



**PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS ON RURAL MARKETING:
A CASE STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PONDURU TAHASIL OF
SRIKAKULAM DISTRICT IN ANDHRA PRADESH STATE**

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ABSTRACT

Rural Marketing in India is now catching the corporate attention in view of its importance in creating human prosperity, business vibrancy and national wealth. As urban markets are running towards saturation, the focus of business world is now shifting towards going rural. Despite of various challenges, rural markets are potential of providing numerous new business opportunities. In this context, the present study is an attempt to understand some pertinent aspects of rural marketing in a rural setting in Srikakulam District of Andhra Pradesh State in India. This is a quantitative perceptual study aimed at understanding perceived rural marketing in rural market participants. In this regard, field survey data was gathered from a sample of 100 respondents who are actual participants of rural market in the study setting, using snowball non-random convenient sampling. Simple percentage analysis was done for treating the respondents' perceptual data. Results are discussed.

Keywords: Rural Marketing, Rural Market, Rural Customer, Rural Business

INTRODUCTION

Marketing is a business function aims at creating a mutually advantageous situation by providing value to the customers and getting value by managing profitable relationship with customers. In this context, marketing aims at fulfillment of the needs and wishes of the customers by delivering products or services which can provide them an experience of need fulfillment and satisfaction. Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller (2017:5) define marketing as "a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, and freely exchanging products and services of value with others". Thus, marketing is the process of identifying and satisfying customers' needs and is fundamentally a demand management science and skill in the sense that it is not only about strategizing as to how to meet the market demand, but also strives to generate demand for products or services.

India is a developing country with major proportion of the population is living in rural areas. The World Bank Staff Estimates based on the United Nations Population Division's World Urbanization Prospects (2018) projected that in 2020, the rural population in India constitutes 65.07% in the estimated 138 crore total population. India with its huge population is a big and attractive market to both indigenous business players and foreign corporate houses to sell their products or services. Especially, Rural India is a potential market for business opportunities. Rural market is now growing faster than its urban counterpart, observed as potential of creating overall balanced economical and social development in India. Thus, it reveals that rural areas are now consuming large number of industrial and urban manufactured products. Given the rural agricultural production and consumption playing a



predominant role in developing the Indian economy, rural marketing is now assuming an important value addition to the economy.

RURAL MARKETING CONCEPT

“Rural Marketing is defined as a function that manages all activities involved in assessing, stimulating and converting the purchasing power of rural consumers into an effective demand for specific products and services and moving these products and services to the people in rural areas to create satisfaction and a better standard of living and thereby achieving organizational goals” (Vidya Iyer, 2010:1001). It implies applying marketing theory and principles in focusing marketing efforts to create and satisfy needs and wants of rural customers; which in turn involves the process of developing, pricing, promoting, distributing rural specific products and services leading to exchange between rural and urban market to satisfy consumer demand and achieve the objectives of business. It revolves around understanding the complexities and peculiarities in terms of rural market participants, business environment, nature of market, transactions, products, processes, modalities, norms and outcomes etc., so as to evolve and implement marketing strategies to see the reasonable expectations of both the customer and the business met. Rural marketing, to a considerable extent, deals with delivering manufactured or processed inputs or services to rural producers, the demand for which is basically a derived outcome. Thus, the participants in case of rural marketing would include input manufacturers, dealers, farmers, opinion leaders, government agencies and traders. However, most of the visible marketing and selling activities will be confined to the local dealers and retailers. For sustainable business development, besides the bottom line profit imperative, in rural context of marketing, the business house needs to have reciprocal concern for rural development and social contribution in their approach. Of course, product usage by the rural customer, rural consumer behavior and rural economics occupy central part of decision inputs for deciding the price, distribution, promotion, packing, branding, and connected issues in rural marketing. Rafiuddin and Ahmed (2011) presented a classification of rural marketing based on the transactions, source of production and flow of products as given below:

- ✦ Urban to Rural (U 2 R): This type of marketing involves selling of products and services by urban businesses in rural areas. The products may include pesticides, Fast Moving Consumer Goods products, consumer durables etc.
- ✦ Rural to Urban (R 2 U): It signifies agricultural marketing where a rural producer seeks to sell his produce in an urban market. Often a middleman plays as a crucial link in between the parties. The products include seeds, pulses, cereals, fruits and vegetables, milk and related products, forest produce, spices, etc.
- ✦ Rural to Rural (R 2 R): This includes the marketing activities that take place between two villages situated in close proximity. The transactions relate to the areas of expertise the particular village has. These include selling of agricultural tools, cattle, carts etc., to other village customers in proximity.

