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# UNIT 9 MESSAGE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT FOR RURAL MARKETS

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## Objectives

After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- develop an understanding of issues in design and development of communication strategies for rural markets
- describe how communication objectives are set
- explain the components of message decision
- elaborate upon the importance of unique selling propositions for rural communication
- comment upon the use of symbols and pictures
- apply the consideration of colour, music, celebrities and story line
- understand the relevance of the occasion in designing rural communication strategy
- help develop suitable rural promotions.

## Structure

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Setting Communication Objectives
- 9.3 Communication Concepts relevant to the Rural Context
- 9.4 Unique Selling Proposition
- 9.5 Usage of Symbols and Pictures
- 9.6 Use of Colour in Rural Communication
- 9.7 Use of Rhythm and Music
- 9.8 Use of Language
- 9.9 Use of Models and Celebrities
- 9.10 Developing Storyline
- 9.11 Specific Occasions for Communication
- 9.12 Utilising Existing Rural Entertainment Formats
- 9.13 Summary
- 9.14 Self Assessment Questions
- 9.15 Further Readings

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## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

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For the rural marketer, communication with the rural consumers and channel members is an absolute necessity. It is important to communicate about the products and services that may help in the rural consumers' production activities like, agriculture, animal husbandry, or it may be of use in their daily chores, like



durables and non durables for improving then- life style. Advertisement can play a major role in changing the behaviour, attitudes and in turn the life style of rural consumers. Though the task of communication is important there are number of factors which make it an arduous task. Universalized common message and channels are out of question because of extreme heterogeneity of rural markets. On the other hand various media channels also have limitations in terms of reach and comprehensibility. Number of other issues like wide spread illiteracy, socio-cultural values which are generally conservative and others, impose challenges in developing common communication strategies for the rural markets. In this unit, a discussion about the factors which need to be considered in designing and developing rural advertisements and other communication messages is presented. You can develop an appreciation of problems and opportunities in development and execution of communication strategies. Though the basic principles of advertising are applicable for rural markets, the actual implementation has to be focused on the ground realities of the specific market for which the strategies are being developed. Hence, you are strongly advised to refer back to advertising units of your basic marketing course, MS-6.

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## 9.2 SETTING COMMUNICATION OBJECTIVES

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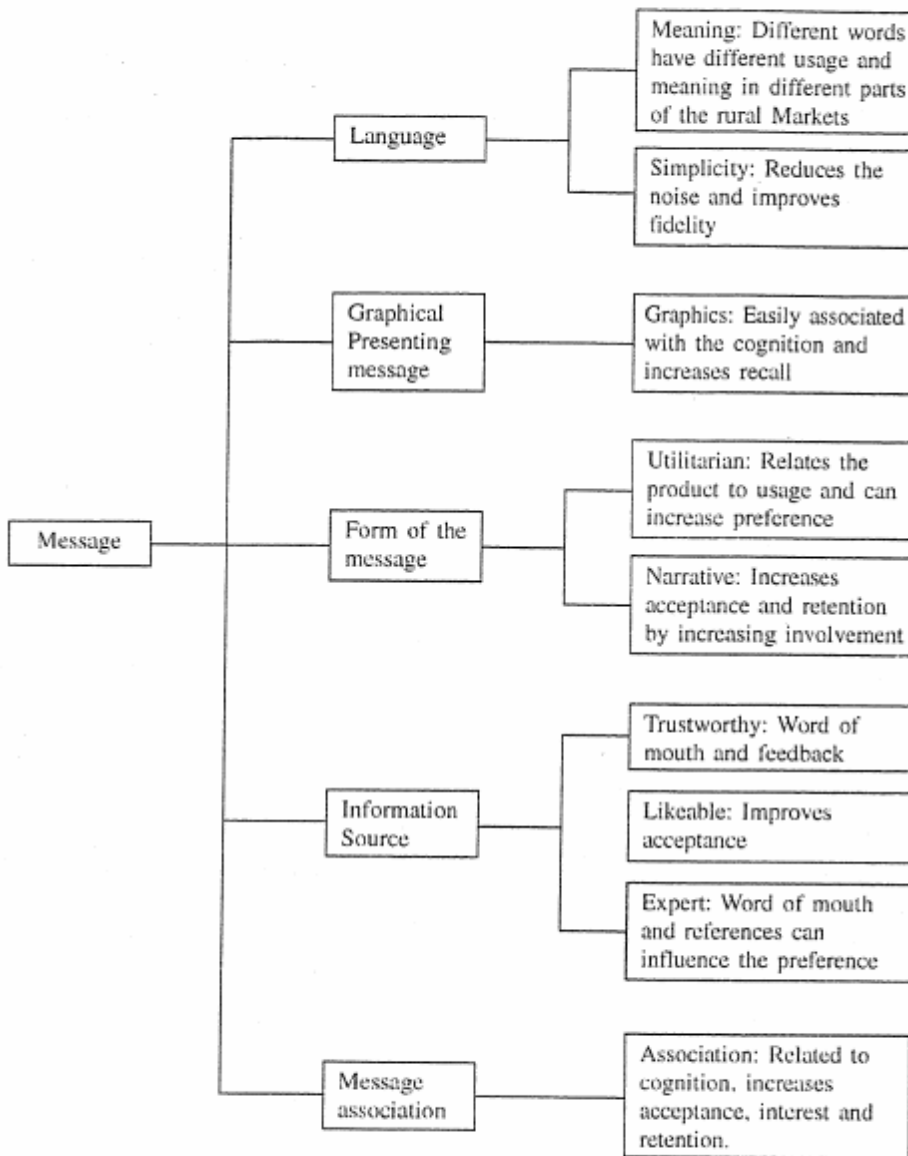
Based on thorough analysis of the market and the internal organizational factors, the marketing manager has to decide the specific objectives for communication. The communication objectives are guided by the corporate mission, strategy, product market strategy, and the product per se on the one hand and the target market conditions on the other hand. In the rural marketing context, the communication objectives can be of wide range. For example, creating awareness, informing about the product for sale, persuading the consumers to try, persuading them to buy and use it in a sustained manner, helping the consumers to use the product effectively, etc. Once the objectives are specifically defined, the further steps in the rural communication process are to be decided.

