

# Developing a marketing framework for the bottom of the pyramid consumers

A marketing framework for consumers

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Received 22 January 2020  
Revised 14 March 2020  
Accepted 17 March 2020

## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper develops a comprehensive marketing framework that firms could use as a foundation for developing a successful business model that ensures sustainability in BOP markets.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study employs a qualitative research approach based on semi-structured in-depth interviews with founders or senior managers of Indian firms who have been successfully operating in the Indian BOP market. The data is then systematically coded and categorized with the help of software to get better insights.

**Findings** – The findings of the paper indicate that although the traditional 4As of marketing are important, they do not explain the success of firms adequately. Based on the findings of the interviews, we propose an 8A model that comprises the original 4As along with adaptability, assistance, action innovation and accelerating scale.

**Practical implications** – The proposed 8A framework would be useful for domestic and multi-national firms aiming to make a foray into the Indian BOP market.

**Originality/value** – The paper contributes to the literature on the BOP market by identifying the factors important for succeeding in the BOP market. It builds on the 4A model to propose 8As marketing framework in the context of BOP markets.

**Keywords** Bottom of the pyramid, Business model, BOP, Marketing framework

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

The Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) market consists of over four billion people living on less than \$2 per day (Prahalad, 2002). The World Resources Institute and International Finance Corporation conducted an extensive study on the BOP and estimated that the market represents a vast and growing consumer group with a large cumulative global consumption expenditure (Hammond *et al.*, 2007). The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (2018) estimates that about 1.3 billion people live in acute poverty in the world. This estimate is based not only on income but also on parameters like health, education and living conditions. Although the private sector has garnered interest to reap the benefits of this market segment, only a few companies have been able to successfully cater to the segment.

The BOP market is characterized by low and irregular incomes, and geographically dispersed population, leading them to be relatively isolated (Anderson and Markides, 2007; Arnould and Mohr, 2005). The BOP customers are significantly more price sensitive and prefer products and services that are adapted to their specific needs (Basu *et al.*, 2013; Wooldridge, 2010). The other challenges faced by companies catering to the BOP market include difficulty in demand estimation, uncertain cash flow, undeveloped business ecosystems, and sales and distribution challenges (Karnani, 2007). Thus, to achieve



Journal of Advances in  
Management Research  
Vol. 17 No. 3, 2020  
pp. 455-471

© Emerald Publishing Limited  
0972-7981  
DOI 10.1108/JAMR-01-2020-0015

success at the BOP, firms are required to adapt their business models to environments that hugely differ from their core markets.

Extant literature in the area of innovation, particularly for emerging markets, emphasizes the importance of adaptation of the product design, entire value chain, and various elements of the business (Wooldridge, 2010; Agnihotri, 2017). Most of the existing studies on business models in the BOP domain rely on sector-specific unique cases to suggest strategies to succeed in the BOP market (Gebauer *et al.*, 2017; Goyal *et al.*, 2015, 2016). There is another stream of research that takes a conceptual view of research work done in this area (Bates and Buckles, 2017; Alberti and Garrido, 2017). The BOP market needs business models that are sustainable in economic terms. Many firms, for instance, Procter and Gamble's water purification powder "Pur" and Du Pont's subsidiary Solae (Simanis, 2012), had to exit the BOP market in India since they could not sustain in the long term. However, existing literature does not seem to lay enough emphasis and adequately address the issue of economic sustainability in business models for the BOP market.

It is widely accepted that the traditional marketing mix comprising the 4Ps (price, product, promotion and place) plays a key role in implementing successful marketing strategies in different contexts (Sheth, 2011; Constantinides, 2006; Gronroos, 1994). However, Prahalad (2012) and Anderson and Billou (2007) argue that the traditional 4Ps framework may not always be sufficient in the low income emerging markets. Prahalad (2012) suggests that companies should additionally focus on 4As (awareness, accessibility, affordability and availability). Yet, it appears that companies face substantive challenges in the BOP markets in terms of making sustainable profits while creating a social impact for the poor (Pels and Sheth, 2017). Therefore, this paper aims to develop a comprehensive marketing framework that firms could use as a foundation for developing a successful business model that ensures sustainability in BOP markets.

