

Role of Marketing Communication in Enhancement of Quality of Life in Rural India

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Abstract

Increased globalization has led to drastic growth in consumerism worldwide. India is no exception. Almost all global brands are present practically all over the country. The recent phenomenon that has caught the attention of advertisers and marketers is the spurt in consumerism in the economically weaker areas. Several studies have shown that these markets are raring to go (*Business World, 2004*). The quality of life indicators suggest that there is adequate scope for socio economic improvement, too. This paper attempts to assess the role of global and national advertisers in local development by analyzing brand communication and the impact of penetration of mobility products (two wheelers and cell phone service providers) and one personal care product (toothpaste). The effect of brand communication has been inferred by comparing survey findings with secondary data like Development Reports and Market Planners Guides. The role of mass as well as local media and the potential of the emerging market have also been examined.

India is experiencing a cultural transformation at the grassroots level. This has triggered a consumer boom in regions that had low economic activity until recently. Income earning capacity has increased and interest in enhancing personal quality of living is greater than ever before. This opportunity can be referred to as the 'emerging market'. It is a segment that is rife with social problems that impede development. If industries can provide solutions to some of the socio-economic problems while promoting their brands, development would be accelerated. There is vast opportunity in education, finance, energy, personal convenience and primary health, in developing markets.

Communication that supports the new thrust on development oriented marketing in economically weaker areas, emphasizes mutual growth. This paper introduces the concept of 'symbiotic marketing communication'. On the one hand, it supports marketing by reaching out to rural consumers, and on the other, it identifies the product with social issues and offers solutions. In other words, it creates a synergy between marketing and development. Recent examples in India are the Lifebuoy rural campaign of Hindustan Levers which focuses on prevention of diarrhea, and ICICI's rural banking and micro credit initiatives.

The primary objective of this research paper is to evaluate the role of global advertisers in local development by studying the effect of marketing communication on enhancement of quality of living in a selected district in West Bengal, India.

Conceptual Analysis and Literature Review

Indian market is broadly divided into rural and urban. The "middle class" which has had the highest aspirations and growing disposable income so far, has been the target of

marketers and advertisers. The emerging market consists of the population strata which was erstwhile poor, but is now steadily making rapid economic progress.

Over 70 per cent, (roughly 670 million) of India's teeming masses live in rural areas. Of these, more than two million live in almost complete media darkness, without access to TV, radio, and beyond the reach of newspapers and magazines. Widespread illiteracy allied with the multitude of languages and dialects puts most of these people beyond the reach of conventional media planning. Yet, the villagers are increasingly gaining importance as consumers. A survey by India's National Centre for Applied Economics and Research revealed double-digit rural growth rates in a cross section of products ranging from scooters to confectionery between 1995 and 1999 (*Sravantu, 2004*).

The main challenge in the emerging market is the basic understanding of the rural consumer who is very different from the urban counterpart. Compared to the Indian urban society, which is turning into a consumerism society, the rural consumer will always remain driven by needs first and will therefore be cost conscious and thrifty in spending habits.

The rural consumer buys small packs, as they are perceived as value for money. Often this is due to the small amount of savings at a given time. However, disposable income is not low. Per capita annual income in rural areas is Rs. 9,481 (*Human Development Report, 2004-2005*). Buying is a collective decision and the influencer, decision-maker, buyer are often different. So campaigns will have to appeal at different levels. Those which build loans and buying schemes into the promotion have been found to be successful.

The Quality of Life Indicators are a set of development factors that go beyond traditional macroeconomic indicators to illustrate the dynamic state of our social, economic and environmental quality of life. The dimensions of life examined include: education, employment, energy, environment, health, human rights, income, infrastructure, national security, public safety, recreation and shelter (*Calvert-Henderson, 2000*).

Basic information on the conditions of rural habitats of Indian States is largely lacking. However, some indicators suggest that the condition of the human settlement in rural life has improved during the last five decades. More perceptible changes are noted over the last decade, apparently due to reforms, privatization and employment opportunity (*Human Development Report, 2004*).