Rural Marketing - Indian Perspective

Rural marketing in India is not much developed as there are many bottlenecks in the area of market, product design and positioning, pricing, distribution and promotion aspects of various products. Rural market is large but scattered into numerous regions. There may be less number of shops available in rural areas. Standard of living and disposable income of the rural customers is relatively less. Villages develop slowly and have a traditional outlook with propensity to consume remains a bit low, slow and gradual in increase. Rural traditional folk, either rich or poor would try to purchase gold out of their hard earned savings, instead of consuming money by adapting trends. They are conservative, extremely frugal and often averse to latest consumer durables until they are convinced that the product is essential or of considerable use to them. Low literacy (based on the National Statistical Office survey, 75th round of National Sample Survey - from July 2017 to June 2018, it is found that India's Overall Literacy Rate is 77.7%. In rural areas it is 73.5% in contrast to 87.7% urban literacy), lower per capita incomes and



savings, societal backwardness and low awareness on what is happening across the nation or world are making the rural population not able to adapt to the latest technology or modern trends. Due to dispersion of geographical areas and uneven land fertility, rural people have disparate socioeconomic background, which ultimately affects the Indian rural trade. Infrastructure facilities like cemented roads, warehousing, communication system, and banking are even inadequate in rural areas. Physical product distribution is a big challenge in remote rural environment. However, the fiscal tax regime, in-time monsoon, government regulation of agricultural product pricing through minimum support price (MSP) are contributing to increased disposable incomes in rural population; as such the rural customer is willing to afford purchasing products according to their purchasing capacity.

Rural Marketing - Value Addition to Economic Growth

Rural marketing turns a big promising opportunity to business units, people residing in rural areas, people residing in urban areas and obviously to the entire nation. Rural marketing ushers in improved rural infrastructure and prosperity. It is expected that people can live comfortably in villages by the variety of goods and services available at a comparatively lower prices. Hike in aggregate demand generated by growth of rural marketing activities pushes consumption and investment activities which in turn promote employment and income generation in rural people. It reduce rural migrant population pressure on urban. As Rural India is highly linked with agriculture, rural marketing is potential of improving agriculture and in turn it contributes to establishment of start-ups in agro-based processing industry using fruits, vegetables, cereals, pulses, etc., as raw-material inputs. Growth of rural marketing leads to increased business operations, multiple options will be available to farmers and local producers to market their products. It leads to improved transportation, warehousing, banking, communication and other facilities. By the availability of basic infrastructural facilities, business units can conveniently reach the target rural customers. At improved income level, availability of better quality products at reasonable price, availability of facilities etc., in rural area, it leads to refined life style and quality of life in rural areas. Through innovative rural marketing practices, untapped and underutilized resources can be utilized at optimum level in rural areas and that can further accelerate overall economic growth. Thus, rural marketing process is both a catalyst as well as an outcome of the general rural development process. In this line, rural marketing is both a benefactor and beneficiary in which it can contribute towards reducing urban-rural divide.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The researchers reviewed available research and literature for having a proper understanding on various aspects of rural marketing with its dynamics. A brief note on the literature reviewed in this connection is presented here:

Bhavika Hakhroo (2020) in her review on rural marketing provides that rural market consists of 83.3 crore people in India and this is the fact attracts marketers to enter into this market. She told that the business houses must understand rural consumer behavior. She observes that there is a shift from urban to the rural marketing as the development and levels of literacy and awareness among the rural consumers is growing. Now, rural consumers are expecting value for their money. Shiv Shankar Das (2018) citing from Livemint, 2018, mentions in his research on rural marketing that in 2018 the rural consumption has rose by 9.7% against the annual growth of 8.6% in urban spending. He told that green revolution, globalization and privatization has given further boost to rural marketing. Shailender Kumar (2018) while linking poverty eradication to rural development and rural marketing; suggested that as per 2011 Census, 68.84 % population of India resides in 6,40,000 plus villages, as such, significant attention of marketers on rural areas can add great value to the people and economy by coordinating rural marketing initiatives that contribute to sustainable livelihood, through the efforts at the global, national, regional and local level. The researcher suggests that, products in consonance with the view of the rural customers, affordable pricing, word of the mouth publicity by opinion leaders, one or two level channels of intact distribution are most suitable to win the rural customer.



