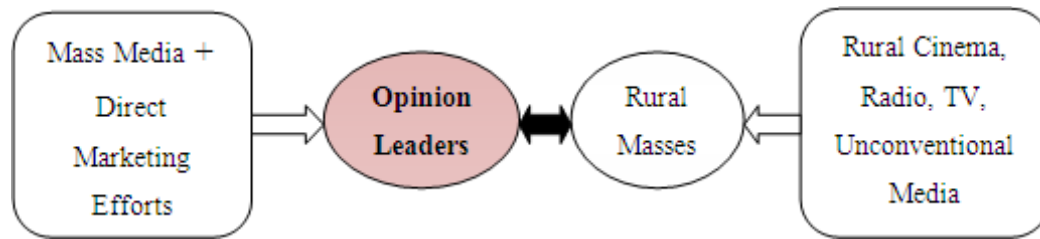

Word of mouth: the key to unlock hinterlandP.Prialatha¹ and K.Malar Mathi²*¹Doctoral Scholar/²Associate Professor, Bharathiar School of Management & Entrepreneur Development,
Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, India.*

ABSTRACT: Advertising and other promotional efforts form crucial part of rural marketing communication, that to with increasing rural prosperity, marketers are keen to inform villagers about the benefits of buying and consuming their products and services. The promotion aspects always create a challenge in rural markets because of the fact that villages have thin population density and are widely spread over large remote areas. Some of the rural markets are also inaccessible to television signals and are often designated as –media darkl. Interpersonal communication accounts for over 80% of the rural communication process. ‘_Word of Mouth’ form of communication plays a vital role in rural consumer purchase decisions. The study was conducted among rural areas of Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu, to identify rural consumer’s exposure to different media vehicles and to understand the importance of ‘_Word of Mouth’ in influencing rural consumer’s purchase decision with regard to personal care products. The study throws insight into the need for positive word of mouth generation, thorough right media mix decisions targeting rural consumers. ‘_Word of Mouth’ communication rules brand building in Hinterland and the marketers foraying into it must focus on a long term effect and decide on innovative and feasible media options to capture the mind space of rural consumers.

Key words: Hinterland, Media Mix, Word Of Mouth & Opinion Leader.

1. Introduction. The promotion aspects always create a challenge in rural markets because of the fact that villages have thin population density and are widely spread over large remote areas. Some of the rural markets are also inaccessible to television signals and are often designated as –media darkl. Therefore, the rural poor are not only denied access to products and services, but also to knowledge about what is available and how to use it. What marketers and advertisers today are worried about is how to develop a scalable model for influencing the rural consumer’s decision over a period of time. One basic problem of using the mass media for marketing communication in rural India is the time gap between the point of exposure and the time of purchase, which is long. The memorability of the message cannot be expected to be strong enough, to last till the time of purchase, if the impact of communication is not very effective (Bhatia, 2007). (Kashyap & Raut, 2008) state that having developed a good communication package aimed at the rural masses, it is equally important to deliver the same through a combination of mass media and unconventional media. Even today, interpersonal communication accounts for over 80% of the rural communication process. The authors further propose an ideal media model to reach rural audiences in which ‘_Opinion Leaders’ are given center stage. The marketers must influence the opinion leaders first and win them over before targeting the rural masses, as the former guide the latter in their purchase decisions.



The regional press plays a very important role in reaching opinion leaders in villages, who are generally literate and exposed to rural masses and the mass media. Since such opinion leaders are few and can be identified easily, direct marketing efforts such as road shows, direct mailers and one-to-one contact programs specifically aimed at them can help create a favorable image about a product. In addition, messages conveyed through the mass media like television and radio are understood by these opinion leaders in the same way as they are by urban audiences. Dealers too, play a major role in influencing the choice of a brand at the point of sale for both the target audiences.

2. Media Vehicles and Rural Market. Television plays an important role in rural life, with regard to social, economic and political processes that have been revolutionizing the landscape of village India in recent years. The ethnographic fieldwork in two remote villages in the mountains of Western Maharashtra - Danawli and RajPuri, shows that there is social change at both the structural as well as psychological levels and indicates that the village audience is an active and vibrant participant in the use of media, which has ramifications for 'development' both at the village level and beyond (Johnson, 2001). (Bhawna, 2007) conducted a study among 150 rural consumers of Jhangadi (Mawana) to understand the brand preference of hair oil. The research showed that TV advertising had a deep impact on the minds of consumers (47%) from the villages. (Das & Ashutosh Ka, 2009) analyzed the growing popularity of radio and its impact on the listeners. 1872 respondents from Barrackpur Municipal area of West Bengal were taken up for the questionnaire survey. The study found that respondents, irrespective of their occupation variation, opined that, popularity of audio media has significantly increased after privatization. The various categories of respondents also favored the opinion that the spreading of information has increased significantly after the introduction of FM channels. Radio Mirchi was ranked first by the respondents. Thus FM radio as a medium was found to have considerable impact in spreading of information and upliftment of lifestyle of its listeners.

