

## Paradigm Shift in Rural Marketing: A Case study of Hindustan Unilever Limited (HUL) in State of Rajasthan



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### Abstract

With more than six lakh villages and 65% of the population, rural India has become a mass market for FMCG consumption. Low per capita income, low level of literacy, low brand awareness, and inadequate communication make it more difficult for the companies in the FMCG sector. Now in this scenario, there is an urgent need of the companies to look for innovative marketing strategies to enter, grow and sustain in the Indian rural market. This paper attempts to uncover the strategies of Hindustan Unilever Limited which have done fairly well in rural markets and also an attempt to give the companies the strategies to focus before entering the rural markets in India.

**Keywords:** Marketing Strategy, Rural Marketing, Rural, Rajasthan, FMCG, HUL

### Introduction

Even after the paradigm of industrialization and IT revolution, the mainstream of India's population still lives in rural areas. A vibrant economy, rising per capita income, changing habits, preferences, and attitudes of the consumer make it more evident in the rural part of the country. Thus, there is an emerging need to build expertise in rural marketing. With the spread of television, better infrastructure and transportation in recent times, the consumer has become far more demanding. Companies will have to acquire professional skills and equip themselves with practical knowledge if they want to succeed in the Indian rural market. In such a competitive business environment, organizations need a distinguishing approach that will keep rural consumers identifying and buying their products. With the increase in competition, mere leadership in price and quality is not enough to ensure the success of a product anymore in both rural and urban markets. In other words, the companies are realizing that the true worth of the organization is not the tangible assets it owns, but the value ascribed to the brands it is developing to satisfy the needs of the consumer.

### Rural Marketing: The HUL Way

HUL has embarked upon an aggressive coverage expansion journey for its rural and urban consumers. To maintain their competitive advantage, HUL has aggressively extended more deeply in India, moving from large to small towns and from urban to semi-urban areas. The unorganized and scattered character of markets in India means sales and distribution requires a different tactic from that of more developed economies. In order to develop and maintain the market leadership, HUL pursues innovative distribution mechanisms to reach the millions of rural consumers in small remote villages where there is no retail distribution network, no advertising coverage, and poor roads and transport. HUL realized from the onset that its sales and distribution network gave it an edge over the competition, but that rivals would try to match it over time.

### Review of the Literature

Studies conducted on marketing strategies of FMCG for the rural market of Rajasthan. The rural market is one of the best opportunities for the FMCG sector. In some sense we can say that the rural market is the future of FMCG.

Aithal Rajesh K of IIM (L) (2006) in his study on "Rural Telecom in India: Marketing Issues and Experiences from other countries" explains that rural markets are an important and growing market for most products and services including telecom. The characteristics of the market in terms of low and spread out population and limited purchasing power make it a difficult market to capture. The Bottom of the pyramid marketing strategies and the 4 A's model of Availability, Affordability, Acceptability and Awareness provide us with a means of developing appropriate strategies to tackle the marketing issues for marketing telecom services in rural areas. Successful cases like the Grameen Phone in Bangladesh and Philippines also provide us with some guidelines to tackling the issue.

Arora Pankaj (2008) in his study on "India: Innovation in Rural Marketing" explains that the increase in the services provided to the rural people (in terms of various services offered) will result in the overall betterment of the society on one side by enriching the people with updated market information and providing latest technological developmental news and organizations on other side by creating more market opportunities for them and adjustment of the market prices. IT can build up the role of each governance pillar in rural development and scarcity reduction. It can facilitate rapid, transparent, responsible, efficient and effective interaction between the stakeholders. This not only promotes better administration and better business environment, but also saves time and money in transactions costs of government operations.

