

Role of Public Relations in Rural Marketing with Special Reference to Bihar

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ABSTRACT

Public relations develop confidence among the public and they prefer to use its services continuously. It ensures the development of a strong engagement by rural buyers. Rural people always believe on the facts provided by the retailers. If retailers are getting good commission on particular product then they use their relationship and make the consumers ready to buy particular product but if retailers are giving negative reviews then people will not like to buy that product. The study uses the questionnaire method to gather data, and graphical analysis method is used to evaluate the data. 50 retailers are being involved and necessary questions related to public relationship are being asked. The data is being structured and through graphs it is being interpreted. The findings indicate that public relations play a significant role in rural marketing. It helps in gaining the trust and loyalty of people, and also supports in increasing the revenues of the companies in the rural areas.

Keywords: Public Relations, Rural Marketing, Customer Relationship, FMCG Companies

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In the last few years, development has changed the rural markets in India. Rural marketing has set new trends in rural areas. Rural areas have proper connectivity of roads and communication as well. Rural marketing is a tool that ensures that a large number of rural consumers are attracted towards the products and services of the companies. The people who live in rural areas generally believe in a public relationship. They always buy goods and services from the place they trust (Information about Bihar: Agriculture, Industries, Economy Growth, Geography, 2021). Public relations develop a healthy bond between the public and the organisation. Public relations always play a significant role in the business, as it supports maintaining the image of the business unit in the market and conveys the message to the public in the right manner.

In rural areas of India, most people are illiterate. They do not believe in the products until someone close to them provides clear information about that product. Many FMCG companies are using public relations marketing

strategies in rural areas to attract the rural population. The employees of the company work as public relations executives who present the image of the firm in front of people and convert the prospective consumers into actual buyers. Public relations always help the business unit in developing a better understanding among the public and make them aware of how the actual firm works (Fast Moving Consumer Goods Market in Rurban Bihar (A Fast-Changing Landscape), 2020).

Bihar is a state in India where more than 60% of the people are living in rural areas. The educational system is not developed and people prefer to buy goods and services from trusted retailers. FMCG companies have adopted this marketing tool to promote their products in the rural areas so that they can reach the large population of Bihar, and can increase the selling of goods and services as well (Indian Rural Market, 2019).

Aim and Objectives

Aim

To identify the role of public relations in rural marketing with special reference to Bihar.

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Objectives

- To understand the conceptual framework of rural marketing.
- To analyse the significance of public relations in rural marketing in Bihar.
- To identify the impact of public relations in rural marketing on the growth of business.

Research Questions

- What is the meaning of rural marketing?
- What is the extent to which public relationship in rural marketing in Bihar is significant?
- What is the impact of public relations in rural marketing on the growth of the business?

Rationale

The main reason for carrying out this investigation is that it is a very interesting topic to research. In recent times, companies are using digital platforms to promote brands. However, rural areas have less connectivity to digital platforms; hence, firms need to use traditional marketing to promote the brand in rural areas. Another reason for researching this topic is that Bihar is the home town of this researcher. Hence, there is a special connection to this state. It comes under the rural areas, and so, the topic has been chosen to develop a broad understanding of this area and how the companies promote their brands in these rural areas (A study on the rural consumer buying behaviour in Bihar, 2013). The research topic is related to the study areas that the scholar is studying; the same has therefore been chosen for the present research.

Significance

The study is important for the FMCG companies that are aiming to expand their sales in the rural areas in India. This study will make them aware of the significance of public relations in rural marketing and how they can implement this strategy to accomplish their goal. This study will be significant to other companies as well that aim to enter the Indian market. India is a country where a large number of people are living in rural areas. Many people are uneducated and they always believe in what someone close to them says (Zuk et al., 2018). This study

will be helpful to companies to increase their reach in these rural areas and enter the Bihar market significantly. This will be helpful for other scholars as well; they will realise the role of public relations in rural marketing and will conduct their studies in the future on the same topic on Bihar and other rural areas in India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural Marketing

As per the view of Belletti, Marescotti and Touzard (2017), the strategies and activities executed by the marketers to promote the products among the rural population focuses on their standard of living, and converting their need to demand of goods based on their purchasing capacity. This will lead to the availability of goods and services for the rural area population and account for the higher standard of living for the rural public, along with the promotion and sales of the products for the marketer. This can be a vice-versa process for driving products from urban areas to the rural population, like technical and other advancements; and agricultural goods grown in the rural areas may be supplied to the urban areas. In the context of Bihar, where most of the population resides in rural areas, rural marketing can be beneficial to marketers.

