

Role of Influencer Marketing Strategy – A Study on Rural Startup Enterprises of Shivamogga District



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Abstract

Recently, influencer marketing has emerged as a transformative strategy in the digital marketing landscape, offering businesses a direct and engaging way to connect with their target audiences. Traditional marketing methods have dominated rural markets for decades, the rise of social media penetration and local digital influencers have presented fresh opportunities for startups in remote areas to build brand awareness, drive customer engagement, and enhance credibility. The major objective of the study is to understand the significance of influencer marketing strategy on rural start up enterprises and also to explore their challenges and opportunities while implementing influencer marketing strategies. The study employs descriptive statistical tools such as simple percentages and one-sample T-tests to test the set hypotheses. The study selected 61 respondents from Shivamogga district and employed a questionnaire as its instrument. The findings suggest that influencer marketing, when aligned with local culture, language and community values significantly contributes to customer trust and business growth in rural regions. The study concludes that localized influencer marketing has strategic potential as a cost-effective and impactful tool for rural entrepreneurship development.

1. Introduction

India is rapidly moving nation towards market and this movement has been faster during the present years. With it, various government digital payment endorsement schemes have been launched. Digital market requires digital endorsement and marketing strategies. Digital marketing has increased in the last a few years in India and has tremendous potential to increase in sales provided businesses should have knowledge to implement it in right way. Benefits like increased brand recognition and better brand loyalty can be gained by effective digital media plan. Digital marketing campaign help in reduction in costs, boosts in inbound traffic and better ranking in search engines (*Launch Marketing* 2018).

Traditionally associated with urban markets and large brands, influencer marketing is now gaining traction in rural regions, where startups are beginning to harness the power of local voices to build trust and drive engagement. Rural startups often face unique challenges, including limited access to mainstream advertising platforms, low brand visibility and resource constraints. In this context, influencer marketing, especially when localized offers a promising alternative by leveraging individuals who hold sway within their communities whether through social media, community leadership or word-of-mouth. Rural areas are often characterized by lower population density, limited access to high-speed internet, and distinct cultural, social, and economic landscapes which can create bigger challenges and opportunities for influencer marketing campaigns. Startup marketers need to ensure that influencer content resonates with the specific cultural context and speaks to the values of rural consumer. (Sonali Gedam, Dr. Amod Markale., 2024).

2. Influencer Marketing- An Overview

Influencer marketing is a marketing strategy that revolves around engaging influential individuals on social media platforms to endorse a brand's products or services to their followers. This approach harnesses the influence and trust that social media influencers have built with their audience to enhance brand visibility, foster interaction, and ultimately boost sales. Influencers are individuals who have garnered a significant number of followers on popular social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube and Face book. They use their platforms to create and share content with their followers, including photos, videos, and blog posts. Brands can leverage the influence and popularity of influencers to promote their products or services. By collaborating with influencers, brands have the opportunity to expand their reach to a broader audience, enhance brand recognition, and cultivate trust among their intended target audience. The importance of influencer marketing revolves around building authentic relationships with influencers and their audiences to effectively promote a brand or product.

3. Concept of Rural Start-up Enterprises

Rural start-up enterprises play a vital role in driving inclusive and sustainable development by addressing the unique needs and challenges of rural communities. They contribute significantly to local economic growth by creating employment opportunities, reducing migration to urban areas, and promoting entrepreneurship among youth and women. Overall, rural start-up enterprises serve as engines of transformation, fostering self-reliance and resilience in rural regions while contributing to national development goals. The importance of rural start-ups covers Job Creation, Reduce Migration to Cities, Support for Farmers, Women Empowerment, Improved Access to Services, Use of Local Resources, Promote Innovation and Technology, Boost to Local Economy, Environmental Sustainability and Stronger Rural Communities.

4. Review of Literature

Amod Markale and Surya Datta (2024) reviewed the existing literature on influencer marketing and explores how it is shaping consumer behavior and brand engagement in rural contexts. They discuss the unique challenges and opportunities that influencer marketing presents in rural regions, factors influencing its adoption and the broader implication for marketers targeting these areas.

Dorothy Dutta and M.K. Sarma (2023) examined the impact of internet skills on the adoption of digital innovations in India. The study utilizes a quantitative approach with multinomial logistic regression to analyze the relationship between internet skills and five adopter categories. The sample size consists of digital users in India and the findings suggest that internet skills play a significant role in influencing the adoption of digital innovations with implications for digitalization strategies in emerging economies.

