

## Challenges & Opportunities of Digital Marketing in Rural India

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### Abstract

*With the buzz in globalization, the world is witnessing a greater challenge in the diverse facets of business. One of the most important parameter of business growth being its stake holders are mainly attracted by the advertising strategies. Digital marketing on the other hand can be defined as an umbrella term for the marketing of products or services using digital technologies, mainly on the Internet, but also including mobile phones, display advertising, and any other digital medium. The concept of digital marketing has become a fashion in the companies to promote their products and services. While marketers with positive experiences would tend to believe that digital marketing works and some would disagree in rural India, but one would be sure that magnitude of its impact is increasing in rural market, when compared to urban and other markets.*

*This paper studies and establishes the impact of digital marketing. The study also probes into the learning of impact of digital marketing on rural markets and rural employment. Through research and analysis, the paper emerges some points which can be used as a blue print criterion for grabbing rural market. As the paper is the foundation brick of the impact of digital marketing on rural India, the paper also ends with few insights on impact of digital marketing to be considered for rural markets.*

**Key words: Digital marketing, Globalization, Technology, Customers & India.**

### Introduction

Digital marketing can be defined as an umbrella term for the marketing of products or services using digital technologies, mainly on the Internet, but also including mobile phones, display advertising, and any other digital medium. The concept of digital marketing has become a fashion in the companies to promote their products and services. Digital marketing is the promotion of products or brands via one or more forms of electronic media and differs from traditional marketing in that it involves the use of channels and methods that enable an organization to analyze marketing campaigns and understand what is working and what isn't – typically in real time. Digital marketers monitor things like what is being viewed, how often and for how long, sales conversions, what content works and doesn't work, etc. While the Internet is, perhaps, the channel most closely associated with digital marketing, others include wireless text messaging, mobile instant messaging, mobile apps, podcasts, electronic billboards, digital television and radio channels, etc.

### Importance of Digital Marketing

Digital media is so pervasive that consumers have access to information any time and any place they want it. Gone are the days when the messages people got about your products or services came from you and consisted of only what you wanted them to know. Digital media is an ever-growing source of entertainment, news, shopping and social interaction, and consumers are now exposed not just to what your company says about your brand, but what the media, friends, relatives, peers, etc., are saying as well. And they are more likely to believe them than you. People want brands they can trust, companies that know them, communications that are personalized and relevant, and offers tailored to their needs and preferences. Digital marketing and its associated channels are important – but not to the exclusion of all else. It's not enough to just know your customers; you must know them better than anybody else so you can communicate with

them where, when and how they are most receptive to your message. To do that, we need a consolidated view of customer preferences and expectations across all channels – Web, social media, mobile, direct mail, point of sale, etc. Marketers can use this information to create and anticipate consistent, coordinated customer experiences that will move customers along in the buying cycle. The deeper your insight into customer behaviour and preferences, the more likely you are to engage them in lucrative interactions. Digital marketing is catapulting past analogue. People are consuming more digital content daily – using their smart phones, desktops computers, laptops, tablets, and more. The thing is, companies need to recognize that they need to alter their marketing strategies to adapt to this. Digital marketing is also more eco-friendly than more traditional forms of marketing. There is no need for any materials to be consumed which means that there is less harm done to the environment to get the name of your business out there. Your business is immediately responsible for sustainability. Today, your digital footprint is much more important than the physical footprint of your business.

### The Importance of Digital Marketing in the current scenario

Whether it is product or a service, we just can't under estimate the power of digital marketing. The current age where we live, it is fully dedicated to digital media and so when you are marketing or advertising then you must not forget that there has to be online marketing too.

What makes a difference? Almost everyone would use the online and social media these days. Also, there have been many people who would just like surfing and checking what's on the web. Thus, you can see that almost everyone would come online once a day at least. In fact, some people stay online whole day. Keeping these facts in mind, you just can't leave digital marketing alone when it comes to marketing the product or service.