According to Thaker, Thaker and Pitchay (2018), the rural markets are developing in a state like Bihar, as the income of the rural population is increasing. Therefore, the sellers have a new scope of the market in the rural market. Marketing in rural areas can open up a broad market base for the marketers in the rural areas of Bihar.

Role of Public Relationship in Rural Marketing

Byrne, Kearney and MacEvelly (2017) stated that public relations can be understood with the word itself, as establishing a beneficial relationship between the buyer and the seller. The method involves building a trustworthy and commending image about the product among the different segments of rural population; it is the relation between your products supply chain and the buyer. Unlike the paid advertising of newspapers or pamphlets, it is not done to gain publicity. In the rural sectors, where the values of personal relations are higher, it is important

to maintain a healthy relationship with the vendors and the customers, so that this has a positive impact on the individuals and helps to build up the brand and increase market reach.

As per the view of Martin and Murphy (2017), the rural areas are still away from the new communication technology of broadband and telecom networks. Therefore, communicating the latest and best can be a tough task for the marketers. In these situations the public reach is helpful, to be on the ground and analyse the factors beneficial for the marketing of the product. Mbise (2019) declared that the emotional link with the rural customer can be set up easily with the use of the local language of communication. This will help to target the specific customer base for the product in the rural areas of Bihar. Educating the individuals will help to develop trust and faith among the individuals, who can turn out to be potential customers of the brand. The education will also create the general awareness required.

According to Johnston and Sheehan (2020), the best way to promote a product is by word of mouth publicity. This can be a productive and the best way to establish a brand in rural areas. To achieve it, the process of establishing a personal relationship is the best way. This will help influence the individual about the product and the brand, and it can then communicate the same to the others in the neighbourhood. This method has a superior impact on the locals and can easily change the local behaviour about the product. Along with this, the periodic needs of the area can also be studied so that the products can be routed more durably.

Grunig (2020) argued that the personal relationship establishment in the rural regions of Bihar can be beneficial based on strong relationship outcomes. If the outcomes are minimal, the efforts to drag the customer's attention may be nullified. The recognition of the local culture when not met can also result in the de-branding of the products. The personal relationship plays an important role in the loyalty and faith development of the product among the individuals in the rural areas.

The major population of Bihar resides in rural areas (approximately 88% of the total population), which caps at around 9.30 crore, approximately. This opens a huge market sector for marketers, where the ratio of male to female is almost equal. The FMCG sector is likely to

cross the \$100 billion mark in rural sales and many of the brands have a major stakes in the profit from the rural market (Information about Bihar: Agriculture, Industries, Economy Growth, Geography, 2021). Bihar has more than 84 million mobile users, standing at the third-highest user count. The travel industry in Bihar is also growing, with a revenue of more than 34 million from the industry.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is considered an essential tool that scholars use to understand the nature of the study and apply the correct technique that may help in finishing the research. The research methods are important to collect adequate data and to analyse information properly.

Research philosophy is the essential element of a research that always considers the values and beliefs of the scholar who conducts the research. There are 2 main kinds of philosophies: interpretivism and positivism (Ørngreen & Levinsen, 2017). Qualitative studies generally apply the interpretivism philosophies, where the scholar is required to research subject viewpoints by using theories and involving human beings as well. On the other hand, positivism philosophy is used in quantitative studies, where the researcher uses hypothesis and statistical information to arrive at the result. The present research applied the interpretivism research philosophy that ensured the involvement of rich theories and data to develop a better understanding of the role of public relations in rural marketing in the context of Bihar.

The research approach is another significant element of the research project. Inductive and deductive are 2 main approaches that are used in different kinds of research projects. The inductive approach is applied in qualitative studies. On the other hand, deductive approaches are used in quantitative studies (Kumar, 2018). The present research applied the inductive research approach that ensured the use of the theoretical background of rural marketing and the role of public relations in rural marketing. It will systematically ensure research and will not frame any kind of hypothesis. This will help in developing a new theory and generating a valid outcome.