Towards this end, we use a qualitative research approach using semi-structured in-depth interviews. Specifically, respondents from five organisations were interviewed, after following a systematic process of screening and selection. The research context was in the Indian BOP market, which has a significant proportion of the BOP population. The results obtained from this study would be useful to the organisations aiming to make a foray in this important BOP market.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. First, we review the literature related to the BOP concept, business models for BOP and introduce the 4A model. Next, we present the research methodology and context and provide a summary of the five cases. Then, the paper forwards a comprehensive marketing framework based on the findings, discusses it and presents critical views of the field experts on the proposed framework. The paper concludes with the implications of the research and directions for future research.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1 Bottom of the pyramid

BOP refers to four billion people mostly residing in emerging economies, accounting for a majority of the population of the world (Hammond *et al.*, 2007). Their annual per capita income is less than \$1,500 (Prahalad and Hart, 2002; London and Hart, 2004). More than one billion of these four billion people have a per capita income of less than \$ 1 a day. Starting from the seminal work by Prahalad (2005) in this area, the first generation of research on the BOP was primarily conducted on the evolution of the concept, focusing on whether companies should enter the market (Prahalad and Lieberthal, 1998; Ryan, 2004; Seelos and Mair, 2007). The second generation of research on the BOP market laid emphasis on developing market strategies (Weiser, 2007; Fowler and Hope, 2007; Subrahmanyam and Arias, 2008; Bang and Joshi, 2008; Tracey and Phillips, 2011), building value-based

partnerships (Mendoza and Thelen, 2008; Aleman and Sandilands, 2008; Webb *et al.*, 2010; Dahan *et al.*, 2010), innovation (Jaiswal, 2008; Santos *et al.*, 2009; Simanis and Hart, 2011), marketing and market entry strategies (Nielsen and Samia, 2008; Ireland, 2008; Chelekis and Mudambi, 2010) and consumer behaviour (Jaiswal and Gupta, 2015; Singh *et al.*, 2015; Sinha *et al.*, 2017). Literature suggests that, in the recent past, research has been directed towards creating service ecosystems (Ben Letaifa and Reynoso, 2015), business models (Goyal *et al.*, 2015, 2016; Angot and Ple, 2015; Gebauer *et al.*, 2017; Devang *et al.*, 2017), branding strategy (Sinha *et al.*, 2017; Bates and Buckles, 2018) and product adoption (Hasan *et al.*, 2017; Nakata and Weidner, 2012).

## 2.2 Business models for the BOP

The literature on business models highlights the transformational value that business model innovations bring to consumers, especially more in the emerging markets (Boons and Ludeke-Freund, 2013; Schaltegger *et al.*, 2016). Recent research highlights the importance of studying social value creation of new business models. This encompasses important concepts, such as an inclusive business models, BOP business model, social enterprise business model, social business models, sustainability business models, shared value and transformative business models (Bocken *et al.*, 2015; Hahn, 2012; Marti, 2018; Michelini and Fiorentino, 2012; Sanchez and Ricart, 2010; Upward and Jones, 2016; Yunus *et al.*, 2010). Based on their relevance to the BOP market, a few important business models can be enlisted, such as an inclusive business model, BOP business model, corporate-NGO collaboration business model and social enterprise business model. These were analysed in order to understand their core objective of profit-making versus social value creation, as well as their focus on poverty alleviation and consumers.

*Social enterprise business model*- Social enterprises refer to both non-profit, as well as profit-making enterprises. For an organisation to be called a social enterprise, the majority of the total income should be market-based (Defourny and Nyssens, 2010). The social impact here is not only a by-product of business activity but also the main outcome (Wilson and Post, 2013).

*Inclusive business model*- An inclusive business model is different from that of a social enterprise, by way of its higher profit-making motive (Asian Development Bank, 2012). Targeting social and economic value creation, the core characteristics of inclusive businesses are profit-making as the most important incentive, aiming at reducing poverty through job creation and better income, and involving the BOP in the entire supply chain (Goyal *et al.*, 2015).

*BOP business model*- While the inclusive business model is aimed at alleviating poverty, a BOP business model focuses on broadening the base of consumption goods for the BOP (Asian Development Bank, 2012). A BOP business model focuses more on profits, while a social enterprise focuses more on social goals (Hahn, 2012). The core characteristics of this business model are, poverty alleviation by creating mutual value and making profits, and treating BOP mostly as consumers in the value chain (Martinez and Carbonell, 2007; Simanis and Hart, 2008).

*Corporate-NGO collaboration business model*- Collaboration between corporates and NGOs can create both economic and social value at the BOP (Dahan *et al.*, 2010). For succeeding, strong leadership, effective planning and clear communication are needed by these collaborations (Amadi, 2013).

The dominant paradigm of the BOP concept is the development of the BOP market. A desired level of poverty alleviation can be achieved only if the self-sustaining model of profitability and growth is adopted (Prahalad, 2005; Viswanathan *et al.*, 2008; Singh *et al.*, 2015). Thus, any business model that helps companies sustain themselves and aims for long-term growth in the market while targeting social value creation will succeed in the BOP development.