Basu Purba (Faculty of ICFAI business school) (2004) in his study on "Lifestyle of Rural Consumers" suggested that rural Indian market and the marketing strategy have become the latest marketing buzzword for most of the FMCG majors. She added the strategies of different FMCG companies for capturing rural market like Titan's Sonata watches, Coca-Cola's 200ml bottle, different strategies of HUL and Marico etc. She takes into consideration the study of National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER). According to the NCAER projections, the number of middle and high-income households in rural area is expected to grow from 140 million to 190 million by 2007. In urban India, the same is expected to grow from 65 million to 79 million. Thus, the absolute size of rural India is expected to be double that of urban India.

Bhattacharjee Abhigyan (2008) (Professor, Department of commerce, Assam University)-in his studied on "Media influence on FMCGs- A comparative study among rural & urban Households on their product purchase decision" revealed that-influence of media in the purchase of, FMCG product seems be similar for both rural as well as the urban households in different income classes and family types. It is informed that media has considerable influence upon the rural follows like their urban counterpart's. The effective mean of rural marketing communication, to a large extent is influenced by media habits of rural consumer. However with the

increasing rate of literacy, print media in the form of newspapers, magazines etc. are also gaining popularity in rural context, as is indent form the study. It is for the marketers to understand the implication of the influence of version media and marketing their products especially to the rural areas.

Hitendra Bargal, Research Associate, (2005) Indian Institute of Management Indore (IIM-I) in his report on "Promotion of Brand in Rural Market of India" has revealed that Promotion of brands in rural markets requires the special measures. Due to the social and backward condition the personal selling efforts have a challenging role to play in this regard. The word of mouth is an important message carrier in rural areas. Infect the opinion leaders are the most influencing part of promotion strategy of rural promotion efforts. The experience of agricultural input industry can act as a guideline for the marketing efforts of consumer durable and non-durable companies. Relevance of Mass Media is also a very important factor. The Indian established Industries have the advantages, which MNC don't enjoy in this regard. The strong Indian brands have strong brand equity, consumer demand-pull and efficient and dedicated dealer network which have been created over a period of time.

Neelmani Nilesh (Professor, EMPI B-School, Delhi) in his studied on "Consumer attitude towards FMCG's: A comparative study of private labels and national brands" revealed various parameters like-- *Quality*- study indicates that consumer still believe that national brands have a better quality as compare to private labels; *Regarding price*- consumer believe that private labels have higher value for money; *Risk free* - national brands are less risky to buy as compared to private labels; *Freshness*- attitudes towards freshness of both is almost the same; *Packaging*- attitudes towards packaging are more or less the same; *Healthy*- Data suggests that on the profile of being healthy, consumer do not differentiate much and *Prestigious*- comparison of indicate that national brands have a higher prestige as far on consumer's attitude is concerned.

Tognatta Pradeep (Former Vice president of LG) (2003), suggested that, the economic growth in India's agricultural sector in last year was over 10%, compared with 8.5% in the industrial sector. This implies a huge market potentiality for the marketer to meet up increasing demand. Factors such as village psyche, strong distribution network and market awareness are few prerequisites for making a dent in the rural markets. The model is of the stolid Anglo-Dutch conglomerate Unilever Group, which has enjoyed a century-long presence in India through its subsidiary Hindustan Lever Ltd. It was Hindustan Lever that several years ago popularized the idea of selling its products in tiny packages. Its sachets of detergent and shampoo are in great demand in Indian villages.

The focus of literature, mainly written is on highlighting potential of vast rural market and providing description of a few cases of commercial organization of rural areas. The literature has uncritically borrowed theories, framework and concept

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from the mainstream marketing discipline, which has shifted the growth of the subject as an independent field of academic investigation. There is an urgent need to build a distinctive perspective and a sound theoretical base for rural marketing, which would create its own concepts, frameworks, theories and body of knowledge. The issue needs immediate attention of the researcher in rural marketing. However with the increasing rate of literacy, other forms of promotion Medias are also gaining popularity in rural context. It is for the marketers to understand the implication of the influence of various media and marketing their products especially to the rural areas.

