

STRATEGIC MARKETING OF TRIBAL PRODUCTS THROUGH CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN KERALA: ENHANCING CONSUMER ACCEPTANCE, EXPORT POTENTIAL, AND SUSTAINABLE BRAND POSITIONING

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Abstract

This paper analyses strategic marketing of tribal products based on the co-operative societies in Kerala in terms of consumer acceptance, export, and sustainable brand positioning. With the help of a mixed-method research design, tribal producers, cooperative officials, and urban consumers were sampled to determine the usefulness of promotional strategies, branding mechanisms, and market integration practices. The results show that cooperative-based storytelling, eco-labelling, and exhibition-based promotion have a strong positive impact on the product perception and consumer confidence, and that the low adoption of digital marketing limits a broader market penetration. Consumer acceptance of tribal products is high owing to its perceived authenticity and moral worth but there are problems associated with packaging, certification, and facilitation of export trade, which limit competitiveness both at the national and international levels. The paper identifies the twofold position of co-operatives as institutional middlemen and strategic marketing agents that have the potential to empower value chains and sustainable livelihoods to tribal communities. The combination of the traditional knowledge and contemporary branding and online platforms assumes that cooperative marketing is one of the possible avenues towards increasing market resilience and inclusive economic growth. This research will make its contribution to the indigenous marketing literature by connecting the concept of cooperative governance to ethical models of consumption and sustainable development outcomes and providing policy-relevant information to empower tribal enterprise systems in Kerala.

Keywords: Tribal products, Co-operative marketing, Consumer acceptance, Sustainable branding, Export potential, Ethical consumption.

Introduction

The state of Kerala has a rich tribal community whose economic structure is highly interdependent on forest ecosystems, subsistence agriculture, and the popular artisanal activities. The indigenous products of the tribal communities are diverse such as non-timber forest products (NTFPs), organic spices, medicinal herbs, bamboo crafts, honey, and handwoven textiles. The products are a product of ecological experience and culturally

developed systems of production that are intergenerational. Recent research points to the fact that forest-based production remains a crucial source of additional income to tribal households especially to women and marginal landholders, among other things, which is important as a source of livelihood diversification and resilience (Nair and Menon, 2021; Mohanty, 2023). Kerala offers new economic prospects of tribal products, thanks to the high literacy rates and growing ethical tourism and organic consumption markets, which make the state a place where the idea of sustainability and authenticity can be implemented (Raghavan and Joseph, 2022). The institutional interventions of TRIFED and the policy programs like Van Dhan Vikas Yojana have also enhanced collective production and value addition amongst tribal producers making tribal products as the tools of inclusive growth and sustainable development (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2022; Kumar and Behera, 2024). At the same time, the changing consumer behavior denotes the growing trend toward environmental awareness, ethically produced, and community-oriented products among urban and younger consumers (Bhattacharya and Roy, 2021; Singh and Kaur, 2023). Such a meeting between indigenous production and ethical consumerism provides a strategic background to rebranding Kerala tribal products in the form of structured marketing, branding, and cooperative structures based on authenticity, sustainability and social accountability.

Co-operative Societies Role in Integrating Tribal Markets

There is a long-established cooperative movement in Kerala which is very important in rural development, market mediation, and social inclusion. Tribal and primary marketing cooperatives are collective institutions whereby fragmented production is aggregated, primary processing is achieved and access to organised markets is made. These organisations lessen their reliance on informal intermediaries and maximise the price by conducting formal purchases and collective bargaining (Thomas and Pillai, 2021; Das, 2022). Empirical studies have shown that cooperative participation has a positive effect on income stability, risk-sharing, and market participation between tribal households through enhancing access to credit, training, and government subsidies (Chaudhary et al., 2023). To that end, TRIFED and cooperative federations at the state level have gone beyond branding, certification, packaging, and e-commerce integration and have expanded their activities to cover tribal products into the national and export markets (Verma and Sahu, 2021; Gopalakrishnan, 2024). At Kerala, cooperatives are more embracing organized marketing activities, such as adherence to standardized packaging, electronic marketing, and geographical branding, thereby establishing new connections with ethical markets of consumption. Their democracy and social ownership put them in an important position of balancing tribal production to the modern market systems and make them inclusive and equally allocate value.

