a dynamic body, be it rural or urban. Sophistication and socio-economic pressures of fast paced life brings changes. Increasing population, receding landholdings and ever increasing economic burdens have fuelled the rate of urbanization in rural settings. More and more youngsters are moving out of villages for education or jobs. Joint family systems are giving way to nuclear families. According to the 1991 Census, three-quarters of the population of Rajasthan lived in rural areas. Ensuing decade has seen migration of youth to urban areas for the purpose of better education, employment and better life-style opportunities. Rural youth are no longer keen on ploughing the fields themselves. With time, bullocks have been replaced by tractors. Meals in field are now replaced by lunch at home though the 2 meal a day pattern has not changed in villages. Adults in the family still prefer brunch followed by an early dinner. In urban areas, the 3 meal pattern is more prevalent. Diet rich in ghee, milk and curd is slowly fading away from urban as well as rural places. Physical drudgery has been reduced to a great extent. Average income has improved over the period of time. Urbanization and globalization has caused intermingling of cultures that has brought changes not only in diet habits of female population but also in mind sets.

Following are the changing consumption pattern of women in rural areas:

- Transition in Dietary Habits.
- Average income has improved over the period of time.
- Globalization is the reason which changes the diet habits of rural women. Along with this change in mind sets as well.
- Social and cultural values have a very strong hold on the people in rural markets.
- Traditional dishes prepared by rural women had whole wheat flour and jaggery as their basic ingredients which were rich in natural fibre and iron and were healthful have replaced by various other ingredients. Snacks consumed by present generation are based on refined wheat flour, refined sugars, preservatives, synthetic colours and other chemicals which are not pro for health.
- Trend has changed not only for dairy product consumption but also other traditional products. The youngest rural generations are unfamiliar to traditional food and liking cornflakes, Maggi, biscuits, chow Mein, pizzas and burgers have found place in their platter.
- Earlier clothes were given to tailors for stitching. Now the demand of readymade garment is increasing.
- In education, the trend has increased for tuition expenditure.
- Rural women are taking care of their health also. Taking medicines is another changing consumption pattern.

- The most spectacular increase in expenditure has been on telephones. This increased by 6 times.
- Traditional fuels such as firewood and chips, and dung cakes still remain the main sources of household cooking energy. However, the use of LPG is on the increase because of its improved availability and convenience.



### Rural Women Consumers and Product Information

The buying preferences of India's rural women consumers are changing fast, and their decision-making power and independence is increasing. These women are eager to purchase branded, high-quality products, They are no longer willing to accept inferior products simply because such offerings cost less than higher-quality ones.

- use mobile devices to stay in touch with family and friends, and even research brands.
- 53% of the rural women consumers gather information about products through 'word of mouth' while 32% from local mom and pop shops in rural areas
- Women in rural India are better connected in both the physical and digital sense
- 84 percent of rural women travel outside their own village or town to a nearby city or district headquarters to make purchases and bring the products home.
- Companies are playing vital role in providing information regarding products.

### Marketing Strategies toward Rural Women in India

- **Lower Price is Attraction**

Nowadays companies mention SALE in advertisements so that rural women consumers can also be attracted towards products.

- **Quality Purchase**

74% of rural women travel outside their own village to a city in the vicinity or district headquarters to shop. Majority of rural women consumers buy high value goods.

- **Awareness**

Nowadays rural women are also aware of different products available in the market. Increasing number of malls may be one of the important factors of this awareness. At work place also there may be discussions regarding products available in market. Word of Mouth is Major Source of Awareness in Rural Areas.

- **Strategic Communications with Rural Women Consumers**

Marketing communication includes advertising, the sale force, public relations, packaging, and any other signals that the firm provides about itself and its products. An effective communication strategy target at rural women consumers requires answers to the following question: What effects do we want our communication to have on the target audience? We often state that the purpose of advertising and some marketing communication is to promote sale. While, this is the ultimate objective, the behaviour objective is often much more immediate, that is, it may seek to have the audience learn something about the product, seek more information about it, then like the product and recommend it to others, feel good about having bought the product, or a host of other communication effects.

### **Developing Specific Products for Specific Segment**

- **E-retailers are Reaching Rural Women Consumers**

The e Commerce companies like Snapdeal, Myntra, Jabong, Voonik, Amazon, Shopclues, Flipcart are earning good revenues from villages. 37 per cent of the rural women are aware of the online shopping methods. Even they know how to use smart phones.

### **Need to Market to Women Differently**

- **Challenges for Rural Marketing in India**

In spite of rural marketing boom in India, the Indian marketing literature has shown several weaknesses. After having made a very comprehensive literature survey on subject, Jha (1998) has broadly summarized the weakness of rural marketing.

- **Less Education to Girl Child and Women**

There are not enough opportunities for education in rural areas. The literacy level is as low (36%) when compared to all- India average of 52%.

- **Seasonal Demand**

Demand for goods in rural markets depends upon agricultural situation, as agriculture is the main source of income. Agriculture to a large extent depends upon monsoon and, therefore, the demand or buying capacity is not stable or regular.

- **Transportation**

Transportation is lacking in most of the rural areas. Many rural areas are not connected by rail transport. Roads become unserviceable during the monsoon and interior villages get isolated.

- **Distribution**

An effective distribution system requires villagelevel shopkeeper, Mandal/ Taluka- level wholesaler or preferred dealer, distributor or stockiest at district level and company-owned depot or consignment distribution at state level. The presence of too many tiers in the distribution system increases the cost of distribution.

- **Communication Problems**

Phone connectivity is poor in rural areas.

- **Traditional Life**

Life in rural areas is still governed by customs and traditions and people do not easily adapt new practices. For example, even rich and educated class of farmers does not wear jeans or branded shoes

- **Buying Decisions**

Rural consumers are cautious in buying and decisions are slow and delayed. They like to give a trial and only after being personally satisfied, do they buy the product

- **Media for Promotions**

Television has made a great impact and large audience has been exposed to this medium. Radio reaches large population in rural areas at a relatively low cost. However, reach of formal media is low in rural households; therefore, the market has to undertake specific sales promotion activities in rural areas like participating in meals or fairs.

- **Problem of Sales Person**

It is desirable that sales persons, especially those who have been brought up in cities are given a thorough training consisting of both theory and practical aspects of village life. The training will help these sales persons to align themselves with the market realities and settle down smoothly in their jobs

### **Summary**

Women in the rural area are looking for reliable, trusted products and services, where the manufacturer or the seller would offer consistent services during the sales and in after sales services. The companies should understand that affordability plays a crucial role in product selection and should identify local retailers and POS retail representatives who most powerfully influence female consumers at the moment of purchase. Digital communication would be the better means for the companies to communicate to these women customers going forward.

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