- What to communicate?
- How to communicate?
- When to communicate?
- Where to communicate?
- What channels to use?
- How to evaluate the communication effectiveness, etc.

The answer for the question 'what to communicate?' would determine the message development and execution process.

In Figure 9.1, number of rural communication message decisions and the factors that may have to be considered by the decision makers are presented. A typical advertisement copy or television commercial would have all these components, and the manager has to judiciously decide the message strategy by considering all these factors for effective and efficient rural marketing communication strategy.

Figure 9.1 : Components of Communication Message Decision Making and the Factors to be Considered



Source : Adapted from Sanal Kumar : Rural Marketing, Response Book (2002) P102

### Activity 1

Look at the advertisement for fertilizers or some consumer product advertisements targeted at the rural market. For any two of the campaigns identified by you , comment upon the

- Language of the commercial
- Association sought to be built
- Presentation of the message

What are the key differences you observe with reference to the above, between the rural communication and an urban mass communication.

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### 9.3 COMMUNICATIONAL CONCEPTS RELEVANT TO THE RURAL CONTEXT

India has traditionally been an oral collectivistic culture. In a rural society, communication is primarily oral. According to McInnis, any form of media/technology attempts to control space or time, when introduced in a society must fit into a cultural context. In traditional India, forms of media have always been time-binding and not space-binding, as made clear by the ever pervading sculptures, temples and monuments. Time-binding cultures tend to be traditional, religious and hierarchical. Social class structures are rigid and formalised. We may appreciate the fact that feudal systems are still prevalent in rural India, based on the above and word of mouth, on account of predominance of oral communication over written is a more powerful medium.

In an urban individualistic society, literacy rates are higher due to the rapid industrialisation provided by mechanised means. The Urban Man is therefore passive, individualistic in nature, being brought up on technology, primarily print, i.e., books. The linear nature of print technology therefore brings in passive, rational thinking on the part of the Urban Man.

In a largely illiterate collectivistic culture, affiliation needs are stronger, therefore... a villager's highest priority is to identify himself with his tribe. There is a feeling of collective identity felt by the village. The rural culture is by nature, non-linear, and collectivistic unlike a linear, sequential and rational urban culture. Articulation of the rural villager's motivations and attitudes is difficult when exposed to rational tool bound means of testing

Oral collectivistic cultures are participative in nature. The rural man indulges in a sort of ritual along with his class. Stage shows, plays, puppet shows have always been popular in rural India, owing to their participatory nature. NGOs have been able to appreciate the above fact, which is witnessed by their increasing usage of role plays and puppet shows.