New Marketing Tribal Products Challenges

Tribal products marketing still encounters structural and operation limitations, even with the support of the policy and institutional intervention. These are, poor storage facilities, poor product standardisation, poor transport as well as poor quality management system. Empirical research on the field shows that these limitations impair adherence to official retail and export

regulations, which has limited entry to high-end markets (Rao and Mishra, 2022; Jha, 2023). The next important issue is the lack of good brand recognition and awareness. The products of the tribes tend to be sold as generic or unidentified commodities without having any sight of their cultural, ecological, and social value propositions. This limits their power to charge price of ethical consumer segments (Gupta and Sharma, 2021; Bose and Chatterjee, 2024). Moreover, digital platforms present a new marketing opportunity, and inadequate digital literacy and limitations of infrastructure still limit their usage on the cooperative level (Shetty and Varghese, 2022). Other factors that lower strategic effectiveness of cooperatives include governance inefficiencies, low professional marketing capacity and the lack of consistency in financial management. Seasonal fluctuations in production and climate related weakness are contributing to instability in supply. These obstacles put emphasis on the necessity of improving collaborative marketing potentials, strategic change of simple procurement organizations to complex market-oriented organizations.

Gap in the Existing Research and Rationale of the Study

Although the topic of tribal livelihoods and poverty alleviation has received a lot of research, little scholarly work has specifically dealt with the concept of strategic marketing and branding of tribal products using cooperative processes. The current literature is inclined to concentrate on production constraints and welfare interventions more than on the recently developed marketing tools, including eco-labelling, digital promotion, storytelling, and export-oriented positioning (Mukherjee, 2021; Sharma and Patel, 2023). At the same time, studies of ethical consumption and sustainable branding have progressed to higher levels, but seldom make the use of the aboriginal system of cooperatives or tribal value chains a part of the analytical framework (Klein and Loewenstein, 2022; Roy and Banerjee, 2024). The study attempts to fill this two-fold gap by assessing the integration of tribal products into the market by the cooperative societies in Kerala, the impact of consumer acceptance, and the outcomes of strategic marketing programs. The rationale is based on the contribution of empirically based insights that could be used to inform sustainable marketing paradigms and reinforce inclusive tribal marketing systems.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Co-operative Marketing Theory and Ethical Consumption

The theory of co-operative marketing represents cooperatives as institutions which are democratic owned by members, which act in the best interests of the collective and fairly allocate surplus profits as well as social justice rather than just profit making purposes. Cooperatives are used in agricultural and tribal economies to lower transaction costs as well as enhance bargaining power and to grant marginalised producers access to the market (Birchall, 2021; Singh and Reddy, 2023). The ethical consumption theory brings out the fact that there is increase in the modern consumer toward making judgements of product consumption that are related to environmental sustainability, social equity and openness in governance. Research has shown that consumers show increased intentions to buy the products which are in line with fairness, sustainability and upliftment of the community (White et al., 2022; Kumar and Verma,

2024). The strategic positioning of tribal products can be explained through a strong prism of co-operative marketing and ethical consumption conceptual intersection. Co-operatives are the intermediaries that change ethical will into practical market forms and relate socially responsible customers and tribal producers in an open and fair regime.

Sustainability Branding and Community-Based Marketing Paradigms

Sustainable branding combines ecological consideration, cultural wholeness and social justice into brand worth, beyond functional product worth. In the case of indigenous products, sustainable branding is focused on credibility, heritage, and fair-trade (Kapoor and Arora, 2022). This type of branding builds emotional resonance and customer trust in case of associated credible certification and clear narratives (Chen and Lin, 2023). The community based marketing models imply active involvement of the producer communities in marketing decisions related to branding and make sure that brand stories have the reference to the indigenous identity and socio-cultural values. The studies show that ethical products with co-created branding are more differentiated in the market and have a higher price (Martinez and Gupta, 2024; Dey and Choudhury, 2022). Among tribal settings, known as cooperative branding strategies, geographic indication, eco-labelling and fair-trade certification have proven to enhance consumer loyalty and help to maintain cultural preservation. These strategies enable tribal producers because their cultural voice would not be marginalized in the process of expanding their business.