**Research Objective**

1. To assess consumer awareness for H.U.L. products in selected rural areas of Alwar and Jaipur district.
2. To study the marketing strategies of selected products of Hindustan Unilever Limited (H.U.L.) in rural market of Alwar and Jaipur district.
3. To study the impact of various factors affecting the rural consumer buying behavior, towards selected products of H.U.L in rural market of Alwar and Jaipur district.

**Need of the Study**

The study will be beneficial for the rural consumer of Rajasthan state. With the help of this study the consumers will know about the various products, pricing factors, promotional schemes, marketing strategies, competitiveness of the product and the availability of products in their surroundings. The study may also be beneficial for the H.U.L. to know about the expectation of rural consumers in the selected areas of Rajasthan state. H.U.L. can decide their marketing strategies, product strategies, promotional schemes, pricing policies, advertising policy, etc at the time of taking crucial decisions to enhance their business at mass level. On

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academic point of view it may be helpful for researcher and academicians to take it as a reference material for further studies on and around this topic at regional, national and global level.

**Research Methodology**

The study is empirical and analytical in nature and is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Multistage random sampling is adopted, for selecting the strategy of HUL in rural market of Rajasthan. Sample size is 100, out of that 50 from both districts viz. Jaipur and Alwar. Jaipur and Alwar districts are divided in 13 and 14 panchayat Samitis respectively. 5 villages from each district have been randomly selected. The selection of villages was done on random basis keeping this thing in mind that it should represent the true picture of the rural India i.e. villages nearby the city may not represent the true picture of rural India as the persons resides over there may be purchasing their necessity goods from the city itself. Interview of the 10 inter-mediaries--distributors, whole sellers and retailers and the responses of the customers were also collected for both rural areas. After collection of the Primary data, 5 questionnaires were rejected due to various reasons so researcher analyzed only 95 respondents. For the purpose of the study, the secondary data was taken from various sources like: Books, Periodicals, Magazines, and Repudiated Journals, Research articles, Online Journals, Annual Reports of HUL and Internet websites.

**Results and Discussion**

Before analyzing the first research objective, researcher prepared the demographic profile of the respondents. Table 1 clearly shows that out of total 95 respondents, the majority of the respondents were Male with age group of less than 45 years who heavily depend on agriculture income and live in Pakka Houses.

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondent**

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	64	67
	Female	31	33
Age (in Years)	Below 25	13	14
	25-35	30	32
	35-45	30	32
	45-55	10	11
	55 and Above	12	13
Qualification	Illiterate	9	9
	Primary	15	16
	Secondary	14	15
	Senior Secondary	12	13
	Graduation	30	32
	Post-Graduation	15	16
Occupation	Self-Employment in Agriculture	43	45
	Regular Salary /Wages	24	25
	Self-Employment in non- agriculture	20	21

Monthly Income of Family	Unemployed	8	8
	Below 5000	21	22
	5000-10k	13	14
	10k-20k	17	18
	20k-30k	23	24
Nature of Accommodation	30k and above	21	22
	Hut	11	12
	Kuccha House	23	24
	Pakka House	61	64

The main objective of the research is to study the marketing strategies of selected products of Hindustan Unilever Limited in rural market of Alwar

and Jaipur district. To explore it, first we need to understand the buying habits of the consumer in these areas, which is shown in Table-2.

