

“SHAKTI”: A Strategic Marketing Approach Of FMCG Giant, HUL-Enabling A Journey Towards Business Excellence In The Era Of Globalization

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INTRODUCTION

It could be lethal for companies to ignore the importance of marketing (Yli-Kovero, 2006; Salminen, 2006) because marketing efforts and know-how are instrumental in commercializing ideas and inventions successfully. Marketing strategy is the single biggest factor which determines the success or failure of any kind of business. Accordingly, a strategic approach in the marketing activities is obligatory. Strategically, an organization applies its resources within a changing environment to satisfy customer needs while meeting stakeholder expectations. Marketing is strategically concerned with the direction and scope of the long-term activities performed by the organization to obtain a competitive advantage and its role in strategic planning for the organization means identifying the optimal long-term positions that can ensure customer satisfaction and support. These optimal positions are determined largely by fundamental changes in demographic, economic, social and political factors (Anderson 1982, p. 24). In this era of globalization, the changing demography, economy, and social environments of 'Rural India' are making an indication towards the optimal sphere for the business organizations. 'Rural Marketing' is the strategic approach adopted by so many big players from the Indian origin to target MNCs, such as HUL, LG, Samsung, and Revlon and insurance biggies like Birla Sunlife, Max New York Life and Prulife in the era of globalization to cope up with tremendous competition. Marketing in rural areas demands thoughtful strategizing and management of the marketing process. To successfully operate in this extremely multifaceted segment of the Indian rural market, an additional thinking and totally differentiate approach is required. Strategies and tactics appropriate to rural heterogeneity are extremely important to sharp shoot on the rural marketing issues with a focus on 'EXCELLENCY'.