Marketers should use organized media-mix like TV, radio, cinema and POP advertising for their marketing communications in rural areas. Television is gaining popularity in rural areas but due to the poor supply of electricity, radio is performing significantly better than TV. Since the rural people have a need for demonstration, short feature films with disguised advertisement messages, direct advertisement films and documentaries that combine knowledge and advertisements will perform better rural communication. Hence the companies may also use audio-visual publicity vans, which may sell the products with promotional campaign. To attract the rural consumers, companies can organize the puppet shows, village fairs, dance and drama shows, group meetings to convince the rural consumers regarding the products and services (Srivastava, 2005). (Faldy, 2009) intended to understand whether customer recognition of a selected brand of Personal Care Industry in

Print media is influenced by certain personal variables. 300 respondents of Gujarat were taken for the study. He found that Advertising plays a vital role in boosting the sales through brand recognition in the Personal care Industry. Advertising needs to be evaluated for its effectiveness. Increasing number of firms go for combination of Print as well as Television advertising. While designing advertisements, certain variables viz. Age, Sex, Occupation and Education need to be taken into consideration as significant difference in recalling ability was found to exist between the respondents of different age, sex, occupation and education groups. (Kirti, 2009) through her study delineated the dimensionality of advertising attitudes across rural and urban India. It was observed that advertising attitudes did consist of believability, trust and control dimensions. The study shows that the prolific advertisements and the various media options available have resulted in the consumers losing interest in the ads, giving rise to selective attention and absorption. It was observed that traditional media scored better than the Internet. In both urban and rural India, newspapers scored as the number one media, but it also seemed uninteresting to the respondents. It was also observed that the Internet is gaining importance in the media options in both urban and rural areas, and must be carefully explored by the marketers. The study suggests that advertisers need to be more creative in their advertising copy for newspapers. The advertising claims should be relevant and not deceitful, and the message should focus on product attributes and benefits.

Wall Paintings are an effective and economical medium for advertising in rural areas. Retailers normally welcome paintings of their shops, walls, and name boards, since it makes the shop look cleaner and better. Their shops look alluring and stand out among other outlets. Besides rural households, shopkeepers and panchayats do not expect any payment, for their wall to be painted with product messages. The greatest advantage of the medium is the power of the picture completed with its local touch (Sathyanarayana & Ramani, 2008). Brand communication to the consumers is always an important marketing goal of marketers. In doing so, they spend a lot through their marketing services firm, which provides the advertising and communication services to the client firms. Most of the marketing services firms bill their client heavily mainly due to using easily deployable medias, like TV, print papers, etc. But in South Asian countries like Bangladesh, there are many rural or semi-urban areas which are traditionally media poor and have little access to print. Companies can use point of purchases (POP), like retail outlets and surroundings, for brand communication. The author personally visited some rural and semi-urban areas as part of the distributors' sales representative team and pointed out some simple, cost-effective ways to effectively reach the customers, like: Product Card (picturesque) with Corporate Identity for the Retailers, Brand List card with Corporate Identity for the Consumers, Classifying Educated and Professional Traders, Running Promotion Cards, General Shopping List to the Consumers, Associating other Value Added Item or hot FMCG in the Strategic CP campaign, Informing the Retailers of Upcoming Promos Earlier, Company Named Shopping Bag for High Volume Purchases, Sun Shed for the Shop, Sorting the products/ brands properly (visibly) in the shelf, Dedicated company display shelf space, Corporate or specific brand labeled T shirts, etc. The author found that many of the above mentioned ideas are still underutilized or unutilized by many companies. Especially in rural and sub urban areas with low media reach, these brand communication techniques are more directly visible and related to customers, retailers, and distributors (Moslehuddin, 2010).

