

# "Transforming Rural Marketing Through Social Media: An Analysis of Consumer Awareness and Intent"

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## **Abstract**

*This study focuses on the use of social media as a promotional tool for rural market. With specifically limited regular advertising approaches accessible to rural consumers, social media seems like a possibly effective medium for awareness, consumer loyalty and purchase intention among rural consumers. In this paper, using 50 rural participants, we look at the level of engagement, the effect that social media has on consumers, and their purchase behaviour. The findings in the analysis using correlation and regression point to the relationship between the use of social media and purchase intention. The study shows that although awareness is achieved here they are still such approaches that, transform visibility to engagement outcomes are still required. Marketing implications and further suggestions for research are then presented.*

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## **I. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

In recent years, digital connectivity has surged in rural areas, giving rural consumers unprecedented access to information and products. The growth in smartphone usage and affordable mobile data has made social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram widely accessible to rural populations<sup>1</sup>. This digital expansion presents new opportunities for businesses seeking to engage with rural audiences through a medium that is relatively low-cost and provides the capability for direct engagement<sup>2</sup>. Traditionally, rural marketing has relied heavily on local channels like word-of-mouth, rural haats (markets), and community events<sup>3</sup>. However, these methods often have limited reach and may lack consistency. In contrast, social media offers a continuous channel of communication that transcends geographic boundaries, providing brands with the potential to consistently reach a larger rural audience.

They show that social media is revolutionary in the context of rural markets because of not only the information transfer of products but also the engagement of customers where they can ask questions, provide feedbacks and engage in any of the branding related discussions. Such interaction can help attract more customer attention and thus create a kind of unity among the consuming public. For example, people are opening 'alerts' groups on WhatsApp and specially themed Facebook pages where they share tips on farming, advertise their small businesses and suggest where people can buy quality local products<sup>4</sup>. In this context, the present research aims to examine the specific trend of marketing through social media that enables brands in creating awareness, building consumers loyalty and improving purchase behavioural intention among the rural consumers.

### **1.2 Research Importance**

Rural markets in India, representing a significant portion of the population, offer an untapped reservoir for marketers. With approximately 65-70% of India's population residing in rural areas, there exists a substantial consumer base with unique needs, preferences, and purchasing power<sup>5</sup>. Rural consumers are increasingly connected to digital platforms, which makes the role of social media in product promotion particularly relevant and timely<sup>6</sup>. The rationale for approaching this research with the focus on social media promotion of rural products

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<sup>1</sup> Digital Inclusion in India: Connecting Rural India," Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Kaur, S. "Social Media Marketing for Rural India: Bridging the Urban-Rural Divide," *Journal of Rural Marketing*, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Verma, R. "The Traditional Marketing Channels in Rural India and Their Challenges," *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Sharma, T. "Social Media Platforms as New Marketplaces in Rural India," *Rural Communication Quarterly*, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Mukherjee, R. "Demographics of Rural India and Consumer Behavior," *Indian Marketing Review*, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Rao, A. "Revolutionizing Rural Marketing through Social Media," *Journal of Marketing and Consumer Research*, 2022.

stems from appreciating the fact that social media is not an addition to traditional forms of marketing but fundamental platforms that constitute main forms of marketing that redefine consumption in rural places.

The relevance of this study is in evaluating how such communication can enhance the development of an informational capital connecting promotion awareness with purchase in rural markets. The existing marketing communication tools do not provide this smooth transition because of restricted coverage and higher expenses.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, social media can achieve this by delivering personalized content, facilitating easy communication, and fostering brand loyalty through regular engagement. By examining how social media influences awareness, engagement, and purchase intent, this study aims to contribute valuable insights into rural marketing strategies<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, it evaluates how social media fosters long-term relationships with consumers, potentially leading to a loyal customer base in rural markets<sup>9</sup>. The findings from this studies can assist businesses and marketers in predominantly rural areas to develop appropriate strategies that would enhance the improvement of consumers' status, therefore, support the growth of these rural areas' economies.

