

Information Technology Initiatives to Enable E-Marketing for Self-Help Groups



Sridevi K B, K.G.Nalina, V.Seema

Abstract: *Economic uplift of a nation starts right from the bottom layer of a society. The concept of Self Help Groups (SHGs) is formulated in the rural areas of our Nation to strengthen our economy right from the root level. Self Help Groups (SHGs) are small groups of women joined together and perform entrepreneurial accomplishments in their own rural areas by means of producing and marketing the products which are made from the raw materials that are obtainable in their areas. They take up their business in a micro or small scale and experience many challenges. Most significant areas of their challenges are marketing, customer analytics and branding. Information technology could transform the way of business of SHGs. The market penetration of mobile technology and social media has extended the digital platform for the SHGs and it facilitates them to have easy accessibility to the customers, marketing and also branding. This article has developed a model framework for applying information technology to enable E-marketing for the betterment of self- help groups. This paper highlights the significance of various information technology initiatives and its effectiveness in implementing E-marketing for SHGs. It enables self-help groups to expose themselves to large and potential global consumers and that too in a cost effective manner.*

Keywords: *Information Technology, Self-Help Groups, E-Marketing, Entrepreneurship*

I. INTRODUCTION

Economic uplift of a nation starts right from the bottom layer of a society. The concept of Self Help Groups (SHGs) is formulated in the rural areas of our Nation to strengthen our economy right from the root level. SHGs are small groups of women joined together with common interest and perform entrepreneurial accomplishments in their own rural areas by means of producing and marketing the products with their available resources and that are made from the raw materials that are obtainable in their areas. The self-help group members work as micro entrepreneurs and they all have homogenous social and economic background. The SHGs are formed, trained and supported continuously by the government with lots of schemes. They take up their business in a micro or small scale and experience many challenges.

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Most significant areas of their challenges are marketing, customer analytics and branding. Information technology could transform the way of marketing followed by SHGs.

The market penetration of mobile technology and social media has extended the digital platform for the SHGs and it facilitates them to have easy accessibility to the market, marketing and also branding. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the significance of various information technology initiatives and its effectiveness in implementing E-marketing for SHGs.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Reference [4] defined the SHGs as informal groups, generally small in size and they are grouped by their self-interest. They take part in economic and entrepreneurial activities by voluntary involvements and collective pattern of governance followed for the development of the poor. The SHGs are basically initiated and encouraged by the government to empower the rural and economically backward women by fine tuning their economic and entrepreneurial abilities. Reference [7] explained about the need for such women empowerment and its implications in social and national development. Whereas, in the process of such participation and entrepreneurial performance include many challenges for the SHGs [9]. The study highlighted the practical problems experienced by SHGs such as shortage of raw materials, lack of awareness on packaging, financial knowledge and specially marketing know-how. References [5] and [11] stated that marketing is continuously perceived as a challenging activity by the SHGs, since the strategy to reach their target market in an easy and effective way is not commonly followed. Still, most of the SHGs depend on the informal way of marketing to promote and market the products to their customers. Reference [12] identified the social problems of the SHGs women and its implication in their marketing. The authors presented the mobility problems of women and due to this challenge; the SHGs could not market their products in large scale.

The SHGs continue their marketing in a very micro and informal way [6]. The researchers highlighted the major reason as the lack of marketing know-how. Due to this deficiency, the SHGs are lacking in mass production and marketing, packaging, increasing the customer database and marketing mix strategy formulations. In general, the SHGs market their finished products to the known ones and they distribute their goods through the neighboring shops or personal selling through door to door marketing.



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The existing reviews strongly endorse the need for the application of information technology to enable the E-Marketing initiatives to the SHGs in order to develop their socio and economic status. This is given due importance by our governments and also many corporate come forward to uplift the SHGs by introducing information technology and training them to adapt it for their marketing activities. In this context, this paper is depicting the role of information technology introduced by several organizations to enable E-marketing of the SHGs.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research followed a qualitative method to gain insights on the application of Information technology initiatives to enable E-marketing for the SHGs. The research has analyzed the existing review of literature pertaining to the problems of the SHGs and their marketing deficiencies. The study is descriptive in nature and it focuses on linking information technology to enable E-marketing model for the SHGs. A framework has been proposed by the researcher for effectively implementing E-marketing model for the target group. This model identifies the phases and fields for applying Information technology to enable E-marketing. Secondary data is collected about the SHGs profile and analyzed comprehensively. The findings depicted the strong need for enabling E-marketing to expose the SHGs to large and potential global consumers and that too in a cost effective manner.

