



Marketing paradigms and the Indian firm

A study of the emerging challenges and firm responses

Krishnaveni Muthiah

PSG Institute of Management, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

Purpose – Over the years, nearly eight marketing paradigms have been recognised. Yet, what really is the extent of the changes/paradigms adopted by firms in India? What changes have the forces of challenges brought in, in the marketing management of Indian firms? The purpose of the present study is to find answers to these questions.

Design/methodology/approach – Expert opinion method has been adopted, wherein CEOs/Heads of marketing department have been personally interviewed.

Findings – Content analysis of the responses gathered shows that, Indian firms are now coming forward to accepting professional management. Conflict paradigm, where primary emphasis is on competition has been greatly acknowledged. Social constructionism, with its strong emphasis on consumers' view, is also reflected in the responses. From being inward-looking, the respondent firms are becoming outward-looking due to the pressures of the market. It is "quality" which is the paradigm that has gained a new momentum, in the form of customer-specific quality to gain market, quality to withstand competition and quality pressure from world market.

Research limitations/implications – Coverage of many more industrial cities like Mumbai and Delhi has not been included due to insufficient response to the mailed questionnaires. Hence the study has been to the extent of personal interviews in selective cities.

Originality/value – For academicians and marketing professionals, the study provides a practical insight into the changes in business practices among Indian firms. Policy makers and trade associations should on the basis of the changes identified, take steps to provide the necessary structural adjustments and supportive framework. If need be, they can carry out the relevant studies mentioned in the future scope of research and base their decisions.

Keywords Marketing models, India, Driving forces, Business performance, Content management

Paper type Research paper

1. Emerging economic scenario

The arrival of world-class competition has challenged the very survival of companies in many of the Indian industrial sectors. Competition has become intense and new practices like submitting tenders on the net is gradually becoming the order of the day.

Since 1991, with the opening up of the economy, the country has been going through a process of economic reforms. Policies relating to industrial licensing, foreign trade and foreign investments have undergone major changes. Structural adjustments relating to this flow of capital and flow of goods and services have been carried out. The overall objectives of all these measures have been the modernisation of the country's industrial system, encouraging private investments, weaning away public sector from direct investment support, attracting of foreign investment, expanding the global market share of our products and the integration of India's economy with the global economy.

The author gratefully acknowledges the support and encouragement extended by the Management and the Director of PSG Institute of Management, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India.



Liberalisation in foreign exchange dealings, market driven exchange rates, liberalisation of imports, measures of export promotion have all been undertaken with this aim of integrating the Indian economy with the world economy. All these measures have affected the competitiveness of Indian products. There have been great changes in the business and marketing environment of the country. These environmental changes demand new realisations and new efforts to combat these challenges in the effective marketing operation of the business firms.

2. Related readings on marketing paradigms

According to the Oxford Dictionary, “paradigm” means “a typical example, pattern or model of something. That is, a model underlying the theories and practice of a scientific subject”.

In the area of research on marketing paradigms, Simmonds (1986) states that marketing can be viewed as organised rational innovation, a function concerned with identifying the opportunity for change, inducing the action required and monitoring the change once introduced. This paradigm of innovation directly focuses on what the marketer actually does, wherein innovation is taken to be, something done for the first time by that firm. According to him “innovation” is the eighth marketing paradigm. The seven recognised paradigms are:

- (1) Market paradigm with emphasis on supply and demand, rationality, competition and equilibrium.
- (2) System paradigm – emphasis on structure and function of a system of economic relationships.
- (3) Consumer satisfaction paradigm – focuses on the value received by the consumer.
- (4) Choice paradigm – emphasis on decision theory consumer behaviour and produces alternatives.
- (5) Exchange paradigm – emphasis on dyadic relationships in marketing channels and in organisational interactions. It examines the interaction between suppliers and customer organisations over time that is often stable, complex and long lasting.
- (6) Conflict paradigm – focuses on the pattern and resolution of conflict. Concepts of power, opposition risk coalition, threat and attack are all drawn in.
- (7) Influence paradigm – focuses on the influence approach to bring about desired response from some other party. Marketing is to produce desired response by creating and offering value to the market. Marketing programme must be based on these exchange values.
- (8) Innovation paradigm – Marketing is fundamentally about change. Innovation lies at the core of marketing and the marketer’s task is to identify, induce and monitor innovation.