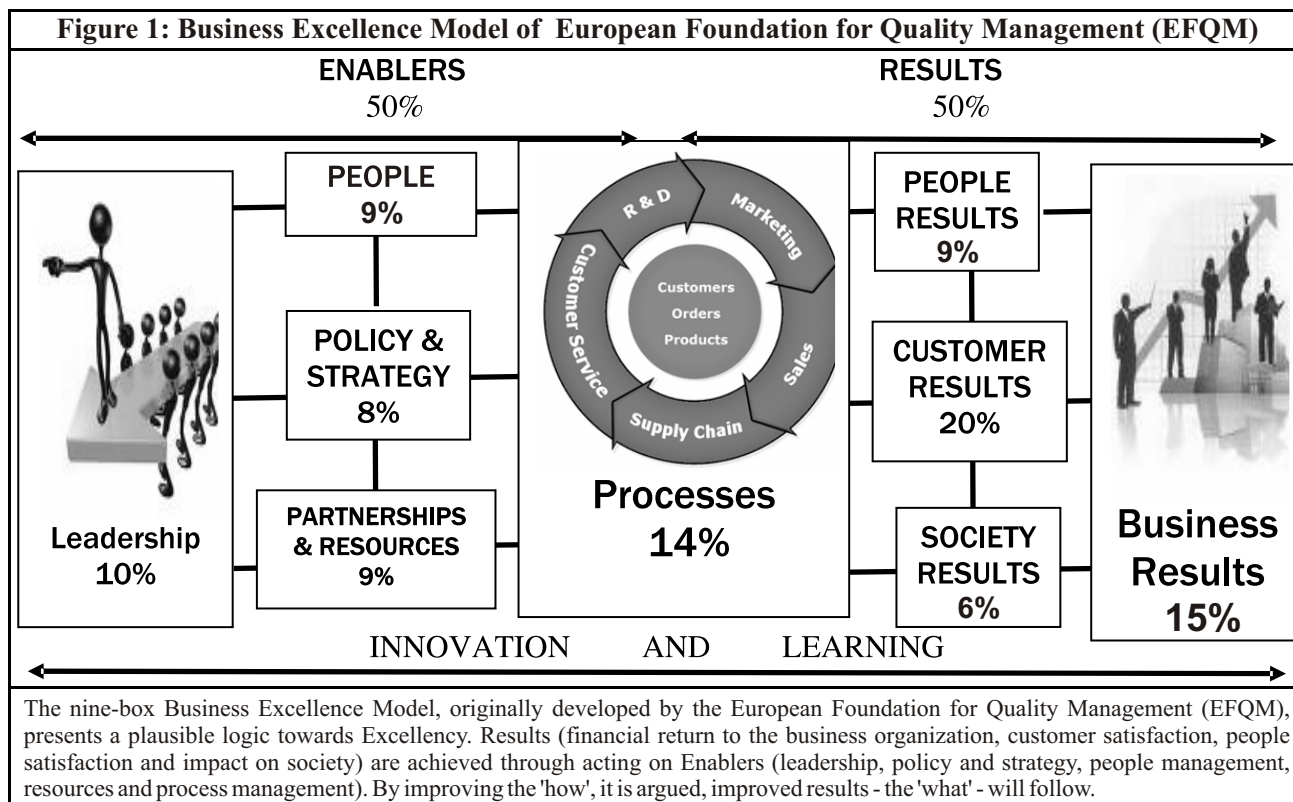
BUSINESS EXCELLENCE: A STRATEGIC ORIENTATION OF RURAL MARKETING IN INDIA

Business Excellence Portrayal: An Indication Towards Strategic Marketing Approach

“Business Excellence”¹ has become the '*mul-mantra*' for the organizational salvation among the corporate management in this era of globalization when there is a very skinny barrier at cross boundary entrance that results in competitive scenario at its maturity level (probably) and as a result, a narrower market share in most of the business sphere. Excellence is closely linked to pursuance of best practices. Excellence is the systematic improvement of performance. Business excellence is the use of quality management principles and tools in business management to retain the customer set intact and additionally to increase the sphere of the set. So '*Excellency*', in the grassland of business activities comprises of 'quality' as well as 'quantity'. The question uppermost in the minds of today's managers is: "*How to become world class?*". Key practices in business excellence applied across functional areas in an enterprise include 'continuous and breakthrough improvement', 'preventative management' and 'management by facts'. Action rather than reaction is the prerequisite of Business Excellency. European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) describes 'Business Excellence', as “outstanding practices in managing the organization and achieving results, all based on a set of eight fundamental concepts”, these being (i) results orientation, (ii) customer focus, (iii) leadership and constancy of purpose, (iv) management by processes and facts, (v) people development and involvement, (vi) continuous learning, (vii) innovation and improvement; (viii) partnership development, and public responsibility” (Fig 1). These are the adaptable business solutions to make a business organization “MORE AGILE”. And all these fundamental notion of business excellence make an indication towards the strategic marketing activities of the organization that can refurbish the other managerial activities into its strategic version which is the ultimate requirement of this modern management era. Day (1994) claimed, “it is almost an article of faith within marketing that superior business performance is the result of superior skills in understanding and satisfying customers.”