Molly Chaturvedi (2017) while reviewing the changing market landscape and environment in rural areas and the challenges of rural markets in India; highlighted the significant share of rural contribution in obtaining Life Insurance Corporation policies, signing up of Rediff mail, purchase of motorbikes, soft drinks, cigarettes, Fast Moving Consumer Goods and consumer durables. She observes conversion of the rural population into potential customers is a big deal in India at their low disposable incomes. The researcher highlighted that at a stage where urban markets are getting saturated, further tapping them with a high profit margin has become difficult, and hence, rural marketing occupies the latest mantra among the business people. In a similar vein, Deepak and Gaurav (2016) in their research, emphasized on the relevance of knowledge in rural consumer behavior, their needs, expectations and preferences is imperative to be successful in marketing. They told that rural markets are growing at an estimated 5 times to the urban markets in India. Not only seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, cattle feed, poultry feed and agricultural machinery; the rural consumers are now looking for modern goods like refrigerators, color TV sets, cosmetics, automobiles, mosquito repellent and tooth pastes etc., which is a big opportunity for businesses. Pradeep Kashyap (2017) provides a fine example of human development that the increased disposable incomes of people in Kota in Rajasthan State due to coaching centre hub activities for various engineering admission tests in India are in high demand and resultant of reduced people migration from Kota to other areas for a living. This researcher tells that understanding the opportunities and ground realities, the entire eco-system of the rural market, consumer behavior in small towns and villages will ultimately help in designing customized solutions around the rural customer views.

Priyanka Gite and Nidhi Taneja (2016) concludes that currently there is wide scope for rural marketing, although rural people have relatively low disposable income or consumption pattern compared to their urban counterparts, yet they wish to enjoy most of the urban products. In their opinion, increasing literacy, urban migration, developed media and communication networks, availability of credit and micro financing schemes, rising globalization, cheaper technology products (such as television, mobile, camera etc.), government sponsored employment generating schemes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, tax concessions and loan waivers etc., are some factors contributing to the rising aspirations and demands among rural buyers. Now, the rural population has become more informed and conscious about the quality, price and availability of the products. Viewing the dynamics of rural marketing in the fast emerging market economy of India, Ahmed and Kumar (2016) found that the approach in rural marketing should be seen as a function of rural development with its propellers and dynamics for agricultural modernization, non-agricultural development wealth, education, and above all, marketization of the rural economy. The researchers say that the corporate houses must venture into the vast rural hinterland and its huge population. They observed an increased use of mobiles, T Shirts, Jeans and sun-glasses, cosmetics, and even morning tea among rural youth. On the contrary, emphasizing challenges, Gosavi and Vishal (2016) felt that majority of rural entrepreneurs are facing problems due to non-availability of primary facilities like lack of education and social infrastructure, financial problems, insufficient technical and conceptual ability and low skill sets in rural people makes it difficult to stabilize industries in rural areas. Bilas Kale and Chobe (2016) stated that rural marketing is more challenging due to poor and inadequate infrastructure, storage facilities, communication deficiency, and small size of outlets etc. which in turn badly affect the distribution of products to rural consumers. Besides that, lower literacy rate, rural indebtedness, less participation of women in rural markets is also adversely affects in purchasing. Rural economy depends on monsoon and there are considerable income fluctuations which have deep impact on purchasing power of rural people. However, the researchers observed ever-increasing demand for white goods in rural areas. They say that there is shortage of drinking water but enough stock of Pepsi soft drink is available in tiny outlets. Dhoti-Kurta has been replaced by pants and shirts. Cosmetics are in great demand. Added to that, information and communication technology (ICT) is instrumental in disseminating the information about various products in remote rural areas. Gomathi and Kalaiselvi (2016) opined that rural markets typically signify complex logistical challenges and it is observed that promotional efforts creating more awareness on the products will go a long way in influencing rural consumer behavior positively.