Ambler (1994) has highlighted “Guanxi” as marketing’s third paradigm. His explanation goes as follows. From a managerial viewpoint, there are three paradigms of marketing, neo-classical, conflict and relational. Neo-classical is the microeconomics-based analysis, namely the “4 ps”, where it is expected that sales or profits are generated by the right economic marketing mix. The perspective is mechanistic; the

right input will generate the required outputs. In the conflict paradigm, the primary emphasis is on competition. Marketing plans start with strategies to achieve advantage and may or may not cover the classical marketing mix. The third paradigm recognises that marketing has more to do with cooperation than competition. Between the various members in the supply chain up to the ultimate consumer, it is relationships that are basically important for success. In this, Chinese believe that one should build "relationships" and if successful, transaction will follow. Westerners build transactions and if successful, a relationship will follow.

Relationship management is important not only in management of the members in the supply chain of a firm, but it has to be given due importance also in customers management. In this, Peppers and Rogers (1995) have insisted that even while undertaking mass marketing an innovative alternative is "relationship marketing". Addressing customers individually and entering into dialogue with them can be done even while offering mass customised goods and services, and this would in turn help in terms of developing the capacity. Relationship marketing involves a paradigm shift from the more traditional measurement of success in terms of "market share increase" to a long term gauge of success in terms of gain in the share of a customer's business.

Continuing on relationships, cooperation, competition and dominance, Achrol (1997) says that marketing has to shift away from the current dyadic paradigm, in which a dominant firm has power over a dependent firm, toward a network paradigm, in which multiple firms seek cooperative, mutually beneficial relationships. He brings out the characteristics of four types of network organisations, namely, the internal market network, the vertical market network, the intermarket network and the opportunity network. He says that the marketing environment in the 21st century promises to be knowledge rich and very turbulent. The classic vertically integrated, multidivisional organisation, so successful in the 20th century, is unlikely to survive in such an environment. It will be replaced by new forms of network organisations consisting of large numbers of functionally specialised firms tied together in cooperative exchange relationships.

Marsden and Littler (1996) have evaluated the underlying assumption of positivist and social constructionist, research paradigms. They argue that positivism; the dominant paradigm that informs most of the theories and methodologies used in marketing is production-oriented. Hence it should be complemented by alternative paradigms such as social constructionism with its strong emphasis on the consumer's view of the world.

David (1998) in his article discusses in detail the influence of strategic relationships, market orientation and learning, superior customer value, distinctive competencies and organisational change on "marketing strategy". He concludes, saying that, as the market-driven era develops, there will be a significant de-emphasis on the functional perspectives and instead an organisation-wide perspective will have to be developed, wherein the perspective will be toward the customer and strategies for providing superior customer value.

Wilson (1999) has highlighted that, in practice, the response of organisations in volatile environments depends fundamentally on how the managers involved perceive their environment. This managerial perception can vary considerably between rival organisations facing similar environments. The effectiveness of an organisations strategy would depend crucially on these managerial perceptions or paradigms.

In formulating strategies, managers adopt an implicit integration of multiple strategy paradigms. By doing so they can simultaneously address deterministic

evolutionary forces, probabilistic emergent issues, developmental issues and rational analytical planning issues, according to Combe (1999). He argues that use of any single research paradigm would provide too narrow a view to capture the complexity and the multifaceted nature of business reality.

Godin (2001) in his article discusses about paradigm shifts on the marketing strategies of “Proctor and Gamble” and “American Express”. The article touches upon “innovation” in promotional measures at P&G and “innovation” in products/services at American Express, which have become a necessity due to changes in the market situation. Reddy (1999) in his article discusses services marketing paradigm for developing countries, on the basis of developing tourism business. He highlights strategies that would help policymakers in the government and businesses in travel and tourism industries to improve their strategies to generate more tourism revenues.

Palmer and Ponsonby (2002) in their paper on marketing paradigms have stated as follows: relationship marketing and one-to-one marketing are recent ideas which have gained much support. Marketing knowledge reflects the interpretation of reality by individuals. They claim that new marketing paradigms should be deconstructed in the context of three phenomena: time, place and role. They have emphasised the social construction of marketing paradigms and the difficulty of separating objective reality from personal interpretation.

With the aim of expanding the global market share, all countries are integrating their country's economy with the global economy. In the context of this phenomenon of globalisation, Singh (2003) has expressed his views that the word globalisation tends to create a homogenous image of the world. It creates the impression that everything and everybody is getting integrated with the rest, which is not the case. There are millions of people who have had no taste of the modern technology. What globalisation actually means is that opportunities to establish global connections exist. Whether these opportunities have been utilised or not, is a different matter. The world is too heterogeneous to assume that all the actors will participate in the global process on equal terms.

