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*(Special Issue)*

**“Impact and approach to pandemic covid-19 on various sectors”**

## **Rural digital marketing: A post COVID-19 Scenario**

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### **Abstract**

The concept of Rural Marketing plays a very important role in the Indian Economy. As we all know, most of the Indian people live in villages and it is more than 70% of the total population of the country. Rural Marketing generates more revenues in the country because the majority of the customers are from rural areas. Rural Marketing can be done in three ways i.e. Rural to Urban, Urban to Rural, and Rural to Rural. Therefore, rural marketing is opening for vendors to come and invest in it. But there are some obstacles in doing business in rural areas and marketers try to overcome these obstacles by shifting towards Digital Marketing. Digital Marketing is becoming the most important tool to target a large audience including rural areas. The government of India has taken many steps and started programmes to promote digital activities; it is the cheapest mode of communication. This paper focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on the rural areas after the adoption of digital marketing by the farmers. In India, most of the farmers use digital marketing platforms i.e. Whatsapp, Face book, YouTube (video sharing), social photos, etc. Furthermore, these platforms such as Whatsapp or Face book groups, Twitter helps the farmers to communicate with the online specialist. The COVID-19 crisis hit the agricultural industry to adopt different tools and types of equipment and the use of digital technology help the farmers to make the right decisions and improve their productivity. Therefore, real-life case studies have been illustrated at the end of the paper showing the post-COVID-19 impact on rural digital marketing.

**Keywords:** Rural digital marketing, COVID-19 Scenario

### **Introduction**

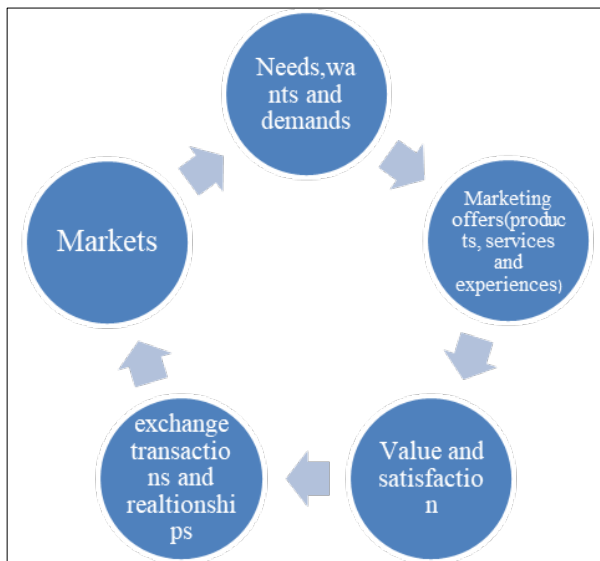
Rural area means an area of land which is outside the constraints of the city or region, or an assigned business, commercial or residential center. The Rural area involves different patterns of settlements, livelihood, infrastructure, and socio-economic while comparing with urban areas. There is a difference between rural area and urban area in terms of its occupation, population size, education level, accessibility of information, accessibility of services, demographics, politics, etc.

The Census defines urban India as - "All the places that fall within the administrative limits of a municipal corporation, municipality, cantonment board etc. or have a population of at least 5,000 and have at least 75 per cent male working population in outside the primary sector and have a population density of at least 400 per square kilometer.

Marketing has been discussed and assessed regularly since marketing was perceived as a distinctive discipline and domain. Numerous definitions of marketing have been put forward throughout the years as every age attempts to catch how marketing is and what it affects them. Over the last 50 years, marketing has been reclassified to fit new contexts, for example, not-for-profit, political and social sectors. With the help of new techniques, equipment and different tools of media have invited more opportunities for redefining marketing. Marketing is the process of determining and translating the consumer needs and wants into product specifications, creating demand and then in turn expanding this demand. "Marketing is a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with other" (Phillip Kotler). Kotler and Armstrong also defined marketing as the process by which

companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships to capture value from customers in return.