Indigenous Product Marketing based on Value Chain Integration

Value chain integration is the process that brings integration between production, processing, branding, distribution, and retailing. Integrated value chains enhance value capture in tribal economies, which control the quality, standardisation, compliance, and market linkages (Porter and Kramer, 2022; NITI Aayog, 2023). According to recent tribal enterprise research, the programs aimed at training, development of infrastructure, and logistics contribute greatly to the increase in income and market competitiveness (Sundaram and Joshi, 2021). The value chain development of cooperatives in Kerala indicates possibilities of transforming raw materials into high value final products by branding and certification. Sound integration can make subsistence based marketing sustainable commercially based marketing and guarantee it gets more returns to primary producers and sustainable brand identity.

Model of connectivity between Governance, Empowerment, and Competitiveness

The suggested framework is connected with three fundamental dimensions, namely governance, empowerment, and competitiveness. Governance is made to mean transparency, accountability, democratic participation as well as strategic professionalism in cooperatives. Good governance increases the trust among the members and allows good marketing practices (Birchall and Simmons, 2021). The empowerment entails access to knowledge, skills in entrepreneurship, financial inclusion and technological capacity. Empowerment will lead to increased participation of the producers in the value chain activities and branding projects (Kumar and Mehta, 2023). Brand equity, the credibility of certification, digital presence, and sensitivity to ethical consumer demands make companies competitive. The inclusive

governance and empowered producers are important elements of sustainable competitiveness that depend on synergy. The framework assumes that effective governance frameworks will help empowered tribal producers to help promote strong and sustainable market positioning.

Review of Literature

Indigenous and Tribal Products Marketing in India

The commercialization of indigenous and tribal products in India has widely drawn research in the field of inclusive development, cultural conservation, and sustainable livelihoods. The marginal character of tribal products in the formal market was frequently pointed out in earlier literature where the authors describe that the goods were restricted to local haats, informal traders, and seasonal fairs (Mukherjee, 2021). Nevertheless, recent studies underline a shift to organized marketing, which is institutional intervention-based, branding, and mainstream integration of value chains (Sharma and Patel, 2023). Various researches highlight that the main issues that tribal products continue to face are poor market connectivity, fluctuating prices, and poor branding that undermines their competitiveness outside regional markets (Rao and Mishra, 2022). Meanwhile, it is also becoming increasingly acknowledged that indigenous products have specific value attributes such as authenticity, eco-friendliness, and cultural richness, which fulfill appeal in niche consumer segments very well (Bose and Chatterjee, 2024). The creation of state-supported platforms and joint marketing systems has increased the opportunities to offer tribal products to both urban and digital markets, but the areas of strategic promotion and value communication are still missing (Kumar and Behera, 2024). According to recent studies, storytelling, origin based branding, and certification are vital in rebranding tribal goods in the ethical and sustainable consumer domains. As an example, research on handicraft and NTFPs has shown that branding in relation to community identity has a positive impact on perceived value and is priced at a premium (Roy and Banerjee, 2024). Nonetheless, such initiatives are usually disjointed and there is less coordination between the producers, marketing firms and cooperatives. The literature body of work indicates that there have been general improvements in structure, yet the holistic marketing approach which brings together branding, digital promotion as well as cooperative governance is still immature in the tribal product sector.

The Co-operatives in Rural and Tribal Development

The co-operatives have long been identified as important institutional means to rural development, social-economic inclusion, and group empowerment. Cooperatives have a particularly important role in tribal settings, which is to coordinate the small-scale output, even out earnings, and expand access to formal credit and markets (Thomas and Pillai, 2021). Recent researchers confirm that in addition to improving the economy, cooperatives also help in social integration and decision-making in tribal communities (Chaudhary et al., 2023). Empirical studies indicate that cooperative membership is beneficial in enhancing livelihood results by allowing the realisation of prices, minimising the effects of middlemen, and access to government subsidies (Das, 2022). Tribal cooperatives in forest-based economies have recorded quantifiable improvements in not only increasing transparency in the processes of

procurement, but also increasing the local bargaining power (Verma and Sahu, 2021). Nevertheless, such issues as poor leadership, inadequate managerial competencies, and financial resources oftentimes impair their efficiency (Gopalakrishnan, 2024).