(Suresh & Sathyanarayana, 2008) states that rural marketing has been witnessing a lot of action from both the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector and consumer products manufacturers but, there has been little success in the manner in which rural research is carried out. Media efforts for rural markets are usually never looked at seriously, ultimately, what matters, is how well the medium is utilized and what innovations can be created to attract and retain brand attention. With the huge geographical spread of rural markets, decentralized promotion would also synergize with scrotal development of pockets of the rural consumer base. Companies must also turn to innovative methods of advertising like non-conventional or traditional media, fairs or haats to reach their potential customer base. The most important element in rural communications is to integrate three things as companies communicate: communication (of message), trial or demonstration (convincing) and final sale. This proved to be extremely effective in advertising to the rural market. (Baneriji, 2005) reveals that the rural markets have already overtaken urban markets in many categories of mass consumption branded goods in terms of both volume and growth. He observes that a rural business organization in India is expected to communicate with various cultural and language groups. Hence multilingual abilities become necessary on the part of rural marketing and rural business personnel. He adds that many business executives in India often fail to be successful because of the language barrier. He states that Haats provide a good opportunity for promotion after brand building has been done at melas. (Archana, 2006) through her study found that residents of atleast four villages visit Saunda Haat in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh every Thursday, as do merchants from the same villages. There are around 60 stalls in Haat selling everything from groceries to apparel to kitchenware to fresh produce. Few of the brands which are familiar include Parle- G, tiger, Parachute and Lifebuoy. She further adds that Saunda Haat is one of the 47000 that is serving the needs of around 70% of India's rural population of 742 million. She concludes that despite constraints, the rural market especially for Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs), apparel, footwear and fuel, is bigger than the urban market.

(Urvashi & Vijendra, 2010) surveyed the respondents who were in the age group of 21-30, literates, exposed to media options, from rural and urban areas of NCR region, western Uttar Pradesh to find the factors affecting the choice and preference of media vehicles among rural and urban population. Data was collected for 10 factors and 8 media options. Customer perception in rural segment for different media options were as follows: (i) Newspapers were found to be informative, reachable, believable, economical and attention seeking, (ii) TV was found to be highly attention seeking, reachable, user friendly and helpful as a buying guide. But it also caused wrong decision and exaggeration, (iii) Radio was considered to be economical, user friendly and reachable, (iv) Internet was found to be informative, attention seeking and believable, (v) Magazines were considered informative and believable, (vi) Movies were user friendly, but cause wrong decision and exaggeration, (vii) Out of Home advertisements were economical and attention seeking and finally (viii) Mobiles as a media has negative perception. Though it is considered User friendly, it is also exaggerated and misleading. (Pankaj & Anurag, 2011) suggest that tie-ups with NGOs, Self Help Groups, Improving physical infrastructure and stimulating the flow of market information can all help the marketers to cope up with the communication challenges faced in reaching the rural consumer.

2.1. Right Media Mix for Positive Word of Mouth. The literacy scenario in rural markets shows a need for special measures in promotion of brands. Due to the social and backward condition, personal selling efforts have

a challenging role to play in this regard. The word of mouth is an important message carrier in rural areas. In fact the opinion leaders are the most influencing part of the promotion strategy of rural promotion efforts. Relevance of mass media is also a very important factor. Doordarshan has already acquired high penetration in rural households. Now the cable and other channels have also penetrated in rural households. The Newspaper and other printed media is also gaining importance but their role is still secondary in this regard (Hitendra et al, 2005). Research conducted among 250 rural consumers and 45 retailers in villages of Gujarat, indicates that the rural retailer acts as an opinion leader and influences purchase decisions through Word of Mouth communication and product display. Hence sheer product availability alone cannot determine brand choice, volumes and market share. The relationship with local retailers must be maintained effectively. These retailers play an important role in providing information regarding product features, quantity of pack available, promotional schemes, POP display of print advertisements, consumer feedback, etc. They act as a bridge, updating information to both rural consumers and companies (Naresh & Reshma, 2005). (Khare, 2008) state that besides, TV & print media, nowadays marketers are opting for wall paintings, mobile vans and word of mouth publicity with the help of opinion leaders to propagate their brand among the masses. To market its jeans, Arvind Mills' promotional effort included teaching tailors in villages to stitch the jeans. As the tailors are opinion leaders for clothing, they became votaries for jeans and for the '_Ruf & Tuf' brand.

Media being the carrier of the advertisement content, smart choice of media could clearly make a difference. A medium should be selected on the basis of its reach and its associated cost. At the same time, the medium should match with the brand characteristics. Hence, there are a number of alternatives available to an advertiser with both merits as well as demerits. An advertiser should do cost-benefit analysis of the alternatives in media strategy and media choice, so that it serves the purpose (Rai, 2008). Companies could acquire customers through costly but fast-acting marketing investments or through slower but cheaper word-of-mouth process. Their long-term success depends critically on the contribution of acquired customers to the overall customer equity. An application to a web hosting company reveals that marketing-induced customers add more short-term value but word-of-mouth customers add nearly twice as much long-term value to the firm (Villanueva et al, 2008). (Micael et al, 2009) conducted an experimental study of six (real) campaigns, manipulating media type and brand reputation (with appropriateness and expense measured within subjects). It was found that non-traditional media enhance consumer-perceived value. The effects are greater for low-reputation brands, than for high-reputation brands. The paper shows that non-traditional media enhance the consumer-perceived value of marketing, and suggests that consumer-perceived value is important in generating purchase and word-of-mouth intentions.