There are five core marketing concepts that give a smart approach to marketing and aims to achieve goals, provide a degree of achievement and maintain time management using specifically designed plans for every target or goal.

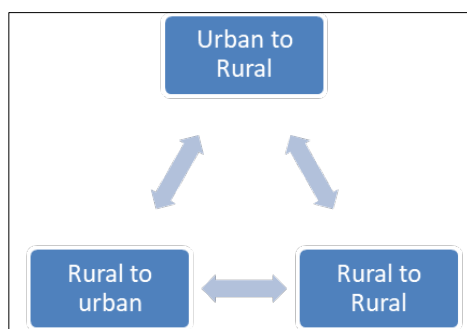


The thought of rural marketing in the Indian Economy has consistently assumed an important section in the routine of individuals. In India, most of the customers are from rural areas and the rural market brings in greater revenues within the nation. Indian rural market results in more than half of the country's financial gain. Indian rural market is very difficult to understand because of its special uniqueness. Many companies were able to enter into the rural market and achieved success with the help of a proper understanding of innovative marketing techniques and practices. It is very hard for companies to overlook many opportunities offered by the rural market. More than half of the population exists in rural areas and it is unexpected for the companies to be effective in rural markets.

“Rural Marketing is defined as a function that manages all activities involved in assessing, stimulating and converting the purchasing power of rural consumers into an effective demand for specific products & services and moving these products & services to the people in rural areas to create satisfaction and a better standard of living and thereby achieving organizational goals”

**Ways of Rural Marketing**

Rural marketing is a two way marketing process wherein the transactions can be:



1. **Urban to rural:** It includes selling of goods and services by urban marketers in remote areas. These include FMCG sector, consumer durables etc.
2. **Rural to Urban:** A rural producer (involved in agriculture) sells his produce in urban market. This may not be immediate. These are generally middlemen, agencies, government co-operatives, etc. who natural products, vegetables, grains, pulses and so on.
3. **Rural to rural:** These include selling of rural instruments, cattle, carts and others to another town in its nearness. India is a place where there is variety and about 70% of Indian population lives in villages. These villages contribute in the financial development of the country through the production of food grains, vegetables, etc.

Marketing is a stressed, fast changing, and dynamic business activity. The job of marketing itself has changed significantly because of different emergencies - material and energy deficiencies, inflation, recessions, unemployment, warfare and war, and various impacts because of quick technological changes in specific enterprises. Such changes, including the internet, have constrained today's marketing executive turning out to be more market-driven in their strategic decision making and using a regularized means of obtaining information about customers, products, marketplace, and the overall environment. Digital marketing refers to a market on the internet.

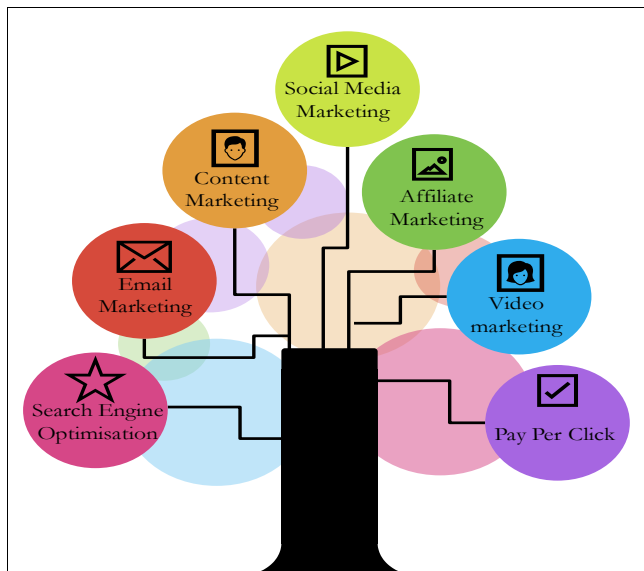
Digital marketing encompasses all marketing efforts that use an electronic device or the internet. Businesses leverage digital channels such as search engines, social media, email, and their websites to connect with current and prospective customers. This can also be referred to as 'online marketing' of products and services using internet mobile phones, digital technologies, display advertising, and any form of the digital medium. Business grow significantly with the help digital marketing as by making use of various techniques and strategy, digital marketing not only helps to attract more traffic but the quality traffic which engages and convert more.