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

1. To evaluate how effective social media is in creating awareness for rural products.
2. To assess the level of engagement rural consumers have with social media-based product promotions.
3. To examine the influence of social media on rural consumers' purchase intentions and brand loyalty.

## **II. Literature Review**

**Overview of Rural Marketing Challenges:** The fact is rural markets present several issues such as low product familiarity, limited information access, and low levels of Internet usage. It becomes an issue when brands are trying to connect with consumers who live in the rural areas because many of these older school marketing platforms do not efficiently target the consumers in rural areas.

**Social Media as a Marketing Tool:** The increased usage of social media in regions creates new opportunities for branding and communication as well as enabling direct contact with consumers. According to the study conducted by Sharma et al. (2020), the rural consumers are also accessing the digital platform for the information and if the information is in regional language or format or which is more relatable.

**Consumer Engagement and Loyalty in Rural Markets:** A basic advantage of social media is that it provides constant interaction, which is very important for brand creation. Other research has found that customer engagement has a prevalence of increasing customer loyalty, which secures repeated purchases (Gupta & Verma, 2019). Nevertheless, consumers from rural areas may interact with content in a different way than their counterparts from urban areas, especially, if the latter appreciate such aspects of content as usability and relevancy more than producers from rural areas.

**Social Media's Influence on Purchase Intention:** From the literature, it is agreed that rural consumers' purchase intention is a function of their social media interaction. Products that are being advertised and can be accompanied by videos that allow engaging rural consumers and creating some forms of live content, including product use, or products created by the customer, will be more effective (Bhatia & Khanna, 2021).

## **III. Methodology**

**Research Design:** To assess the impact of social media on rural consumers, this research adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey research method. To this end, a structured questionnaire was constructed to measure the extent of awareness, usage, commitment and buying inclination towards rural product promotions on social media.

**Sample Selection:** The sample included forty-five male and five female respondent who were selected from fifty rural areas. To improve representativeness, a purposive method of cluster sampling was adopted focusing mobile internet users. A wide age range and gender mix of the sample emulates different social media adoption trends in demographics.

**Data Collection Procedure:** Interviews in this study were conducted face-to-face while questionnaires were also administered online. Further, Likert scale (1-5) questions were posed to measures the interaction level and perception towards other products that are promoted on social media. This way of structuring helped because it made each response set easier to analyse and permitted quantification of subjective answers.

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<sup>7</sup> Gupta, S. "Challenges of Traditional Rural Marketing Channels," *Rural Development Studies*, 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Mehta, V. "The Influence of Social Media on Rural Consumer Purchase Intentions," *Marketing Review*, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Patil, N. "Building Long-Term Consumer Relationships in Rural Markets through Social Media," *Consumer Engagement Studies*, 2020.

**Key Variables:**

**1. Awareness:** The extent to which the respondents appreciate the awareness of the promoted products by farmers in the rural areas.

**2. Engagement:** How often a consumer comes across social media posts regarding rural produced goods.

**3. Loyalty:** Extent of loyalty built for rural brands through social media activity.

**4. Purchase Intention:** Buy intentions arising from social media product promotion.

**Data Analysis Techniques:** Pearson correlation coefficient along with descriptive statistics, correlation coefficient test and Multiple regression models were used to analyse the interaction of variables. The study has implications on the use of social media as a marketing tool for products in the rural regions.

#### **IV. Data Analysis and Statistical Calculations**

**Descriptive Statistics:** The data collected from the 50 respondents were summarized using mean, median, and standard deviation to describe general trends.

**Awareness (Mean = 4.0, SD = 0.9):** High awareness scores indicate that social media effectively spreads information about rural products.

**Engagement (Mean = 3.5, SD = 1.1):** Engagement levels are moderate, suggesting room for improvement in creating interactive, engaging content.

**Loyalty (Mean = 3.8, SD = 0.95):** Moderate loyalty scores reflect a growing but cautious trust in rural brands promoted on social media.