The literature of recent development focuses on the changing role of cooperatives in addition to traditional procurement roles. They have become more engaged in branding, product diversification, digital marketing, and supporting export, and as such, reposition themselves as decisive participants in the market instead of mediators (Singh and Reddy, 2023). Kerala Cooperative structures have shown promise in terms of balancing commercial and social equity, and thus it is an appropriate platform in promotion of sustainable tribal entrepreneurship. The literature as such makes cooperatives vital players of change in the development of tribes assuming that institutional capacity and professional management is enhanced.

Ethical Consumption Behaviour and Consumer Perception

The modern consumer trends show that there is a significant change towards ethical, sustainable, and socially responsible consumption patterns. Ethical consumption behaviour is an indicator of consumer tastes that put more emphasis on environmental conservation, fair working conditions, and societal good (White et al., 2022). Urban consumers are becoming more inclined to think of tribal and indigenous products by the Indian context as authentic, sustainable, and culturally inherent (Bhattacharya and Roy, 2021). Studies indicate that the perceived ethical value has a strong effect on the purchase intention and brand loyalty. The consumer trust is more likely to be created by products that project a clear social impact, fair-trade, and environmental responsibility (Klein and Loewenstein, 2022). Research also illustrates that emotional appeal and readiness to raise the premium price are more often promoted by the product presentation that is based on the narration, i.e., the mention of tribal heritage or eco-conscientiousness (Singh and Kaur, 2023). There is an unequal consumer awareness, especially in semi-urban and rural markets where price sensitivity is a more important ethical consumption factor (Gupta and Sharma, 2021). This implies that the market of tribal products should be developed with the help of proper communication and awareness-building measures. Scholars come to the conclusion that ethical consumption is a good chance to rebrand the indigenous products, but the potentiality is not used because of the weak branding and a lack of consumer education.

Traditional Goods Branding, Certification and Export Strategies

Branding and certification have become important tools in the improvement of global competitiveness of traditional and indigenous products. It has been shown that geographical indication (GI) tags, organic certification, and fair-trade labelling enhance the credibility of the market and boost demand in the global market (Kapoor and Arora, 2022). Research on handicrafts and agro-based products demonstrates that certified products are more trusted in the eyes of the consumers and they command higher prices because of the perceived quality assurance (Chen and Lin, 2023). Sustainable branding and supply chain transparency export strategies have worked to increase the visibility of traditional products of the developing

regions (Martinez and Gupta, 2024). The literature, however, observes that the Tribal cooperatives do not usually have the technical expertise and infrastructure to stay on par with the export standards and navigate foreign markets (Dey and Choudhury, 2022). Combining certification and storytelling and digital marketing is also indicated as one of the strategies to expand the potential of exports and ensure the cultural authenticity of the process.

Objectives and Hypotheses

Research objectives should be stated as follows

This paper will attempt to make an analysis of strategic marketing of tribal products by use of co-operative societies in Kerala with particular focus on enhancing market integration and sustainable brand positioning. The primary objectives are:

1. To analyze well the marketing strategies embraced by the co-operative societies are effective in helping to market the tribal products and increase their visibility in the market.
2. To evaluate the importance of tribal co-operatives in determining consumer acceptance, perceived value and satisfaction to tribal products in Kerala.
3. To measure the effect of branding, certification and promotional mechanisms on the export potential and competitiveness of tribal products sold with the help of co-operatives.

These goals aim at developing empirical knowledge which would streamline Co-operative marketing practices in accordance with the changing trends of ethics consumption and sustainable development models.

Development of Research Hypotheses

According to the idea and purpose of the research, the next hypotheses are drawn:

H1: Cooperative marketing strategies and consumer acceptance of tribal products have a significant positive relationship in Kerala.

H2: Co-operative societies that have adopted branding and certification practices are largely involved in determining the export potential and the perceived value of tribal products.

H3: Cooperation and marketing integration have a positive influence on the competitiveness and sustainability of the tribal product value chains.

