

## RURAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIC MODEL USING A NEW UNCONVENTIONAL MEDIA MIX

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### **ABSTRACT**

*A rural segment in India across the country constitutes around 69% of the population of the country as per census 2011. There are only four metro cities and 54 big cities including 36 state capitals around the country out of 5000 marketplaces where the top brands are concentrated. They are basically the urbanized markets which are now stagnant and saturated for the companies of repute. This is why the companies are targeting rural India. Due to the vast size of rural India which is developing at a rapid pace with changing socio-economic conditions with regional disparities in demography, use of technology, culture, social, and physical infrastructure where language and local dialects pose major threats for the companies to communicate with them. Keeping in view the problems faced by the companies to communicate with its rural target market, a communication strategic model has been developed.*

*The strategic model of rural communication using a new unconventional media mix is the outcome of the research work carried out on the rural markets of the four districts – Barabanki, Sitapur, Hardoi and Raebarelli of Central Uttar Pradesh. The model is basically a communication strategy to reach the huge untapped market of rural India which is developing at a rapid pace with changing socio-economic conditions with regional disparities in demography, use of technology, culture, social and physical infrastructure.*

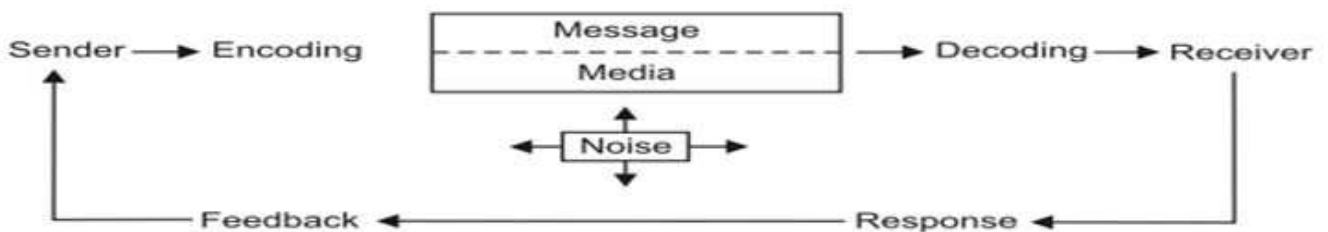
**KEYWORDS:** *Strategy, Rural Communication, and Unconventional Media Mix*

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is generally said that the success of any marketing communication strategy largely depends upon how effectively and innovatively the communication efforts put forth by the marketers. Messages communicated should be so appealing and stimulating that they act as compelling factors to make the target customers responding to the market offerings. The biggest marketing communication task before marketers is to mold the perceptions of the target customers in the area under study. During the study, it was observed that target customers are now matured enough to understand their needs. They are cost

conscious and value-driven, but are highly resistant to any change. They have a strong belief in their tradition, culture and value system. They give respect to senior and educated persons in the society, and hence, they are very much influenced by the eligible influencers. It has also been experienced during the research survey that the target customers exhibit any desired purchase behavior only when they are convinced about the benefits. They get influenced very much by storytelling. They develop a positive or negative attitude towards something based on the negative or positive ending of a story. The response of the target customers to an offer in the research area under study will be based on what they are going to lose or gain.

Any effective strategy involves planning, implementing and evaluating the results and so is the communication strategy. The communication process as depicted in the figure below remains standard for both rural and urban markets.