IV. E-MARKETING MODEL FOR SHGS

The paradigm shift from the conventional marketing to E-marketing through information technology needs a systematic phase wise implementation. The SHGs are less aware of application of Information technology, hence a comprehensive model framework is proposed as follows:

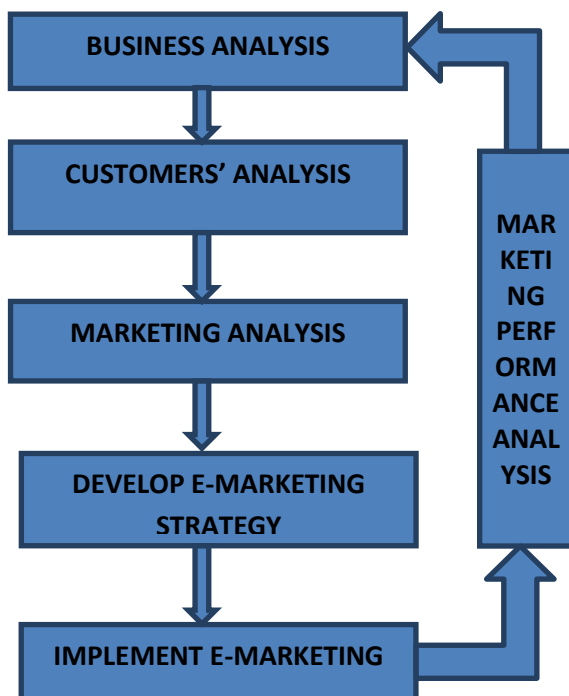


Figure 1: Framework for enabling E-marketing model for the SHGs

A. Business analysis:

The SHGs are involved in a wide range of business activities. The nature and depth of the business need to be analyzed and appropriate customization has to be done in their respective E-marketing model.

B. Customers' analysis:

A detailed analysis of the customers of each individual SHG has to be reviewed and based on the profile of the customers, their geographical distribution and buying behavior, the E-marketing has to be planned.

C. Marketing analysis:

Critical analysis of the existing convention marketing method and the challenges involved in it are to be seriously reviewed. This will give insight for betterment of marketing process through E-marketing model.

D. Develop E-Marketing Strategy:

Based on the three levels of input, an efficient E-marketing strategy is to be formulated in such a way that it matches with the business and customers profile and a solution for the existing problems of the conventional marketing model.

E. Implement E-marketing:

This is a crucial stage where a meticulous application of information technology into the process of marketing is to be well done. An effective implementation of E-marketing would overcome all the marketing challenges faced by the SHGs such as geographical reach, market penetration and branding.

F. Marketing Performance analysis:

The success of E-marketing depends on the accomplishments of the E-marketing goals. A regular review of the marketing performance in comparison with the key performance indicators would give a proper direction for the further implementation of E-marketing model.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The effectiveness of E-marketing model fully depends on the application of Information technology. Basically, the SHGs are not familiar with the E-marketing and the significance of information technology. Hence, in order to facilitate them for a smooth transformation towards E-marketing, intensive training programs are to be organized on E-marketing and its approaches. In India, the E-marketing is just an emerging area for the SHGs and to encourage them; lots of e-marketing initiatives have been extended by government and non government agencies. In the initial stage, a pilot approach was implemented by Flipkart and Mumbai municipality with a randomly selected ten SHGs. Intensive training programs was conducted in the areas such as documentation, standardization process and quality testing. This initiative ensured global market exposure to the rural born self-help groups [10].



In the recent scenario, social media marketing is tremendously growing and more preferred by the marketers. This trend has also become as possible for the rural women belonging to Telangana self-help groups. Facebook has joined with the Telangana government in uplifting the state's self-help groups through their intensive training programs which starts from the step of Facebook page creation, posting, browser engagement and application of social media marketing to market their products digitally [2].