These hypotheses will be tested empirically to investigate how far the mechanisms of cooperative-based marketing will improve consumer perceptions and export preparedness of tribal products, and this will lead to sustainable development of tribal livelihoods.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Approach

The research design to be used in the present study is descriptive and analytical research design with the aim of investigating the strategic marketing of tribal products using the co-operative societies in Kerala. This design is suitable because it enables the understanding of the marketing mechanisms, institutional roles as well as consumer response in the real world situation in a holistic way. The research has a mixed-method nature in that it combines both

quantitative and qualitative research methods to ensure that it covers the multidimensional character of cooperative marketing practices and consumer perceptions. Consumer acceptance, levels of satisfaction, and assessment of the efficiency of promotional strategies are measured using the quantitative approach, and the qualitative element examines the views of the cooperative managers and tribal producers on branding, governance, and market integration. This study is cross-sectional, i.e. it examines data that is gathered in a specified period of time and therefore the study provides the researcher with the ability to analyze current market trends and performance of the institution. This methodology will guarantee the empirical rigor and contextual depth to it, which will help in making a well-balanced interpretation of cooperative marketing dynamics and their consequences to sustainable tribal entrepreneurship in Kerala.

Methods of Data Collection and Sampling Framework

The research is founded on primary as well as secondary data. The methods of primary data collection are structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and field observations. The primary data base is composed of three major respondent groups: tribal product producers, co-operative society managers and urban consumers who purchase tribal products. This multi-stakeholder strategy will help in triangulation and improve findings validity. The stratified sampling method is used in order to have a fair representation of every group. The research region covers some chosen tribal controlled regions of Kerala like Wayanad, Idukki and Palakkad where cooperative participation in tribal marketing is active. Out of these districts 120 tribal producers, 40 co-operative officials and 90 consumers are chosen making the total sample size of 250 respondents. The selection of producers and consumers is done depending on their active participation in cooperative marketing and urban retail stores and cooperative sales centres respectively. The secondary data will be obtained through the cooperative reports, state tribal development papers, government policy papers, and published research articles. This two-way data collection approach is more effective in terms of strengthening the study and making it contextually relevant.

The surveys were conducted using Survey Instruments and Variables

The main tool of the research will be a structured questionnaire which will be developed on a five-point Likert scale to get the degree of perceptions, attitudes, and level of satisfaction. Each group of respondents is administered separate questionnaires in order to get role-specific views. Some of the variables captured in the consumer questionnaire are the product quality, trust in the brand, fairness of price, packaging attractiveness, awareness of eco-labels and the ability to repurchase. In the case of cooperative managers, the questions in the survey are based on marketing plans, branding programs, certification, promotion via the internet, and governance effectiveness. Among tribal producers, the variables are the stability of incomes, training availability, contentedness with cooperative support and feelings of empowerment. Open-ended questions are also fitted to enable the respondents to give qualitative information about the challenges and expectations. The means of ensuring content validity is through expert review and reliability is done by testing Cronbachs Alpha to determine internal consistency of the measurement scales prior to full-scaled data collection.

Analytical Methods and Statistical Software

The results of data gathered through questionnaires are coded and analyzed with the help of statistical analysis programs like SPSS and MS Excel. The variables that respondent characteristics and general trends of perception and satisfaction are summarised using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentage analysis, mean scores, and standard deviation. The proposed hypotheses are tested in the inferential statistical methods. The focus of the correlation analysis is on determining the relationship between cooperative marketing strategies and consumer acceptance, utilized by Pearson. To estimate the effect of branding and certification on the perceived value and export potential, multiple regression analysis is used. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is used to compare level of satisfaction between various categories of respondents and various districts. To make certain that the data will be consistent and sufficient to sample, reliability and validity tests, such as Cronbachs Alpha and Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) are carried out. Thematic coding is used to analyse qualitative answers aiming to uncover recurring patterns when it comes to governance efficiency and empowerment. Such analytical processes offer both statistical rigor and interpretative richness, which allow finding the ability to make meaningful conclusions about the usefulness of cooperative-based marketing approaches to tribal products.

Results and Analysis

In this section, the author provides empirical evidence, which is the main survey of tribal producers, cooperative officials, and consumers in Kerala. Promotional effectiveness, market expansion, consumer acceptance, and impact of branding and digital platform on the performance of tribal products being marketed via cooperatives are assessed in the analysis.