**Figure 1: The Communication Process (Source – Marketing Management by Philip Kotler)**

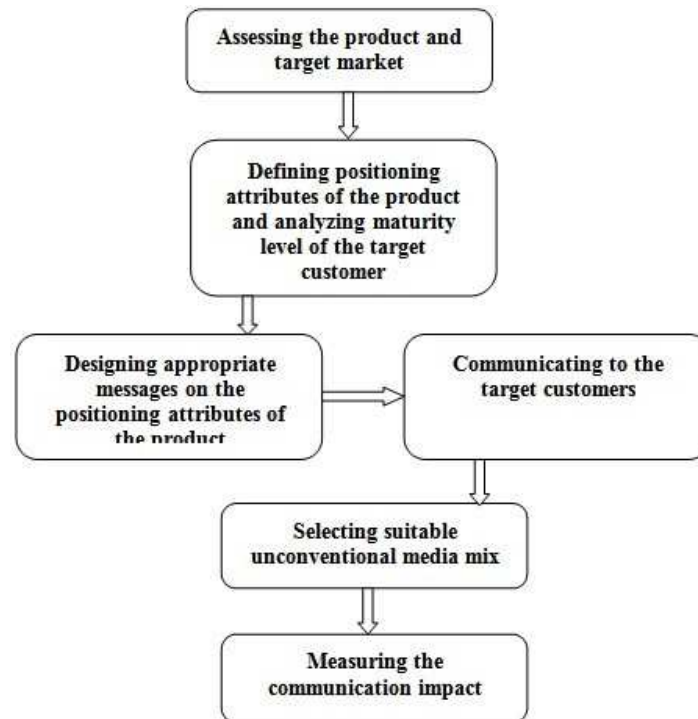
Due to the existing dichotomies in the urban and rural markets, marketing communication is different in rural markets in view of the urban markets. Marketing communication as such is a very difficult task and particularly communicating with the customers who are innocent, ignorant, less knowledgeable, poorer, and skeptical, who need to be educated, for whom most of the common goods are very new, it is not a very easy task. The marketers must keep in place specific communication tools, models and strategies for succeeding in their communication effort. The messages need to be tailored according to their cultures. Their sentiments need to be addressed very cautiously and not to be hurt. Hence, there is a need for different marketing communication strategy in rural markets.

## **STRATEGIC MODEL USING A NEW UNCONVENTIONAL MEDIA MIX**

Building relationships with the customer groups, persuading them to alter their buying and consumption patterns, influencing their behavior highly depend upon the way the whole communication exercise is taken up. Media selection, consideration of local cultures, languages, beliefs and value systems, overcoming the barriers form an important part of rural communication strategic model. With all such critical aspects kept in mind, the rural communication strategic model using a new unconventional media mix is depicted step by step below-

## **ASSESSING THE PRODUCT AND TARGET MARKET**

It starts with assessing the product. Here, the product assessment involves finding out its features, benefits, durability, use and functionality, its PLC and BCG stage. It deals with deciding whether the product is a low-end or mid-end or high-end product. It is generally seen in the rural areas that low - end products, which are low priced, are more preferred to the mid-



**Figure 2: Strategic Model USING a New Unconventional Media Mix (Source – Self-Developed)**

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## PRODUCT

In this strategic communication model, detergents, sanitary napkins, and campaign for safe drinking water are considered as sanitary and hygiene-related product. Verily, the research conducted in the four districts revealed some interesting facts. The inter-village and intra-village status of sanitation and hygiene was found different across the areas studied. There was an apparent lack of awareness and misconceptions about the correct hygiene, water and sanitation practices among the villagers. Villagers are not much motivated to follow the right practices due to lack of appreciation of benefits accruing from the correct practices. Women and girls face greater problems – increased workload, privacy, and safety – for maintaining

hygiene and sanitation than boys and men. Women are therefore more often interested in and motivated for sanitation improvements than men. Men have a lower personal need and economic demand to improve the sanitation situation. They are, however, motivated by other factors, e.g., protection for their wives and daughters and a higher value of their house. Both sexes may appreciate a higher social status from the presence of sanitary facilities (women and men) and better hygiene (women).

## **PRICE**

It has been experienced during the survey that customers in the rural areas are highly cost-conscious and at the same time they are value driven. This is why the government and private agencies and companies involved in offering sanitation and hygiene-related products are pricing their products at lower prices. They adopt a low penetrating pricing strategy. This pricing strategy is adopted for the products of mass consumption. The volume of the production is large enough to earn huge revenues and sizable profits at a low cost. This sector is highly enticing for the companies producing hygiene related products. Rural marketers need to deliver value to consumers by developing suitable products at a price they are willing to pay. So the product should be affordable to the consumers and suit the mindset and requirements of the market.

## **PLACE**

The distributors in urban and rural markets act as a hub for distributing hygiene and sanitary related products through rural retailers, kirana and street shops in the villages, health care centers, primary health centers, and public distribution shops etc. as the spokes. The products, somehow, are made physically available to the users in time.

Assessment of target market involves studying the need level of the target customers, knowledge about the product, demographic profile, attitude and belief system. This will help in analyzing the maturity level of the target customers. Apart from that delivery vans, cooperative societies and community-based organization can be used for direct delivery of products to rural consumers.