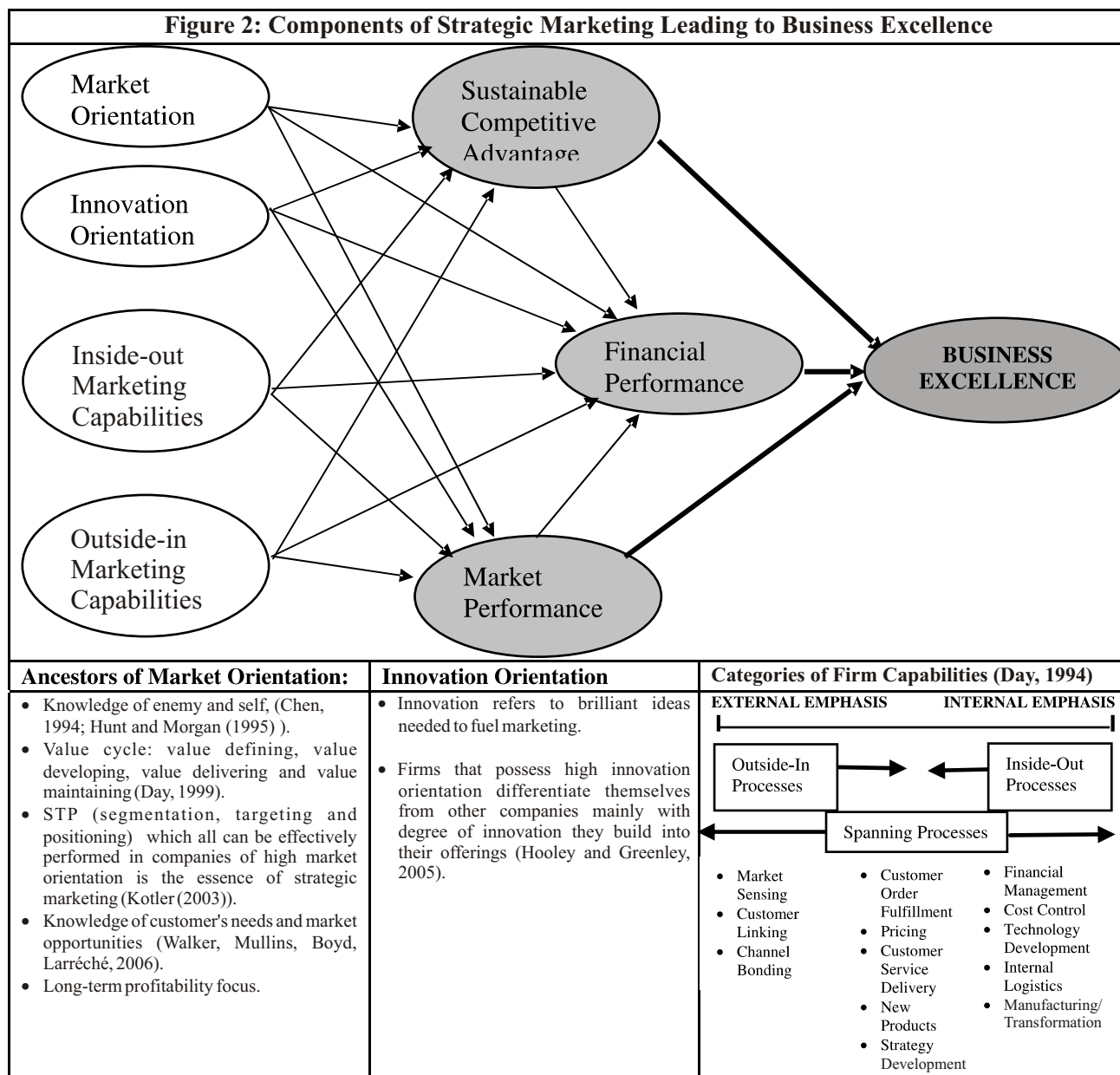
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¹ TOM PETER'S and Robert Waterman's pioneering book, *In Search of Excellence*, published in 1982 saw the emergence of the concept of organizational excellence as a central feature of management literature.



Rural Marketing in India: Strategic Marketing Gambit

Management gurus' consideration is that "Marketing" is the 'engine' of any business organization that drives the excellence of that unit. 'Marketing' is, in its most simple strategic format, a complete commitment to excellence in the quality and delivery of goods or services that requires detailed understanding of 'market needs', and 'proactive use of competitive intelligence'. Strategic Marketing focuses on what the firm does best at the SBU level to secure and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage. The challenge of strategic marketing is to manage marketing complexity, customer and stakeholder expectations and to reconcile the influences of a changing environment in the context of a set of resource capabilities. If the organizations don't know where they are going, they might end up somewhere else and this indicates the importance of strategic marketing approach. Strategic Marketing Decisions include: "Where to compete" (requires enough market orientation, which is closely related with the knowledge, focus, control and R & D), "How to compete" (implies the innovation orientation, the differentiation capabilities and it urges for -- a customer linking, market sensing, channel bonding and technology monitoring (outside-in capabilities); excellent human resource management, technology development etc. (inside-out capabilities)) (figure 2) and last but not the least, "When to compete". The answer to the question 'where' and 'when' to many of the organizations operating presently in India and those who are interested to take entry give an emphasis on 'rural markets of India' right at this present era of globalization with due consideration of urban market saturation and worth mentioning potentiality, quantity wise as well as quality wise, of the rural pastureland. Just at the doorstep of rural marketing, the existing players are attempting to determine ways of offering superior value with a long-term perspective, based on the handful information obtained through demographic and socio-economic research. This is gradually becoming the weaponry to most of the business organization, whether it's a goods manufacturing organization or it is a service organization, to cope up with competitions in this era of globalization. With a long term perspective, most of the Indian organizations and also the MNCs are developing and commercializing new goods and services to cater to this segment; allocating resources among marketing activities and designing an appropriate organizational structure for this segment without damaging urban customer relationships. They enter into this hinterland with a greater degree of customer linking; market sensing, channel bonding and technology monitoring (outside-in capabilities). Aimed with tools like- excellent human resource management and state of the art technology etc. (inside-out capabilities), they are trying to cater to this segment. Rural Marketing activities are distinguishing between the individual customer's



short-term needs and wants and the longer-term welfare of society. It's a strategic approach of the business organization, whoever is practicing it presently in each and every concern, and is giving an indication towards the business excellence for the rest of the world. This strategic marketing approach can provide extra leverage in share battles. "Rural Bazaar" is "Ideas of today for a better tomorrow".