### Why Digital Marketing is Important for Business

The world is quickly becoming digital. People are consuming digital content on a daily basis. Companies and the business world in general are starting to recognize the importance of getting digital and it is essential that marketing departments adapt quickly to the new circumstances and actively hire professionals in the field of digital marketing. Digital marketing is extremely important, not only because of its rapid growth but also because it is essentially the future of marketing. Soon all other traditional marketing forms will disappear as digital marketing will replace them altogether. While some generations will no doubt lament the loss of paper newspapers, books and old fashioned communication methods, new generations who have grown up with internet and mobile phones are already embracing the brave new world of digital consumption. Digital marketing methods are faster, more practical and versatile than the old traditional ones. Technology has put business in the digital age. Some of the most common forms of digital marketing are:

1. Website (SEO content)
2. Blogs
3. Internet banner ads
4. Online video content
5. Pay-per-click advertising
6. Email marketing
7. Social media marketing (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.)
8. Mobile marketing (SMS, MMS, etc.)

### Now let's highlight some of the key reasons of using digital marketing:

1. **More affordable than traditional marketing:** An e-mail or a social media campaign can transmit the same message to customers for less money than a TV-Ad or a newspaper one. Moreover social media campaigns can reach a wider audience in any part of the world.
2. **Easier to track results:** With a wide range of analytics and data we are able to analyse our own marketing campaigns and find out how the campaign performed and how it can be improved. Of course you can get this data for traditional marketing campaigns but a digital campaign will allow you to measure the success in real time, giving you the advantage of planning more effectively and making changes almost instantly.

3. **The number of consumers:** Traditional marketing has lost a huge amount of consumers. Most people read their newspapers on their iPad or some type of tablet. You need to develop your marketing and embrace the digital age.

### Advantages & Disadvantages of Digital Marketing

#### Advantages:

1. Advertisement on the internet is cheaper than (Low cost) the print advertisement. It is a two way communication between sales person and the potential customer which takes people to the company website. It has a much wider reach.
2. It helps in spreading the business worldwide, with no geographical barriers, making it accessible from one country to another via Internet.
3. It is a 24X7 (365 days) open store where people are welcome to shop anytime from anywhere. This further directs the potential customer towards the company website.
4. Internet makes the product reach much more easy; while researching or getting accurate information on a product. It also adds value by adding a point of reference and a touch of individualized customer service.
5. It also helps in creating credibility and gain trust and confidence of the customers. Many people use internet for the pre-purchase research so that they can find themselves a particular product which meets up to their requirements.
6. It also helps in updating the subscribers through a fast mode of e-mails. Visitors get up-to-date information on each visit.
7. In case of information sensitive business such as a law firm, newspaper or online magazine, or a newsletter, you can deliver the products directly to the customers online.
8. Increased ability to measure and collect data.

#### Disadvantages of Online Marketing

1. Easier to have out dated information on internet, update timing is a critical issue here.
2. Many web visitors expect something for free. Do you have something to offer free?
3. There is a lot of competition in the market and by the time visitor reaches the product they have already gone through many links and got the required product. Unless they find what they are looking for quickly.
4. There are many pros and cons of internet marketing. It's important to consider each when creating internet marketing strategy.

#### Digital marketing: Boon or Bane to real India!!!

The Rural India is the home of the country's most abundant natural resource. Rural India known as Real India is being highly ignored with respect to several parameters of development. The areas to be focussed for development are the basic amenities like illiteracy, Poverty, High Inflation rates, Power supply, Hygiene Sanitation, child labour and many more. With its amazing diversity and variety, real India is also a commercial hotspot and is inviting several companies and travellers from all across the world. Taking advantage of this "the growth and potential" Rural India has really made its presence felt recently. Considering these several aspects this paper explores the challenges and opportunities of digital marketing in rural India. (Through descriptive research)

#### Challenges of Digital Marketing in Rural India

1. **Standard of living:** The number of people below the poverty line is more in rural markets. Thus the people in rural India are still yet to purchase smart phones or computers with internet access. Accordingly digital marketing is also weak and marketing strategies have to be different from those used with e-technology.
2. **Communication Problems:** Facilities such as internet, telephone, fax and telegram are rather poor in rural areas. Quick communication is the need of the hour for smooth conduct of business, but it continues to be a far cry in rural areas due to lack of communication facilities like telecommunication and internet systems etc. The literacy rate in

the rural areas is rather low and consumer's behaviour in these areas is traditional, which may be a problem for effective communication.

