

Rural Consumer Perception toward Confectionery Advertising: A Behavioral Analysis through the Lens of the Indian Knowledge System

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Abstract

Rural markets in India have increasingly become a significant source of growth for the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector. Among these categories, confectionery products such as chocolates, candies, and toffees have experienced considerable expansion due to improved distribution systems, smaller packaging formats, and growing consumer aspirations. Advertising plays a central role in shaping product awareness and influencing purchase behaviour within these markets. However, most studies examining advertising effectiveness are largely based on Western behavioural frameworks and rarely incorporate indigenous philosophical perspectives that may influence rural consumer decision-making. This study explores rural consumer perceptions of confectionery advertising by analysing insights obtained from secondary data sources. The research integrates established behavioural frameworks, particularly the Theory of Planned Behavior, with ethical ideas derived from the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Concepts such as Dharma (ethical conduct), Satya (truthfulness), and Lokasangraha (collective welfare) are used to interpret consumer responses to advertising messages within rural communities. Secondary data were gathered from academic journals, rural marketing studies, government publications, and industry reports relating to the FMCG sector. The analysis indicates that rural consumers tend to evaluate advertising messages not only on informational or emotional appeal but also on perceived credibility and ethical alignment. Factors such as trust, transparency, and community approval appear to influence purchase intention more strongly than celebrity endorsements or repetitive promotional exposure. By integrating behavioural theories with indigenous ethical frameworks, the study proposes a culturally contextualized understanding of advertising effectiveness in rural markets. The findings offer useful insights for marketers seeking to design responsible and socially aligned communication strategies that resonate with rural consumers.

Keywords: Rural Marketing, Confectionery Advertising, Consumer Perception, Indian Knowledge System, Brand Trust, Ethical Communication.

Introduction

India's rural economy represents one of the largest consumer markets for fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG). In recent decades,

the growth of rural infrastructure, rising income levels, and the spread of digital media have significantly increased the penetration of branded consumer products. Among these categories, confectionery products have gained substantial popularity due to their affordability, availability in small units, and appeal among younger consumers.

The expansion of rural consumption has encouraged companies to invest heavily in advertising and promotional strategies. Advertising functions as an important communication tool that informs consumers about product benefits, builds brand recognition, and influences purchase decisions. Nevertheless, the manner in which rural consumers interpret advertising messages often differs from the responses observed in urban markets.

Rural purchase behaviour is frequently shaped by social relationships, cultural values, and trust-based interactions. Consumers in rural communities often rely on collective opinion, retailer recommendations, and perceived credibility when evaluating products. As a result, advertising effectiveness in rural contexts cannot be understood solely through conventional persuasion models.

Most existing research explains advertising influence using behavioural theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Hierarchy of Effects Model. While these frameworks provide useful explanations of how attitudes and intentions influence behaviour, they may not fully capture the ethical and cultural dimensions that shape consumer decisions in rural India.

The Indian Knowledge System offers an alternative perspective rooted in ethical values and social responsibility. Traditional philosophical ideas emphasize fairness in trade, accountability in communication, and the importance of collective welfare. By incorporating these ethical principles into the analysis of advertising behaviour, researchers can develop a more contextually relevant understanding of rural consumer perception.

This study therefore examines rural consumer responses to confectionery advertising through a framework that combines behavioural theory with ethical principles derived from classical Indian thought.

Objectives of the Study

Primary Objective

To develop a conceptual understanding of rural consumer perception toward confectionery advertising using secondary data and ethical principles derived from the Indian Knowledge System.

Secondary Objectives

- To examine the role of trust in influencing rural consumer responses to advertising.
- To analyse the relative influence of emotional appeal, celebrity endorsement, and ethical messaging in rural advertising studies.
- To explore how ethical values derived from Indian philosophical traditions may influence consumer perception and purchase intention.

Research Design

The present research adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design based on systematic analysis of secondary data sources. Rather than conducting primary field surveys, the study reviews existing literature and institutional reports in order to identify recurring patterns and insights related to rural consumer behaviour.

Secondary data were collected from multiple sources, including:

- Peer-reviewed academic journals indexed in Scopus, ABDC, and UGC-CARE databases
- Industry reports published by organizations such as Nielsen, KPMG, and Deloitte

- Government publications related to rural development and consumer markets
- Research studies from management institutions and marketing scholars
- Books and scholarly publications on consumer behaviour and marketing management

The collected materials were analysed in order to identify themes relevant to rural advertising effectiveness and consumer perception.