Consumer Shopping Behavior: (Table 2)				
S. No.	Buying Habits	Commodities		
		Food and drinks Like Tea or Coffee	Home care Like Washing Powder and Soap	Personal care Like Shampoo, Cream
<b>a) From whom do you purchase?</b>				
	Weekly bazar	10	12	6
	Permanent Stores	45	62	84
	Peddlers	35	20	5
	Others	10	6	5
<b>b) Where do you purchase?</b>				
	Local shopping Centre	50	45	55
	Main bazaar	20	15	25
	city or Town	30	40	20
<b>C How do you purchase</b>				
	Cash	30	40	25
	Credit (Monthly Payment)	70	60	75
<b>d) Frequency of buying</b>				
	Daily/Alternate Day	10	5	12
	Weekly	30	30	30
	Monthly	60	65	58
<b>f) Who made regular purchase</b>				
	Husband	20	5	20
	Wife	50	80	40
	Wife and husband	10	5	5
	Children	20	10	35

Table 2 Clearly shows that rural consumers shows altogether different buying behavior counter parts like most of the rural people have tendency to make purchase from permanent store from local shop or shopping centre as may be the reason that local

shop owners provide them the credit facility which they usually pay on monthly basis as rural people depends on salary or agriculture income. It can also be concluded that wife or female is major decision making even in rural areas for FMCG product.

Table 3: Consumer's Awareness Level towards Selected H.U.L. Products:					
category	Product	Aware		Not Aware	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Toilet Soap	Lux	90	95	5	5
	Lifebuoy	92	97	3	3
Detergent Soap	Rin	87	92	8	8
	Wheel	89	94	6	6
Toothpaste	Pepsodent	90	95	5	5
	Close-Up	92	97	3	3
Hair Shampoo	Clinic-Plus	89	94	6	6
	Sunsilk	90	95	5	5
Tea	Tazza	81	85	14	15
	Taj Mahal	76	80	19	20

Source: Compiled from questionnaire –SPSS Output

From Table-3, it is very much clear that consumer is very well aware about HUL Products in selected rural areas of Alwar and Jaipur District.

Awareness level is almost 90% in all product categories studied, except Tea (for Taaza and Taj Mahal). As per the views of the retailers, loose tea is

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having a good demand in few areas which may be one of the reason of low awareness among the

consumers.

**Table 4: Factors affecting Buying Decision and Brand Selection of Selected H.U.L. Products**

S. No	Product Attribute	Lux/Lifebuoy		Rin/Wheel		Pepsodent/Close-up		Clinic-Plus/Sun silk		Taaza/Taj Mahal	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1	Product Quality	89	94	84	88	79	83	78	82	84	88
2	Fragrance	41	43	28	29	25	26	35	37	28	29
3	Color	11	12	15	16	17	18	11	12	15	16
4	Brand Name	32	34	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
5	Brand Loyalty	5	5	5	5	4	4	3	3	4	4
6	Size	46	48	45	47	34	36	42	44	34	36
7	Low Price	82	86	78	82	40	42	73	77	67	71
8	Discounts	28	29	29	31	34	36	27	28	21	22
9	Advertisement	8	8	5	5	7	7	6	6	9	9
10	Availability	46	48	46	48	43	45	41	43	50	53
11	Word of Mouth	2	2	3	3	6	6	3	3	5	5
12	Celebrity endorsement	2	2	1	1	4	4	6	6	1	1
13	Friends and family	12	13	14	15	6	6	3	3	13	14
14	Dealer's Opinion	21	22	12	13	18	19	13	14	14	15

Source: Compiled from questionnaire –SPSS Output

In the third research objective an attempt has been made to identify the factors affecting consumer buying decision and brand preference of selected H.U.L. products, and from Table 4, it can be inferred that, most important criterion of brand selection and brand preference in rural area, is good product quality

at a lower price. Along with this they give importance to some less critical factors like easily availability, fragrance, color, variants etc Factors like brand loyalty, celebrity endorsement, advertisement, dealer's opinion are comparatively least important for consumers while making the purchase decision.