In the year the 2000s and 2010, the process of digital marketing became more sophisticated due to the rapid increase in the number of devices that can access digital media. With the introduction of social media in the year 2000s (LinkedIn, Face book, YouTube, and Twitter) the consumers became even more dependent on digital electronics in day-to-day life. The rapid increase of internet users has led to a drastic improvement in the field of digital marketing techniques. Worldwide digital marketing has become the most common term, especially after the year 2013. Digital media growth was estimated at 4.5 trillion online ads served annually with digital media spend at 48% growth in 2010.

**Various goals of digital marketing are as follows**

- **Increase in problem and solution awareness:** when the customers get to know about their needs through online marketing, it is called problem awareness and they come to know about the solution for the problem it is known as solution awareness.
- **Acquiring new leads and customers:** The main motive of digital marketing is to attract new leads and convert them into their customers.

- **Activating leads and customers:** It is the process in which companies remind customer how they bring more value to them and persuade them to buy from them in this way they activate the customers to buy from them for the first time.
- **Monetizing existing leads and customers:** This includes various strategies such as up-selling, cross-selling, and various other types of offers to attract more leads and encouraging the existing customers to buy from them.
- **On boarding new leads and customers:** Under this strategy, the company gives special treatment to their new customers by sending them welcome emails or welcome packets that inform them on how to use product or service, what they can expect, and where they can go if they need help with their purchase.
- **Building community and advocacy:** One of the main motives of every business is to gain customers that become advocates and brand promoters of your company.
- **A new way to do Marketing: Digital Marketing.** Some new digital marketing techniques and tactics are:



**Social media marketing:** Social media marketing is the practice of promoting your brand, product, or website through various social media platforms which include Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, etc. These channels are used to drive traffic to your website, create brand awareness, and generate leads for the business.

**Email marketing:** It is a strategy in which one sends commercial messages to current and potential customers. It is one of the most effective digital marketing techniques, it means of communicating to your current and potential customers. It is the method of promoting content, discounts, events, etc to your audience.

**Pay per click:** Pay per click is the approach in which the traffic is derived to your website by paying to the publisher every single time the user clicks on your advertisement. One of the most prominent examples of pay-per-click is the Google ad words in which the top slots on Google search pages can book by paying for them.

**Search engine optimization:** It is an approach of increasing the organic (free) traffic to your website by optimizing it to rank higher in search engine result pages. Various algorithms are used to do this task. Website, blogs are info graphics are amongst them which are most benefits by this technique.

**Content marketing:** It is the process of creating the content and then promoting it to increase lead generation, brand awareness, traffic growth, number of customers. Blogs, white papers, online brochures, etc are various channels of content marketing that do not directly promote the brand but stimulates the interest of the customers.

**Affiliate marketing:** Affiliate marketing is the process of earning profits/commission by promoting someone else product. It is performance-based marketing in which one gets paid by the amount of traffic brought by him to the website. Your tube partner program and posting affiliate links from your social media account are some examples of affiliate marketing.

**Video Marketing:** While doing online marketing, Videos can be added to the webpage to increase the company's site traffic. Information sent to this target audience should apply to addressing their requirements, and along these lines, the video should be planned in a way that is reliable with the perception and understanding ability of the customers.

### A Connection between Rural marketing and Digital Marketing

As we know that, 70% of the total population lives in rural areas. Among these, most of the customers are from rural areas and the rural market brings in higher revenues within the nation. Indian rural market results more than half of the income is obtained from them. Furthermore, the rural market is expanding and opening for sellers to make proper use of it and to invest. Now, many more businesses have started selling their goods in rural areas because it generates optimum profit. Concerning this, there are several challenges which rural marketing has to face such as low literacy, Traditional life, seasonal demand, language barriers, communication problems, lack of awareness, no desire to adopt new life, etc. To overcome these problems that create hurdles while doing business and marketing in rural areas by shifting from traditional rural marketing to digital marketing.