## **DEFINING POSITIONING ATTRIBUTES OF THE PRODUCT AND ANALYZING MATURITY LEVEL OF THE TARGET CUSTOMER**

With inputs from the first stage, product's attributes should be defined based on its features and benefits best suiting to the needs of the customers. These product's attributes shall be positioned in the minds of the target customers through appropriate messaging via select unconventional media mix. Data from the assessment of target market are to be analyzed to know the maturity level of the target customers about their needs and specific satisfier, language, culture and the belief system which they live life with.

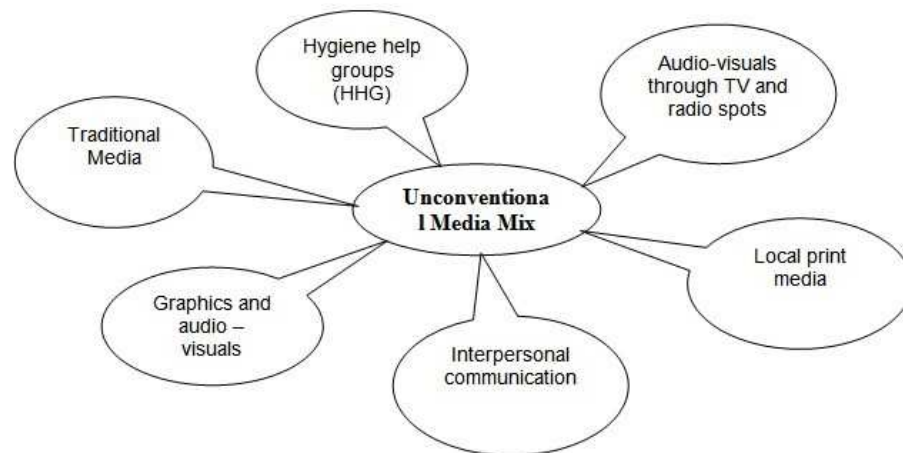
## **DESIGNING APPROPRIATE MESSAGES ON THE POSITIONING ATTRIBUTES OF THE PRODUCT**

The product's attributes defined at stage second of this model are to be called as positioning attributes. Designing an appropriate message to communicate the positioning attributes to the target market is a challenging task for marketers. The target customers in the rural areas under study are relatively resistant to any change, innocent and ignorant. But, they go by the preset examples and success stories about the product's benefits. They, being innocent, are very much afraid of failures and losses. They hate false and deceptive messages. But, they accept any offer when they understand the benefits suited to their needs. Other various issues like levels of knowledge among the target audience, local issues, and languages are of major concerns for marketers. The rural consumer should be able to connect and relate to the message. Broadly, below are the heads to be taken care of while crafting a rural message.

- Languages – The message should be easily understood by the rural consumer. It should be simple and use appropriate keywords for instant connect. A message should reflect the culture and religious sentiments of the audience. e.g. Dabur distributed religious calendars in rural markets.
- Pictorial Presentation – Considering the literacy levels of rural markets, pictorial representation of message becomes an important part of communication.
- Message Form – The message should be native to the place and have utility for the consumer.
- Source – Many times the source from where the message is coming from adds to the credibility in the rural market. The message source should be trustworthy and traceable.
- Message Format: The managers concerned must take all care in various critical aspects like message design, copy layout, color, words, sounds, etc. It would generate results if the ad copy possesses more pictures rather than words and text.

## **SELECTING SUITABLE UNCONVENTIONAL MEDIA MIX**

The selection of any communication channel is driven by the programme objective. The issue of safe water, hygiene, and sanitation is relatively low on priority amongst the various stakeholders. Since this programme, talks to various sets of audiences whose requirement is different in terms of information needed and the manner in which it is required, multiple channels are essential to harness optimum results. The key audiences and the merits of a media will be the key factors in prioritizing the various channels. The new set of unconventional media mix is highly cost-effective. Audio-visuals through TV and radio spots, local print media, interpersonal communication, graphics and audio-visuals, Traditional Media (Street theatre, puppets, storytelling, folk dances etc.) hygiene help groups (HHG), are considered here as new unconventional media mix.