(Ajith, 2010) explains the term -Urban Myopia and attempts to present a frame work named 3P Framework for rural marketing in India. This model will not only help the marketing firm to develop innovative products for rural markets but will help to align the CSR activities to its marketing activities. This will bring the rural consumers into the value-net of the firm and help create innovative and green products. The 3P Framework comprises (i) Push Approach where the products catering to urban consumers are pushed, without any modification to rural folks through Rural Retail Outlets (RPO). It mainly aims at market penetration. Bharati

Airtel is found to adopt this method effectively. Push Marketing is very important in Kerala since it is the only state in India with no uninhabited villages (Census of India 1991), thus reaching every RRO is crucial. (ii) The Pull marketing mainly aims at communicating with the rural consumers and reduce disconnect between what marketing firms offer and what rural consumers want. Vernacular advertisements, local opinion leaders and ambassadors are used to communicate with rural consumers. The products sold in urban markets are modified as per the preferences of rural consumers in various regions. Majority of the modifications are at the packaging level (smaller packs). Pull marketing use media, melas and haats as the focal approach to target rural consumers - to attract, educate and make them brand loyal. The promotional efforts aim at motivating rural consumers to buy company's brands from the feeder markets or small towns where the company's products are made available. Messages are designed keeping in mind the rural psyche and unconventional media. Pull Marketing is very crucial in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as they have 11,147 and 10,184 uninhabited villages respectively (Census of India 1991). Gujarat and Rajasthan are the most media dark states of India (IRS 2001 Round 2). The reach of media (TV + Radio + Press + Cinema + Satellite) is 41.1 percent and 41.4 percent respectively. Non-conventional media like Periodic markets, Melas, Wall paintings, Video-vans, Folk media, Rural sports, Animal-parade will have to be used in the above states. HUL use street performers - magicians, singers, dancers and actors - adjusting their scripts and acts based on the clientele the company wants to reach. Following a series of street performances in northeastern India, the company saw public awareness of Breeze 2-in-1, its low-priced shampoo-soap, increase from 22 to 30 percent. During a six-month period during 2005, it saw awareness of Rin Shakti, a detergent bar, jump from 28 percent to 36 percent and finally (iii) The Pull Up marketing aims at co-creation and innovation which involves collaboration with various organizations (both Govt. and NGOs) as well as close interaction with the rural consumers to understand their needs better, to empower them (create a source of livelihood) and also to capture their knowledge, wisdom and innovative ideas in the form of green products. Pull up marketing use empowerment (CSR) and Co-creation (DART) as the focal approach to target rural consumers. Shakti is HUL's rural initiative, which targets small villages with population of less than 2000 people or less. It seeks to empower underprivileged rural women by providing income-generating opportunities, health and hygiene education through the Shakti Vani program, and creating access to relevant information through the Shakti community portal. Many marketing firms are adopting just one or two components of the 3P Frameworks, and face problems. They need to implement the missing component of the 3P Framework to successfully capture rural market.

By 2017, per capita consumption of consumer goods in rural areas is expected to equal what is currently witnessed in conurbans. The rural infrastructure program – Bharat Nirman Schemell launched by Indian Government in 2005 is the biggest in the world. In addition, its Employment Guarantee Scheme will ensure that one member from every rural household will be given 100 days of paid employment. Many private banks are opening in rural branches. All these situations provide huge opportunity for marketers, as the purchasing power of rural consumer increases. He indicates that awareness of products or services on rural consumers requires one-on-one communication and marketers must provide them with 'touch & feel' experience through live demonstration. India has 42000 regular markets (haats), each of which has around 300 stalls to which 5000 people repeatedly flock. He advises marketers to have distribution in larger villages and cites the example of

Colgate's -Last Mile Distribution, where young male entrepreneurs sold the brand on bicycles at haats and village shops (Kashyap, 2008).

3. Method. The study was conducted among rural areas of Coimbatore district in Tamil Nadu during the months from May to September, 2011. The sampling method adopted was simple random sampling whereby six villages namely, Pitchanur, Valukkuparai, Divansapur, Bilichi, ZaminKottampatti and Pannimadai were selected and 50 respondents from each village were interviewed using a schedule. The sample size for the study is 300 respondents.

3.1. Study Objectives. The objectives of the current study can be listed as follows:

- (1) To identify rural consumer's exposure to different media vehicles.
- (2) To understand the importance of 'Word of Mouth' in influencing rural consumer's purchase decision with regard to personal care products.
- (3) To analyze the variation across Gender, Age group, Educational levels, Occupational groups and Income groups of rural respondents with regard to their media preference.

3.2. Results & Discussion. The demographic profile of the rural respondents is summarized (Table 1), which highlights the lack of importance given to education as a cumulative 83.4% of the respondents fall under the range from 'No formal education to School education'.