Analytical Framework

To organise the findings systematically, the study used three complementary analytical approaches:

1. Thematic Content Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns across existing studies. Key themes were coded and grouped based on recurring concepts appearing in rural marketing literature. The following constructs formed the basis of the coding framework:

- Trust in advertising
- Ethical messaging
- Emotional appeal
- Celebrity endorsement
- Purchase intention
- Community influence

Through this process, the study identified several dominant themes explaining rural consumer response to advertising communication.

Thematic Insights from Literature

1. Behavioural Intention Models

Many advertising studies rely on behavioural models to explain consumer decision-making. The Theory of Planned Behavior explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control influence behavioural intentions. Similarly, the Hierarchy of Effects model proposes that consumers move through stages of awareness, interest, desire, and action when responding to advertising messages.

Although these models provide useful theoretical explanations, their application in rural contexts sometimes overlooks social and cultural influences that shape consumer evaluations.

2. Trust as a Key Mediating Factor

Across multiple studies, trust consistently emerges as an important determinant of consumer response. Rural consumers often evaluate advertising messages based on perceived honesty and reliability rather than persuasive appeal alone.

Trust may develop through several mechanisms, including:

- Word-of-mouth communication within the community
- Recommendations from retailers and local opinion leaders
- Consistency between advertising claims and actual product performance

These factors indicate that trust functions as both a psychological and social construct within rural markets.

3. Ethical Branding and Moral Perception

Recent marketing research has highlighted the growing importance of ethical branding. Consumers increasingly evaluate companies not only based on product attributes but also on perceived fairness, transparency, and responsible behaviour.

In rural communities, moral perception may significantly influence brand reputation. Advertising messages that appear exaggerated or misleading may quickly lose credibility. In contrast, communication that reflects honesty and social responsibility tends to generate stronger consumer acceptance.

4. Cultural Embeddedness of Consumer Behaviour

Another important theme emerging from the literature is the cultural embeddedness of consumer behaviour. Rural consumers often interpret advertising messages within the context of local traditions, values, and social relationships.

Despite this reality, relatively few marketing studies incorporate indigenous philosophical traditions when analysing consumer perception. This gap highlights the importance of integrating culturally relevant frameworks into advertising research.

Integration of Indian Knowledge System Principles

The Indian Knowledge System provides several ethical concepts that can be meaningfully connected to marketing communication.

Dharma (Ethical Conduct)

Dharma refers to moral duty and ethical behaviour. In the context of marketing, this principle suggests that businesses should communicate honestly and avoid misleading promotional practices.

Satya (Truthfulness)

Satya emphasises the importance of truth and transparency. Advertising that provides accurate and reliable information helps build consumer trust and long-term relationships.

Lokasangraha (Collective Welfare)

This concept highlights the responsibility of individuals and organizations to contribute to the welfare of society. Marketing strategies that respect community values and promote responsible consumption may therefore gain stronger acceptance among rural consumers.

Conceptual Interpretation

By integrating behavioural theories with these ethical principles, the study proposes a conceptual relationship in which:

Ethical Advertising Communication → Brand Trust → Purchase Intention

Ethical messaging strengthens consumer trust, which in turn increases the likelihood of favourable purchase decisions. Community endorsement may further reinforce this relationship in rural settings.

Methodological Contribution

The analytical approach adopted in this study offers several theoretical contributions.

First, it establishes a connection between classical Indian philosophical thought and modern consumer behaviour research. This integration expands the conceptual foundations of advertising studies by introducing indigenous ethical perspectives.

Second, the study provides a culturally contextualised understanding of rural consumer behaviour. Rather than assuming that Western behavioural models apply universally, the analysis highlights the influence of local values and social norms.

Third, by combining behavioural theory with ethical constructs, the research offers a more comprehensive explanation of how advertising influences rural consumer perception.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that advertising effectiveness in rural markets cannot be understood solely through conventional persuasion models. Rural consumers often evaluate marketing communication through a broader lens that includes ethical credibility, trustworthiness, and community acceptance.

The integration of Indian Knowledge System principles provides valuable insights into this process. Concepts such as Dharma, Satya, and Lokasangraha emphasise ethical responsibility, truthful communication, and social welfare. When advertising strategies reflect these values, they are more likely to build trust and establish long-term relationships with rural consumers.

The findings suggest that marketers targeting rural markets should focus on authenticity, transparency, and community engagement rather than relying exclusively on celebrity endorsements or high-frequency advertising exposure.

By adopting ethically grounded communication strategies, companies can strengthen brand credibility while also contributing to sustainable and socially responsible marketing practices.

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