3. **Low Literacy Levels:** The low literacy levels in rural areas leads to a problem of communication. E-advertising media has less utility compared to the other media of advertisements.
4. **Traditional Life:** Life in rural areas is still governed by customs and traditions and people do not easily adapt new practices. For example, even rich and educated class of farmers do not use smart phones or have Wi-Fi connections.
5. **Buying Decisions:** Rural consumers are cautious in buying and decisions are slow and delayed. They like to give a trial and only after being personally satisfied, do they buy the product, and sometimes they wait for other people to use the new product which are launched by the company, if the product has good feedback from those people who has used it then only most of the people like to go and buy that product and get satisfied.
6. **Social and Cultural Challenges:** The cyber café model has not worked in many parts of rural India due to socio-cultural issues.
7. **Cultural Factors:** Culture is a system of shared values, beliefs and perceptions that influence the behaviour of consumers. There are different groups based on religion, caste, occupation, income, age, education and politics and each group exerts influence on the behaviour of people in villages through which people are not savvy with technology.
8. **Many Languages and Diversity in Culture:** Factors like cultural congruence (similarity), different behaviour and language of the respective areas make it difficult to handle the customers. Traits among the sales force are required to match the various requirements of these specific areas. This factor is strongly not assisting digital marketing in rural India.
9. **Distribution and Logistics:** Infrastructure continues to be a challenge in rural India. Moreover, the lack of an efficient distribution network prevents penetration of products/services into rural India. The distribution chain is not very well organized and requires a large number of intermediaries, which in turn increases the cost and creates administrative problems. Due to lack of proper infrastructure, manufacturers are reluctant (unwilling) to open outlets in these areas. They are mainly dependent on dealers, who are not easily available for rural areas. This is a challenge to the marketers.
10. **Seasonal Demand:** Demand for goods in rural markets depends upon agricultural situation, as agriculture is the main source of income. Agriculture to a large extent depends upon monsoon and, therefore, the demand or buying capacity is not stable or regular.
11. **Transportation:** Many rural areas are not connected by rail transport. Bumpy and patchy roads become unserviceable during the monsoon and interior villages get isolated. Transportation is one of the biggest challenges in rural markets. As far as road transportation is concerned, about 50% of Indian villages are connected by roads. However, the rest of the rural markets do not even have a proper road linkage which makes physical distribution a tough task. Many villages are located in hilly terrains that make it difficult to connect them through roads. Most marketers use tractors or bullock carts in rural areas to distribute their products. Warehousing is another major problem in rural areas, as there is hardly any organized agency to look after the storage issue. The services rendered by central warehousing corporation and state warehousing corporations are limited only to urban and suburban areas.

### Opportunities of Digital Marketing in Rural India

1. **Large Population:** The rural population is large and its growth rate is also high. Despite the rural urban migration in 50 years only, 40% villages have been connected by road, in next 10 years another 30% would be connected. More than 90% villages are electrified, though only 44% rural homes have electric connections.
2. **Rural Telephone Density:** It has gone up by 300% in the last 10 years; every 1000+ pop is connected by STD. Rural literacy, the rural areas continue to be the place of living majority of Indians.

3. **Evaluate before Buying:** Rural consumers think hundred times before buying any product or service. They check out all the features of the product and also the price of the product. And they always ask their effectiveness or feedback of the product. After doing all this they again think to buy.
4. **Increasing Income:** There has been increase in the income of farmers because of the usage of scientific farming equipment's and usage of advanced fertilizers because of which there has been good results got by the farmers from their respective fields , result of which farmers are making good income from their respective fields.
5. **More Loyal Consumers than Urban Consumer:** Rural Consumer many times to buy a single product , but once the rural consumer feels that they are getting more benefits from the product than the price paid by them , rural consumer will always remain loyal to that product and it will be very difficult for the competitors to break that loyalty.

## Conclusion

Indian rural market is undoubtedly complex but there are some simple truths that we need to accept. The rural consumers are very value-conscious. They may or may not have purchasing power, but they can make a difference to the company's growth if concentrated. Gone were the days when a rural consumer had to go to a nearby town or city to buy a branded product. The growing power of the rural consumer is an opportunity for the companies to flock to the rural markets. Gandhiji believed that India's future lay in her villages and rural markets will have a significant part in India's economy.

Thus, looking at the challenges and the opportunities, which rural markets offer to the marketers, it can be said that the future is very promising for those who can understand the dynamics of rural markets and exploit them to their best advantage. A radical change in attitudes of marketers towards the vibrant and burgeoning (growing) rural markets is called for, so they can successfully impress on the 230 million rural consumers spread over approximately six hundred thousand villages in rural India.

Any starting venture in rural Indian market must have to look into these aspects and after that, schedule their next steps, because one-step wrong from their side can ruin their whole brand image in other parts of the country also.

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