Geetha, Mano Chithra and Malathi (2015) suggest that the marketer has to strengthen the distribution and pricing strategies. They observed that rural consumers are keen on branded goods nowadays as seen from the usage of products of Hindustan Liver, Coca-Cola, LG Electronics, Britannia, Colgate-Palmolive and the products of foreign invested telecom companies. Rural market accounts for half the total market for TV sets, fans, pressure cookers, bicycles, washing soap and tooth pastes where the flow of FMCG products in rural markets is growing much faster than its urban counterpart. Thus, in this context, the researchers suggested rural marketers to forge innovative marketing strategies to win the consumers. Priyanka Singh (2013) suggests that in rural marketing, the vast spectrum of approaches to be followed require special care and attention with respect to the product, its quality, packaging, brand, pricing, advertisement, personal selling and channels of distribution. The strategy of rural marketing has to be appropriate to appreciate fully the scattered character of rural markets, and the need for a different communication mix on account of the low literacy and environmental differences.

Pawan Kumar and Neha Dangi (2013) observed that low unit price of the product is more important than its economy to the rural buyer but at the same time the rural buyer tries to buy value for money not cheap products. The researchers identified less transportation, less media coverage, warehousing problems, low penetration rate, seasonal fluctuations in demand are challenges in rural marketing at a juncture where literacy, disposable income of the people and infrastructure is slowly growing in rural India.

Pallavi (2011) suggested '4As' marketing mix; containing elements of affordability, awareness, availability and acceptability in the place of traditional '4Ps' of marketing mix, in rural marketing. Mithileshwar Jha (1998) contests that it is misstating to say rural markets have not been exploited at all. Substantial penetration was already happened. Further he states that, with the changing economic conditions in the country, and with better purchasing power among the rural population, the newly emerging rural markets are bound to yield rich dividends. The researcher observed that since the markets are fully scattered, a better communication mix is to be kept in place. More so, he invited more of government's role in conducting rural market surveys, compilation of vital statistics and their publication for creating awareness on rural marketing.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

It is in view of the challenges and opportunities that are discussed and highlighted in the above mentioned research studies; the present study is undertaken aiming at examining the participant perceptions on rural marketing in *Ponduru Tahasil of Srikakulam District in Andhra Pradesh State* of India. Srikakulam District comes under the north coastal area of Andhra Pradesh State and is economically backward area. So, a study aiming at understanding perceived rural marketing in market participants of one of the 38 tahasils (a tahasil is a primary revenue administration unit in a district) of Srikakulam District may provide some valuable input information, which may serve as decision input to the stakeholders connected with rural marketing. Therefore, with this in view the study is undertaken.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Based on the review of available literature and research on rural marketing, the below presented objectives are framed for the present study:

1. To understand the participant-respondents' profile and to examine the participants perceptions on rural marketing in the study setting area.
2. To analyze the perceptions of the survey respondents to arrive at conclusions on various pertinent aspects of rural marketing that are considered in the present study.
3. To provide suggestions for the advancement of rural marketing in the study setting area.



METHODOLOGY

The researchers have adopted quantitative method of analyzing the data by utilizing survey method for primary data collection. Based on the literature review and gap analysis, a questionnaire containing 10 aspects of rural marketing was prepared and it was judge rated. The questionnaire contains two parts, the first part contains items to tap respondents’ socio-demographic profile and the second part of the questionnaire contains 10 items to tap data on perceived rural marketing in the study setting. By following snowball convenient sampling technique, the researchers have administered the questionnaire on 100 respondents who are participants of the rural marketing and collected the primary data. All the respondents are participants of rural marketing in the study setting. Percentage analysis was done and results are tabulated. To enrich the study secondary data was utilized.

Study Setting and Sample

Ponduru is one of the 38 tahsils in Srikakulam Didtrict of Andhra Pradesh State. It has 37 villages under its revenue administrative purview with a population of 91,624 as per Aadhar Identity estimates. Ponduru is famous for its handspun / handloom made fine cotton khadi (Patnulu) fabrics. People from nearby villages visit Ponduru market for purchasing various products. Although Ponduru is a small town having Tahsildar Office, Tahasil Development Office, Police Station, State Bank and Union Bank branches, small touring theatre, groundnut oil-mills and rice mills; still it exhibits the flavor of rural ecology and environment in all aspects. Hence, the researchers have chosen this Tahasil for the present study. Ponduru has 36,432 skilled workers, 4,648 cultivators depending on agriculture and 12,522 agricultural labour. Currently, 50 houses are doing cotton spinning works for their livelihood and 40 houses are having handlooms for producing khadi fabrics and sarees.