### 2.3 The 4A model

Marketing decisions play a critical role in implementing successful marketing strategies in different contexts (Sheth, 2011; Constantinides, 2006). The most commonly used marketing framework is the 4Ps (product, price, promotion and place). However, scholars argue that the 4Ps model may not be applicable to the emerging market conditions (Anderson and Billou, 2007; Prahalad, 2002). The poor live both in rural and urban areas, while in India, 70% of the BOP population resides in rural areas, most of the poor in Brazil live in urban slums (Prahalad, 2012). These distinct differences suggest conditions of the heterogeneous and fragmented market along with a shortage of resources. Prahalad (2002, 2012) and Anderson and Billou (2007) suggest companies to rather focus on 4As (awareness, accessibility, affordability and availability). Awareness refers to letting BOP consumers know what is available and how to use it (Prahalad, 2012). Accessibility is defined as the customers' ability to acquire and use the product or service (Sheth and Sisodia, 2011). Affordability refers to the customers' willingness to pay a particular price for the product or service (Anderson and Billou, 2007). Lastly, availability is important to build trust at the BOP and refers to the uninterrupted supply of products and services (Prahalad, 2012).

Apart from the 4As, researchers have discussed other factors to ensure success in different BOP markets. Subrahmanyam and Arias (2008), Viswanathan and Sridharan (2012) and Nakata and Weidner (2012) underline the importance of relevance, adaptability and tailoring products to suit the needs of the BOP market efficiently. Castillo *et al.* (2012) emphasize on development of innovative product-service systems for the BOP market, which may ensure more sustainable consumption. Foster and Heeks (2013) highlight the importance of information and communication technology innovation in the BOP market to achieve the scale of operations. Niti (2009) presents 5Ds (development, design, distribution, demand and dignity) as the guiding principle for addressing the BOP consumer. The key differentiating feature of the 5D approach is that it suggests the importance of design innovation in the offering that generates immediate value for BOP consumers, but that does not highlight their economic situation. Thus, it is evident from different studies that there is a need to develop a comprehensive framework that firms could apply to succeed in the BOP market.

While several scholars acknowledge the relevance and usefulness of the elements of the 4As marketing framework (Prahalad, 2012; Nezakati *et al.*, 2011; Dadzie *et al.*, 2017), there is little evidence in research examining whether the 4As construct helps achieve success at the BOP. This research examines the 4A model and develops a more comprehensive framework for suitable and sustainable success in the BOP market.

### 3. Methodology

The research context for the study in India, where a considerable proportion of extremely poor people of the world reside (Kharas *et al.*, 2018). Although the neoliberal policies of the state have resulted in the increased growth rate of the country, it is argued that the primary beneficiaries are a small section of the population resulting in severe economic inequity (Sen and Himanshu, 2004). In addition to the sizable market and an increase in overall consumption, rising aspirations of the BOP consumer in India has increased the interest of academia and industry in the BOP segment in India.

The review of the literature has highlighted areas for further research in the BOP area. Our study uses a qualitative approach involving semi-structured in-depth interviews. This is consistent with the call for more qualitative research in emerging markets (Chikweche and Fletcher, 2011).

Given that the BOP research area is still nascent, the study aims at the development of the relevant theoretical framework. The present study involves a multiple case study method, which is a powerful approach to theory development (Eisenhardt, 1991; Perry, 1998). Multiple

case approach facilitates a detailed examination of a class of phenomenon, allowing the investigator to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Abercrombie *et al.*, 1994; Yin, 1984).

The case selection method used is purposive in nature, implying that the cases were selected by several specific features and not in a random manner (Gerring, 2011). A multi-stage iterative approach to case selection was used. In the first stage, 57 for-profit companies working at the BOP in India were shortlisted. These were selected from journals, academic publications and articles. Some broad themes were identified based on this analysis. These include innovative products or services, technology-driven solutions, network solutions, MNCs backed ventures, etc. Out of these, 24 cases were then selected based on their representation of the emerging themes. Some cases, despite being successful, such as Aravind Eye Care and Narayana Hrudayala, were not considered in the selection as they have been studied extensively in the extant literature (Mascarenhas *et al.*, 2005; Ferrar, 2009; Girling, 2009; Dwivedi, 2015).

Further, eight companies were selected based on the delineation of the domain, which involves the setting of criteria for case selection (Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2003). Companies were selected if they met the following criteria; (1) the company recorded a net profit (2) minimum operating tenure of five years (3) geographic presence in two or more states in India. All eight companies were approached by letter of invitation, and in-depth interviews were conducted using a broad discussion guide (see Table 1). Interviews were conducted telephonically with the founder or senior manager of the company. Each interview recorded for about forty minutes. After the interviews were conducted, the richness of information was evaluated. Three companies had to be dropped due to the lack of willingness to share information. Finally, five cases were retained as part of the study.

