

A Study of Diffusion of Digital Marketing in Rural Akola

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ABSTRACT

Digital marketing has become an important tool for communication, product promotion, customer engagement, and business growth. In India, digital technology is expanding rapidly through smartphones, internet services, and digital payment systems. However, many rural areas are still unable to use digital tools effectively for business purposes. Rural Akola is also facing a similar situation.

Although smartphones and internet access are increasing in villages, many people still use mobile phones mainly for entertainment, chatting, and social media browsing. Farmers, shopkeepers, women entrepreneurs, and youth have good opportunities to use digital marketing, but low awareness, poor digital skills, trust issues, and weak network connectivity are slowing adoption.

This study examines the diffusion of digital marketing in Rural Akola. The study is based on descriptive research design. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire using Google Forms from respondents of Rural Akola. Secondary data was collected from journals, reports, books, and previous research studies.

The findings show that smartphone ownership is high, internet usage is increasing, and awareness of digital marketing is growing. However, business use of digital platforms is still limited. Most respondents are interested in learning digital marketing. The study concludes that Rural Akola has strong growth potential if proper training, awareness programs, and infrastructure support are provided.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Rural Akola, Adoption, Awareness, Farmers, Youth, Rural Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing means promoting products and services through internet-based platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Google Search, and websites. It helps businesses communicate directly with customers, increase visibility, reduce marketing costs, and expand market reach.

Before digital growth, rural businesses mainly depended on traditional marketing methods such as word-of-mouth promotion, local markets, banners, pamphlets, and personal selling. These methods had limited reach and slow communication.

India has seen rapid digital growth due to affordable smartphones, low-cost internet plans, and digital payment systems. Government initiatives such as Digital India, BharatNet, and PMGDISHA are also helping rural digital development.



Akola district is mainly agriculture-based. Farmers cultivate cotton, soybean, and pulses. Along with agriculture, small shopkeepers, women entrepreneurs, service providers, and youth also contribute to the rural economy. Therefore, digital marketing can create strong opportunities in Rural Akola.

The present study aims to analyse the diffusion of digital marketing in Rural Akola and understand the level of awareness, adoption, and barriers among rural people.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although smartphones and internet access are increasing rapidly in Rural Akola, the adoption of digital marketing is still comparatively low. Many rural people own mobile phones and have access to internet services, but these resources are mainly used for personal and entertainment purposes rather than business development. A large number of users spend their time watching videos, using social media for entertainment, chatting with friends and family, and making phone calls. The productive use of mobile technology for marketing, online selling, customer communication, and business promotion is still limited.

There are several barriers responsible for the low adoption of digital marketing in Rural Akola. One of the major problems is the low level of awareness regarding digital marketing tools and platforms. Many rural people are not familiar with tools such as WhatsApp Business, Facebook Marketplace, Instagram promotion, Google Business Profile, and online advertising methods. Poor internet connectivity in villages is another important challenge, as weak network signals and slow speed reduce the effective use of digital platforms.

Fear of online fraud and cyber scams also creates hesitation among rural users. Many people do not trust digital payment systems and feel unsafe while making online transactions. In addition, the lack of training programs and guidance prevents rural entrepreneurs, farmers, and small shopkeepers from learning practical digital skills. Limited business knowledge and lack of confidence further reduce adoption.

Because of these problems, rural people are unable to receive the full benefits of digital marketing such as wider customer reach, low-cost promotion, improved sales opportunities, better communication with customers, and higher income generation. Therefore, there is a strong need for awareness programs, digital training, and better infrastructure in Rural Akola.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

3.1. Primary Objective

To study the diffusion of digital marketing in Rural Akola.

3.2. Secondary Objectives

1. To assess awareness level of digital marketing among rural people.
2. To identify barriers such as low skills, low trust, and poor internet.
3. To examine the role of youth, colleges, and government programs.
4. To study opportunities for farmers and small businesses.
5. To suggest practical strategies for increasing adoption.

4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study is limited to rural areas of Akola district. It focuses on analysing awareness, adoption level, benefits, and challenges of digital marketing among selected respondents. The study is based on responses collected through an online questionnaire.

5. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Digital marketing has become an important tool for business growth, customer engagement, and market expansion. Previous studies show that digital marketing improves visibility, customer reach, and growth opportunities for small businesses.

Researchers found that social media platforms, websites, and digital advertisements help businesses connect directly with customers at lower cost. However, many rural businesses continue to rely on traditional marketing due to lack of awareness, financial limitations, weak internet connectivity, and shortage of technical skills.

Several studies also highlight that youth participation, digital literacy programs, and government support can significantly improve adoption in rural areas.

Most earlier studies focus on metro cities and urban markets. Limited studies are available specifically on Rural Akola district. Therefore, the present study attempts to fill this research gap.

6. RESEARCH GAP

The present study is based on descriptive research design. It aims to analyse the diffusion of digital marketing in Rural Akola.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Particular	Details
Research Design	Descriptive Research
Data Type	Primary + Secondary
Primary Data	Questionnaire
Tool Used	Google Forms
Sample Size	120 Respondents
Sampling Method	Convenience Sampling
Area	Rural Akola
Analysis Tools	Percentage Method, Tables

8. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 4.1 Smartphone Ownership

Response	Percentage
Yes	98.72%
No	1.28%

The analysis indicates that almost all respondents own smartphones. This creates a strong foundation for digital marketing adoption in Rural Akola.