In West Bengal, 77.9 per cent of rural area is electrified. However, West Bengal ranks only 11th among 14 major states of India on progress made in rural electrification (*Rajvanshi, 2006*). Rural telephony has grown by 30 percent in the last five years. Rural literacy is at 50.5 percent. Life expectancy at birth increased by 16 per cent between 1991 and 2001, but has remained more or less the same in the last five years. Number of hospitals, dispensaries, available doctors, paramedics, primary health centers, patients treated and immunizations have grown by 36 per cent in the last two decades. But the ratio of the population to the available medical facilities is still very large. Rural employment (without migration) is 36.61 per cent in West Bengal according to the 1991 Census. These figures have grown by about 17 per cent between 1991 and 2004.

Method

A survey of product users and non-users in a selected district of West Bengal was conducted as an area study to assess impact of branded products (Two Wheelers, Cell Phone Services and Toothpaste users) and brand communication on quality of life. Individuals with regular income were interviewed. The sample size was 100 each in 2 mobility product/service and toothpaste categories spread across different small towns/villages in one district of West Bengal: South 24 Parganas. All the product categories under study were available in the district, which has a population with both an agricultural and industrial base.

Research Design

From 30 Development Blocks of South 24 Parganas, 5 Blocks were selected through random sampling method. Samples were drawn from those using products from 2000 to 2005.

	User	Nonuser	Total
Two wheelers	60	40	100
Cell Phones	60	40	100
Toothpaste	60	40	100
Total	180	120	300

Questionnaires, suitably designed to incorporate all variables studied were administered to the three categories of respondents: users of two wheelers, cell phones and toothpaste. Cross tabulation and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. The processed data was tabulated and represented as graphs and charts that describe the findings. Statistical tests were conducted for significance and validity using SPSS. Cornbach's coefficient with raw and standardized variables, deleted variables and Pearson's Coefficient of Correlation were computed applying the CORR procedure. The key objectives were to determine effect of brand communication and penetration, to evaluate effect of product usage on quality of life, to assess the role of marketing communication and media, and to study the scope of the selected markets.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Demographic Profile

The product usage is mainly among the males (98%) in the age group of 18 years to 45 years. Users' average age is 30 years. The users are mainly literate (72% below graduate). Education varies from secondary school to college drop outs and graduates. Vocational education and training centres like polytechnic institutes are extensions of high school education. Trade or business is the main occupation of the users (58%). The office goers (clerks, representatives, officers/executives) and professionals together constitute around 13% user-ship. Student user-ship is at 12%, followed by skilled labour at 8%. Average family income is Rs. 4600 and average family size of the user is 4.8.

Factors Influencing Decision

Referrals play an important role as decision making influences (around 53%) apart from mass media advertisement. Average number of sources for decision making in selection

of a brand is 2.7. Purchase of a high value item like two-wheeler depends a lot on endorsement from existing users. The awareness generated from mass media communication is not strong enough to induce purchase. It has to be supported by recommendation of friends/relatives or even dealers.

Factors Influencing Selection of Brand

The respondents were asked to rate different factors considered for selection of a brand on a scale of 1 to 10. In order of mention, price, goodwill followed by quality, after sales service and availability in local market emerged to be the main factors. (See Tables 1, 2 & 3). It is interesting to note that advertising was ranked the lowest when, as “source of awareness” and “decision making factor” it had the highest mention. This indicates that even though advertising/marketing communication is the major source of awareness, it actually plays only a support role in selection.

Brand Recall & Source of Awareness

The average number of brands recalled by an individual is 2.23 in case of users and 1.8 in case of non users. Mass media plays a major role in generating awareness. Localized media is comparatively low. The ratio between mass media & localized media is 70: 30. (See Table 4).

Benefit Perception

Table 1: Two wheelers

Benefits <i>Note: multiple responses</i>	User	Nonuser	User	Nonuser
	No.	No.	%	%
Convenience of commuting	60	17	100.0	42.5
Time saver	57	17	95.0	42.5
Upliftment of status	20	4	33.3	10.0
Speedy delivery of supply	35	4	58.3	10.0
Convenient for emergency service	41	9	68.3	22.5
Able to avail better education facility	19	3	31.7	7.5
Economical	18	3	30.0	7.5
Total	60	40	100.0	100.0