The interviews were recorded after seeking prior permission from the respondents and were later transcribed for analysis. The data mining and visualisation software NVIVO 7 was used to manage data and identify main themes and subthemes. Analysis of the meaning of the text was achieved through condensation, categorisation, narration and interpretation. This was achieved in two phases. In the first phase, initial coding was developed, where qualitative evidence related to various aspects of the BOP concept were identified and grouped. In the second phase of selective coding, the purpose was to make a deeper analysis of each category developed in the initial phase of coding, which facilitated detailed analysis and drawing of inferences. Different sectors were covered in the study, namely, healthcare, power, education, banking and financial services, and retail network. This was done with a view to enhancing the generalisability of the findings through a selection of diverse samples and cross-case comparisons (Creswell and Poth, 2017).

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#### Questions

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- What prompted you to operate in the BOP or low-income market?
- Can you briefly explain the business model of your company?
- What, according to you, are the major challenges of working in the BOP markets?
- What strategies do you adopt to overcome these barriers?
- What are the key characteristics of the BOP market segments in the sector that your company operates in?
- Do you observe any shift in consumer behaviour at the BOP segment?
- Several companies have not been able to succeed in the BOP sector. What, according to you, are the critical factors for success in this sector?
- Out of the four dimensions- awareness, affordability, access and availability, what do you think is the most important to succeed in the BOP market and why?
- How important is an innovation for succeeding in this market?

**Table 1.**  
Discussion guide



### 3.1 Case descriptions

*Vakrangee Kendra* -Vakrangee Ltd. was incorporated in 1990 as a technology consultancy and later became the single largest systems integrator for all key government projects in India (Forbes, 2017). One of its major strategic projects is Vakrangee Kendra (VK), which was started in 2014, to leverage the emerging technology in India to provide unbanked households with basic financial services. More than 45,000 brick and mortar “ultra-small” branches are already operational across 20 states in India. Almost 80% of VK’s presence is in the rural BOP and in Tier 5 and Tier 6 [1] cities, providing access up to the Gram Panchayat [2] level. It is positioned as “assisted digital convenience store.” The unique proposition that the VK offers is access to six services under one roof. These include government to citizen (G2C) services such as Bharat Bill pay, IRCTC ticketing, etc., assisted e-commerce (B2C), logistics, which includes a spectrum of services from direct cash disbursement to delivering high-end consumables, insurance, banking and financial services through a tie-up with 31 banks and ATM services. VK has built strategic alliances with reputed partners in each of the six sectors, such as Indian Oil Corporation, Life Insurance Corporation, FedEx, Amazon, Reliance Mutual Fund and State Bank of India.

*Business model*- VK offers two kinds of branch models, Silver Kendra and Gold Kendra, based on the area requirements. The applications of the VK franchise are screened for the fulfilment of basic requirements, and selections are made after due verifications. A minimum investment in real estate and equipment, which are provided at low cost through tie-ups with companies, needs to be made by the franchise owner (FO). The interiors of the branch need to adhere to the branding, layout and signage specifications of VK. This is done to maintain uniformity in look and feel of the branch for better consumer experience. The FO is provided with requisite knowledge and training to successfully operate the services. The FO is also provided with field support on a continuous basis by VK’s block officer network, who is responsible for 10 to 12 franchises along with his team. There are nearly 1,150 district and block area managers. The role of the block officer is to visit franchises alternatively to resolve any problems at the ground level of the FO. The company earns revenue through a transaction fee, a major part of which is shared with the FO. Vakrangee Ltd. envisions opening 75,000 VKs across each pin code in India by the year 2020.

*SAS Poorna Arogya Healthcare Pvt. Ltd.*- India faces a shortage of trained medical personnel along with poor healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural areas. There is limited access to high-quality healthcare due to the high costs involved. Healthcare insurance companies are providing alternative financing options to avail better quality healthcare. However, there is a need to design and implement innovative schemes in order to cater to the specific needs of the BOP. SAS Poorna Arogya Healthcare Pvt Ltd. (SAS-PAP) was founded with the vision to provide high quality and affordable healthcare, which is accessible, focussing on rural BOP in India. SAS-PAP is a community-based healthcare program to provide low-cost healthcare services to rural poor in India in collaboration with microfinance institutions (MFIs) and network of partner hospitals. The SAS-PAP has close to five lakh members, mostly in Karnataka and some parts of Assam state.

*Business model*- Members enrolled in the SAS-PAP program get outpatient consultancy for a nominal fee of Rs 25 (USD 0.4) per visit throughout the year. For attaining membership, the contribution is Rs 250 (USD 4) per member for one year. The members can avail cashless inpatient treatment up to Rs 6,000 (USD 86) per year in a recognised partner hospital, which is part of the 120 member hospitals. For instance, if five members of a family are registered, they can avail treatment up to Rs 30,000 (USD 430) throughout the year. In case the members are not able to pay the membership fee up-front, they are eligible to avail the facility of loan, which can be paid back to the MFI in nominal installments. A part of this membership fee is shared with the MFI and retained by SAS-PAP. The company runs a voluntary cashless community health insurance program to cater to the rural BOP, targeting to provide

healthcare facilities within 28–30 km of the membership area. In 2014, SAS-PAP won the World Bank's India Development Marketplace (IDM) award in 2014 to replicate and scale up their model in the North Eastern state of Assam.