PROJECT SHAKTI: VISION

Shakti is HLL's rural initiative. It seeks to empower underprivileged women of villages with populations of 2000 or less by providing income-generating opportunities, health and hygiene education through the Shakti-Vani program, and creating access to relevant information through the i-Shakti community portal. Shakti is a pioneering effort from the private sector in creating livelihoods for rural women. Started in 2001, Shakti has already been extended to about 50,000 villages in 12 states - Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Chattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and West Bengal (respective state governments and several NGOs are also actively involved in the initiative). For HLL, it is "enlightened self-interest" -- creating opportunities to increase the rural family income; putting more money in their (rural people) hands to purchase the range of daily consumption products - from soaps to toothpastes - that

HLL makes. It also enables HLL to access hitherto unexplored rural hinterlands (Kamath, 2003).

THREE SHAKTI INITIATIVES: STRATEGIC BREAKTHROUGH

Shakti Entrepreneur:

- Typically, a woman from a SHG is selected as a Shakti entrepreneur -- direct-to-home distributor (of Hindustan Lever products) in rural markets.
- They receive stocks at their doorstep from the HLL rural distributor and sell directly to consumers as well as to retailers in the village.
- Each Shakti entrepreneur services 6-10 villages in the population strata of 1,000-2,000 people.
- A Shakti entrepreneur sets off with 4-5 chief brands from the HLL portfolio - Lifebuoy, Wheel, Pepsodent, Annapurna salt and Clinic Plus. The company layers it with whatever else is in demand, like talcum powder or Vaseline during winters. [These brands apart, other brands which find favor with a rural audience are: Lux, Ponds, Nihar and 3 Roses tea]
- Typically, unit packs are small.
- All the brands are national and HLL is cool to the idea of creating a rural-specific brand as it will only dissipate the advertising media effort for the brands.
- To get started, the Shakti woman borrows from her SHG and the company itself chooses only one person. With training and hand-holding by the company for the first three months, she begins her door-to-door journey selling her wares.

Shakti Vani:

It is *One-to-many communication* for category growth. Shakti Vani ("Voice") takes Project Shakti a stage further. Hindustan Unilever trains local women to give talks to villagers about basic health practices, such as good hygiene, disease prevention and pre- and post-natal care using visual aids to overcome widespread illiteracy. Women trained in health and hygiene issues address village communities through meetings at schools, village *baithaks*, SHG meetings. The Vani project is operational in more than 20,000 villages in states like Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Chattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. Shakti Vani is a social communication programme. In 2004, Shakti Vani had covered 10,000 villages in Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Karnataka.

i-Shakti:

- The Premise: To provide demand driven information and services across a large variety of sectors that unlock economic and social progress, impact the daily livelihood opportunities and living standards of the village community through increased productivity of the rural community.
- This IT-based rural information service covered the areas such as agriculture, education, vocational training, health and hygiene. 'i-Shakti' has been set up in 400 villages in Andhra Pradesh and has been functional since August 2003. The i-Shakti kiosks are operated by the Shakti Entrepreneur. During the launch of these kiosks, important village members like the sarpanch, schoolteacher and doctor are invited to help reinforce relationships with the villagers.

i-Shakti, the Internet-based rural information service, was launched in Andhra Pradesh in association with the Andhra Pradesh Government's Rajiv Internet Village Programme. The service is now available in Nalgonda, Vishakapatnam, West Godavari and East Godavari districts.

PROJECT SHAKTI: TONING STRATEGIC MARKETING

Market Orientation Tenor in SHAKTI:

Knowledge of the enemy and self, (Chen, 1994):

HLL has enjoyed a competitive advantage as a sole provider of personal hygiene care products before the liberalization of India's economy. When the Indian economy opened up in early 1990s, with the entry of foreign MNCs, HLL was suffering from stagnant growth and lower profit margin. Strategically, Hindustan Lever drove into rural India to cope up with growing competition. Multinationals such as Procter & Gamble stepped up activities that forced Hindustan Unilever to seek higher revenues and growth by reaching into villages with 2,000 or lesser residents. Project Shakti was created to address these issues. Though, to a greater extent, this initiative is not proactive in nature (the core requirement of business excellence), still this reactive approach has placed the company in every nook and corner of 'Shining India'.