In its traditional ways, rural marketing has been done through wall paintings, hoardings, van campaigns, haat, mela, or mandi campaigns, etc. A lot of businesses have generated excellent results at that time. We cannot say, that the traditional way of rural marketing has been eliminated with the entering of digital marketing but it is noticed that some changes take place in rural areas with the use of smartphones and the internet. Today's Rural market has transformed in multiple ways and they try to explore new things and as same as what is done in rural areas. Digital Marketing has got a huge opportunity to invest in rural marketing while doing business in its developing phase in India. With the increase in the demand for the internet, most of the users start using social media and there is heavy traffic on it. Digital Marketing is the cheapest source of communication which helps business to earn higher incomes. The government of India starts promoting Digital

activities and also initiated many programs to increase awareness among rural people.

### **How Digital Marketing Transform Rural Marketing after the impact of COVID-19?**

In most of the developing countries, The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the supply chain, agriculture input system, occupations, farmer's income, etc. It is difficult for the farmers to market or sell their goods, particularly perishables goods. The COVID-19 has made us all self-reliant and farmers use digital technology more and more than previously. There is an increase in the use of digital marketing platforms that can help small-scale farmers to make investments after the COVID-19 pandemic will have passed. Now, Agripreneurs use different types of digital marketing tools for marketing their products and to share their views and thoughts. Farmers spend their time watching videos on Facebook and YouTube and start sharing among their own farmer's groups to get some benefits. They also discuss their problems in the WhatsApp groups and find the best solutions to their problems. In this way, the content in the particular video gets viral and it gives the best opportunity to the farmers to grow in the market. In this COVID-19 pandemic, farmers are able to digitally develop their brand visibility and online reputation. The COVID-19 crisis hit the agricultural industry to adopt different tools and types of equipment and the use of digital technology help the farmers to make the right decisions and improve their productivity. Nowadays, the majority of farmers in the world uses mobile applications to approach the target market and received the information with help of voice and text messages. This will lead to the proper use of digital technology by the farmers for agricultural harvest and output. Furthermore, Progressive farmers use remote sensors to make optimum use of water irrigation, appropriate seeds, and chemical pesticides to protect crops from diseases and reduce risk. Internet of Things is a worldwide network of interconnected objects uniquely addressable, based on standard communication and protocols. Internet of Things (IoT) helps the farmers to monitor the production system, proper understanding of weather and environmental conditions, improve the food quality by remotely controlling the locations, etc.

Traditionally, agricultural information can be transmitted with the help of magazines, newspapers, and television. Now, it is the 21st century and it is the world of social media. The growth of social media from the last two decades has changed the business environment to the large extent. There are various types of social media tools i.e. Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc. In COVID-19 crises, farmers are starting using social media at each stage of business. They use Information Communication Technology and Social media for sharing information throughout the world and giving advice on particular causes. Many companies provide better services to the farmers. Example: BSNL is providing a maharishi plan. This helps the users to directly interact with customer service providers. Social media is now a mainstream form of communication and connects millions of people with the increase in the number of smart phones.

Social media refers to the exchange of information and ideas among people. Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) define social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of

Web 2.0 and that allows the "creation and exchange of user-generated content. After the COVID-19, farmers are using these popular social media tools:

- **Facebook** plays an important role to educate and communicate the farmers because it is the world's most popular social networking site. It connects millions of people, friends, relatives and they share pictures, videos and audio files with each other. Furthermore, farmers use face book on personal bias and tell their stories of success and failure to the world.
- **Twitter** is the mode of communication used to start one-on-one conversations with anyone who follows on Twitter. Direct Messages allows the farmers to have private conversations, group chats and ability to send direct messages to people they don't know. Farmers can share their message of 140 characters and these messages are called as "Tweets", this is showing to everyone who is interested in reading them.
- **Youtube** is the video-sharing platform where users can upload, view, rate, share, comment on videos etc. Farmers can upload their videos and sharing their personal stories to millions of people.
- **Whatsapp** is the cross-platform centralized messaging and voice-over-IP. It is used to send text messages, voice messages, make voice and video calls, share images, make groups etc. It is the handy use of social media and mostly preferred for related groups.
- **LinkedIn** is employment- oriented online service platform used professional relationships and allow job seekers to post their CVs and employers to post jobs. Farmers can write posts and articles within the LinkedIn platform to share with their network.