*Husk Power Systems Ltd.*- Nearly 1.4 billion people have no access to electricity worldwide, including 400 million people living in 125,000 villages in India (IEA, 2010). Within India, where most residents are not connected to the grid, 80 million people live without electricity in Bihar, one of India's poorest states. Even those connected to the grid, due to a lack of generation capacity, often receive erratic service. While the government's rural electrification scheme, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana [3] scheme (DDUGJY), has helped to bring electricity to almost all villages in India, the quality and reliability of power still have a scope for improvement.

Husk Power Systems Ltd. (HPS) was established in 2008. It was the first company to pioneer an off-grid power generation, using 100% biomass gasification from rice husk and distribution solutions to serve rural consumers in Bihar, India. In 2014, HPS developed a hybrid system that was grid compatible and could generate 24/7 power by synchronising solar and biomass gasification power plants. This innovative solution provided rural BOP high-quality power along with the flexibility of usage. HPS's solar-biomass hybrid power plant is the lowest cost solution capable of delivering 24/7 power to households and commercial customers such as small and micro-enterprises. Most of the units developed by HPS generate 32 kilowatts of power from 50 kilograms of rice husk per hour, which is enough to provide basic needs of a village of 500 people. Rice husk, an unused detritus of rice hulling process, causes many respiratory diseases due to its usage as a traditional fuel in rural India. Every year in Bihar, nearly four billion pounds of rice husks are leftover from rice processing.

*Business model*- HPS currently serves more than two lakh households in 60 villages of Bihar, Tamilnadu and West Bengal with 2 megawatts of power plants installed. The company also operates in Tanzania. It offers a flexible "pay-as-you-go" service, using a smart metering system that is mobile-enabled. The business model runs on a prepaid system, where the consumer gets the power credited to his account, based on the flexible tariff levels. For instance, suppose a consumer has limited usage of one fan and one light to operate on the HPS system. The consumer may choose a 100-W connection, whereby he will get 180 h of usage for a month, which will get automatically disconnected after 180 h or one month of usage, whichever is earlier. The consumer will have to recharge his account to continue service. Although the price per unit of HPS's power is almost three times more expensive than grid-based power, there is a huge demand for it in rural BOP, especially for commercial usage, due to its superior reliability and quality. Apart from providing access to off-grid power, HPS also sells household and commercial appliances to local communities. The company claims to be earning operating profits at the plant level. It relies on a cluster-based operation to achieve cost efficiency, which is critical for high infrastructure costs involved in the power generation sector.

*Labour Net Pvt. Ltd.*- LabourNet is a for-profit company enabling sustainable livelihoods in rural and semi-urban India. It was founded in 2008 to integrate the impact of social and business by bridging gaps in education, employment and entrepreneurship. This is achieved through skill interventions, wage or self-employment and entrepreneurship facilitation while working with multiple stakeholders. LabourNet operates in 28 locations in India across 60 geographic clusters.

*Business model*- The company has been profitable for the past three years. Most of their revenues come from the education vertical, through which it runs vocational training programs at the secondary level schools. The revenues come from the government. LabourNet also provides vocational training to youth and women in their 150 centers, in which they work on a shared value model with corporates. They also operate short programmes or certifications for people already in the informal sector who may have dropped

out of formal education. It also focuses on continuous skill improvement through its apprenticeship programs, in which the prospect is handheld for a period of three years, ensuring that his skills remain relevant for the job. LabourNet also provides consulting services to existing small and micro enterprises operating in the rural and urban BOP. The company currently has a consumer base of around two lakh people belonging to the BOP in India. The company aims to contribute to 0.07% to India's GDP by the year 2023 and hopes to build a model, which can be replicated across the country.

*Basix Sub-K iTransactions Ltd.*- Basix Sub-K iTransactions Ltd. is a subsidiary company of BASIX (Bhartiya Samruddhi Investments and Consulting Services Ltd.). The vision was launched in 2010 to provide a technology-enabled transactional platform for the unserved Indian population. It operates and manages inclusive transactions through recruiting and training local entrepreneurs as business correspondent (BC) agents who enable last-mile connectivity through mobile or kiosk based technology. Sub-K is a service company providing the BOP segment in rural and urban areas in India with affordable, accessible and scalable digital payment solutions. It provides banking services, such as cash deposit, cash withdrawal, remittance, transfer of funds, debt enquiry, mini statement and repayment of loans. Microcredit, insurance, pensions, farm loans, personal loans, vehicle loans and other value-added services are also facilitated by Sub-K.