**Figure 3: Unconventional Media Mix (Source – Self -Developed)**

### **AUDIO-VISUAL (TV SPOTS & RADIO SPOTS)**

This medium is important as it has the ability to communicate effectively with a large number of people at the same time. This medium leaves the audience with an image, which has more shelf life than a text or only a voice-driven message. This also increases the credibility of the message being delivered. The barrier of illiteracy is removed and the communication can be understood by all – literate as well as illiterate. Though it is an expensive medium considering its reach and speed is a suitable medium to meet the objectives. The other advantage with this medium is the imagery created. Media innovations and strategic buying of media can help in optimizing the results. This medium is most effective in delivering a simple, clear and focused message. Communicating a lot of information using this medium has high the cost implications and can create confusion.

### **LOCAL PRINT MEDIA**

This medium is an effective medium as it, too, reaches to a large number of people at the same time. Further, this is a credible and relatively less costly medium. The existence of various vernacular print mediums also helps us customize the communication as per the language understood by the people. This medium is useful in giving detailed information but to optimize the impact of the communication the focus should be on the key message. In the use of print media, the use of visuals is more effective. This media has restricted use - only among the literate audience.

### **INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION**

It is an interactive medium and provides credibility to messages. It also helps in providing detailed information to the audiences and helps in building a supportive environment. This medium allows for immediate feedback on ideas, message, and practices. It also helps in addressing specific important issue instantly, which has been missed in another medium. It can reach to areas not covered by mass media. The message can be communicated to the illiterate audience also. This is a time consuming with a high cost per person/contact. One of the critical elements of this medium is that it requires practical skills training and support of field workers to be appointed. It reaches to a small number of individuals in one stroke. This strategy envisages extensive use of interpersonal communication techniques.

## **GRAPHICS AND AUDIOVISUAL**

This medium provides for timely reminders and attracts the attention of the participant group at the place of exposure. It provides basic information on the issue (behavior/practice)/product and its benefit. It is handy and reusable. It provides accurate standardized information all across and I give confidence and credibility to the person communicating messages. It can be distributed to areas not penetrated by mass media. Training of implementers would be necessary for effective design, development, and production and it might not be cost effective.

## **TRADITIONAL MEDIA (STREET THEATRE, PUPPETS, STORYTELLING, FOLK DANCES ETC.)**

The main advantage of this medium is that communication can be customized as per the audience need by using local jargon and slang. Familiar messages and situations can be selected to generate empathy. This medium is more personally relevant than another medium. One can use local talent and involve the community. It has the potential to be self-sustaining at low/no cost. It helps in stimulating discussion of topics among families, friends, neighbors etc. within the community. The restricted reach is a problem coupled with the need for training and support to such media at the local level.

## **HYGIENE HELP GROUPS**

This is the most innovative medium for conveying the hygiene messages in the rural areas under study. In addition to field workers, a group of young girls and house makers should be formed at the panchayat level. With proper training and support, the group should be exhorted to visit the places like haats, local mandis, local small Kirana / grocery shops, village centre, Primary Health Care Centre, School, Government Rashan shops, community halls at appropriate times when a large number of peoples are gathered to discuss the benefits of hygiene factors. Women are known for making talks and play an important role in influencing the other persons in the family. It has been seen in the villages that gyne health workers are very successful in helping the women facing gyne related problems.

## **COMMUNICATING TO THE TARGET CUSTOMERS**

At this stage, the designed message through the select unconventional media mix should be initiated for communication to the target audience. The communication in the select rural areas can be effective only when they are ethically conveyed and directly relate to the needs of the customers. The effectiveness of the communication also lies in making the customers realizing their needs and associating their needs with the products offered to them. There is no need to impose the product on the customers. The communication should be so stimulating that customers exhibit purchase decisions immediately. False and defective messages should be avoided because the rural masses are comparatively innocent and ignorant. Once, they get a doubt on a source, they will never turn up towards that source.



## MEASURING THE COMMUNICATION IMPACT

The impact of communication should be measured on fortnightly, monthly and quarterly basis. The desired result may be in the form of changed attitude and behavior to respond the offers made to them. In case of hygiene products under the FMCG category, the result may be measured in terms of sales in that product line of FMCG company.

## CONCLUSION

We can conclude that the above mentioned rural strategic model can certainly prove effective in transmitting the message to the target customers in the four districts. The marketers should be careful in performing the communication model exercise to be effective and enjoy the predetermined benefits. Agreeing to the fact that the market is varied in nature, all specific characteristics must be considered in designing and devising the communication strategies for the markets. Innovation is going to be the key to success. Innovations are expected in media, message design, and message execution while attempting to reach the erstwhile neglected markets at the base of the cone segment.

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