Pointing out to the shift in business practices among Indian firms, Karki *et al.* (2004) narrate that:

The nature and dynamics of Indian companies' engagement with the overseas markets have undergone through a shift. Overseas expansion and competitiveness are increasingly dependent on firm level capabilities rather than on national endowments in traditional products and commodities. One, the process of liberalisation and globalisation of Indian economy has led to the development of competitive capabilities by Indian companies and has brought about intensive interaction with global corporations, professionals, capital, ideas and practices. Two, the transforming impact of information and communication technology on the world of business has resulted in the emergence of new types of business and new ways of organising.

In this development of “global markets” and “world without borders”, for those who are considering tapping into the Indian market place, Merchant (1999) expresses his views that the Indian market is a diversified one. India provides immense opportunity for marketing. Its large and diverse population, along with its value system may create not only a challenge, but a wealth of untapped marketing potential.

Baker (2005) is of the view that “the need for a theory of marketing arises from the recognition of the enormous complexity associated with exchange relationships and recognises that neither economics nor the behavioral sciences fully satisfy the need.

In the field of marketing, paradigms, research and traditions are many and varied to such an extent that no single paradigm or anything dominates in this field”.

Going through the readings related to marketing paradigms, it is found that Simmonds has identified and discussed paradigms in a well-known structured form, Ambler has a different classification of paradigms but does not differ from the basically accepted paradigms and goes on to explain his addition about “relationship” paradigm. In expressing their views, Marsden and Litter’s method of classification is different, but their views are same as those basically held in marketing. Wilson, Combe, Palmer and Ponsonby have stressed on perception, that too, specifically on the perception of the manager. Singh and Combe have laid stress on complexity and diversity of business reality. Combe and Baker have highlighted that no single research paradigm can capture the complexity of business reality, and Combe adds that managers adopt an implicit integration of multiple strategy paradigm. Karki points out on firm level competencies in increasing competitiveness and identifies the forces of liberalisation, globalisation and technology explosion which have demanded the shift to new business practices and competency development.

3. Need for the study

The challenge of world class competition and the attempts at globalisation and liberalisation have tremendously altered the business environment of firms in India. In contributing to the working of any firm in India, be as a policy maker or as a person doing business with a firm in India or as a marketing practitioner or as an academician, it is important to understand how practically the firms have taken measures to combat the onslaught of these challenges. What new turns have been made in the actual working system of the firms? Or in other words, an understanding of the exact nature of the paradigm shifts in these firms. That is, from the point of view of an individual firm in India, how has the challenge of the changing economic environment been perceived and what new efforts have been adopted towards managing these challenges.

3.1. Objectives of the present study

The emerging economic scenario has brought to the forefront its own challenges, and the pattern of working of the marketing department of the business firms has to be geared up in its work pattern to keep up with the challenges of the changing external world. Thus, this present study has been undertaken to identify the pattern of marketing management that has emerged within the Indian firms. The specific objectives are, as stated below.

- to identify the various forces of change in the emerging economic scenario which have given rise to new pattern (paradigm) of working in marketing management; and
- to study the revamping that is taking place in marketing management due to the globalised environment.

3.2. Utility of the study

For academicians, marketing practitioners and budding marketing professionals, the present study provides a practical insight into the changes in business practices among firms in India. Against the background of what is understood from the press and publications on the onslaught of globalisation and liberalisation, how actually each firm in India perceives the challenges and counteracts can be understood with practicality.

Policy makers and trade associations have to take stock of the changes identified in the study and should take steps to provide the necessary structural adjustments and supportive framework needed by the business firms. If need be, they can carry out on the basis of this present study, the relevant studies mentioned in the future scope of research, and base their decisions.

4. Methodology

The present study has been conducted in the industrial cities of Coimbatore and Tirupur, which are well-known business towns in the State of Tamilnadu, India, having about 30,000 small, medium and large industrial units. Since the basic objective has been to identify business practices, the CEOs/Heads of the marketing department were contacted in person to conduct an in-depth personal interview. Thus expert opinion method has been adopted for this study. The experts have been identified on judgmental basis, namely based on their years of experience in the marketing field. Thus a total of 50 CEOs/Heads of marketing department have been personally interviewed to find out the changing patterns setting in, in the working of their marketing department keeping in tune with the rapidly changing economic environment.