*Business model*- Sub-K's innovative operating model leverages local entrepreneurship and mobile connectivity to serve the unbanked people at the BOP. Local small retailers or "kirana" shop owners (primary grocers) are appointed and trained to be agents and serve as representatives of the bank. The company's low-cost business model promotes sustainability. Moreover, the agents operate from a fixed plane and self-funded wallets to ensure community trust and eliminate cash risk. Sub-K operates on a fee-based business model with the banking partners. The two revenue streams are revenue sharing for credit facilitation and transaction value-based fee, which is charged for all transactions that happen on the Sub-K platform. The company operates on a robust in-house technology platform that integrates various banking systems and enables fully authenticated real-time transactions. Sub-K currently operates across 25,000 villages across 24 states in India.

#### 4. Findings and discussion

Based on the findings of the in-depth interviews, we propose an 8As marketing framework for the BOP market. The model comprising the original 4As along with adaptability, assistance, action innovation and accelerating scale seems to be more applicable in the BOP context. These additional 4As are explained below in our discussion of the expanded 8As model.

##### 4.1 The 8As marketing framework

The framework (see [Figure 1](#)) has been divided into three broad phases of establishing, expanding, and stabilising in the BOP market. We emphasise that although all eight strategies mentioned are important, companies need to give higher importance to certain strategies depending upon their stage of operation.

Phase I: Establishing in the market- The interviews revealed that this phase is characterised by problems faced in production and selling in terms of educating the market. During this stage of operation, it is important that the business model is built around five factors viz., availability, accessibility, awareness, affordability and adaptability. It was found that all the cases studied were operating within the 4As marketing framework, namely-availability, accessibility, awareness, awareness and affordability, in an integrative way. The comments of the top management confirmed that the usefulness of the 4As lies in the functioning of all the elements in unison.



It all goes hand in hand. If there is affordability and no access, if someone is staying in North Karnataka and if they have to travel 100 miles to get healthcare which they can afford, and it is not accessible then again it does not make sense. So, it goes hand in hand. – *Mr. Vinayak Mahey, MD and CEO, SAS- Poorna Arogya Healthcare Pvt. Ltd.*

It was also found that although 4As market strategies are highly applicable and useful in comparison to the 4Ps marketing mix, some strategies out of the 4As are pre-dominant, based on the nature of the product. For instance, Product awareness in terms of know-how and education was considered a more important factor for innovative and non-aspirational products, such as in the case of Vakrangee Kendra and LabourNet.

*Adaptability-* Another important element in the first phase is adaptability. [Dodd \(2015\)](#) and [Shah \(2012\)](#) emphasised that marketing strategies need to be adapted to the vast differences in the emerging market’s level of economic development, purchasing power, and ability of consumers’ to pay for products and services in the market. Our study highlights that apart from adapting to the EM’s business ecosystems, the companies need to understand the critical market characteristics. More specifically, they need to adapt their business models to safeguard the interests of the BOP consumer in EMs. For instance, it was found that BOP consumers required high level of engagement in terms of communication. Due to their low level of education and attention-seeking behaviour, they respond well to personal forms of communication. This was especially true in case of new services or new applications to the same service.

...other thing is that we have to engage with the customer because the rural customer requires a lot of pampering. . .they like it when you go to them often, explain them. . .they like that someone from outside the community is coming to my house sitting with me and explaining me. . .they want attention.- *Mr. Subendru Goswami, Head, Customer Acquisition and Business Development, Husk Power Systems Ltd.*

The BOP population is either geographically dispersed, in case of rural BOP, or live in urban areas that are densely populated ([Anderson and Markides, 2007](#); [Johnson, 2007](#)). In both cases, the BOP markets tend to be relatively isolated from regular markets. This leads to the creation of strong cultures ([Arnould and Mohr, 2005](#)). In various cases, it was highlighted that although it is a heterogeneous market, they are a closely-knit community.

One very big characteristic of the BOP population is that they have a very strong community feeling. So otherwise they are all very different (in needs, demography and behaviour) but if something happened to one person in the community then everyone becomes one. . .this is sometimes an opportunity sometimes a challenge.- *Mr. Subendru Goswami, Head, Customer Acquisition and Business Development, Husk Power Systems Ltd*

All the cases studied emphasized on the importance of safeguarding the interest of the poor. It was highlighted that true value will only be derived by the customer if the product or service protects his interests. This will also ensure sustainable success at the BOP marketplace. As stated by one of the CEOs,

...in this segment we do not want to push our numbers and make it a compulsory program we want to make it more voluntary. . . you want to avoid them going in debt. . .so even though scaling in terms of revenue takes a lot of time, you need to be patient. The MFI that we work with almost has 16 lakh

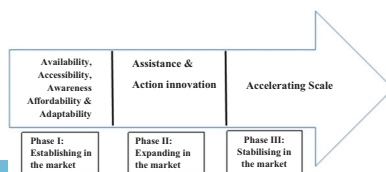


Figure 1. Improved 8As marketing framework

clients but out of that the clients that we serve are in Karnataka are quite less. - *Mr. Vinayak Mahey, MD and CEO, SAS- Poorna Arogya Healthcare Pvt. Ltd.*

Phase II: Expanding in the market- The primary challenge faced in the next stage is to attract new customers by building trust. In this phase, companies need to focus on action innovation and providing assistance in order to increase product adoption rates in the BOP market.