**Table 5: Brand Switching Behavior from Selected HUL Products to another Product**

Selected Products	Thinking to Switchover the Selected HUL Products									
	Not at all		Rarely		Sometimes		Many Times		Always Keep Changing	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Lux and/or Lifebuoy	12	13	15	16	30	32	21	22	17	18
Rin & Wheel	10	11	13	14	22	23	30	32	20	21
Pepsodent/Close-up	14	15	10	11	20	21	21	22	30	32
Clinic-Plus/Sunsilk	7	7	13	14	24	25	31	33	20	21
Taaza/Taj Mahal	10	11	6	6	23	24	27	28	29	31

Source: Compiled from questionnaire –SPSS Output

In Table-5, it's shown that in case of bathing soap, fabric soap and shampoo category, approx. 20% of the respondents are having Variety seeking buying behavior (always keep changing) while one fourth of the respondents are showing habitual buying

behaviours. In other category of the products, its also clear that rural people are not brand loyal. They are happy with the existing brand which they are using but don't mind to switch to another brand if something better is offered and provide value for money to them.

**Table 6: Level of Satisfaction towards Selected HUL Products**

Selected Products	Satisfaction level of respondents for Selected HUL Products									
	Highly Dissatisfied		Dissatisfied		Neutral		Satisfied		Highly Satisfied	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Lux/Lifebuoy	2	2	2	2	3	3	68	72	20	21
Rin/Wheel	3	3	1	1	2	2	71	75	18	19
Pepsodent/Close-up	1	1	5	5	2	2	71	75	16	17
Clinic-Plus/Sunsilk	5	5	4	4	5	5	61	64	20	21
Taaza/Taj Mahal	1	1	1	1	2	2	67	71	24	25

Source: Compiled from questionnaire –SPSS Output

It's very clear from Table-6 that the majority of the rural respondents are quite satisfied with the products and overall product attributes in the given product category.

**Table 7: Most Favorable Promotional Activity for Selected HUL Products**

Selected Products	Most Favorable Promotional Activity for Selected HUL Products									
	Free Samples		Extra Quantity		WOM		Attractive Packaging		Discounted Price	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Lux/Lifebuoy	10	11	8	8	12	13	5	5	60	63
Rin/Wheel	8	8	9	9	14	15	2	2	62	65
Pepsodent/Closeup	12	13	8	8	12	13	8	8	55	58
Clinic-Plus/Sunsilk	6	6	21	22	9	9	1	1	58	61
Taaza/Taj Mahal	13	14	12	13	10	11	2	2	58	61

Source: Compiled from questionnaire –SPSS Output

From Table 7 its very much evident that the most preferred promotional activity in rural areas, is price discounts followed by word of mouth. People in rural areas prefer the opinion of other people specially opinion leaders, family and friends as well. From Table 7 and table 4 its can also be concluded that such WOM promotion is key to success even in rural counterparts as well.

**Table 8: Main Source of Information for Selected HUL Products**

Selected Products	Main Source of Information									
	Television		Radio		News Paper		Wall Painting		Others	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Lux/Lifebuoy	86	91	1	1	1	1	2	2	5	5
Rin/Wheel	80	84	2	2	2	2	1	1	10	11
Pepsodent/Closeup	82	86	1	1	1	1	2	2	9	9
Clinic-Plus/Sunsilk	83	87	2	2	2	2	2	2	6	6
Taaza/Taj Mahal	88	93	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	4

Source: Compiled from questionnaire –SPSS Output

The communication in the rural market is tough. For the advertisement of products and services the words and languages should be used in a proper manner. Due to the low literacy levels the consumer cannot understand the message that has been done through advertisement of the respective product or

service. So the communication needs to be considered as a challenging factor to overcome. There are lots of companies which have faced the imitation of their products. Most of the products are sold in haats as the organized market does not reach there. The companies which cannot reach the remote

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locations face these kinds of problems in the market. For ex: Ponds with polons, Life buoy with and Life joy, Fair and lovely with friends and lovely and so on. So these things became a challenge for the companies to

tackle. To tackle these types of situations companies need to improve their distribution and need to reach the market including haats.

