

Is rural marketing helping or hurting rural India?

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The answer is both. The real question is how to maximise the help and minimise the hurt.

For me and for this article Rural India is as described by Harsh Mandar "While India is proud of its scientific inventions, rural communities are silently inventing ways to survive. They have identified local wild shrubs, weeds and tubers growing in forests and wastelands, with no nutritional content, but with which they can fill their stomachs to combat the insistent pangs of hunger. These pseudo-foods include waste like mango kernel. Some tubers are poisonous, but they are boiled over and over again to enable human consumption.

The food, that they gather, at times just a handful, is boiled in a large pot of water, sometimes with chilly powder and salt, to create the illusion of plenty and this is shared in the household. This is rural India. And because of existence of these kinds of Rural India all the revenue projections based on the rural population has gone hay-wax.

This happens because "Rural marketing is trapped in a sales mindset". The marketer looks at rural India only as consumers. Analysis of rural area for a multiplicity of complex processes- economic growth, the lack of it, prosperity, poverty, practically anything focus on the individual as consumer. The tunnel vision that sees people as consumers loses sight of the fact that they are human beings first. In this process "Indian farmer is the latest life form to become a myth".

Around 65% of Indian population lives of agriculture - 650 million people. Care to know the size of the agrarian population in developed countries? Two percent.

In simple terms, a farmer produces food only for self-consumption. Such farmers have no motivation or are simply unable to produce more than their own requirements and is a part of the market economy. It is therefore futile to even contemplate the possibility of increasing their income and living standards.

Farming is not a profitable activity in the entire area and it is going to be even less profitable over time.

What in fact is required is that rural area should attract both financial and human capital. Rural marketing is about a consumer who will not necessarily enjoy it

when you talk to him in his own dialect but a consumer who will say "you speak my way and let us talk. It is a more confident with him. Success of mobile phones and failure of B&W TV has proved this. While the mobile phone was designed for common man who wants to communicate, B&W TV was designed for some one who does not have aesthetic sense. In case of B&W TV, consumer was treated as a moron rather than a consumer with a limited spending capacity.

For this to happen rural marketing should also mean marketing of rural products in urban area. But things are different, rural product is in retreat everywhere. Rural artisan's skills are being killed.

There are some exceptions and hugely successful ones, like much talked about ITC's "e-choupal" and not so talked about but equally successful "Kissan Centres" by Tata Chemicals.

Let us take some examples of rural brands:

- Kolhapuri Chappal
- Chicken Works of Lucknow

No marketing guru or corporate have tried to build this brands, these are the brands created by common man. Their brand values, if such an exercise were carried out would exceed the values of brand India.

The handicraft products are a signal to India that lots of value resides in rural India, in the unique skills of its craftsman.

These handicrafts appeal lies in the modern India's nostalgic quest for its rural roots. The brand though still small represents the confluence of Bharat mata and modern India. As value maximising strategy it has many parallels.

All these homespun industries create content using creativity skill and intellectual property to produce goods and services with social and cultural meaning and with huge, booming market potential across the globe. They empower each other and ex-

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plain India to Indians and to the rest of the world in a way no one else can.

The world market for handicrafts is estimated at around \$235 bn and is said to be growing at 5% per annum. At present India's share in the world market is less than 2%, but its exports have been consistently growing by more than 10% annually over the last decade. The industry provides more than

50000 jobs to rural artisans and craftsmen and its annual production is estimated at around rs.50,000 crore. Out of this, nearly 31% is exported every year. The transformation of marketing of rural India will need the transformation of 60000 villages spread over different parts of the country - with physical connectivity, electronic connectivity, knowledge connectivity leading to economic connectivity.

One of the easiest things to do is to make wearing khadi products compulsory any single day of the week say Friday.

Or, every corporate should consume the same amount of products as it sales in the rural area.

Government and Private sector should take the

initiative to create Rural Economic Zone rather than or along with Special Economic Zone. In Rural Economic Zone they should be talking about developing the rural India as it is, without disturbing the landscape.

The country has not seen or heard any big idea after "Golden Quadrangle Highway Projects". With few small initiatives of individuals, Institutions, Corporate and Government Rural Marketing will start helping rural India rather than hurting it.

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