Research type needs to be ensured before conducting any research. The present study used the qualitative research type. It avoided involving calculations and complex data

sets. This paper used the simple theoretical background of public relations and rural marketing. It helped in reaching the desired outcome.

The study applied the descriptive research design. The application of descriptive design is very important in these kinds of qualitative studies (Zangirolami-Raimundo, Echeimberg & Leone, 2018). This ensured the involvement of theories, describing each fact clearly. This developed a better understanding among the scholars and helped researchers gather rich data, generating valid outcomes.

Data collection is an important method in the research. In the absence of rich data, the scholar cannot complete the investigation adequately. Data collection can be done by using 2 different sources: primary and secondary. A primary source is the kind of tool in which scholars gather information first hand and all the details are fresh, that is, these details have not been used in any previous studies. On the other hand, secondary sources are sources through which scholars gather already used details and apply the data according to the suitability of the research topic. The current research implemented the primary source of data collection. The questionnaire method was used for the gathering of data (Bresler & Stake, 2017).

Sampling is the essential method that helps the scholar gather data from the right respondents in the population. This study applied the random sampling method and will ask from the 50 small retailers operating in the rural areas of Bihar. They gave the correct information about the role of public relations, as they meet with the rural public of Bihar and interact with them regularly. They have a broad knowledge, and hence, they can share a clear picture of the role of public relations in rural marketing in the context of Bihar.

Data analysis is considered an essential technique that helps in evaluating the data and reaching an actual outcome. The analysis of data in the present study is done with the help of a graphical analysis technique. The study prepared the themes and will graphically present data (Fletcher, 2017). The interpretation of each graph will be carried out. In this way, the scholar reached the actual outcome and generated results on the role of public relations in rural marketing in the context of Bihar.

Ethical Consideration

This study ensured to follow the ethical guidelines systematically. It involved respondents only after getting their consent. The scholar sent them a consent form and made them aware of the actual reasons for carrying out this research. After getting their consent, the scholar involved them in the research. The study ensured not to give financial benefits to any persons to participate in this investigation. It collected data from authentic sites only and ensured to avoid copying and pasting information from websites and plagiarism. This was taken care by rephrasing each detail, so that plagiarism can be avoided.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1: Since How Long are you Operating your Retail Business in the Rural Area of Bihar?

Less than 1 year	7	14%
Between 2-3 years	5	10%
Between 4-5 years	24	48%
More than 5 years	4	8%
Mean	20	
Median	12	

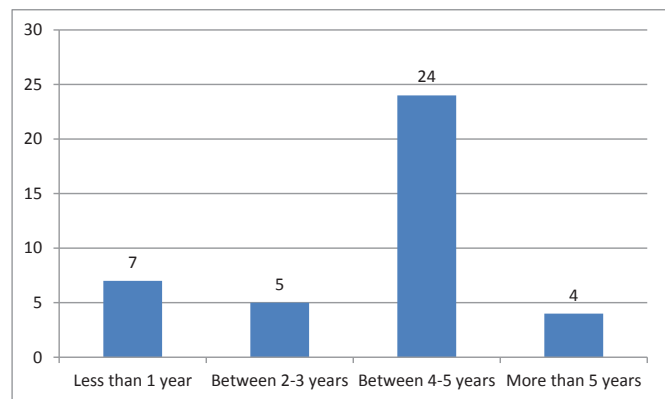


Fig. 1

Interpretation: A large number of respondents are working as retailers in the rural areas of Bihar for 4-5 years. They have great experience about the local people and how they make their purchase decisions. Most of the

of Rural areas of Bihar are working between the 4-5 years that indicates they have the strong experience and they can highlight about the geographical areas.

Table 2: What Promotional Tools are Effective to Promote the Product in the Rural Areas of Bihar?