Games can be used as effective marketing research tools, which involve collective participation of the tribe. Typical 5-point, 7-point scales used in the urban market are not effective in the rural context because they involve complex understanding on the part of the rural consumer. The rural consumer is not spatially well equipped. Pictorial scales may be used in their place. Scales can also be simplified to three-pointers, which involve less complex processing of information required.

A photograph/painting is highly visual and supplies more information than that can be processed by the rural consumer (hot media). In their place, cartoons or caricature, which lack information, are message formats which provide a participatory role of all the five senses.

These need to be thought in 'extreme strategic detail before such message designs are carried out. A lot depends on what must be conveyed and to whom, what the target group's current perceptions are and whether special media attributes such as interactivity would be of help (significant enough to outweigh the additional cost). Then come the questions of the scale of media usage, the precise creative formulation' and packaging of the message.

Starting with advertising, this last bit needs intense understanding. An agency scripted travelling puppet show, for example, could convey the message far better than age old wall paintings, but it would snaked world of difference if the performers are empowered to conduct the shows on an interactive basis - with live inputs from the specific audience. The trouble is that the brand's image must get through and the show must not be allowed to meander. It calls for intensive



training. Wrong voice intonation, for example could shift emphasis from the brand proposition to something totally irrelevant. These performances offer great scope for making intimate contact with India's rural masses.

Of course, it's all a matter of keeping a finger on the village pulse. Anecdotes usually prevalent in rural society suggest, for instance, that villagers are far more open to mildly blasphemous humour than city slickers imagine. It's just that they don't always let strangers in on this. Novelty, however, is a critical aspect. Over-exposure of any medium leads to boredom. So, inventive minds have to keep thinking of something to keep the interest alive.

At the end, brand recognition and sales is what most of the clients want. So, relevance is everything. This is exactly what O&M did in the case of Breeze, a Hindustan Lever soap brand that has a -rose as its symbol (it's under attack from Nirma's Nima Rose). It contains the essence of rose. But roses on the wall paintings rarely resembled roses (it's not easy to paint a realistic rose). So people had all sorts of opinion of the soap. To counter this and to explicitly show that the soap was made of roses, the company employed a simple but effective routine. In the interval of a folk performance, it wheeled in an outsized 'bar' of Breeze (made of thermocol or some such material). Once on stage, the 'bar' was smashed, and a heap of roses fell out, thus signifying that the soap was indeed 'filled' with roses. The message went through and that too very well.

Marketers who have managed to cut through to the rural consumer and make the right connection feel that the biggest mistake that urbanites -often make is to stay unaware of the 'invisible patterns' along which rural society is ordered. This could have a bearing on the permissions to be sought for staging a performance, where it must be held, who all should attend it and who's perceptually 'qualified' to serve the tea. With a little sensitivity to local concerns and some persuasion, it's possible to chalk out a plan that actually maximises village attendance.

The modern village is a lot richer and a lot more aware (A.' choices than most people imagine. But being aware of the choices does not make him a prospective consumer. Research shows that it could be perilous to base marketing decisions and the brand message on the census data. Often as trivial a factor as the distance from a highway may change the emphasis of the brand, giving it a whole new dynamism.

Rural marketers need to ask a few questions before designing the brand communication. The first step in designing an effective message for the rural consumer is an analysis of their daily routines and immediate environment. Question such as 'Who buys the brand?' 'Who uses the brand?' and 'Who decides which brand is to be bought?' must be answered.

Even though men and children actually go out and buy the product, it is increasingly actually the women who make the brand decision. Of course, children sometimes influence the brand decision, especially when they are sent to do the household 'shopping'. It may, thus, be the children who are the early adopters. By using a message and medium which appeals to this segment, marketers can initiate first-time use, which is half the battle won.