Co-operatives Evaluation Promotional Strategies

The analysis indicates that cooperatives in the society use both traditional and contemporary promotion methods to make tribal products more noticeable. They consist of the attendance at government-sponsored exhibitions, local fairs, awareness campaigns, point-of-sale displays and sparing use of social media platforms. Another important percentage of cooperative officials said that they were increasingly relying on storytelling and eco-certification as means of distinguishing between tribal goods and mainstream products.

Table no: 1 Promotional Tools Utilised by Co-operatives and Perceived Effectiveness

Promotional Strategy	Mean Score (1–5)	Effectiveness Level
Local exhibitions & fairs	4.32	High
In-store visual displays	3.89	Moderate
Social media promotion	3.12	Moderate

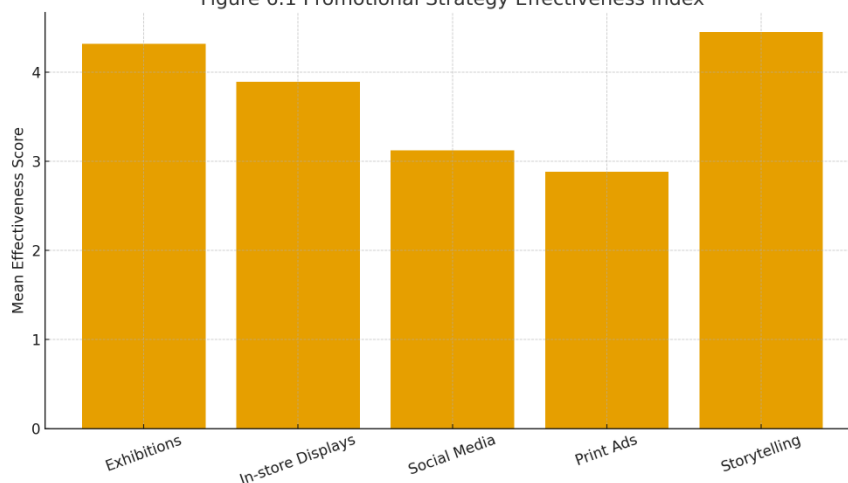
Print advertisements	2.88	Low
Storytelling & product origin	4.45	High

According to the findings it is observed that community-based storytelling (mean 4.45) and exhibitions (mean 4.32) are considered as the most effective promotional tools. Yet, even though the significance of digital marketing is increasing, cooperatives are not prominent in the way of adopting the structured use of social media campaigns, which implies a need to strengthen the capacity.

Figure no: 1

Promotional Strategy Effectiveness Index

Figure 6.1 Promotional Strategy Effectiveness Index



The promotion approaches should be evaluated and contrasted in terms of their effectiveness, with storytelling and exhibitions being the most effective at the same time, presented in a bar chart image. On the whole, cooperatives are strategic but the low level of integrating digital marketing minimizes the outreach potential. Increasing digital literacy and professional marketing capacity can go a long way to enhance outcomes of strategic promotion of tribal products.

Co-operative role in Market and Export Expansion

Co-operatives have a role to play in making tribal products available to more markets such as the export market. Results have shown that over 62 percent of cooperative officials have described their involvement in state-sponsored trade fairs and international shows, which have helped in creating more exposure of the tribal products including spices, handicrafts, and organic honey. Nevertheless, official export business is minimal because of the issues in the regulations and certification limitations.

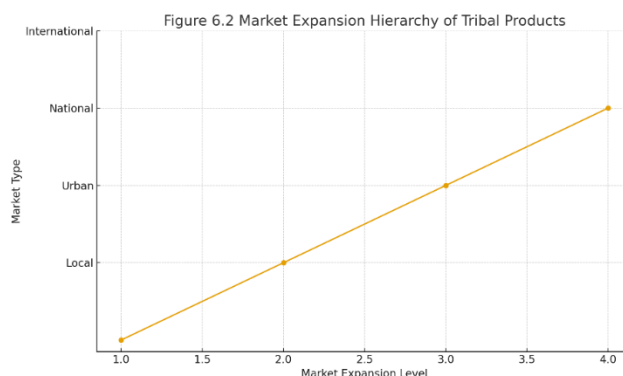
Table no: 2 Market Expansion Channels Utilised by Co-operatives

Market Channel	Percentage of Usage (%)
Local cooperative outlets	78
Urban retail stores	66
Online platforms	42
National trade fairs	58
International markets	21

Although growth of urban retail is observable, only 21% of cooperatives have ventured into export markets, which means that there is potential. Success in exports is said to be attached to investment in packaging, quality assurance, and certifications.