TABLE 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

| Age Group | N (%) | Educational Qualification | N (%) | Occupational Groups | N (%) |
|--------------|------------|---------------------------|-------------|---------------------|------------|
| Below 21 yrs | 46 (15.3%) | Nil | 53 (17.7%) | None | 11 (3.7%) |
| 21- 30 yrs | 77 (25.7%) | Primary Education | 33 (11%) | Student | 47 (15.7%) |
| 31- 40 yrs | 69 (23%) | Higher Secondary | 164 (54.7%) | House wife | 69 (23%) |
| 41- 50 yrs | 59 (19.7%) | Under Graduation | 29 (9.7%) | Employed | 29 (9.7%) |
| 51- 60 yrs | 38 (12.7%) | Post Graduation | 7 (2.3%) | Business | 50 (16.7%) |
| Above 60 yrs | 11 (3.7%) | Diploma | 6 (2%) | Farmer | 29 (9.7%) |
| | | Professional Course | 8 (2.7%) | Labour | 60 (20%) |
| | | | | Others | 5 (1.7%) |

| <i>Total</i> | <i>300</i> <i>(100%)</i> | <i>Total</i> | <i>300</i> <i>(100%)</i> | <i>Total</i> | <i>300</i> <i>(100%)</i> |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| | | | | | |
| Income Group (Annual Income) | N (%) | Monthly Expenditure on Personal Care Brand Purchase | N (%) | | |
| Below Rs.50,001 | 8 (2.7%) | Less than Rs.101 | 9 (3%) | | |
| Rs.50,001 to 100,000 | 79 (26.3%) | Rs.101 to 200 | 16 (5.3%) | | |
| Rs.100,001 to 150,000 | 99 (33%) | Rs.201 to 300 | 47 (15.7%) | | |
| Rs.150,001 to 200,000 | 65 (21.7%) | Rs.301 to 400 | 83 (27.7%) | | |
| Rs.200,001 to 250,000 | 32 (10.7%) | Rs.401 to 500 | 68 (22.7%) | | |
| Rs.250,001 to 300,000 | 9 (3%) | More than Rs.500 | 77 (25.7%) | | |
| Above Rs.300,000 | 8 (2.7%) | | | | |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>300 (100%)</i> | <i>Total</i> | <i>300 (100%)</i> | | |

For the study, 15 media vehicles were taken into consideration and the rural consumer's exposure to these media vehicles (Figure 1) shows TV has reached a majority of 89% of the respondents, in the mass media category. While the next form of communication that has the second major spread across rural folks is the 'Word of Mouth'. Further, the study focused on the Personal Care Segment. Though this falls under the convenience goods category, the consumer often shows special interest in the products for his personal use and is more likely to be well informed about the choices available to him in the market. The study intends to analyze whether the interest to know about daily use personal care brands, holds good with the rural consumer also.