Saravanan Ravi and Sundara Rajan (2023) explored the factors influencing people's willingness to use digital marketing tools, focusing on attitude, trust, adaptation, value, and quality. The article presents various research methods, including quantitative and qualitative analyses and case studies from databases like Web of Science and Scopus, to provide a better understanding of the topic. The study addresses various components and techniques in digital marketing and suggests that further research on social media and entrepreneurship could provide insights into how agriculture evolves and how farmers adapt to technology.

Dhanyashree M (2023) stated that India's rural areas are improving and benefiting from the nation's overall progress. She feels that businesses may now access rural market in a highly effective and economical manner at cheap cost as a result of the development of new technologies and diversification. Digital marketing, social

media marketing, and search engine marketing are all becoming more and more popular in rural area as technology advances as per her observation. She described the present scenario of rural digital market and explores the challenges and potential opportunities businesses have with it.

Atul Kumar and Neha Saxena (2022) highlighted that influencer marketing has caught up extremely well giving rise to a selection of influencers. They analyzed the use of technology and innovative online content by influencers develop a level of trust between the brand and the consumer and eventually leads to purchase. It is found that the online shopping in India has accelerated by 2-3 years in a matter of weeks after the first lockdown began in 2020 and digitally influenced purchases increased by up to 25% amongst urban consumers, in just three months.

Sarika Aba Jagadale (2022) said that digital market in India is an evident that the digitization is taking place with a high speed but the fact is that digital marketing has tremendous potential to increase in sales provided businesses should have knowledge to implement it in right way. She suggests that benefits like increased brand recognition and better brand loyalty can be gained by effective digital media plan. Also, digital marketing campaign helps in reduction of costs, boost in inbound traffic and better ranking in search engines.

Raisanen and Tuovinen (2019) have presented on way of supporting the diffusion and adoption of digital innovations in rural-micro enterprises. They examined the challenges and digital competency of micro enterprises in rural areas. It is found that the workshop concept work well for spreading information for encourage g positive attitude towards digital innovations and for planning the use of innovations. Also stated trust, communication and changing the role of agents and opinion leaders are very important factor to work.

5. Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study

Influencer marketing is increasingly vital for rural enterprises due to technology as it allows businesses to connect authentically with rural consumers through local influencers who understand their culture and preferences. Influencer marketing is a significant strategy for startups because it helps build brand awareness, credibility and customer engagement cost-effectively. It allows startups to tap into influencers' existing audiences and leverage their social media presence to reach new customers and drive conversions. It also poses certain challenges for rural enterprises such as limited internet access, trust issues, language and cultural differences and hiring influencers. Therefore, present study is intended to understand the role and importance of influencer marketing strategy on rural start-up enterprises in Shivamogga district.

6. Objectives of the Study

Following specific objectives have been set for the study

- To understand the significance of influencer marketing strategy on rural start up enterprises
- To explore the challenges and opportunities rural start up enterprises while implementing influencer marketing strategies in the study area

7. Hypotheses of the Study

Hypothesis 1

Ho: Rural startup enterprises have no significance on using influencer marketing strategy

H1: Rural startup enterprises have significance on using influencer marketing strategy

Hypothesis 2

Ho: No obstacles are faced by rural startup enterprises on using influencer marketing strategy

H1: Obstacles are faced by rural startup enterprises on using influencer marketing strategy

8. Scope of the Study

The study covers significance of influencer marketing strategy on rural startup enterprises operating in Shivamogga district.

9. Research Design

The work is exploratory as well as descriptive in nature.

10. Data Sources

Primary data has been collected through a field survey from the sample rural start-up entrepreneurs from Shivamogga district during the month of April-May 2025. A detailed and pre-tested questionnaire was used for data collection on the influencer marketing practices of rural start-up entrepreneurs. Also, necessary Secondary data has been collected from relevant library records, books, newspapers, journals, magazines, and websites.

10.1 Sample Plan

With 486 rural entrepreneurs registered in Shivamogga as per the records of District Industries Centre, Shivamogga district, Karnataka for 2024-25, a total of 61 respondents is contacted for the purpose of the study using convenience sampling.

10.2 Survey

For the collection of data well-structured questionnaire is used with a set of questions related to demographic details of rural startup entrepreneurs, significance of influencer marketing strategy by using rural startup enterprises in their business.