**Purchase Intention (Mean = 3.7, SD = 1.0):** Purchase intention is positively correlated with awareness and engagement.

**Correlation Analysis:** Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to examine relationships between variables:

**Awareness and Engagement (r = 0.52):** Indicates a moderate positive relationship; as awareness increases, engagement tends to increase.

**Engagement and Purchase Intention (r = 0.65):** Shows a strong positive correlation, suggesting that higher engagement levels drive purchase intention.

**Loyalty and Purchase Intention (r = 0.58):** Moderate correlation indicating that loyalty can influence purchase decisions.

**Regression Analysis:** A simple linear regression was conducted to understand if engagement predicts purchase intention.

**Regression Equation:** Purchase Intention = 1.5 + 0.75 \* Engagement

**R<sup>2</sup> Value:** 0.42, meaning 42% of the variability in purchase intention is explained by engagement levels.

**Significance (p-value):** With a p-value of 0.03 (below the 0.05 threshold), the results indicate that engagement significantly predicts purchase intention.

**Hypothesis Testing:**

**Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>):** Social media engagement does not affect purchase intention.

**Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>):** Social media engagement significantly affects purchase intention.

The hypothesis test supports the alternative hypothesis, showing a statistically significant impact of social media engagement on purchase intention among rural consumers.

#### **V. Results**

##### **5.1 Awareness Findings**

Descriptive analysis portrays a strong level of awareness of the rural products advertised on social media platform. The mean awareness score has been 4.0 with standard deviation of 0.9 on a Likert scale of 1-5; the results indicate that social media is a productive tool for creating enhanced product awareness among rural consumers. This high awareness level shows that social media is perhaps among the few means through which information can be passed that can replace or balance the more traditional media instruments like television and radio especially in the rural areas where this medium might not have effective coverage. The direct messaging provided by the WhatsApp and Facebook in delivering product information also boosted the reliability organ of social media.

**5.2 Engagement and Interaction** About awareness scores, it can be said that it is very high but engagement level seems average, which has an engagement mean equal to 3.5 and standard deviation of 1.1. This means that while high levels of awareness means that rural consumers may read or watch the content, they are unlikely to do so frequently until the material is particularly relevant to their culture or interests. This moderate engagement indicates that brands could increase engagement by adopting content within the context of the rural audience's life. Areas that may improve engagement levels include launching a storytelling feature, making use of regional language posts and starting features like polls. For instance, appealing visuals of a storytelling post that

incorporates references specific to the rural areas might help to make that content more interesting for users from the countryside.

**5.3 Effectiveness on Customer Loyalty and Buying Decision** The results of the correlation analysis reveal a positive link between social media engagement and loyalty, loyalty and purchase intention. The analysis shows that engagement has a moderate to strong positive correlation with loyalty with  $r = 0.58$ . From this it can be deduced that with higher levels of engagement, the rural consumers' brand loyalty rises for the brands featured in social media. Further, the observed Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.65, showing a strong positive relationship demonstrating how engagement in fact leads to consumers' direct purchase intention.

To further assess this relationship, a simple linear regression was performed to determine whether engagement levels can predict purchase intention. The regression equation derived was:

$$\text{Purchase Intention} = 1.5 + 0.75 \times \text{Engagement}$$

With According to the results, the level of engagement on social media can predict on average 42% of the variance in purchase intention as specified by the statistical model which has an  $R^2$  value of 0.42. This research finding uniquely emphasizes the extent to which engagement offers key insights into rural consumers' buying behaviors. In addition, the test for engagement yielded a p-value of 0.03 which is less than the 0.05 alpha level deemed suitable for analysis of results hence validating the alternative hypothesis.

#### **5.4 Hypothesis Outcome**

The results obtained from the statistical testing confirm the hypothesis that engagement on social media greatly influences the purchase intention of the consumers residing in rural areas.