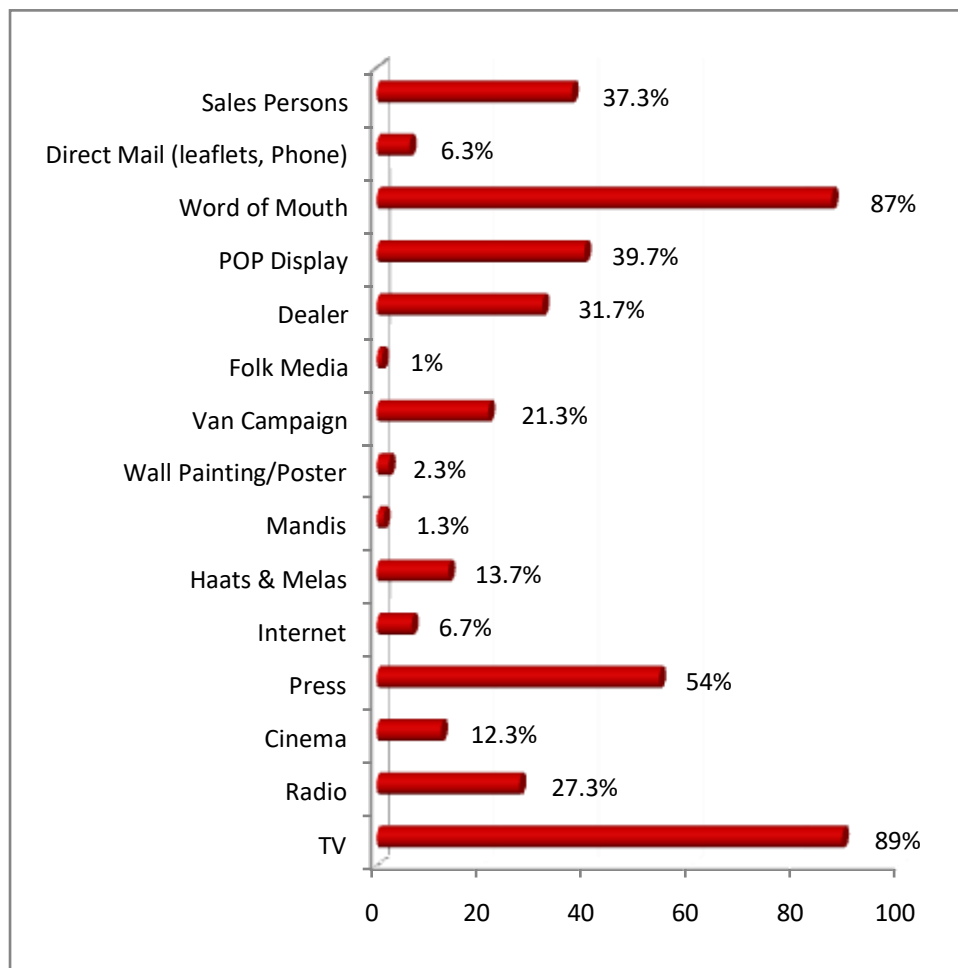


FIGURE 1: Rural respondents Exposure to different Media Vehicles

On contrary to the rural respondent's Television exposure, 'Word of Mouth' form of communication was found to be the most preferred choice among rural respondents to get information on personal care brands before deciding their purchase (Table 2). They trust the message from their opinion leaders more than mass media vehicles like TV and Press, which take the second and third positions respectively. We also find poor use of local media vehicles like Wall painting, Van campaigns, Mandis and Folk media, by the marketers, as Van Campaigns and Wall painting have a relatively favorable preference among the rural folks.

TABLE 2: Rural Consumer Preference for Media Vehicles

| MEDIA VEHICLES | MEAN | RANK |
|----------------------|------|------|
| TV | 1.89 | 2 |
| Radio | 1.20 | 8 |
| Cinema | 1.04 | 12 |
| Press | 1.55 | 3 |
| Internet | 1.04 | 12 |
| Haats & Melas | 1.06 | 11 |
| Mandis | 1.03 | 13 |
| Wall Painting/Poster | 1.27 | 6 |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|------|----|
| Van Campaign | 1.30 | 5 |
| Folk Media | 1.03 | 13 |
| Dealer | 1.42 | 4 |
| POP Display | 1.18 | 9 |
| Word of Mouth | 2.53 | 1 |
| Direct Mail (leaflets, Phone) | 1.11 | 10 |
| Sales Persons | 1.24 | 7 |

The importance of ‘_Word of Mouth’ form of communication is explained (Figure 2) by identifying the opinion leader for the rural respondents. 35% of the rural respondents claimed that they do not seek advice from anyone to decide their personal care brand purchase, the rest 65% of the respondents seek advice from a variety of sources, among whom the contribution of shopkeepers is on the lead. It was also found that only 47.7% of the respondents made their purchase of personal care brands from shops in town/city, while the rest 52.3% bought from shops in their village. Thus we can understand the role played by shopkeepers as opinion leaders to rural consumers.