*Assistance-* This factor is a key linkage between the company and the end consumer. It was observed during the study, that successful companies working in the BOP market appoint someone from the local community a last mile enabler who provides assistance to the consumers. The BOP consumers are largely illiterate, with low and irregular incomes (Ireland, 2008; Banerjee and Duflo, 2007), which makes them quite vulnerable. With the help of the enabler, companies can educate and convince the BOP consumers about the benefits of the products and have higher consumer engagement. The other benefit of having such assistance is that it helps build trust and a critical link with the social community, which may help in handling negative feedback at any point in time. Distrust is pervasive amongst low income families (Levine, 2013). The companies can leverage the assistance enabler to gain the trust of the consumers. This can result in higher adoption rate for products and services.

...one wrong feedback from a consumer can affect the enrolments and the MFT's repayments in that area. But we try to provide proper guidance. We have *Sakhi*, a lady from the local community, in each hospital to guide the members that keeps these things in control. Also, the *Sakhi* propagates the program because she is from the local community. . .when the client goes to the local hospital they do not know whom to contact or what papers to carry with them so the *Sakhi* guides them. . .they might feel lost in the hospital. . .the *Sakhi* helps them. . .gives the personal touch to them. . . - *Mr. Vinayak Mahey, MD and CEO, SAS- Poorna Arogya Healthcare Pvt. Ltd.*

Another CEO commented,

There is also a field support given to the franchise owner to run the shop all the time. There is a local or block level support available for him. So, one block officer handles 10 to 12 franchises or shops. He visits franchises alternatively to resolve any problems.- *Mr. Rajesh Bhojwani, CEO, Vakrangee Kendra, Vakrangee Ltd.*

*Action innovation-* In the BOP market innovation is not just about a product. It was found that for BOP markets, innovation needs to be present at the process level also. This finding is consistent with Prahalad's (2012) assertion that it is important to develop an appropriate ecosystem for BOP markets that enables a new business system to function (Prahalad, 2012). In the case of HPS, VK, LabourNet and SAS-PAP, special attention was given to the workflow. In all these cases, it was observed that, unlike the regular markets, in the BOP markets, there is no premium charged on innovation. The companies can create an advantage by applying innovation on processes at different phases of their business model.

The success of the business model of HPS partly lies in their innovation in their payment scheme. HPS provides flexibility to BOP consumers to choose and plan their pattern of consumption. The consumers choose the tariff plan based on their need for power, which is made available to them throughout the month as per their needs. HPS also provides the flexibility of payment by not penalising non-payment for regular customers, thus building trust.

... it is a pre-paid system, the consumer can choose depending on his need for power. . .we do not sell energy, we sell power. If he chooses 100-W connection he will get it for 180 hours in the month, so anytime power is available with him and he can choose accordingly. . .we have told them, no issues if you cannot pay us next month, pay us next to next month, we will not penalise you. With this flexibility, we break the barrier of irregular income of BOP. *Mr. Subendru Goswami, Head, Customer Acquisition and Business Development, Husk Power Systems Ltd.*

VK uses innovation that provides convenience and access to six services of the BOP consumer and successfully mitigates risk and capital costs requirements.

You see a stand-alone ATM would never work especially in rural India, no company will get success because of the cost involved. But, if you use shop-in-shop concept where the money is loaded by the franchisee himself, you eliminate the additional cost. There is no security guard requirement because the FO is sitting in premise. . .major cost is eliminated, no security cost and no rental pressure since six businesses are running in the same shop. *Mr. Rajesh Bhojwani, CEO, Vakrangee Kendra, Vakrangee Ltd.*

This focus is in sync with [Prahalad's \(2012, p. 11\)](#) observation, "These processes lead to a very different approach to capital intensity of business. The focus is on reducing capital intensity to a point where the capital requirements—fixed assets as well as working capital needs—are spread over the ecosystem and not borne by one firm."

Phase III: Stabilising in the market- During this phase, the interviews indicated that the companies face formidable challenge of improving margins and profits to achieve sustainable success in the market. Here, companies need to focus on accelerating scale of operation by taking advantage of operational efficiencies and last mile enablers.