The researchers conducted field survey and administered the questionnaire on 100 respondents belonging to 5 villages i.e., Kintali, Gorinta, Raapaaka, Pillalavalasa and Lolugu because of the proximity of these villages to Ponduru market. The sample respondents were chosen after confirmation that they have participation and knowledge in rural marketing.

Table 1 Participants’ background and association with rural marketing

| Sl. No. | CATEGORY | Sample | Percentage | |
|---------|--|-------------------------|------------|-----|
| 1 | Respondents’ Rural-Urban Background | Kintali (Village) | 22 | 22% |
| | | Gorinta (Village) | 18 | 18% |
| | | Rapaka (Village) | 23 | 23% |
| | | Pillalavalasa (Village) | 19 | 19% |
| | | Lolugu (Village) | 12 | 12% |
| | | Ponduru (Town) | 6 | 6% |
| 2 | Participant Association with Rural Marketing | Customer | 72 | 72% |
| | | Retail Business | 18 | 18% |
| | | Wholesale | 7 | 7% |



| | | | | |
|--|--|------------|---|----|
| | | Business | | |
| | | Big Mart | 2 | 2% |
| | | Dealership | 1 | 1% |

The survey participants, as shown in Table 1, are connected with rural marketing either as customers, running retail business shops, wholesale business, big mart, or running dealership business. While 72% of the respondents are customers of rural market, 18% of them are running retail business, 7% of the respondents are running wholesale business, 2% of them are proprietors of big marts and the remaining 1% of the respondents are in dealership business.

Demographic Features of the Respondents

The respondents’ age is considered on the premise that it may be linked to the maturity and understanding levels of the participants. As shown in the below presented Table 2, 65% of the respondents are in the age bracket of 31-40 years, 13% of the sample respondents are in 41-50 and above age group and 22% of them are youth in the age group of 21- 30 years.

Table 2 Demographic Features of the Respondents

| Sl. No. | CATEGORY | | Sample | % |
|---------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|-----|
| 1 | Age | 21- 30 Yrs. | 22 | 22% |
| | | 31- 40 Yrs. | 65 | 65% |
| | | 41- 50+ Yrs. | 13 | 13% |
| 2 | Gender | Male | 68 | 68% |
| | | Female | 32 | 32% |
| 3 | Marital Status | Married | 85 | 85% |
| | | Unmarried | 15 | 15% |
| 4 | Family Size | 2-3 Members | 15 | 15% |
| | | 4 Members | 58 | 58% |
| | | 5 Members | 15 | 15% |
| | | 6 or More members | 12 | 12% |
| 5 | Level of Education | Primary | 59 | 59% |
| | | Secondary or Intermediate | 25 | 25% |
| | | Graduation | 12 | 12% |
| | | Post Graduation and Other Degrees | 4 | 4% |
| 6 | Religion | Hindu | 60 | 60% |
| | | Muslim | 15 | 15% |
| | | Christianity | 20 | 20% |
| | | Others | 5 | 5% |



| | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------------|----|-----|
| 7 | Social Category | OC | 48 | 48% |
| | | BC | 22 | 22% |
| | | SC | 18 | 18% |
| | | ST | 12 | 12% |
| 8 | Employment | Self | 65 | 65% |
| | | Private | 28 | 28% |
| | | Government | 7 | 7% |
| 9 | Agricultural Background | Farming | 68 | 68% |
| | | Non-Farming | 32 | 32% |