4.1. Profile of the respondent's firms

Thirty six per cent were from the textiles sector, 32 per cent were of the heavy engineering sector, followed by fourteen per cent from services, eight per cent from auto components sector and 10 per cent from other sectors. Sixty four per cent of the respondents were from small scale enterprises, having investment in plant and machinery of not more than Rs.10 million. Twenty two per cent of the respondents were from medium scale enterprises, having more than Rs.10 million investments in plant and machinery, but an annual turnover of less than Rs.1,000 million. Fourteen per cent were from large scale enterprises having an annual turnover of more than Rs.1,000 million. The turnover and investment criteria are as followed by the Government of India to identify small scale industries and the parameters followed by the Confederation of Indian Industries to identify large, medium and small scale industries.

4.2. Limitations of the study

The survey has been undertaken specifically for the purpose of developing this research paper and does not form part of any ongoing major funded research work. Hence within a limited time frame, the study has been conducted among a limited number of respondents. The opinions of the identified experts in the field, who are either the CEO/Head of the Marketing Department, have been collected through in-depth interviews personally conducted. Of the questionnaires mailed to business firms in the industrial cities of Mumbai and Delhi, notable number had not been received back, hence the study has been limited to the number of personal interviews held in Coimbatore and Tirupur.

4.3. Tool for analysis of the responses of the participants

Content analysis method has been undertaken to identify the challenges and new marketing practices. Content analysis is a technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages (Malhotra, 2005).

5. Analysis and interpretations

Applying the tool of content analysis, the specific characteristics identified in the messages of the respondents are presented here under, with respect to:

- forces which have given rise to new pattern (paradigm) of working in marketing management; and
- revamping that is taking place in marketing management practices.

5.1. Forces that have given rise to new practices

The responses regarding the various forces have been categorised on the following bases:

- the international environment;
- the national environment;
- environment within the industry; and
- environment within the firm.

5.1.1. *International environment for the industry.* The various responses are presented below:

- Demand condition for the product in the world market.
- Price changes in the international market.
- Supply sources developing for the world market in other countries, especially, Latin America East Asia.
- The rulings of the WTO.
- Trade pacts between countries.
- Sentiments regarding child labour in the world market.
- Pressure on quality standards.
- Sanitation and other standards demanded by the world market.

Specific characteristics in the messages: The perception of the respondents relating to forces of change in the external environment shows that (i) they feel the pinch of the market factors of demand, supply competition and the fluctuations in price. (ii) Over and above this prevails the challenge due to the multilateral trading forum of WTO and trade relationships of countries. (iii) In addition, the underlying apprehension in the minds of Indian firms are the rulings regarding child labour, sanitary, environmental standards which have an element of non-transparency and hence pose difficulty in comprehension and (iv) to cap all these is the pressure on quality by world market in terms of precision, labour standards and other related standards prescriptions.

5.1.2. *National environment of the industry.* The various responses are presented below:

- Government policy to reduce import duty.
- Withdrawal of government control on price of raw material.
- Availability of raw material.
- Market expectation on speedy and timely delivery.

Specific characteristics in the messages: Relating to the national environment (i) governance on raw material supply, (imports and domestic sources), distribution among the competing firms and prices of raw materials, are perceived to be main challenge. (ii) In addition to the raw material issue, logistical efficiency expectation of the market has been perceived as challenges by the respondents.

5.1.3. Challenges in the industry. The various responses gathered are presented below:

- Cut throat competition for market share.
- Competition for raw material share.
- Competitive manufacturing.
- Quality and competition.
- Growing number of new firms in the industry.
- Awareness of the market of the environmental standards and other technical limitations inherent in the industry.

Specific characteristics in the messages: In the industry front (i) the challenge of competition in growing number of units, sharing of market, share of raw material is greatly felt by the respondents. (ii) In addition, growing awareness of the market on environmental and technical standards is challenge to be taken care of as per the perception of the respondents. (iii) Gaining winning edge in manufacturing efficiency in today's world of technological advancement has also been perceived by the respondents. (iv) Quality as a competence to stand in the competitive field has been acknowledged as a force for making changes in past practices.

5.1.4. Challenges within the firm. Forces perceived by the respondents are presented below:

- Product based costing methods no more applicable.
- Need for cost competitiveness.
- Lack of advanced IT (information technology) infrastructure.
- Level of technology adoption.

