

Some Aspects of Marketing in Rural India

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Abstract

Marketing products in rural India is a fascinating experience. Apart from cost consideration, aspects of beliefs, cultural practices, kinship relations, community relations, etc. play an important role. Seeking a fashionable product is also earnestly done. Change in living conditions bring in a variety of demands for a variety of products. In this paper, a brief descriptive analysis of marketing concepts is presented, based on my field trips in Tenkasi District of Tamilnadu, India. Traditional concepts of marketing such as the following are used to describe the ongoing processes of marketing process in rural India: Production concept, Product, Selling concept, Marketing concept and Societal marketing concept (<https://oxidian.ch/en/the-five-marketing-concepts-explained/>)

Keywords: marketing, rural, India, beliefs, products

With rapid semi-urbanization of rural areas in India, marketing often assumes that products meant for urban areas are equally valid and in demand in semi-urban and rural areas. Products specific to rural areas are not specifically produced in most cases. However, one also notices that what is popular in rural areas, particularly in food and garments, are marketed with appealing advertisements for sale in urban areas. The list of items such as paint and cement are identical both in rural and urban areas. Rural residents generally adjust themselves to this situation, and yet they do make suitable changes.

Several decades ago, homes in rural areas were whitewashed with alum solution and painting homes with a variety of colours was not yet popular. At present, “whitewashing” is still done to meet religious requirements of festive occasions. In addition, based on the economic status of people, modern paints are also used. Choice of colors continues to be guided by religious affiliation. For example, *kesari* colour is commonly preferred in certain sections within and outside the house by many Hindus. Muslims seem to prefer green. Culturally speaking, bright colours seem to be preferred by many in rural areas. There seems to be an assumption that bright colours will last longer and will help avoid or hide scribbling, scratches, etc.

I also noticed that homes of brothers/cousins located continuously within a compound seem to prefer painting their outer walls with the same colours. And yet some would like to have different colours for different homes within the same compound. The compound wall may have the same colour.

Places of worship of Hindu sects (Saivism and Vaishnavism) prefer the same colour combinations in most temples. However, temples of deities who accept animal sacrifice, may prefer whitewashing with some additional colours. *White* and *kesari* are preferred colours. The compound wall around the temple usually have white and kesari stripes. Christian churches, depending upon the socio-economic status of the members, often seem to use a variety of colours including expensive paints.

Private educational institutions have become a prosperous market for different kinds of paints. Beautification of the walls and classrooms using distemper and oil paints is very common in the private educational institutions. Painting becomes a tool to creating a feeling of cleanliness and impressive looks.

Major parks also seem to use paints to add to their natural beauty. This is easily seen in the parks in the hills around Tenkasi.

Thus, even in rural and semi-urban areas, distemper and paint have their own important place as a product. At the same time, economically poor citizens seem to go in for alum solutions, bought from stores in the villages and small towns. The labourers who work with whitewashing, alum solution, are also in great demand, but their wages are lower than the wages earned by “painters”. Newly constructed homes go in for distemper and painting. The owners of these homes assume correctly that distemper and paint maintain their shine longer than alum solution.

Multistory buildings are not many and yet these buildings become attractive to visitors and renters when they shine in the glow of paint.

Now let us look into how the rural situation reveals the use of the five basic marketing concepts mentioned above:

Production Concept

Affordability of the customers and accessibility of the product generally guide or should guide the production. When it comes to the rural India market, there does not seem to be significant level of rural-oriented production. Yet one may expect rural-India oriented production with growing number of brick and mortar as well as concrete buildings. Development of housing for the poorer sections of the society has already increased the use of paints.

Product

Rural-oriented products in the paint category are not many. Products based on price often become the rural-oriented category. At the same time, there is enormous and tremendous opportunity to produce and sell more rural-design oriented paints among the economically higher classes. This class of people find fashion in everything rural and natural. Cost is not the primary concern.

Selling Concept

When there is need rural people come to the stores close by. Suggestions by the store manager is often listened to with attention. I have also noticed that the painter who accompanies the buyer often has greater influence. There may or may not be some link between the seller and the painter. Usually, the painter gets some “commission” from the seller. There is here great scope to train the sellers as to how they should handle the customer, their request and choice of colour, etc. in terms of their real needs, affordability, how long the chosen paint would last on the wall, etc. Note such training is customer-oriented and will result in maintaining the goodwill of the customer. Ultimately, the producer of the paints stands to gain a lot.

What I have presented above is also equally valid for the understanding and implementation of the *marketing* concept discussed below.

Marketing Concept

From my point of view selling and marketing are closely interrelated. Selling a product by hook or crook should not be the goal, although leading textbooks emphasize on selling as an independent act apart from marketing. A seller is also a marketer. Needs and wants of the customers become the focus of the marketing concept. And yet, needs and wants of one customer may vary from the needs and wants of another family. There are umpteen social, economic and geographic as well as other cultural and religious factors that could influence the choice made by the customer. In other words, categorizing of customer needs and wants cannot be avoided. Strategic techniques of mixing primary colours to meet the needs and wants will also require patience on the part of the marketer. Convincing friendly language and willingness to give discounts, showing respect to the customer, etc. are all required here.

Societal Marketing Concept

Many of the items listed and described above are relevant at this level also. More importantly, ethical values are emphasized here. Unity in diversity may also be included here. Individual welfare is seen integrated to community welfare here. In a village street where most houses belong to one particular religion or political party, selling or recommending a colour that is often recognized as an emblem of a particular religion or political party may create some issues.

Marketing practices should help integrate ethical considerations in business transactions even when profit motive continues to dominate.

To Conclude

Marketing in rural India is as complex as the rural society. But there is great opportunity to expand business and make both monetary social gains for the product, producer and seller.

Reference

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