**Table 9: Descriptive Statistics for Variables for Buying Decision**

	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Product</b>		
I usually prefer the products which are available in variety of shape and sizes	3.95	1.001
I usually prefer the products which are available in desired Fragrance and color	3.32	0.93
I normally go for another product in case of non- availability of H.U.L. products.	3.61	0.877
Dealer's Opinion does not change my buying decision	2.9	1.175
I always prefer to buy the product which fulfills my expectations	3.68	0.989
I always prefer original products not the duplicate Products	3.69	1.042
<b>Price</b>		
Value for Money is more important in my opinion as I always prefer good Quality products at Lower Price	3.9	1.091
In my view, low priced products are not always inferior quality products.	3.62	0.824
In my opinion, branded products are not always high priced products.	3.26	0.979
In my opinion, Discounted products are not always outdated products	3.79	1.087
In my opinion, In rural market price charged by the shopkeepers are always high	3.41	1.089
<b>Place</b>		
I purchase the products whichever is available in the shop.	3.88	0.767
I buy the products from the nearest shop in main market	3.52	0.863
I like to buy the products from Hat.	3.05	0.875
In case of non-availability of regular products at nearby shop, I always look for at another shop.	3.6	0.841
In case of non-availability of regular products at nearby shop, I always wait for product to come.	3.72	1.087
<b>Promotion</b>		
Extra Quantity or Sales Promotion schemes always attracts me the most to buy the products.	3.67	0.924
Advertisement always enhances my product knowledge.	3.78	0.678
Advertisement always creates interest for the products which I purchase.	2.21	1.001
Celebrity endorsement usually doesn't influences my buying decisions.	2.11	.987
I believe that, Company offers free products scheme, because to give tuff competition to the competitor	3.72	1.087

Source: SPSS Output

Table -9, shows the outcome of descriptive statistics of four variables of marketing mix in the studies. The table gives an idea about the importance of all variables in designing of any new rural marketing strategy, to identify the importance of particular strategy from the rural perspective, opinion of rural respondents etc. The first independent variable for this study is product, which comprises of different attributes to find out overall opinion of the rural respondents. Respondents are well satisfied or giving much importance to the variety of size of product available in the market, with a mean value of 3.95 out of 5 and standard deviation 1.001. The second important variable for the study is price of the product. It comprises of total 5 attributes to find out the opinion of the rural respondents towards impact of different pricing attributes of product. In this giving more importance of price of the product compare to the brand name or quality of product in their buying decision has highest mean of 3.90 out of 5, with the standard deviation of 1.091. Rural respondents are

giving more importance to the price of the product compare to other variable and they do believe that branded products are always high priced products. Among this they purchase the products because they are easily available has highest mean score of 3.88 out of 5, with the standard deviation of 0.767. So this factor may play an important role while formulating rural strategy for the product. The fourth variable for the study is promotion. This variable is comprises of total 6 attributes to measure the effectiveness of the promotional schemes offered by the manufactures or agencies. In this high mean score is 3.86 out of 5 to the opinion of the respondents that the company offers free products scheme to give tuff competition to the competitor. Rural respondents does not influence much by brand ambassador while making purchase decision (lowest mean score of 2.11 with the SD of 1)

So, overall it can be said that, HUL is mainly focusing on providing good quality product which offer value for money to its consumers in rural areas. Fragrance, coin pricing, small packaging, good

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awareness level are also equally important that create good acceptance level among the customers.

#### Conclusion

In the given case study it can be concluded that by reinventing and developing the distinctive new products with proven consumer benefits that people want, by reinventing the marketing with affordable innovations and responsible communication and by reinventing the selling business partners (Project Shakti and SHG), this FMCG giant is able to hold a huge market coverage especially in rural India. HUL has shown the way to other companies on how to successfully penetrate the rural market. Intensifying its reach in the rural markets, HUL has decided to make its brands more 'experiential' in nature instead of merely making them available in the Indian Rural Market. The better understanding of rural market and rural people psyche, helps HUL to integrate the life of rural people more efficiently and effectively.

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