The other orientation of such a strategic initiative is the success of Integrated Rural Development Programme that started in the year 1976². A key success factor in these developmental efforts has been to create income-generating

² Started at Etah district of Uttar Pradesh, in tandem with the company's dairy operations, the program presently covers 500 villages in the district. Focus of the programme was on training farmers, animal husbandry, generating alternative income, health & hygiene and infrastructure development.

opportunities for the rural population. Such opportunities are successful and sustainable when linked with the company's core business, thus becoming mutually beneficial to both the population for whom the program is intended and for the company. This made the company much more confident for Project Shakti. Based on these insights, HLL launched Project Shakti in the year 2001, with the purpose of integrating business interests and national interests. The company is well aware about its expertise in nutrition and hygiene.

Knowledge of Customer's Needs and Market Opportunities (Walker, Mullins, Boyd, Larréché, 2006):

Business organizations exist for provision of the human needs. An organization can reach the level of excellence if it can fulfill the self-actualization need of human beings. But before that, the organization should take care of the bottom line elements of hierarchy of need, the need for food, need for shelter, need for nutrition & health and need for clothing. But before of all that, they need income. And the organization had a better understanding in this sphere. They know the rural unemployment scenario that leads to poverty. With this orientation, Project Shakti had focused on the following needs of the rural area:

- *High rural poverty.*
- *High unemployment.*
- *Sanitation and health problems.*
- *Poor childhood nutrition.*

MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

ORG's six years period study (1983-89) revealed that the off-take of rural markets for packaged consumer products accounted for Rs 2,083 crores in 1989. The growth worked out to be 184%, compared to 1984, where the urban is 96% (Agadi, Paramashivaiah, 1995). Over 70% of the sales are made to middle class households today and over 50% is in rural India³. The present scenario of rural FMCG market (Table 1 & 2) is reflecting the business opportunities of the organizations from this hinterland.

Table 1: Aggregate Rural Consumption (in Rs. '000 Crores)

1985	1995	2005 (Estimates)	2015 (projected)	2025 (projected)
449	609	968	1670	2648
Compound annual growth rate 3.9%				
	Compound annual growth rate 5.1%			
Source: Marketing white book 2007-08 Business World Dec 2007				

Table 2: Rural FMCG Markets Outpace Urban India

Value Growth				
	Hair-Oil	Coconut-Oil	Shampoo	Toothpaste
All India - Urban	14.3	13.5	14.6	12.2
All India - Rural	20.4	22.0	10.3	17.4
Volume Growth				
All India - Urban	13.3	13.5	7.8	8.0
All India - Rural	19.8	21.2	7.4	14.6
(in April-May 2008)				
Source: Business Standard, Volume XXXIV No. 102, Monday, 7 th July, 2008.				

Table 3. Rural FMCG Market Projections

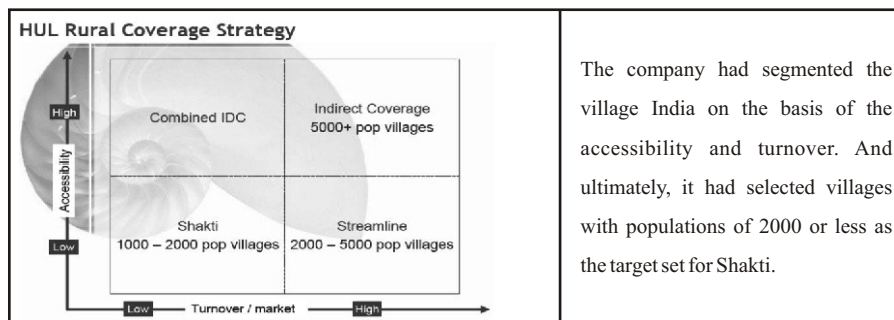
Category	Growth %	2001-02		2006 - Projected		Rural market share %
		Total	Rural share	Total	Rural share	
Toilet soaps	13.4	9645	6021	18086	11291	62.4
Body talcum powder	23.65	1445	793	4237	2292	54.1
Toothpaste	23.5.	3198	1441	9376	4140	45.1
Cooking oil	10.91	20946	15731	35295	25806	73.4
Vanaspati	7.63	4549	2846	6648	4108	62.6
Source: Source: Raj & Selvaraj, 2007						