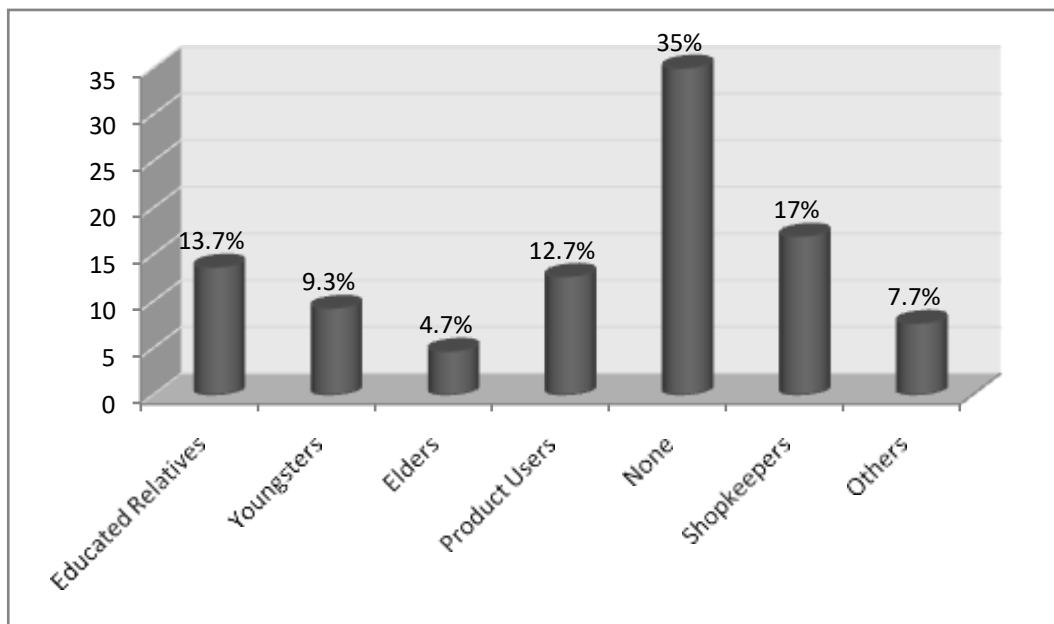


FIGURE 2: Source of Advice for Rural Consumers

When we look at the differences in preference for media vehicles between male and female respondents (Table 3), Women have more preference for television than men, as watching serials is a routine part of their daily lives and commercials in between the soaps also reach them better. Men on the other hand prefer Press, Wall Painting/poster and Word of Mouth forms of communication more, compared to their female counterparts.

TABLE 3: Summary of T - Test for Gender of Respondents * Media Vehicle Preference

| GENDER | | N | MEAN | T VALUE | SIG. (2 TAILED) |
|----------------------------------|--------|-----|------|----------|-----------------|
| TV | Male | 138 | 1.72 | -3.383** | .001 |
| | Female | 162 | 2.04 | | |
| RADIO | Male | 138 | 1.15 | -1.721 | .086 |
| | Female | 162 | 1.23 | | |
| CINEMA | Male | 138 | 1.07 | 1.721 | .086 |
| | Female | 162 | 1.02 | | |
| PRESS | Male | 138 | 1.67 | 3.066** | .002 |
| | Female | 162 | 1.44 | | |
| INTERNET | Male | 138 | 1.04 | .011 | .992 |
| | Female | 162 | 1.04 | | |
| HAATS & MELAS | Male | 138 | 1.03 | -1.809 | .072 |
| | Female | 162 | 1.08 | | |
| MANDIS | Male | 138 | 1.03 | .205 | .838 |
| | Female | 162 | 1.02 | | |
| WALL PAINTING/ POSTER | Male | 138 | 1.54 | 10.706** | .000 |
| | Female | 162 | 1.05 | | |
| VAN CAMPAIGN | Male | 138 | 1.33 | 1.037 | .301 |
| | Female | 162 | 1.27 | | |
| FOLK MEDIA | Male | 138 | 1.03 | -.386 | .700 |
| | Female | 162 | 1.04 | | |
| DEALER | Male | 138 | 1.43 | .244 | .807 |
| | Female | 162 | 1.41 | | |
| POP DISPLAY | Male | 138 | 1.21 | 1.153 | .250 |
| | Female | 162 | 1.15 | | |
| WORD OF MOUTH | Male | 138 | 2.69 | 3.771** | .000 |
| | Female | 162 | 2.39 | | |
| DIRECT MAIL (LEAFLETS, PHONE) | Male | 138 | 1.11 | -.219 | .827 |
| | Female | 162 | 1.12 | | |
| SALES PERSONS | Male | 138 | 1.22 | -.553 | .581 |
| | Female | 162 | 1.26 | | |

*Significant at 0.05 level & **Significant at 0.01 level

H₀, there is no significant difference in mean preference for each media vehicle between male and female respondents is rejected for cases where T Value is significant.

With regard to other demographic variables, the media preference showed significant differences with regard to the media vehicles (Table 4). Mass media vehicles, except Cinema (TV, Radio, Press & Internet) and three of the Personalized media vehicles (Dealer, POP Display and Direct Mail) were found to significantly vary across age groups. Among the different Educational and Occupational groups of respondents, preference for all mass media vehicles showed significant variation. Dealer was a more preferred media vehicle for illiterates and respondents with primary education, while direct mail was preferred more by respondents with Post Graduation and Professional education.

TABLE 4: Summary of One Way ANOVA for Media Preference Across Demographic Variables