Majority of the study respondents (68%) are male and 32% of them are female. Similarly, majority of the respondents (85%) are married and 15% are unmarried. Since family size is associated with consumption, it is considered for the present study. 58% of the respondents are from a family having 4 members, 15% of the respondents are having 5 members, equally 15% of the respondents are having 2 to 3 members in their family and 12% of them have 6 or more members in their family. Level of education ordinarily influences thinking and consumer behavior, in this regard 59% of the study participants have completed primary education, 25% of them have completed secondary or intermediate education, 12% of the study respondents are graduates and only 4% of them did post graduation and other programs. Religion has its relevance in molding the personality, ethical and moral approach towards life, character, behavior, conduct and habits of people. From religion perspective, 60% Of the respondents are Hindus, 15% are Muslims, 20% are Christians and the remaining are from other religions. Again, on the premise that social category, employment, farming or non-farming background may influence the consumer behavior and level of participation in rural marketing, these factors are also considered in the study. In the study participants, 48% are belong to Open Category communities, 22% are from Backward Classes, 18% of them belong to Scheduled Castes and 12% of them belong to Scheduled Tribes. While 65% of the respondents are self-employed in agriculture and allied avocations, 28% are doing private jobs and 7% of them are in government jobs. Moreover 68% of the respondents are from farming families and the remaining 32% have no lands and they are from non-farming families. Thus, viewing from the above information, the sample satisfies the parameters of rural background of the study participants fully.

RESPONDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS ON RURAL MARKETING

The perceptual data presented in Table 3 reveals that majority of the rural marketing is revolving around consumer non-durables as it is evidenced by the responses of substantial number (96%) of respondents telling that in majority of the occasions they involve in selling-buying of consumer non-durables.

Table 3 Perceptions on Rural Marketing

| Sl. No | Description of the Item | | Responses | % |
|--------|---|--------------------------|-----------|-----|
| 1 | Mostly purchased /sold goods in rural marketing | Consumer non-durables | 96 | 96% |
| | | Consumer durables | 4 | 4% |
| 2 | Factor influencing product purchasing decision | Utility and satisfaction | 56 | 56% |
| | | Price | 38 | 38% |
| | | Pride in owning | 6 | 6% |



| | | | | |
|----|---|---|----|-----|
| 3 | Strategy influencing purchasing behaviour in rural marketing | Product quality | 52 | 52% |
| | | Price | 32 | 32% |
| | | Brand | 10 | 10% |
| | | Promotional efforts | 6 | 6 |
| 4 | Media prominently helping in dissemination of marketing information on new products | Conventional mass media (T.V, Radio, Press) | 35 | 35% |
| | | Non-conventional mass media (Folk Media, Mandi, Hast) | 28 | 28% |
| | | Personalized mass media (Neighbors, relatives) | 37 | 37% |
| 5 | The immediate issue that is to be solved in rural marketing | Overcoming from playing fraud on customers | 42 | 42% |
| | | Fair prices | 21 | 21% |
| | | Rural Development Concern | 22 | 22% |
| | | Environment Protection | 15 | 15% |
| 6 | The difficult part to manage in rural marketing | Demand oscillations with seasons | 11 | 11% |
| | | Low household consumption | 7 | 7% |
| | | Price sensitivity | 28 | 28% |
| | | Usage of limited product range. | 54 | 54% |
| 7 | Season showing impact on purchasing behaviour in rural areas | Summer | 24 | 24% |
| | | Rainy | 68 | 68% |
| | | Winter | 8 | 8% |
| 8 | Utility of digital technology interventions in rural marketing | Useful | 31 | 31% |
| | | Not felt | 69 | 69% |
| 9 | Major cause of failure in rural marketing | Failed to adapt innovative methods | 59 | 59% |
| | | Less exchange of market information | 3 | 3% |
| | | Logistics and rural infrastructure | 31 | 31% |
| | | Too much monopolistic | 7 | 7% |
| 10 | The most influential part of marketing mix in rural marketing | Affordability | 52 | 52% |
| | | Accessibility | 17 | 17% |
| | | Availability | 22 | 22% |
| | | Advertizing | 9 | 9% |

With regard to the purchasing decisions of the rural customer, majority of the respondents (56%) expressed that utility and satisfaction received by product occupied the premium portion of purchasing decision, while 38% of the respondents told that price of the product remain important. Majority (52%) of the respondents expressed that product quality, followed by price of the product (32%) are predominant strategies influential in rural marketing. It is noteworthy that product brand was not received greater attention in consumer cognition while purchasing products. The respondents told that conventional mass media (TV, radio and press) is providing them much of the information on markets to rural population. But predominantly, information dissemination is happening from



neighbors, friends and relatives. Majority (42%) of the respondents expressed that rural marketing should make itself raise above from playing fraud on rural customers and 22% of them expressed that there should be concern for rural development in the entrepreneurs operating their business in rural environment.