Odisha government has collaborated with Facebook for enhancing the digital marketing skills of the self-help groups. This initiative has set up a target of training 25000 self-help group members in the field of digital and social media marketing. The ultimate objective of this initiative was 'Digital inclusion', which aims to prepare the self-help group members to leverage the advantages of social media to reach the extended customer base and maximize their business profit [8].

Today's consumers are more tech-savvy and are more interested in online shopping. Hence, the online marketing agency, Speed Bazaar has come forward to support the rural self-help groups in the field of online marketing. Speed Bazaar has initiated assistance on pilot basis to the self-help groups belonging to the areas from Ranastalam and Narasannapeta, through their Dwera bazaars [3].

NABARD has come forward for 'Digital inclusion' through its E-sakthi campaign. Through this initiative, NABARD has come forward with the training programs in the areas such as day to day documentation, account maintenance, marketing and social media marketing. At par with the Indian government's digital financial inclusion, maximum focus is given towards the digital platforms to promote the SHG's transactions digitally [1].

Thus the integration of information technology into the business of SHGs is not a simple process. It is a systematic process and it includes a diverse range of application areas as mentioned in Fig. 2.



Figure 2: Application areas of Information Technology

Thus with the application of Information technology, the SHGs are equipped for the successful implementation of E-marketing.

VI. SUGGESTIONS

A. Intensive training

The SHGs women lack formal education and most of them lack basic reading and writing skills [9]. They depend on known ones to read and write; hence they are unaware of the marketing strategies and benefits of E-Marketing. Hence, intensive training needs to be provided by government and other organizations for developing the SHGs women.

B. Experience sharing

They lack the exposure to run a business, neither do they have experience in online marketing. Experience sharing sessions shall be arranged in which the SHGs could be exposed to the experiences of successful entrepreneurs. This interaction will encourage them and boost up their involvement in entrepreneurial activities.

C. Familiarizing E-marketing

SHGs women have practical constraints in mobility and hence they restrict their market area to a limited diameter [12]. Since the women are not aware of what's happening beyond their village or the area in which they live, it's important for NGOs, educational institutions and government to help women to be familiar about the various avenues of E-marketing. E-marketing is the best way to meet this problem as they really don't have to go out of their comfort zone but can access the whole world by marketing their products online.

D. Consultancy support

If we take into consideration any business entrepreneur who starts their business, they would not start without a proper consultant who would guide them from their startup until they launch their product and market it too. Such expert consultancies would be helpful for women SHGs who start their business but have no expert opinion on whom to go ahead with online marketing their products.

E. Product positioning

Due to Globalization, there are too many competitors who break away the bone and limb of the SHGs. People are more attracted to purchase the products that are sold by the MNCs while they underestimate the products produced by SHGs. Product positioning shall be strengthened for the SHGs' products to convince the people to purchase these products. Such awareness could be created online through social media and E-marketing.

VII. CONCLUSION

In today's digital pace, E-marketing is recognized as a more vital platform for business and it is common for the self-help groups as well. The traditional boundaries are faded away and global reach is facilitated through social media, by means of active interactions among people through virtual communities and networks.

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It enables self-help groups to expose themselves to large and potential global consumers and that too in a cost effective manner. As a result, the self-help groups got an opportunity to create product awareness, market their product and also nurture loyal relationship among their global consumers.

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Dr. Sridevi K B is a Management Professor with specialization in Marketing. She has a blend of industry and academic experience of 18 years. Her areas of interest are Digital and social media marketing, Business analytics, Marketing Management, Business Research Methodology and International Business. Her research works are published in several reputed and peer reviewed journals. She has provided industrial consultancy in the field of Digital marketing and general marketing. She has convened an International conference on the title 'Management in Digital Era' and also edited a book volume on the conference theme. She has completed AICTE certified Faculty Development Programme on 'E-Commerce' provided by IIT-Kharagpur. She has also upgraded her domain knowledge in Digital marketing through recognized MOOCs. She has conducted training programs for small enterprises on adoption of information technology and digital marketing.



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