In 2007, around 34% of the FMCG products sales came from rural areas. The number of households that used FMCG products in rural India had grown from 13.6 crore in 2004 to 14.3 crore in 2007. This growth was achieved on an average 1.8% year-on-year growth in the number of households, which use at least one FMCG product. However, the growth in penetration level for the entire FMCG products was not the same. According to one study by a market research firm IMRB, the monthly consumption of detergents and toilet soaps remained largely stagnant with a 92% penetration, but that of liquid shampoos grew from 68% in 2004 to 83% in 2007. These

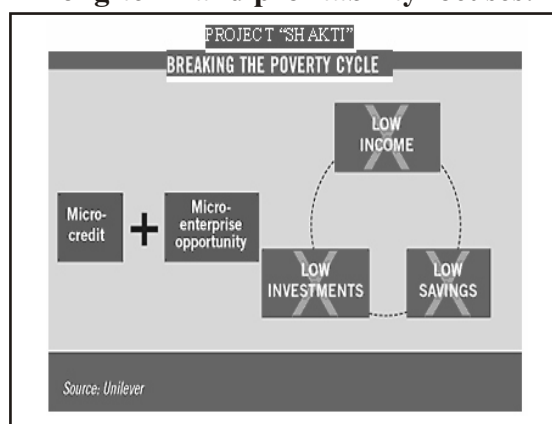
³ Raj & Selvaraj, 2007

figures revealed a shift towards higher-value products among the rural market, from toothpowder to toothpaste or from unbranded to branded products.⁴

STP (segmentation, targeting and positioning) - which all can be effectively performed in companies of high market orientation - is the essence of strategic marketing (Kotler, 2003):



Long-term and profitability focuses:



FMCG giant, Hindustan Lever has embarked on an ambitious venture, Project Shakti to spur growth and penetration of its products in rural India with a 'long term profit focus'. They initiated the program in the year 2001 with a societal objective of changing the lives of rural folk and boosting incomes. The objectives of Project Shakti are to create "income-generating capabilities for destitute rural women by providing a sustainable micro-enterprise opportunity" and to improve rural living standards through "health and hygiene awareness". It aimed at breaking the '*vicious cycle of poverty*' that can result in a high growth of the rural market. Income for women increases the chance of their children going to school (Universal primary education); implies high income earning next generation that can contribute to the earning of the company.

Provision of micro-credit through various partnerships, business skills development through value chain can take a lead to economic growth and hence a greater demand for the organization. So the focus is not tomorrow, rather, it is day after tomorrow.

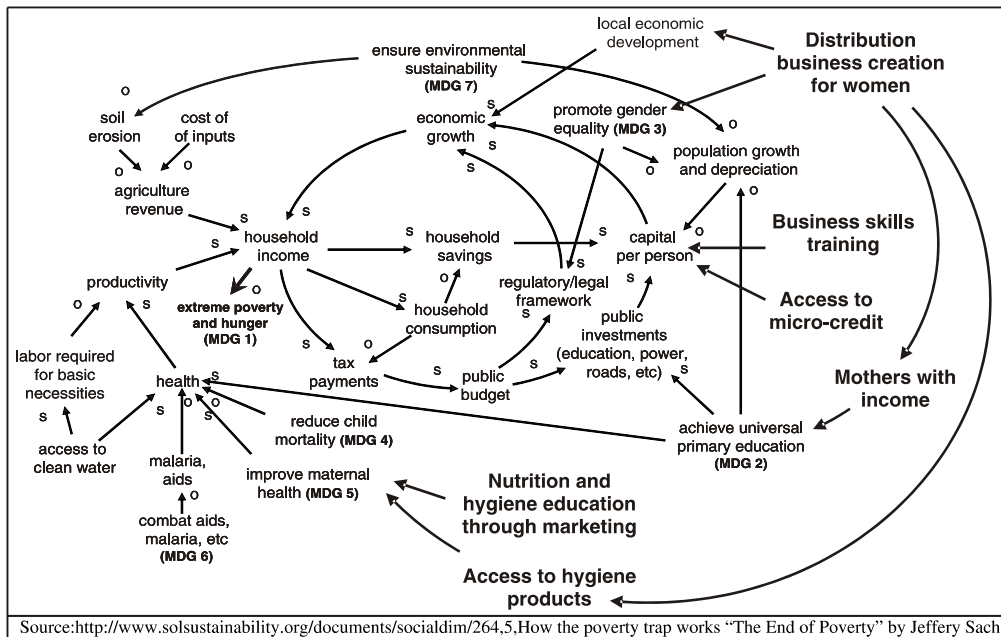
VALUE CYCLE: VALUE DEFINING, VALUE DEVELOPING, VALUE DELIVERING AND VALUE MAINTAINING (DAY, 1999).