Table 2: Cell Phone Services

Benefits <i>Note: Multiple responses</i>	User	Nonuser	User	Nonuser
	No.	No.	%	%
Convenience of communicating	60	21	100.0	52.5
Time saver	52	22	86.7	55.0
Upliftment of status	24	7	40.0	17.5
Convenient for emergency	43	17	71.7	42.5
Easy accessibility	25	5	41.7	12.5
Economical	16	7	26.7	17.5
Total	60	40	100.0	100.0

Table 3: Toothpaste

Benefits <i>Note: Multiple responses</i>	User	Nonuser	User	Nonuser
	No.	No.	%	%
Decreased tooth cavity	58	20	96.7	50.0
Better oral hygiene	57	18	95.0	45.0
Lower medical expenses	19	4	31.7	10.0
Good health improves working capacity	22	6	36.7	15.0
Easy to use	17	2	28.3	5.0
Upliftment of status	20	8	33.3	20.0
Economical	8	0	13.3	0.0
Total	60	40	100.0	100.0

Interest in Brand Message and Reliability to Advertisements

The respondents showed interest as high as 70% in product message delivered through different ads. Just 7% from the user group and 2.5% from the non user group found the advertisements very friendly. (See Figures 1 & 2). There is significant contradiction in the responses of the respondents. They prefer mass media to personalized communication. This could be due to inadequate personalized communication or may be due to the fact that television is a more attractive medium. Again, they had expressed high interest in the message delivered through the ads. But they feel distant or alienated from the ads. It is clearly evident that though mass media is popular, the advertising message is not the primary influence on the non-urban audience.

Table 4: Role of Media

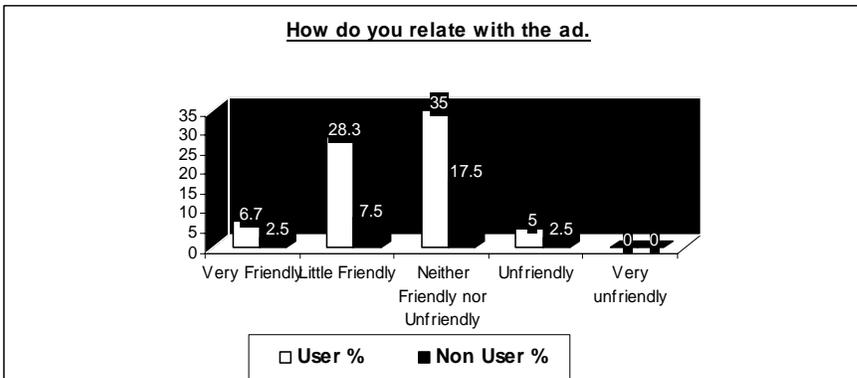
Source of Awareness <i>Note: Multiple responses</i>	User	Nonuser	User	Nonuser
	No.	No.	%	%
Relatives/Neighbors	30	11	50.0	27.5
Dealer Recommendation	11	3	18.3	7.5
Hoarding	22	10	36.7	25.0
Wall Painting	7	4	11.7	10.0
Local Cable	4	0	6.7	0.0
Mobile Van	0	1	0.0	2.5
Kiosk	0	0	0.0	0.0
Banner	0	0	0.0	0.0
Shop Signage	0	0	0.0	0.0
Merchandising Activities	1	0	1.7	0.0
T.V Ad	58	26	96.7	65.0
Newspaper Ad	45	20	75.0	50.0
Magazine Ad	2	0	3.3	0.0
Radio	0	0	0.0	0.0
Total	60	40	100.0	100.0
Average no. of Sources	3.0	1.9	3.0	1.9

Figure 1: Message Likeability and Decode



Scale: Very Much-4 Somewhat3, Notmuch-2, Not at all-1

Figure 2: Message Decode



Scale: Very Friendly-+2, Friendly-+1, Neither Friendly nor Unfriendly-0, Unfriendly -1, Very Unfriendly -2. Respondents feel alienated from the ads and find it difficult to identify with them.

Benefit Perception & Rating of Factors which Improve Quality of Life

Two wheelers and cell phones are strongly perceived both by user and non user groups as a tool which gives convenience, saves time, and is useful in emergency service. (See Figures 3 & 4). Since, in the user segment, traders and businessmen hold the majority, income enhancement ranks highest. Toothpaste users relate oral hygiene better general health, lower medical expenses and improved capacity to work. (See Figure 5).