A word of caution here may not come amiss. Rural societies of India, while not simple pastoral extensions of urban India, are no longer culturally isolated hamlets that media images would seem to portray. The advent of satellite television, increased rural mobility and frequent visits home by migrant labour and education seekers make incremental changes to the rural fabric. Political awareness and spread of education are also notable influences. Statistically, nearly 36% of all adult learners graduating from colleges are from a rural background and are important change agents in the media exposure and decision making patterns in rural India. The question that marketers are today confronted with are:



Should we look on both sides of the rural urban divide or are we today confronted with a rural urban continuum where variables only differ in intensity. The India of the future is definitely moving towards the latter. Of late, therefore, message formats which show an interesting representation of a rural urban mix, in the use of the celebrity icon, the format and the language have shown impressive acceptance and retention levels. A point in the case are the recent Coca Cola commercials showing Aamir Khan in a rural setting, interacting with urban visitors, and treating them with 'Thanda', immersed in a cool well. (Gori, Thanda Peene ke Bahane Aayi ... Thanda Matlab ...) or the one showing him in a rural setting taking on the retailer overcharging for the small sized Coke (Paanch ... Matlab Chota Coke). The language and format straddle the rural urban divide and "reach" both segments.

Research even says that the behaviour pattern of the rural consumers is also starkly different from region to region. For marketers to understand it, it becomes imperative for them to visit and survey the prospective market. By conducting a research, the basic marketing strategies can be modified if needed.

As a general rule, rural marketing involves more intensive personal selling efforts compared to urban marketing. Marketers need to understand the psyche of the rural consumers and then act accordingly. To effectively tap the rural market a brand must associate it with the same things that are relevant to the everyday lives of rural people.\*

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## 9.4 UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION

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Message is the core idea or information that the rural marketer wants to convey to the consumers. Hence, message is the central component of communication design. Once, the advertising stalwart, Ogilvy said that "my original magic lantern started with the assertion that positioning and promise were more than half the battle". But, it is a difficult task to identify a unique proposition for the product and winning the place in the minds of rural consumers.

The USP of a product is the core appeal of the product which has to be identified and emphasized, keeping in view the characteristics and lifestyles of the rural consumers. The USP which is relevant for urbanites may not impress a rural dweller hence making the advertisement campaign a failure. An advertisement for a toothpaste featuring a lady with attractive shiny, white teeth may be impressive for the urban market. But in the rural context it is wise to show the resulting strong teeth and more number of brushings per tube. Hence the USP for the paste should be economy and resulting tougher teeth in the rural advertising campaign.

As most media like TV, radio, print, etc. are the same for the urban and rural markets it is difficult to identify two different USPs for the same product. Hence marketers and advertisers have to identify broad based, common USPs which appeal to the urban and the rural consumers. As the media provides greater opportunities to appeal directly to the rural consumer also, e.g. advertisements for fertilizers and pesticides.

The print media may be targeted to have exclusive advertisement for the rural market. Similarly programmes on radio and TV which are specially aired for the farmers relating to agriculture and farming could be punctuated with such advertisements.

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\*This section is based strongly on a Postgraduate Research Project study by Aparna Shrivastav, submitted to the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, 2003.



### Basic Message

The central product benefit should form the basic message of the advertisement aimed at the rural consumer. Cluttering should be avoided to prevent confusion. If the product is engine oil, trouble free long life of engine should be the basic message. In an advertisement for the fertilizers, higher yield should be the key point.

### Product-in-Use

If the advertisement is on TV it is useful to have shots of how to use the product. Demonstrations for products like pressure cookers, mixer-grinders etc. (which are common in urban areas) are a must in rural advertisements. The recent advertisement of Prtti mixie show the fancy jars, nominal price factor, speed etc. with continuous commentary from the model. This would not be understood by rural consumers. For them the advertisement should show the mixie actually grinding idli batter, coconut chutney, or tough turmeric at the turning of a knob. Even the way to secure the lid has to be shown. Such an ad helps the rural consumer to "relate" the product to his/her own life situation, and influences him to try the product for the first time. Once the consumer is satisfied he spreads the message.

### Activity 2

For the following products targeted at the rural consumers, suggest suitable USPs

1. Shampoo
2. Toilet soap
3. Shoes
4. Tyres

Give reasons for selecting the suggested USP in each case.

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## 9.5 USAGE OF SYMBOLS AND PICTURES

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Usage of pictures and symbols can be a powerful way to communicate with the rural consumers. As old Chinese proverb states that "a picture is worth thousand words". Especially where the larger population of the rural market are illiterate, use of language has considerable limitation. Pictures and symbols can overcome this barrier. For understanding pictures there is no need for special training as in the case of words and language. Pictures were one of the primary means of communication with one another from time immemorial. Advertisers should ask some of the relevant questions like, what kind of pictures can be used in communication? Which one would be more effective? What are the regulatory restrictions in using the pictures? and so on before deciding the communication strategy.