| Media Vehicles | Age Group (F Value) | Educational Levels (F Value) | Occupational Groups (F Value) | Income Groups (F Value) | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----|
| TV | 20.098** | 15.146** | 11.649** | 3.419** | |
| Radio | 4.318** | 5.762** | 3.931** | 2.629* | |
| Cinema | 1.629 | 2.752* | 3.140** | .748 | |
| Press | 4.473** | 10.495** | 4.822** | 1.487 | |
| Internet | 2.688* | 25.649** | 4.696** | 6.878** | |
| Haats & Melas | 1.144 | 1.410 | .921 | 1.628 | |
| Mandis | .765 | .425 | 2.908** | .806 | |
| Wall Painting/Poster | 1.423 | .610 | 6.088** | 1.793 | |
| Van Campaign | .154 | .934 | 2.501* | 1.012 | |
| Folk Media | 1.265 | .740 | .556 | .703 | |
| Dealer | 7.224** | 4.141** | 4.870** | 2.730* | |
| POP Display | 6.430** | .530 | 2.462* | .636 | |
| Word of Mouth | 1.807 | 1.714 | 1.147 | 2.482* | |
| Direct Mail (leaflets, Phone) | 2.442* | 10.925** | 2.018 | 3.380** | |
| Sales Persons | .841 | .641 | 2.170* | 1.151 | |
| <i>Degrees of Freedom</i> | <i>Between Groups</i> | 5 | 6 | 7 | 6 |
| | <i>Within Groups</i> | 294 | 293 | 292 | 293 |
| | <i>Total</i> | 299 | 299 | 299 | 299 |

*Significant at 0.05 level & **Significant at 0.01 level

H₀, there is no significant difference in mean preference for each media vehicle across different demographic groups is rejected for cases where F Value is significant.

In the occupational category, Labor and farmer groups had more preference for local media vehicles namely Mandis, Wall Painting/Poster and Van campaign as they were often in the field and these local media options

have a lasting impression in their minds when delivered in local language/slang. Preference for Dealer, POP display and Sales persons were also found to vary significantly among different occupational groups. While preference towards TV, Radio, Internet, Dealer, Word of Mouth and Direct Mail options were found to vary significantly among the different Income groups of rural respondents.

Preference for Word of Mouth form of communication does not show any significant variation across the age group, educational levels and occupational groups of respondents, but among the educational groups, respondents with less than 1 Lakh annual income were more influenced by shopkeepers and respondents in income groups of above 3 lakh per annum were more brand conscious and consulted Doctors and Educated Relatives to purchase a better brand. They often opted for premium brands like Dove, Garnier, Amway products, Himalayas, etc. Similarly, Men preferred to purchase personal care brands suggested by their family member (Table 3) and thus ‘family’ acted as Word of Mouth means of communication to them.

3.3 Implications of The Study. ‘Word of Mouth’ form of communication plays a vital role in rural consumer purchase decisions and the opinion leaders are usually local retailers and educated relatives, who provide information and suggest personal care brand to the rural consumers. Men are mostly influenced by Print media and Word of Mouth communication from family, friends and relatives, when it comes to purchasing personal care brands. Though penetration of TV is increasing, the urban targeted communication spills over to rural consumers and there are few advertisements which are in local slang that could be easily understood by the rural audience. Further, low educational background of rural folks; make recall of modern personal care brand names difficult. They often tend to ignore the urbanized commercials in between programs. This calls for innovative media-mix on the part of marketers to tap the potential of hinterland

The study shows a clear under-utilization of local media vehicles especially wall painting/posters which is both economical and registers effectively in the minds of rural audience, generating a positive word of mouth influence. The folk media is completely untouched in the rural parts of Coimbatore district. Local newspapers and Radio have not been considered much. Vivel brand of soap from ITC is better recognized for their newspaper advertisements, followed by some fairness creams like Vicco, Fairever, etc. Radio as a medium is gaining popularity among youth, who often listen to the FM channels in their mobile using headphones. Personal Care brand advertisements are very limited in Radio used by some local personal care brands. Local retailers must be given sufficient attention as they are the key influencers of rural consumer who are illiterate and daily wage earners. These retailers can effectively communicate the brand message in local slang and also help in dealing with pirate brands. Further, the premium brands like Amway and others have ample market among the high income group of rural consumers, who are willing to acquire premium quality personal care brands. Hence Direct Marketing efforts must be enhanced to penetrate this segment of the rural market. It is high time; marketers fill these gaps in media usage and generate a positive word of mouth in the emerging markets.

4. Conclusion. Rural people are often slow to adopt, but at the same time slow to give up when they start preferring a brand (Malli, 2009). Pioneering marketers have used innovative means of creating their own channels. Hindustan Unilever's micro marketing program in India tapped into women's Self Help Groups to reach consumers in inaccessible rural markets. Besides selling products these women help transmit brand communication within rural communities. Many marketers use publicity vans, which travel to remote and scattered communities with portable communication devices (audio visual shows, live demos etc). Colgate has created a powerful touch point with its Oral Health Program, which draws rural consumers who are lured by the promise of a 'free oral check up'. The program provides Colgate with a captive audience for communication, trial and brand building. These two companies have already reaped the fruits of rural marketing through their first mover advantage and positive word of mouth generation about their brands. 'Word of Mouth' communication rules brand building in Hinterland and the marketers foraying into it must focus on a long term effect and decide on innovative and feasible media options to capture the mind space of rural consumers.

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