Public relations	26	52%
Radio	7	14%
Newspapers	11	22%
Social media	6	12%
Mean	25	
Median	18	

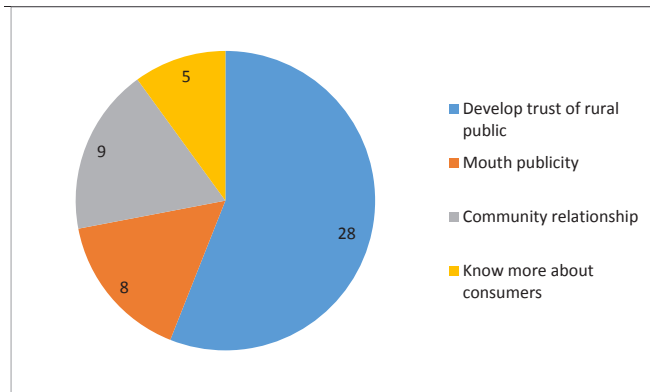


Fig. 2

Interpretation: From Fig. 2 it is clear that 26 respondents have a view that public relations is a great promotional tool that helps businesses succeed in the rural areas of Bihar, and market the product in this area to a great extent. This increases the inclusion of individuals for the product as being promoted on the keynotes of local themes and attributes which reflect their culture. The customers in the rural areas must be educated in the field related to the products, as this will lead to a sense of importance among them from the marketers. As the rural areas public believe on the retailers hence public relationship is the only way through which retailers can sell the products to the consumers. In this way product can be promoted well. The rural area people are uneducated hence they think that retailer will not lie to them hence they believe on them and buy their suggested products.

Table 3: Do you Think Public Relations Play a Significant Role in Rural Marketing?

Strongly agree	31	62%
Agree	8	16%
Disagree	6	12%
Strongly disagree	5	10%
Mean	25	
Median	14	

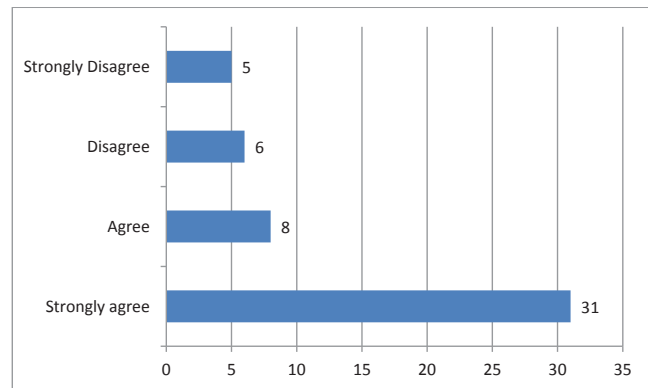


Fig. 3

Interpretation: From Fig. 3 it is clear that 31 out of 50 respondents strongly agree that public relations play a significant role in rural marketing. The public relations developed with the vendors and the customers can be statically understood with the use of technology. This helps one analyse the market for the changing trends and forms. A better forecasting of the demand and supply for the region can be easily tabled with the use of personal relationship managers; thus, the gap of supply and demand can be narrowed. Public relationship is essential key promotional tool in the rural areas because people think that retailer has the strong bonding with the person hence they will not tell wrong about the product ad will suggest the right products. If retailer is promoting any brand by giving positive reviews then people will prefer to buy it.

Table 4: What is the Main Effectiveness of Public Relations in Rural Marketing?

Develop trust of rural public	28	56%
Mouth publicity	8	16%
Community relationship	9	18%
Know more about consumers	5	10%
Mean	25	

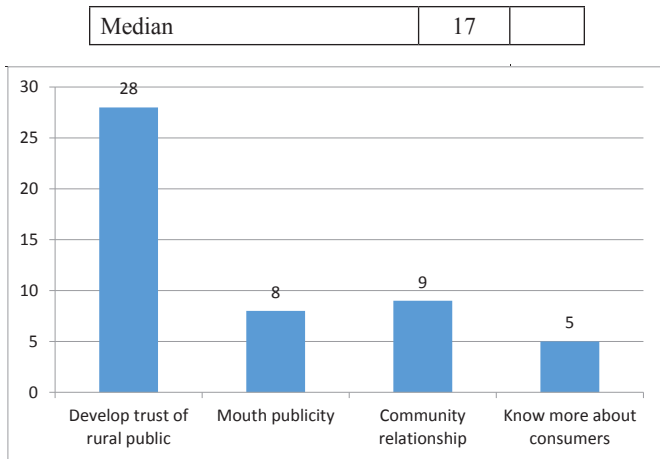


Fig. 4

Interpretation: From Fig. 4 it is inferred that maximum respondents believe that community relationship development is the main benefit of applying public relations in rural marketing. This makes the people loyal towards the brand and they buy the same products frequently. Thus, public relation in rural marketing acts as a marketing tool that promotes the brand and raises awareness among people, so that their interest in the product can be increased. PR always gives a satisfactory reason to the people to buy particular goods and services, and motivates them to purchase that product frequently. Developing the trust of rural public makes them positive. After that they buy the same product for a longer duration and will not change the product until the retailer tells them to change. Hence if the rural population has trust in the products then they will like to use it frequently.