Specific characteristics in the messages: Within the firm environment, the challenges perceived have been cost factors, technology factors and infrastructure factors. This shows that the respondents are highly concerned about the competitiveness of their firm.

5.2.1. Revamping measures. The various revamping measures listed out by the respondents are presented in Table I.

Specific characteristics in the messages: The revamping measures regarding which idea formation and snowballing effect of efforts have been among the respondents include, modernization, capacity expansion, cost competitiveness measures, offer customization, improvement in product features, product range and product quality. In combating macro challenges, the respondents have hinted at standing together (cluster formation), finding a place for oneself (new markets) and brand and quality development.

5.2.2. Changes in practices adopted. Ultimately, it is the changes adopted which are important. The new practices adopted and what has been the corresponding past practice, if any, are presented in Table II.

Specific characteristics in the messages: Buyers-market situation is acknowledged regarding product based marketing decisions. Quality improvement and reaching

Table I.
Revamping measures envisaged to combat challenges

Challenge base	Revamping measures
Firm factors	Efforts to bring down costs Modernise plants Start of new units
Industry factors	Increase range of products offered Improve product features Customise products
National level factors	Improve product quality Develop brand name Industry cluster formation
International level factors	Product uniqueness Explore new markets Quality upgradation

quality standards has been accepted as a basic requirement to stay in the competitive market. With the challenges of globalisation, it is the buyers and the buying agents who specify the product features. Not only products features, but also stipulations regarding accessories, their quality and from where they have to be sourced are being increasingly

Base	New practices	Past practices
Product-based marketing decisions	Quality improvement Product specifications, quality stipulations given by the buyer To maintain standards, product accessories are given by the buyer/ source for accessories specified by buyer	Market was there for the quality/ product supplied Product decisions made by the manufacturing unit Decisions were made by the manufacturers
Pricing	Sell at least cost (adjust production cost) Improve bargaining power by being a big player in that commodity/gain export house status in foreign trade Customer specific prices	Cost plus pricing What was produced was sold, so no issue of bargaining might
Promotion	Develop brand name Submitting tenders on the internet Advertise Participation in national and international trade fairs Team responsibility Develop trade contacts by being a member of trade association/export councils Developing personal contact with buyers/attending buyer–seller meets Networking of customers/word of mouth promotion	Market price No brand name (sell according to market condition) No such practice followed No advertisements In the past importance was not given for trade fairs Single person responsibilities Membership was not given priority Was going through intermediaries No importance given in the past
Physical distribution	Consolidate delivery Find new areas for distribution Direct contact with transport companies	Delivery in assorted lots Distribute in nearest circle Done through agents

Table II.
The past and new practices adopted

specified by the buying agents according to the market demand. The basic premise that “manufacture the product and the market takes it”, that is, the sellers-market situation is lost in today’s economic scenario in the view of the respondents.

One to one selling, bargaining power and competitive pricing are adopted in the area of pricing towards better marketing. Catering to the world market, competition among the Indian suppliers becomes hectic and hence firms compete to sell at least cost, and this in turn increases the pressure on producing at competitive prices. Moreover in the globalised supply chain, prices are to be negotiated and hence bargaining power status turns out to be important. Greater bargaining power commands greater say in the fixing of prices. On deficiency of such bargaining power, customer specific prices and prices specified by the buying agents/channel intermediaries get accepted by the firms in India.

Business practices are undergoing change in physical distribution area also, wherein greater consolidation is resorted to in delivery of goods, direct contact is opted for and other general efficiency measures are undertaken and hitherto satisfaction of being in limited market area has been abandoned and in its place expansion in market coverage has been adopted.

Because of the transition from sellers-market situation to buyers-market environment, the respondents feel the necessity for developing brand name and creating goodwill for oneself and importance of promoting the company name. Trade-fairs and buyer-seller meets are turning out to be important places where contracts are concluded and hence participation in these meets has gained prominence. Likewise, being member in trade associations is gaining greater acceptance, since working through trade association to gain global market for the business cluster is slowly gaining strength. Promotion mix which has traditionally been advertisements, personal selling, promotion and publicity, now as per the responses gathered, has components like participation in trade fairs, buyer-seller meets, team work in personal selling and membership in trade associations to promote business.