*Accelerating scale-* The last factor in the marketing framework which will help companies attain sustainable profits in the BOP markets is accelerating scale. It was found during the study that since margins are low, the success of the business model at the BOP largely depended on the ability to leverage scale of economies. [Sheth \(2011\)](#) argues that EM firms can achieve superior performance by pursuing the advantage of demand aggregation because it results in economies of scale of product and services. This view has been supported by other scholars ([Dadzie et al, 2013](#); [Eccless, 1991](#); [Mutlu et al, 2015](#)). We propose that greater scalability and market penetration can be achieved by leveraging last mile enabler. For instance, the robust business model of VK and SAS-PAP, focused on achieving operational efficiency, is adequately supported by the key enablers such as field support staff and *Sakhi*. The assistance provided by these enablers create a strong linkage between the company and the consumer, thereby resulting in increased usage as well as improved market penetration that help build scale.

#### 4.2 Experts' opinion on the 8A framework

In order to critically analyse the proposed 8As marketing framework, interviews were conducted with three academicians from management field who are actively involved in the study for the last several years. The interviews were carried out or lasted for 20–30 min. These interviews were recorded and transcribed into literal form. The interview themes were related to (1) usefulness of the proposed 8As marketing framework (2) importance of any particular "A" than the others and (3) suggestions to improve the framework further.

Most of the interviewees were broadly in agreement with the usefulness of the proposed framework. One of the experts commented, "it is a noticeable contribution to extend the existing 4As for emerging markets." A few experts also suggested conducting an exploratory study of the interaction of various As and their effect on one another as a future opportunity of research. Another expert expressed his agreement with the proposed framework and cited the example of Blue Box, which provides low-cost e-commerce solutions to low-income markets in India. An expert recommended conducting a comparative study of the various models available for low-income markets. However, one expert remained critical of the broad approach of the existing 4As framework itself, as initially propounded by [Prahalad \(2002, 2012\)](#).

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1 Implications of the study

With BOP markets becoming increasingly important as a source of market growth for firms, there is a growing interest in scholars studying the existing business models ([Gebauer et al,](#)

2017; Goyal *et al.*, 2015, 2016) and conceptualising prior research in this area (Bates and Buckles, 2017; Agnihotri, 2017). Considering the critical role of the marketing mix in implementing successful marketing strategies (Sheth, 2011; Gronroos, 1994), scholars have suggested companies to focus on 4As instead of the 4Ps (Prahalad, 2012). Yet, it appears that companies face substantive challenges sustaining in the BOP market (Pels and Sheth, 2017). This paper contributes to theory and practice by extending the 4As marketing strategies suggested by Prahalad (2002, 2012) and Anderson and Billou (2007) to 8As that includes awareness, accessibility, affordability, availability, adaptability, assistance, action innovation and accelerated scale. Our model is consistent with the findings of earlier studies (Subrahmanyam and Arias, 2008; Viswanathan and Sridharan, 2012) and frameworks such as the 4A and 5D (Niti, 2009) for the BOP market in the sense that it highlights that marketing to BOP consumers involves much more than simply coming out with a low priced offering. Our model provides a holistic framework for companies to evolve suitable and sustainable business models for BOP market development by studying the key dimensions of success for companies operating at the BOP. Firms interested in entering or expanding into the BOP market will find the results particularly useful.

### 5.2 Limitations and future research

The present study lays an important foundation for further research in this area. It proposes 8As marketing framework that firms could use to ensure sustainability in BOP markets. The proposed 8As is an extension of the 4As framework that is expected to better explain the success of firms dealing with BOP consumers. However, the goodness and applicability of the framework can only be examined through further studies. Moreover, the framework has been developed based on the study of firms that have been successfully operating in India. Although we expect the model to hold good in the BOP markets of other countries as well, it would be interesting to investigate the applicability of the 8As framework in other emerging markets. Valuable insights can be drawn by conducting a comparative study of the use of 8As in different markets. Further investigations can also be made to study the interactions amongst the different elements of the 8As for various groups of companies- manufacturing sector, service firms, business to business organisations. Another fruitful extension could be an ethnographic study to examine how firms implement the 8As to different BOP markets. Further, since the current study only looked at successful case studies, future work could look at relatively less successful examples to draw comparisons and contrasts and get better insights into the proposed framework.

### Notes

1. Reserve Bank of India classifies centers into six tiers, based on population ([https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/content/pdfs/100MCA0711\\_5.pdf](https://rbidocs.rbi.org.in/rdocs/content/pdfs/100MCA0711_5.pdf)).
2. A gram panchayat (village council) is the only grassroots-level of Panchayati raj formalised local self-governance system in India at the village or small-town level (<http://www.panchayat.gov.in/>).
3. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana is a Government of India scheme designed to provide continuous power supply to rural India (<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=123595>).

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