10.3 Statistical Tools

Data collected were analyzed using SPSS software. Statistical tools like descriptive statistics, Independent One Sample t- test and one-way ANOVA were used to present and test the data in order to fulfil the objectives of study.

11. Data Analysis

For the analysis purpose, simple statistical tools like simple percentages, charts, graphs, frequencies, and one sample t-tests are used.

Table 1: Demographic and Business details of Respondents (Source: Field survey).

Variables	Characteristics	Respondents	Percentage
Gender	Male	50	81.97
	Female	11	18.03
Age Group (Years)	20- 30	5	8.20
	31-40	21	34.42
	41- 50	30	49.18
	Above 51	5	8.20
Education background	SSLC	23	37.70
	PUC	18	29.51
	Graduation	12	19.67
	Post-Graduation	6	9.83
	Others	2	3.27
Nature of Business	Manufacturing	38	62.30
	Service	23	37.70
Annual Turnover (Lakhs)	Below 5	8	14
	5 lakhs-10	9	15
	10 lakhs-15	12	19
	Above 15	32	52
Size of the Business	Small	32	52
	Medium	17	28
	Large	12	20
Type of Business	Sole Proprietorship	36	59
	Limited Liability Partnership	20	33
	Limited Corporation	5	8
Firm Age (years)	Less than 1	31	50
	1-2	15	25
	2- 3	15	25

Nearly 60% respondents are sole proprietorship firms and limited liability partnership firms, 33% are established rural start-up businesses, slightly out numbering the limited corporations, who constitute the remaining 8%. Half of the respondents started their business very recently and the remaining 25% of respondents are running their

business for 1-2 years and 2-3 years respectively. More than 52% of respondents have a small-sized business, 28% have a medium-sized business and the remaining 20% have a large-sized business.

Table 2: Implementation of influencer marketing strategy in rural start-ups' enterprises (Source: Field survey).

Influencer Marketing Strategy in Rural Startups' Enterprises	Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
	Yes	51	84.60
	No	10	16.40

Hypothesis 1

Ho: Rural startup enterprises have no significance on using influencer marketing strategy

H1: Rural startup enterprises have significance on using influencer marketing strategy

One-Sample Statistics, Source: Field survey

Factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Local Influencer	61	3.8361	.89778	.11495
Preserving Language and Identity	61	3.9180	.73700	.09436
Community Engagement	61	3.9508	.66899	.08565
Awareness and Information Dissemination	61	3.6885	.82747	.10595
Tailored Messaging	61	3.8361	.82017	.10501
Platform Usage	61	3.8525	.79238	.10145
Cultural Sensitivity	61	3.7049	.78197	.10012
Focus on Local Needs	61	3.9016	.78962	.10110
Creating Brand Awareness	61	3.8361	.82017	.10501
Lead Generation	61	3.8525	.79238	.10145
Sales Conversion	61	3.9016	.83076	.10637

One-Sample Test, Source: Field survey

Factors	Test Value = 0					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Local Influencer	33.372	60	.000	3.83607	3.6061	4.0660
Preserving Language and Identity	41.521	60	.000	3.91803	3.7293	4.1068
Community Engagement	46.125	60	.000	3.95082	3.7795	4.1222
Awareness and Information Dissemination	34.815	60	.000	3.68852	3.4766	3.9004
Tailored Messaging	36.530	60	.000	3.83607	3.6260	4.0461
Platform Usage	37.972	60	.000	3.85246	3.6495	4.0554
Cultural Sensitivity	37.004	60	.000	3.70492	3.5046	3.9052
Focus on Local Needs	38.592	60	.000	3.90164	3.6994	4.1039
Creating Brand Awareness	36.530	60	.000	3.83607	3.6260	4.0461
Lead Generation	37.972	60	.000	3.85246	3.6495	4.0554
Sales Conversion	36.681	60	.000	3.90164	3.6889	4.1144

From the table, it is clear that all the factors listed are found to be significant and are less than 0.05. Therefore, it is observed that the influencer marketing strategy significantly aids rural startup enterprises in promoting their products and services. The alternative hypothesis is thus accepted, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2

Ho: No obstacles are faced by rural startup enterprises on using influencer marketing strategy

H1: Obstacles are faced by rural startup enterprises on using influencer marketing strategy