All the products are seen as functional. This indicates that the role of these products in enhancing quality of life is important, although it has not been communicated. Among the unwilling non users, there exists a gap in the benefit perception. There is a definite scope for generating awareness among this group.

Market Potential

There is sufficient willingness and numbers in the non-urban emerging market to support further penetration of the product. (See Table 5). This would mean that more people can experience better quality of living. Awareness of product, brands and benefits is already there. Marketing efforts that link the three through symbiotic communication can hasten the process of development oriented market expansion. *Note: The findings suggest a good opportunity for advertisers and marketers.*

Figure 3: Two Wheelers

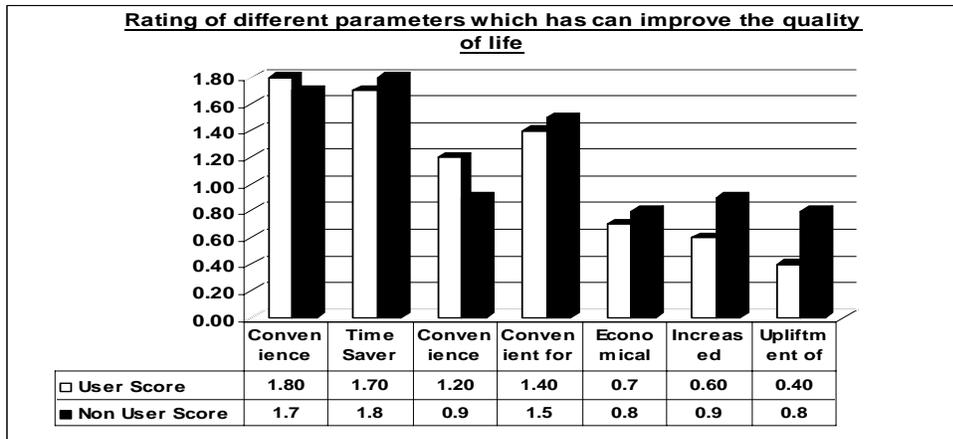


Figure 4: Cell Phones Services

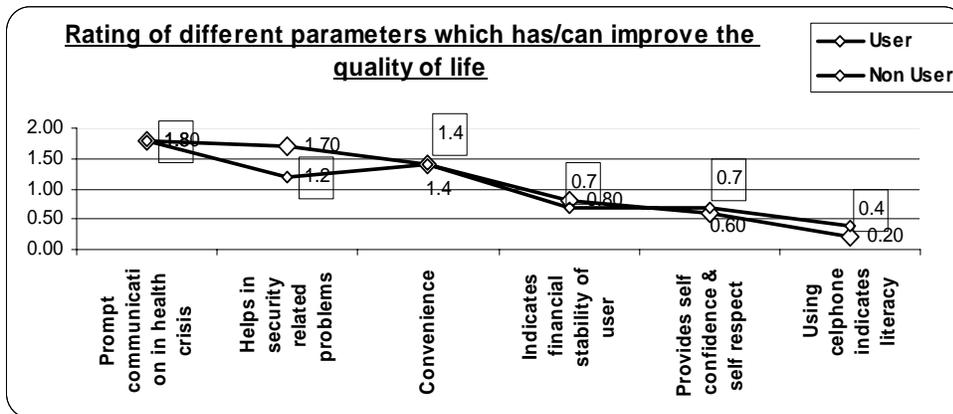
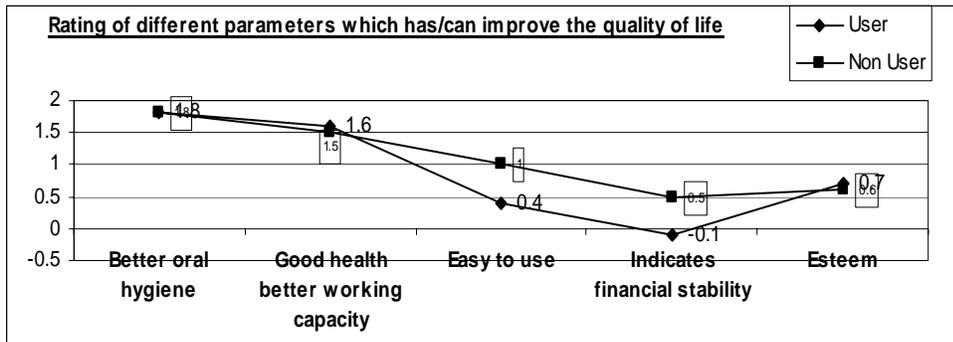