According to Dalip Sehgal, executive director of the Shakti initiative, the objectives of Project Shakti are "to create income-generating capabilities for underprivileged rural women by providing a small-scale enterprise opportunity, and to improve rural living standards with greater awareness of health and hygiene". As depicted in Figure 3, Local economic growth (jobs) to increase income, Increase in both Knowledge capital (through business skills development through value chain) and Financial capital (micro-credit through various partnerships) to promote long term economic growth, Hygiene and nutrition education through marketing and advertising, improved gender equality-income for women means greater say in the household, universal primary education (income for women increases the chance of their children going to school) are the strategic corners of this project. The high growth of Shakti has created managerial challenges for the project management team (Pham Thuy Ha, 2008). HUL envisions the creation of 1, 00,000 Shakti Entrepreneurs covering 5, 00,000 villages, and touching

⁴ <http://ezinearticles.com/?Project-Shakti---A-Win-Win-Situation&id=1245833>

the lives of 600 million rural people by the year 2010. So the organization has a long term perspective and a clear view of the customers and the competitors. All this means a whole market orientation and innovativeness on the part of the organization.

Figure 3: The Value Cycle of Project Shakti



INNOVATIVENESS OF PROJECT SHAKTI

Project Shakti is a demand creator project, no doubt. In spite of finding the existing demand potentiality, the organization is moving to create potentiality with a better understanding of the fact that 70 percent of them are living in rural areas, and annual size of Indian rural market, in value terms, is currently estimated at around US \$ 11 billion (Tamlurkar, 2008).

Shakti is working closely with the rural development departments of the state governments, as well as large number of NGO's across the geographies. It currently operates in with the common goal of rural development. This is another sight of the innovativeness of the project. The model was piloted in Nalgonda district of Andhra Pradesh in 50 villages in the year 2000. The Government of Andhra Pradesh took the pioneering step of supporting the initiative by enabling linkages with the network of DWACRA Groups of rural women set up for their development and self-employment. HUL is working with over hundred NGOs across the country and would like to collaborate with more NGOs who are interested in extending the Shakti initiative amongst their SHGs in different states. Afro Field Unit (Madhya Pradesh), Adarsh (Orissa), Aagakhan Development Network, Aashpura Foundation (Gujarat), AID (Tamil Nadu), CARDS ((Coastal Action for Rural Development & Service) (Karnataka)), Greens (Andhra Pradesh), and most importantly, NABARD are very few on the list of the whole set. Project Shakti is open to providing a limited number of non-stipendiary internships to students interested in working on Project Shakti initiatives in various states.

The company has made a partnership with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS). According to Mr. S. Ramadorai, CEO, Tata Consultancy Services "TCS-HUL partnership for the provision of TCS' adult literacy modules onto the i-Shakti network holds interesting possibilities which need to be explored". AP Online and i-Shakti share a common vision to provide solutions to key requirements of rural masses like business, education, agriculture, health, and government services. HLL and CARE India linked a strategic deal to come together on a mutually reinforcing strategy to empower poor rural women. "Project Shakti" initiated by the New Ventures Division of HLL has concretized a plan to link with CASHE (Credit and Savings for Household Enterprise), CARE India's multi-state microfinance programme⁵. So it's an integrative marketing programme.

Without going for a straight forward distribution strategy, they have opted for CFA (carrying & forwarding agent).

⁵ Through this collaboration, HUL, in the first phase trained and capacitated large no. of SHG (self help groups) under the CASHE programme to create bare foot entrepreneurs (Shakti Ammas) in four districts of Orissa, one of CARE's programme states. CASHE currently works directly in three states with over half a million clients.

By the late 1990s, the HUL management realized certain problems with the existing sales model: First, the model was not viable for small towns with small population and small business. HUL found it expensive to appoint one stockist exclusively for each town. Secondly, the retail revolution in the country changes the pattern of the customers shop. Large retail self service shops were established. In a response to these problems, HUL redesigned its sales and distribution channel and the new system was known as '*diamond model*' in the company. At the top end of the diamond, there were the self service retail stores which constituted 10% of the total FMCG market. The middle, fatter part of the diamond represented the profit-center based sales team. At the bottom of the pyramid was the rural marketing and distribution which accounted for 20% of the business⁶.