Figure no: 2

Market Expansion Hierarchy of Tribal Products



(A flow diagram illustrating how local markets will be followed to urban, national and international markets) The statistics are used to highlight that co-operatives are slowly becoming active intermediaries rather than the passive ones; but there is a need to provide a long term policy and infrastructural sustainability to increase participation in the exports.

Consumer Acceptance and Level of Satisfaction

There are high rates of satisfaction and acceptance of tribal products which are sold by cooperatives. In the survey, one out of five consumers mentioned the overall satisfaction as high or very high, especially appreciating the authenticity and ethical value of tribal goods by the consumers.

Table no: 3 Consumer Perception Scores on Key Attributes

Attribute	Mean Score (1–5)
Product authenticity	4.41
Quality consistency	3.86
Price fairness	4.02
Packaging appeal	3.45
Ethical value	4.52

The scores of ethical value and authenticity are the greatest, which implies the great emotional and moral appeal. Nonetheless, a comparably lower value of packaging indicates one area of concern to improve visual branding and contemporary presentation, whereas 61 percent of the consumers acknowledged to pay a premium in certified tribal products, and 69 percent of the consumers preferred to consume the products that are associated with environmental conservation or community welfare. The results support the relevance of collaborative branding in the generation of consumer trust and loyalty. In general, the findings indicate that tribal product are well accepted and that the packaging and awareness structure can be refined to increase the levels of satisfaction and repeat purchase behaviour.

Effect of Branding and Digital Platforms

The impact of branding and the digital tools on the performance of the market is becoming more apparent. In cooperatives where structured branding strategies were embraced, it was observed that more consistency in demand and more market coverage were realized. Consumer confidence was affected positively by branding items like eco-labeling, geographical indicators and cooperative logos.

Table no: 4 Branding and Digital Platforms and Perceived Effect

Factor	Impact Level (%)
Eco-labelling certification	72
Cooperative brand identity	68
Digital advertisement	54
Online customer engagement	46

Product storytelling	75
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The issues of storytelling and eco-labelling become the prevailing forces of branding. Nevertheless, online resources like e-commerce and social media distribution are not exploited. The number of cooperatives that actively maintain digital pages is only 43 percent, which is a remarkable discrepancy in digital marketing strategy. The analysis shows that cooperatives that involve storytelling with professional branding have better product visibility and customer retention. The introduction of superior digital platforms may also increase the market reach so as to remain competitive in the changing ethical consumption environment.

Summary of Key Findings

1. The best ways of promotion are storytelling and exhibitions.
2. Export potential is not well exploited even when urban markets are increasing.
3. The satisfaction of the consumer is high based on the value of ethicality and authenticity.
4. Trust is highly affected by branding yet the adoption of digital is low

Discussion

Interpretation of Major Findings

The results show that cooperative societies in Kerala are slowly moving to be more akin to an aggregative society to a strategic marketing organisation that actually influences consumer perceptions and market positioning of the tribal products. The significant scores of effectiveness in storytelling and exhibition-based promotion are indicative that the culturally entrenched narratives are central to the fortification of emotional linkage between consumers and indigenous commodities. According to these strategies, it seems that trust is strengthened through conveying a sense of authenticity, ethical source and community share of the benefits as a factor that is seemingly becoming one of the key factors in making purchasing decisions in urban markets.

The reasons behind a low uptake of organized digital marketing, however, indicate a massive disparity between strategic intent and operational capability. The cooperatives which reported to have greater involvement in branding activities like eco-labelling and identity creation also found greater market coverage and customer retention which showed that brand coherence was important in generating value. Market expansion wise, the dominance of local and regional channels and low export participation has been an indication of structural bottlenecks in terms of certification compliance, packaging standards and logistical constraints.