54% of the study respondents expressed that the most difficult part in managing rural marketing is that traditionally rural consumers confine to use limited range of products and they don't change their preferences easily so that selling new products is a difficult job in rural markets and 68% of the respondents expressed that rainy season shows adverse impacts on buying-selling activities. Even in spite of the fact that digital aids add advantage in providing marketing information, only 31% of the study respondents have expressed the utility of digital aids in terms of providing market information and majority (69%) of them felt no significant use with the digital aids in real-time. While 59% of the respondents expressed that lack of knowledge and failure to adapt innovative trends is an important factor in the failure of rural marketing, 31% of the respondents pointed out that logistics and lack of rural infrastructure is a discouraging factor. Coming to the "4As" marketing mix, 52% of the respondents told that affordability occupies prominent place in purchasing decisions and the resultant customer relations.

FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

The study results reveal that major proportion of the rural marketing is revolving around consumer non-durable products, along with demand for agricultural implements, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides etc. In purchasing decisions, it indicates from the data that utility and satisfaction expected from the product and product price plays prominent role. More and above the role of conventional mass media, personal relations are playing key role in transmission of market based information in rural environment. It can be gathered from the respondents' opinion that the business people should make it as a commitment not to play fraud with their customers and they must have concern for rural development and social advancement. Further, it is identified that rural customers confine to usage of a limited range of products and changing their attitude is difficult. It is also found that in rural settings, rainy season shows adverse impact on buying-selling activities. Also it can be gathered from the data analysis that failure to adapt innovative trends and practices and lack of innovation is an important issue in failure of rural businesses, in addition to the logistics and infrastructure issues. It is also found that affordable pricing is an important factor in influencing the purchasing decisions among rural buyers.

LIMITATION

Like any cross sectional research study, the present study is also subject to limitations. Firstly, the study is confined to the analysis of the perceptions of only 100 respondents from 5 villages in one tahsil of Srikakulam District in A.P. State. So, the scope of the study is limited to a particular geographical area. In addition to that, the results are reflective of the perceptions of limited number of respondents and there may be a chance of subjective bias crept into their responses. Therefore the results cannot be generalized.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the study findings, the researchers attempt to present few cogent suggestions for the improvement of rural marketing in the study setting area. They are:

1. Rural customers are sensitive towards utility and satisfaction provided by the product they are going to purchase or purchased. Even beyond the brand image of the product, the rural customer is price sensitive in purchasing decisions. They purchase products relatively lower in price when the need fulfilment is same or similar on par with branded items. Hence, business houses need to look after the affordability aspect while pricing their products. Product quality was also received primary attention in the study. Thus, assurance of product quality is as much important as price in rural marketing. So, quality in products is to be prioritized by the rural marketers.
2. Electronic platforms are useful in providing market information or government initiatives for rural advancement. But still, rural people or not able to get adequate information on markets and products due to



illiteracy. In this context, awareness generation initiatives through periodic audio-visual programmes by Gram Panchayats (Village Secretariat) will be much helpful.

3. Business houses must make a commitment not to play fraud on the customers, by avoiding practices like false advertising, fake free extras, deceptive pricing, mislabelling, exaggerations of product performance, hidden costs etc. Customer trust in seller creates loyalty or else the sale and purchase transaction ends in a onetime visit to the seller.
4. Undoubtedly, in this information age, technology is a big value addition in business. Hence, workshops to create cyber literacy among the participants of rural marketing will provide an edge in getting, transmitting and utilizing latest information on rural products, their prices, places of product availability, and market information at a practical level. Besides creating digital interface platforms by the government or private business houses for providing market information, practical training as to how to utilize the system by rural people is an important parameter to be implemented at every Gram Panchayat level.
5. Innovation is the heart of business. The rural marketer must innovate and follow the latest marketing trends in doing business. Integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in business to get the latest information and apt utilisation of it for business is going to be a value addition.
6. Due to low levels of literacy, lower income and conventional thinking, rural people are rigid and confine to usage of limited range of products. However, attitudinal changing by promotional activities and awareness generation will be of help in improving rural marketing.
7. Rural entrepreneurs must extend their helping hand to improve rural life through social responsibility by sponsoring activities aiming at income generation in rural people, women empowerment, education, health and hygiene, environmental and socio-cultural advancement in the places of business. These developmental activities will get reciprocated through enduring customer relations in the long run.

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