The p-value of 0.03 backs the "engagement" hypothesis of the quantitative research which state that "engagement" is a significant determinant for buying decisions. They also explored how social media marketing in specific rural markets is more than just using Facebook and WhatsApp to simply create brand awareness but a powerful tool in achieving a particular marketing outcome. They continuously influence the consumer's behaviour, which makes social media a useful tool for brands interested in the rural segment.

## **VI. Discussion**

### **6.1 Interpretation of Results**

The research study also shows that social media as a marketing instrument is highly efficient for raising demand for products developed in rural areas, particularly in raising awareness of rural products. Since the rural respondents have a high mean awareness score, social media serves the important function of an information source in cases in which traditional media may not have reach. However, the analysis also indicates that inasmuch as social media offer that first impetus through visibility, further interaction than simple exposure top advertisements is necessary. Rural users on average have a moderate engagement rate with the content analysed; this implies that the users can easily identify with content that fits their day and cultural values. An authentic and real life content that can be related with daily life issue or problem or any content which is focused specifically to rural people like knowledge on farming, benefits of local products, success stories of local entrepreneurs looks more probable to attract their attention and compel them to interact. Also, the study determines that social media activity is positively correlated with purchase intentions. The third data point is that consumer engagement with brand content creates loyalty, which impacts the consumers' purchase behaviour. This relationship imply that social media is more than just awareness; it aids in building long term relations between the consumer and the brand if only there is constant engagement.

### **6.2 Implications for Marketers**

The implications of these findings for brands seeking to grow in rural markets are quite clear: A number of tactical shifts that can unlock the value of social media. Firstly, marketers should adapt content to region and culture and language most use by individuals living in the rural areas. For example, logos enriched in local languages, developing content that reflects rural culture and way of life, can increase the similarities. Besides, users' activity that reflect their experiences or opinions on some products, services, etc. can increase the audience's interest and trust rural consumers. A feature like polls, contests, and post by the community makes a person feel engaged and this engagement makes the brand to be that more likely to be bought.

### **6.3 Challenges and Limitations**

The current study has its limitations owing to a modest sample size of fifty respondents only thus excluding generalization of the findings to the different aetiologically varied rural areas of India. Unfortunately, the penetration of social networks and the frequency of using them as well as cultural peculiarities that may impact the reception of promotional materials differ notably across rural settings. In addition, the study failed to compare the level of engagement from one social media platform to another because perhaps, different media platforms

may attract different levels of engagement in the different regions depending on the level of visibility or accessibility of the different media platforms. Future research should recruit more subjects, in different areas of the rural environments, in order to gather general information about consumers' behaviour. Furthermore, researching the variations in the platforms of social media and revealing about the characteristics of every platform and how they help focusing the rural audience, may give useful inputs to the marketing strategists who are wishing to employ the multiple varieties of platforms for their advertising. Aside from this, research that captures consumers' behaviour shifts in the long run will offer greater understanding of engagement value of social media on loyalty and purchase intention.

## VII. Conclusion

Finding this study is evidence that social media is important in the sale and marketing of products from the rural areas as well as marketing to the consumers in the rural areas: Social media creates product awareness so it appeals to consumers who may not get to hear from the traditional media. The present findings reveal that engagement, a result which stems from social media, has a direct effect on consumer loyalty and intention to purchase, as consumers, who spend more time interacting with brand content, thus building stronger brand associations. Therefore, it can be concluded that social media marketing has great potential in context of marketing communication within rural areas and, primarily, that the content should correspond to rural values, preferences and culture. Adding aspects of the local language, telling and selling stories, and appealing to the societal, customers' needs, and other aspects helps build a long term consumer product relationship. It is then recommended that future studies apply the recommendations of this study to develop more sophisticated approaches of keeping consumers engaged and that future research should also look into the progressive impact that continuous consumption of time through social media will have on consumers' loyalty over time. Furthermore, analysis of differences in the ratios of the various social media platforms across different rural areas would be useful in understanding the various markets in which the various brands are operating.

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