Despite consumers showing high levels of acceptance, average scores on the packaging and digital involvement means that aesthetic and interactive aspects of marketing need to be strengthened. On balance, the results imply that already the consumer demand is oriented towards the ethical and community-focused value propositions, yet cooperatives have to modernise operation strategies to take this opportunity to the full extent. To address the

challenge of survival amidst competitive market forces in the 21st century, this change necessitates the incorporation of professional marketing culture, enhancement of design aesthetics, and development of digital literacy gap between traditional and modern market competitiveness among tribal products systems in Kerala. This alignment will facilitatively have cooperatives participating in sustainable enterprise development at the local level.

Comparison with the Current Literature

This study findings align with the recent academic findings that emphasize on the ongoing marginalisation of the tribal products in the mainstream markets despite the growing awareness on the socio-cultural importance of tribal products. Prior research has also noted that poor branding and lack of digital integration restricts the expansion of indigenous commodities across national lines. The current results support the literature that establishes storytelling, fair-trade communication, and cultural authentication as the most important factors in consumer trust and purchase intention. In addition, the present study supplements the already available data regarding the fact that cooperatives have a significant impact on the income and bargaining power of tribal producers, but still encounter the issue of poor governance and functioning. Although previous studies focus on the structural significance of cooperatives in rural development, the current study takes the discussion a step further by illustrating that the cooperatives are also assuming a new strategic marketing intermediary role. The results thus complement and extend current studies by putting cooperative marketing into context in terms of changing consumerism on ethical grounds.

Consequences of the Tribal Livelihood Sustainability

The results hold significant significance to the sustainability of the tribal livelihoods in Kerala. Cooperative marketing, in addition to making the products more visible, helps to stabilize the household incomes and better the economic security. The willingness by consumers to spend more on ethically sourced tribal products will also enable producers to receive value addition-based pricing and enhanced accessibility to the market. Nonetheless, the sustainability will rely on how well cooperatives will be able to strike a balance between commercial development and preservation of the culture. The long-term livelihood resiliency can be guaranteed by strengthening producer capacities via training, quality improvement, and developing entrepreneurship. Moreover, enhanced assimilation into official value chains will decrease reliance on predatory mediators, which is inclusive of growth. Cooperative marketing can act as a structural channel through reinforced use of community-based branding and market systems based on governance of the tribal communities towards sustainable livelihood development.

Policy Implications and Strategy Recommendations

Building Institutional Support and Certifications

Institutional support should be improved by the government agencies and cooperative federation to increase access to certification tags like organic, fair-trade, and geographical

indication tags. By simplifying the certification procedures and subsidizing the compliance expenses they are encouraged to achieve credibility and enhance competitiveness in the market. The strategic decision-making and institutional efficiency can be further enhanced by strengthening cooperative governance by training leaders and building financial management capacities.

Increasing Online Market Room

To increase the product visibility, it is imperative to invest in the digital infrastructure and marketing capacity. Cooperatives must also be assisted to create e-commerce platforms, sales systems based on mobile and social media marketing campaigns. Cooperative staff and producer training in digital literacy can be provided to allow effective work with the online consumers as the brand visibility and generation of revenues through the latest trade channels can be provided.

Export Diversification and Promotion

The policy programs should aim at promoting export orientation by offering technical advice, trade facilitation and international market exposure to trade fairs. By forming strategic alliances with export agencies and tourism industries, markets would be diversified, and tribal products would be placed in international ethical consumption systems and cultural presence would be increased, thus improving the levels of revenue stability.

Conclusion

The paper shows that cooperative societies are at the forefront in determining marketing environment of tribal products in Kerala. Good marketing campaigns like story-telling and ethical branding go a long way in increasing consumer adoption, whereas the low level of digital integration is a weakness. The export potential is seen as high enough and underutilised because of structural and certification issues.

The study is a contribution to literature on indigenous marketing because its results are an empirical connection between cooperative governance, ethical consumer behaviour, and sustainable branding in the tribal value chains. It emphasizes the changing status of cooperatives as strategic marketing institutions as opposed to procurement agencies. Future studies are needed to investigate the longitudinal effects of cooperative marketing on income sustainability, comparative research on different tribal areas and adoption of improved digital marketing technologies. The readiness to export tribal products of Kerala to international markets can also be enhanced by paying a lot of attention to the consumer behaviour within the international markets, thereby promoting the international visibility of the products.

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