Table 5: To What Extent can Public Relations Affect the Performance of Retailers in Bihar?

To a great extent	29	58%
To some extent	12	24%
No effect	9	18%
Mean	25	
Median	21	

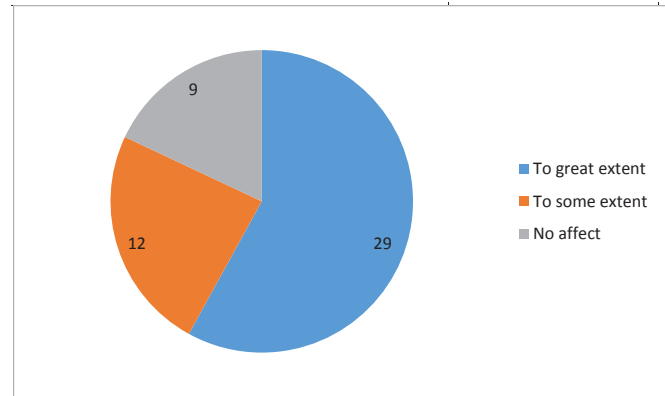


Fig. 5

Interpretation: From Fig. 5 it can be interpreted that a maximum number of people believe that public relations has the capability to influence the retail business in the rural areas to a great extent. PR is a free advertising service that is done by the marketer, by conducting various meets and shows or other ideas to showcase the products they sell to the audience, so that they can relate to it. If there is no public relationship, then people will not prefer to buy that product. They are unable to read and understand the ingredients on the products; hence, they believe the views of retailers. If the retailer does not give positive reviews, then the poor public relationship will have a negative impact, and the consumers will not buy the product. This will decrease sales greatly.

DISCUSSION

Bihar is among the highest contributors in sales in the FMCG sector (about 60% of the total sales in the state). Bihar is among the top five states that have a high rural population contribution in sales among the public. The GDP of Bihar is individually higher than that of Bengaluru. The population ratio of people living in rural areas is higher; thus, exploring a new market for the products in the rural areas can bring up many possibilities. As a result of technological advancement, the income of

the rural population has increased over time. This helps them think about a higher standard of living, resulting in the purchase of products. This is where the different products can be introduced in the rural market. In the rural areas of Bihar, where most of the population is away from the technical advancement of communication, public relation-building can be a key role player for product marketing, as well as brand marketing. The needs and the availability can be easily examined and researched. This will help in planning out the correct marketing strategies and promoting a suitable product, as per the needs of the area. The public relation can be maintained with the inclusion of key people from the area, people whom the locals know and listen to. This will help build a broad customer and audience base. Bihar is a vibrant state with various regional languages and other traditions. In these situations, the marketing strategies must be planned accordingly, keeping in mind the stats of the region. The marketers must relate themselves with the culture of the rural people, so that they can promote with effectiveness.

LIMITATIONS

The study has used only theoretical information; statistical information is not used in this research paper. This is a major limitation of this study. The number of respondents may be high, to get more accurate results. The scholar could have used some statistical software to analyse the data and to generate an authentic outcome.

FUTURE SCOPE

In the future, researcher may use statistical information on the same topic to generate a more authentic outcome. More studies can be conducted in the future, by taking other states in Indian into consideration, to analyse the role of public relations in rural marketing.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Since how long are you operating your retail business in the rural area of Bihar?

- Less than 1 year
- Between 2-3 years
- Between 4-5 years
- More than 5 years

What promotional tools are effective to promote the product in the rural areas of Bihar?

- Public relations
- Radio
- Newspapers
- Social media

Do you think public relations play a significant role in rural marketing?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

What is the main effectiveness of public relations in rural marketing?

- Develop trust of rural public
- Mouth publicity
- Community relationship
- Know more about consumers

To what extent can public relations affect the performance of retailers in Bihar?

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- No effect