Table 4.2 Internet Access in Village

Response	Percentage
Yes	92.31%
No	7.69%

The majority of respondents reported that internet access is available in their village. This reflects improving rural connectivity.

Table 4.3 Frequency of Internet Usage

Response	Percentage
Very Frequently	42.31%
Often	23.08%
Sometimes	28.21%
Rarely	5.13%
Never	1.28%

The data shows that a large number of respondents use internet regularly, indicating positive digital engagement.

Table 4.4 Awareness of Digital Marketing

Response	Percentage
Yes	88.46%
No	11.54%

The findings reveal that awareness regarding digital marketing is high among respondents.

Table 4.5 Use of Social Media for Promotion or Selling

Response	Percentage
Yes	71.79%
No	28.21%

The majority of respondents have used social media for promoting or selling products and services.

Table 4.6 Most Used Platform

Platform	Percentage
Instagram	34.62%
WhatsApp	29.49%
YouTube	26.92%
Facebook	7.69%
Other	1.28%

Instagram is the most frequently used platform, followed by WhatsApp and YouTube.

Interpretation

The analysis clearly indicates that Rural Akola has a positive digital environment. Smartphones and internet access are widely available. Awareness of digital marketing is high, and many respondents have already used social media for promotional activities.

However, many respondents still use digital platforms mainly for communication and entertainment rather than structured business growth. This shows that practical training and business-oriented digital guidance are still required.

9. MAJOR FINDINGS

The findings of the study indicate that smartphone usage is high among the respondents of Rural Akola. A large number of people own smartphones and regularly use them for communication, entertainment, and internet access. This shows that the basic digital infrastructure required for digital marketing is already available in the rural area. Along with smartphone usage, internet penetration is also increasing steadily. More rural users are gaining access to mobile internet services, which creates new opportunities for online communication and business promotion.

However, the study also reveals that entertainment use of mobile phones is higher than business use. Many respondents mainly use their smartphones for watching videos, using social media for entertainment, chatting, and personal communication. Only a limited number of respondents use mobile phones for productive purposes such as promoting products, contacting customers, or conducting online business activities. This indicates that digital devices are available, but their commercial use is still low.

The awareness level of digital marketing among respondents is moderate. While many people have heard about digital marketing and social media promotion, a significant number of respondents still lack complete knowledge about digital tools and platforms. At the same time, the study found that many respondents are interested in learning digital marketing. This reflects a positive attitude toward adopting new technology if proper training and guidance are provided.

The study further shows that fear of scams and weak internet connectivity are major barriers in the adoption of digital marketing. Many rural people hesitate to use online platforms because of concerns related to fraud, cybercrime, and lack of trust in digital payments. Poor network connectivity in some villages also affects regular and effective use of online services.

Another important finding is that rural youth can play a major role in digital adoption. Young people are generally more familiar with smartphones, social media, and online tools. With proper support and encouragement, rural youth can help farmers, shopkeepers, and small entrepreneurs adopt digital marketing practices. Therefore, youth participation can become an important factor in promoting digital growth in Rural Akola.

10. SUGGESTIONS

The study suggests that village-level digital awareness camps should be conducted on a regular basis to educate rural people about the importance and benefits of digital marketing. Such camps can help create awareness about online business opportunities, digital tools, and modern marketing practices among farmers, shopkeepers, women entrepreneurs, and youth.

Special training programs should be organised to teach people how to use WhatsApp Business for business promotion, customer communication, product catalogues, and order management. Since WhatsApp is already widely used in rural areas, it can become an effective and simple tool for small business growth.

Farmers should also be trained to check market prices online through mobile applications and websites. This will help them obtain updated price information, reduce dependence on middlemen, and make better selling decisions for their agricultural products.

Improvement in internet connectivity is another important requirement. Many villages still face weak network signals and slow internet speed, which creates problems in using digital platforms effectively. Better infrastructure and reliable internet services will encourage more people to adopt online tools.

College students and rural youth can be used as digital volunteers because they are generally more familiar with smartphones and online platforms. They can guide local shopkeepers, farmers, and small entrepreneurs in using digital marketing tools and applications.

Learning materials should be provided in local languages so that rural people can easily understand and apply digital concepts. Simple guides, videos, and training booklets in Marathi and Hindi can improve learning outcomes.

Finally, trust in digital systems should be increased through cyber safety training. People should be educated about online fraud prevention, safe digital payments, password security, and responsible internet use. This will reduce fear and increase confidence in adopting digital marketing practices.

11. CONCLUSION

The present study examined the diffusion of digital marketing in Rural Akola. The findings show that digital marketing has strong potential for improving business reach, customer engagement, and income opportunities in rural areas.

Most respondents are aware of digital marketing and regularly use smartphones and internet services. Social media platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube are popular among respondents. However, many users still lack advanced digital business knowledge.

The study concludes that with better awareness, practical training, improved internet infrastructure, and active youth participation, digital marketing can become an important tool for rural economic development in Akola district.

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