One-Sample Statistics, Source: Field survey

Factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Limited internet access and connectivity	61	4.0000	.89443	.11452
Lack of high-speed internet	61	3.9508	.80470	.10303
Limited budgets	61	3.8033	.72617	.09298
Fair compensation for influencers	61	3.8033	.85283	.10919
Difficulty tracking ROI	61	3.9508	.80470	.10303
Language diversity	61	3.8033	.74877	.09587
Cultural sensitivity	61	3.9672	.83601	.10704
Aligning with brand values	61	3.8525	.67912	.08695
Targeting the right audience	61	3.7377	.77248	.09891
Lack of skilled labour	61	3.8033	.74877	.09587
Lack of support and funding	61	3.7213	.75567	.09675

One-Sample Test, Source: Field survey

Factors	Test Value = 0					
	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Limited internet access and connectivity	34.928	60	.000	4.00000	3.7709	4.2291
Lack of high-speed internet	38.346	60	.000	3.95082	3.7447	4.1569
Limited budgets	40.906	60	.000	3.80328	3.6173	3.9893
Fair compensation for influencers	34.830	60	.000	3.80328	3.5849	4.0217
Difficulty tracking ROI	38.346	60	.000	3.95082	3.7447	4.1569
Language diversity	39.671	60	.000	3.80328	3.6115	3.9950
Cultural sensitivity	37.063	60	.000	3.96721	3.7531	4.1813
Aligning with brand values	44.305	60	.000	3.85246	3.6785	4.0264
Targeting the right audience	37.791	60	.000	3.73770	3.5399	3.9355
Lack of skilled labor	39.671	60	.000	3.80328	3.6115	3.9950
Lack of support and funding	38.462	60	.000	3.72131	3.5278	3.9148

It is found from the table that all factors listed in the table are found to be significant and are less than 0.05. Hence, it is observed that difficulties are faced by rural startup enterprises in using influencer marketing strategies because of a lack of skilled labour, a lack of high-speed internet, etc. to promote their products and services. The alternative hypothesis is thus accepted, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

12. Major Findings

1. Most of the respondents felt the implementation of influencer marketing strategy in rural startups' enterprises to promote the product and services.
2. As observed, various factors have significant impact of rural startup enterprises to implement influencer marketing strategies by creating many advantages for entrepreneurs, such as local influencers, preserving language and identity, community engagement, awareness and information, lead generation and sales conversion etc.
3. The implementation of influencer marketing strategy also found some difficulties being faced by rural startup enterprises. As observed, majority of rural startup enterprises face challenges such as lack of skilled labor, lack of high-speed internet, targeting the right audience, cultural sensitivity, fair compensation for influencers, limited budget to promote their products and services.

13. Suggestions

1. The rural start-up enterprises, as they implement influencer marketing strategies, should be combined with personal interactions. Social media platforms and apps should be intuitive, mobile-optimised, and available in regional languages.
2. Influencer marketing also affects the rural startup enterprises in terms of creating brand awareness, consumer trust, sales growth and customer loyalty. Therefore, the rural startup enterprises must implement an influencer marketing strategy to promote their products and services in the rural market.
3. As these rural enterprises are newly started business there is a need to provide proper education and knowledge about different marketing strategies available for them.
4. Most of the rural entrepreneurs are hesitant to adopt modern marketing techniques like influencer marketing as it requires proper marketing knowledge and huge cost. So, it is necessary that government should conduct awareness and skill development programmes and provide financial assistance in the form of loans and subsidies which would encourage rural entrepreneurs to successful implementation of marketing strategy in their business.

14. Conclusion

Nowadays, influencer marketing, which has traditionally focused on urban-centric business strategies, holds significant untapped potential for rural startups. As rural enterprises grapple with limited resources, low brand visibility and infrastructural challenges, influencer marketing offers a cost-effective and culturally resonant approach to reaching and engaging local audiences. However, the use of local influencers as individuals with strong community ties and credibility enables startups to build trust, drive word-of-mouth awareness establish a meaningful brand presence. Based on the study, when influencer strategies are tailored to reflect local values, languages and consumer behaviours, they become powerful tools for business growth in rural areas. However, rural startups must also navigate challenges such as digital illiteracy, inconsistent internet access, and a lack of formal training in digital marketing. Therefore, for influencer marketing to reach its full potential in rural contexts, support in the form of training, infrastructure development, and policy initiatives will be essential.

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Conflict of Interest

We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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