Figure 5: Toothpaste



Scale: Strongly Agree+2, Agree+1 Neither Agree nor Disagree-0, Disagree-1, Strongly disagree--2

Table 5: Buying Interest

Non Users

Buying Interest	Two-wheeler		Potential
	Nonuser	Non user	
	No.	%	
Will Definitely buy	6	15.0	
May think over it	14	35.0	
Will not buy	10	25.0	
Not yet decided	10	25.0	
Total	40	100.0	

Impact on Quality of Life: Symbiosis

India Development Reports and State Human Development Reports (2001-2004) provide state-wise, district-wise data that indicate demographic status. Details like number of members in a family, fuel consumption, electricity consumption, two wheeler possession, telephone subscriptions, education, employment and income are reflective of quality of life and infrastructural developments.

The RKS Market Planners Guide (2004) gives additional facts about white goods possession. It is evident that geographical areas of high development and growth rates correspond to penetration of two wheelers and cell phone services. Likewise, oral health improvement has been linked to toothpaste usage and brushing habits (Colgate Village Program, 2003). Rural Dental Health Improvement Programs consists of free dental camps, school check-ups, oral hygiene demonstrations, talk shows for awareness and scholarships to encourage the “healthy children who perform better”.

The findings of the survey suggest that the improvement in socio economic indicators (education and income) corresponding to two mobility product marketing communication and penetration have been higher than through other State development programs like IRDP(Indian Rural Development Program).

The Communication Challenge

Tapping the emerging market calls for new insights into what helps consumers remember and understand brand messages. Research carried out by Ogilvy Outreach discovered that the rural audience identifies more with colors, numbers, and visuals of animals, all woven together in loud colorful messages. These findings appear supported by the high recall levels enjoyed by brands like Lifebuoy (popularly known as the Lal Sabun or Red Soap, 555, and Monkey brand tooth powder (*David, 2000*).

Communication initiatives in the Emerging Market are built on two key planks. Consumer insight which helps understand rural consumers from their own perspective and experiential marketing, which promises to be the most relevant, emotive and impacting tool, given the language and cultural diversity of each region.. The traditional means of taking the urban brand and its appeal into the rural heartland clearly have not worked(*Indian Journal of Marketing, 2002*). New insights into buying behavior, media habits, decision making processes, influencing agents, changing cultural dimensions, attitudes and needs are all cornerstones of communication in emerging markets.

Conclusion

The role of marketing communication in development has been assessed as a two-step process: the impact of marketing communication on product penetration and the impact of product usage on quality of living. The findings will have to be viewed in the light of the literature review. It is evident that product penetration resulting from marketing communication affects quality of living at the grassroots level. Whether the consumers are aware of this or not, and whether they are able to associate brands with specific quality of life indices has not been established conclusively. There have been more than a few instances of radical change in the quality of life indicators like health, education, convenience, security and income growth, which have been direct benefits of marketing and communication strategies.

In spite of brand penetration, the brand message has not effectively percolated to yield the desired impact. Quality of life has not been the focus of most brands. Some brands have portrayed the general benefit of “better life”. In each category, at least one brand has attempted to create a synergy between marketing efforts and development. These brands have made successful inroads in the emerging market.

The findings reveal a huge, unexplored emerging market with rural consumers who have the inclination to buy products that enhance their standards of living. The affordability of products like two wheelers and cell phones (not to mention toothpaste) through dealer schemes and loans, comprehension of benefits, willingness to consider purchase and need to address socio economic problems, suggest that there is ample opportunity for symbiotic marketing and communication. It suggests the need for a new model for brand communication focusing on mutually beneficial strategies.

There are, today, hosts of multinationals knocking on the doors of rural consumers. The possibilities are innumerable. Each holds the promise of enhancing quality of living at the grassroots level. The measure of success of advertisers can no longer be limited to market figures and cash registers. The emotional equity of a small trader in a remote village might make or break a brand, and the power of numbers lies in the hands of millions like him who are rising from poverty to prosperity.

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