In spite of several programmes to make education compulsory, most villages remain illiterate. They cannot read brand names. Most national brands are in English. Education in English is very much limited. Due to this drawback rural consumers identify a brand by its logo. They ask for the product by the name of logo in the local language. Eveready, for example, got to be known as Lal Billi or Neeli Billi depending upon the variant demanded, tobacco as Baba Chap and











## 9.12 UTILISING EXISTING RURAL ENTERTAINMENT FORMATS

To reach this vast rural audience, it is very important to understand the established and traditional rural communication process such as the folk culture. The most commonly used theory of rural communication is the two-step flow of communication.

It is believed that the illiteracy of the farmer and the poor reach of traditional media till recently, have strengthened the role of intermediaries who receive messages and pass them on to the farmers. Also known as interpersonal communication, the two-step flow of communication accounts for over 80 percent of the [I-Lira] communication process in India.

The intermediaries who act as interpersonal communicators are generally village-level workers, village leaders and extension officers. To this list can be added the dealer who has begun playing a significant role in influencing the purchase decisions of farmers.

If some of the marketers/advertisers are still trying to crack that right marketing strategy to reach the rural consumers, a recent study by Marketing and Research Team (MART) sheds some light on how you should approach them.

According to the MART Study, folk media is an effective vehicle to communicate and advertise in the rural markets. People are drawn to this because it is a source of entertainment and information, especially in places where the exposure to mass media is negligible, and the level of literacy is low.

However, this suggestion comes with a note of caution. MART feels folk media can be effective provided the campaign is designed meticulously. Special care should be taken to ensure that the campaign provides 'edutainment' and is not used for preaching. The folk media campaign should reach out and touch the hearts of the rural masses, not just their minds.

The MART Study delves into the varied forms of folk media that have evolved from the tradition and culture of the land. In the process of surveying folk media campaigns, MART found it was being used in conjunction with other below-the line activities to leave an impact in the rural markets. These activities usually consisted of video-van campaigns, which included screening of product commercials and Hindi films. This was supported by interactive games like Wheel of Fortune, Pick The Ball and other activities like product demonstrations and influencer and retailer contact.

MART has analysed a few folk media campaigns that were coordinated by some major advertising and specialised rural marketing agencies. The campaigns were chosen to study a sample across the two main sectors, the corporate and the development sector. Within the corporate sector too, a spread across different product categories was surveyed. This was done to see if there was a trend in the use/effectiveness of certain folk forms across different products.

Onida's advertisements showing its TV screen being shattered by 'Neighbour's envy' may be understood by urbanites but the rural dweller will think that the screen is of inferior quality. Hence negative advertising are generally avoided. The storyline should be straight forward and comprehensible.

The presence of a fevicol box on top of the TV set prevents the hero in the telecasted movie from falling into the river from a bridge. Comparatively in the other TV set without a fevicol box on top, the hero loses grip from the heroine's hand and falls down. The spectators are carpenters. The above Fevicol advertisement can be understood by everyone and is also humorous.




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## 9.13 SUMMARY

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In this unit the focus was on understanding the decision making process for message design and development. Number of important factors like usage of unique selling proposition, language, celebrity, storyline etc., were presented. It is important to recognize that the basic principles of developing message design have not altered. It is strongly argued that the market context in terms of spread, differences in language, culture, literacy etc., have to be borne in mind while preparing a communication strategy for rural markets. There are limitations due to poor development of communication infrastructure in rural markets, hence, the strategy has to be dovetailed with the available media channels.

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## 9.14 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

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1. How would you set communication objectives for the rural market if you were a product manager in a consumer goods company, seeking to extend your market reach to your existing product line of common salt, toileteries and economy range of detergents? Your want to target the below 2000+ population villages as they represent a market very thinly occupied by competitive presence.
2. What are the communication concepts that must be borne in mind while communicating to the rural audience? Illustrate with examples.
3. Why is USP an important concept in a rural setting?
4. Explain the relevance of symbols, pictorial representations, music and rhythm for designing rural promotion.
5. What do you understand by interactive message formats? How do you think they would work in the rural setting? Give reasons for your answer.
6. Discuss 'language' as a variable in message development in view of the multilingual, multiethnic nature of rural India.

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## 9.15 FURTHER READINGS

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