Content analysis of the respondents’ responses shows that adoptions of the paradigms enumerated by Simmonds (1986) are widely accepted. Choice paradigm adoption in the acceptance of product specifications and quality stipulations given by the buyer. Influence paradigm is found in change in practices towards quality improvement, maintenance of product standards and supply of product accessories. System paradigm in the adoption of competitive least cost pricing in the place of cost plus pricing and in consolidation of delivery to bring down cost. Conflict paradigm in the aspiration to improve bargaining power, working towards gaining export house status and developing brand name. Consumer satisfaction paradigm in adoption of customer specific prices. Exchange paradigm in the form of submitting tenders on the internet towards facilitating smooth performance of establishing buyer-seller relationships, effort to develop personal contact with buyers and direct contact with transport companies. Market paradigm in the efforts to find new areas for distribution. Innovation paradigm is reflected in each and every change mentioned in the marketing practices. Specific new efforts of innovation are advertising efforts in hitherto absent firms, participation in trade fairs, team responsibility, membership in trade councils and networking of customers. Thus, it is found that, multiple-strategy paradigm as stressed by Combe (1999) seems to be in favour among the respondent firms.

5.3. Overall view of the characteristics of the responses

It can be said that academic knowledge and awareness of the challenges and about professional management and basic principles of marketing has already been

developed in the past three to four decades. What is revealed by undertaking this study, wherein the respondents have pointed out their past practices and new changes adopted, it is clearly seen that hitherto, the business firms, in general, had not felt the need for professional management as identified in the various marketing paradigms (Simmonds, 1986), but now because of the escalating degree of threat/challenges, there is growing acceptance of these measures. It can be said that, in an overall manner, with aspirations for growth and development, professionalism in marketing management is slowly pervading among the Indian firms.

In this, conflict paradigm where primary emphasis is on competition (Ambler, 1994) has been greatly acknowledged. Social constructionism (Marsden and Littler, 1996) with its strong emphasis on consumers' view of the world is also reflected in the responses. From being inward-looking, the respondent firms are developing towards being outward-looking and from being production-oriented is truly becoming market-oriented with their functioning being based on the pressures of the market.

Above all, the respondents have accepted that from a hitherto "sellers market" situation they are now facing a "buyers market" environment. In this it is "quality" which is the paradigm that has gained a new momentum in importance among the respondents, in the form of customer specific quality to gain market, quality to withstand competition and quality pressure from world market.

6. Scope for future research

This present study has identified (listed out) various new practices. The extent of adoption of each of these practices among any other selected number of firms can be studied. Comparison of "adoption of new practices" can also be conducted among, large firms, medium-size firms and small firms. Industry-specific studies also can be attempted to highlight changes in business/marketing practices, on the background of the inherent features of the selected industry. Study can be conducted among various business firms in different parts of India and a consolidated view on this topic can be developed. To study the extent of impact of globalisation on marketing management, comparative analysis of responses should be undertaken among firms in domestic market alone, firms aspiring to enter global market firms in domestic and global market, and firms exclusively catering to the global market. The concept of "Quality" as a current paradigm can be studied in-depth. It should cover the following, namely, on what parameters is quality judged by the consumers, and what benchmarking or standards or certificates are aspired upon by the business firms to declare themselves as quality producers in the eyes of the market.

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About the author

Dr Krishnaveni Muthiah is currently working as Assistant Professor at PSG Institute of Management, Coimbatore, India. Formerly, she has worked as Assistant Professor in the Department of Management Studies at Karpagam Arts and Science College and prior to that as, the Head of the Department of International Business at Shri Nehru Maha Vidyalaya College affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, India.

Along with the various academic degrees (M.Com., M.Phil., PGDHRM, MBA., PGDIB, Ph.D.,) she has to her credit, she has also participated and presented papers at various seminars and conferences. She has undergone Trainers Training Course on "Training Management-Methods and Planning", conducted by United Nations Development Programme.

In the past 20 years, she has served in various capacities in different fields, in organising training courses and in implementing action based projects for Indian and International Agencies.

Her teaching experience includes handling subjects in the Postgraduate and Undergraduate Courses in commerce, management, and international business. She has guided various research projects in the field of management and foreign trade.

Her areas of special interest are "International Trade Logistics" and "International Business". Her books on (i) "Logistics Management and World Sea-borne Trade" and (ii) "International Relations" are read with avid interest by students of International Business and have generally been greatly appreciated.

She, in her capacity as member of the Board of Studies (Commerce) at Bharathiar University, has been instrumental in upgrading the course content of the Master of International Business Course on a need based basis. Krishnaveni Muthiah can be contacted at: muthiah992000@yahoo.co.in

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