There are some Post COVID-19 trends, Rural Marketing in Punjab witness these trends i.e. Rural marketing process, On-Farm product development, Rural Kisan Bazar, home delivery of food products in rural as well as urban areas of Punjab, etc.

To show the impact of COVID-19 on Rural Digital marketing, real- life case studies are discussing as:

### **Case study of Honest Farmer Group using direct marketing**

We would like to quote good learning of framers of Sangrur trained from Punjab Agricultural University also the members of Kisan Club (PAU, Ludhiana) forming their own brand i.e Honest farmer Group to cater to needs of rural as well as urban people in the tough situation of Covid-19 to meet their daily needs of milk and vegetables. Honest Farmer Group is a regional group with a product range of different vegetables grown organically in farms and desi cow's milk (A2 PROTEIN MILK). This brand caters to the people of Ludhiana and provides the facility of home delivery in the prevailing situation of the pandemic. This group works on a transparency approach as in the current situation people are highly cautious about what they are consuming and how it is prepared, they share all the techniques used while preparing the product. Honest Farmer group fed their cows on in-house chemical-free greens, they manufacture their own dry feed from homegrown organic corns, wheat, etc. nothing is out-sourced and the process carried out is neat and tidy. Due to the small scale, operations they use stainless steel utensils for carrying milk whereas conventional milk supply chain uses poor quality

plastic drums. They use the ice-cooled box and fast motorcycle-based delivery to keep milk fresh during supply whereas conventional milk supply uses chemicals as their supply chain is very long. Well communicated consumers always have greater trust in the supplier, this technique is efficiently used by the group as they keep their consumers well informed about the whole process, and different techniques used, etc. various digital marketing tools.

#### Case study of Kaler farm in covid-19 pandemic

Kaler farms used rural marketing strategies as well as direct marketing channels for promoting their farm produce. Kaler farm followed all the covid-19 protocols issued by the government authorities in the whole process. They made their workers work while maintaining social distance wearing proper masks and gloves. They acquire curfew pass for providing the home delivery service to their customers, also the people coming from the village for buying vegetables are made to maintain social distance during the whole process of buying. They advertise their products through various social media platforms i.e Facebook and what app group. They cater to both rural and urban populations through various marketing channels.

#### Conclusion

The present paper represents how COVID-19 pandemic effects rural digital marketing. The COVID-19 pandemic affects farmer's income, occupation, agricultural input system, etc. In COVID-19, it is very difficult for the farmers to go outside and sell their goods especially perishable goods. Digital marketing in rural areas helps the farmers to become independent and use digital marketing tools more and more than previously. Agripreneurs use social media tools i.e. whatsapp, YouTube, Facebook, etc. to share ideas and opinions among their farmer's groups to get and give some benefits to others. Farmers start doing and making real-life videos of their work and share their experiences and upload in youtube or Facebook and share the link with other farmers also. The agricultural industry starts using various tools and techniques of digital technology after the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. This will help the farmers to make the right decisions and improve their productivity. Progressive farmer start using remote sensor systems to measure the temperature, humidity, water level, and soil quality. The majority of the farmers use social media to share information and create awareness. Farmers are facing various agricultural marketing problems and social media helps us to provide solutions to those problems. The government of India has taken many steps in providing more technological opportunities to facilitate farmers for more efficient work. Today, the young generation can be more active on social media tools and can change the way of doing business. Various case studies have also been represented in this paper to show the impact of COVID-19 on rural digital marketing.

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