INSIDE-OUT CAPABILITIES & OUTSIDE-IN CAPABILITIES

There is no doubt about the technology, logistics, manufacturing capability and human resource management process of this Rank 4 global organization⁷. And as a direct-to-the-consumer process, Project Shakti is a greater consumer linking process in the rural counterpart of consumer India. They have a strategic sense about these sets of the consumers and their capabilities.

RESULTS (MARKET, FINANCIAL & COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE)

According to A & M's Most Admired Marketing Companies survey, Hindustan Lever Ltd. is India's most admired FMCG Company and a company whose products have among the deepest penetration in rural India. It saw sales of about Rs 9,954 crore in year 2000, in the rural market. In 2005, Hindustan Lever Limited had a contribution of Rs. 5,000 crore from the rural market that was a whopping 50 percent of its total sales turnover and its 2006 revenues were \$2.8 billion (Tamlurkar, 2008). In 2005, the turnover was Rs 10,245 crore, market capitalization: Rs. 28,846 crore, and total size of the business was a little over Rs. 100 crore (Gupta & Rajshekhar, 2005). In India, it is no. 1; in Asia also and globally, it possesses the 4th position.

40,000 Shakti Entrepreneurs are presently working across different rural parts of India. Out of the total 6, 27,000 villages in India, the project has covered 50,000 villages in just 7 years since its inception. A typical Shakti distributor sells products worth Rs 10,000-15,000 (around \$250) a month, which provides an income of Rs 700-1,000 (around \$25) a month on a sustainable basis. While this may not seem to be a high income, it makes an enormous difference to women who live in remote villages in dire poverty. In many cases, earnings from Shakti help them double their household income (Barth, Greene, King, Paradis, 2006). Much of the additional income goes to educating children, and also to purchasing consumer durables such as television sets, which further expands the rural market for such products. According to media reports, Shakti distributors now account for 15% of the company's sales in rural India. Meanwhile, the potential for growth is enormous.

HUL has tapped and untapped potential and this implies the sustainability of the competitive advantage of the organization. Today, HUL dominates rural markets and has a presence in more than 1 lakh villages (Ramkishan, 2004).

HUL's competitive advantage is generated from three sources. First, it is a strong, well- established brand; second, it has local manufacturing capacity and supply chain and third it has vast sales and distribution system.

CONCLUSION

Hindustan Unilever's Project Shakti is an eye-opener for the organizations of the 21st century. The Project Shakti of HUL is well equipped with result orientation, customer focus, leadership and constancy of purpose, management by processes and facts, people development and involvement, continuous learning, innovation and improvement, partnership development, and public responsibility. Strategic stuffing at each and every corner cannot be overlooked. The organization's devotion towards the mission cannot be ignored. And the result is also in hand. Over the last few years, Project Shakti has firmly established itself as a unique rural market development model. The most powerful aspect about this model is that it creates a win-win partnership between HUL and the consumers; some of whom will depend on the organization for their livelihood, and builds a self-sustaining cycle of growth for all. The value web formation programme by the organization can ensure a higher level of profit from this bottom of the pyramid (BOP)⁸ in the days of tomorrow. What is needed is systematic research to understand the ways that BOP initiatives can actually help the poor to increase their earning power, and thus benefit them,

⁶ <http://ezinearticles.com/?Project-Shakti---A-Win-Win-Situation&id=1245833>

⁷ HUL

⁸ The Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) has emerged as a dominant concept in business, propelled by C.K Prahalad's (2005) *The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid*. Given the enormous attention the concept has attracted, it has the potential to impact the world's billions of poor people as well as the managerial practices of multinational corporations.

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directly or indirectly. With a better understanding of the fact that "To be a global business and to have a global market share, you have to participate in all segments", Project Shakti has proved the equation: "Strategic Marketing Approach = Business Excellency".

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(Contd. from page 39)

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that TV is still the most powerful medium for advertisements in terms of its recall and recognition value. In addition, this media is mostly preferred by the respondents because of its entertaining viewer friendly look with convenience of viewing hours, which gives accurate credible information in an understandable way. Also, the respondents perceive that the advertisements aired on this media are more attractive with high attention value, which influences them to view the advertisements again and again. Thus, this study will contribute to a better conceptual understanding of viewers' perception towards memorability of advertisements on TV media. Meanwhile, the study can provide practical implications on how to design memorable advertisements to fully utilize the advantages of the electronic based media-TV.

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