

Study of various marketing challenges and strategies for pomegranate fruit in Maharashtra

Ms. Dhanashri Landge¹, Dr. Dilip G. Belgaonkar²

¹Market Research Analyst, Pune, India

²Professor, Department of Research, Brihan Maharashtra College of Commerce (BMCC), Pune, India

Abstract - The paper aims to explore the study of various marketing challenges and strategies for pomegranate fruit in Maharashtra (India). From secondary data analysis and literature review, it is found that as a highly growing market, Maharashtra has the potential for large quantity consumption and export of pomegranate fruit. In addition, the pomegranate market has the potential to create new job opportunities and uplift the lifestyle of pomegranate producers. On the other hand, pomegranate growers have been facing various challenges related to the marketing of pomegranates. The marketing challenges result in the slow economic growth of growers and ineffective marketing and sales processes of fruit.

Significant changes happened in the pomegranate market last decade due to the high adoption of digital communication. Physical marketing strategies such as word-of-mouth and print media are most popular in the pomegranate market. In addition, adopting digital marketing strategies, including eCommerce platforms, email, and social media, has provided the primary benefit of reducing overall marketing cost. Thereby, combining physical/traditional and digital marketing strategies could be an effective option for improving the marketing process of the fruit. The multi-strategy approach also helps reduce the growers' overall marketing cost.

Key Words: Pomegranate; physical marketing strategies; digital marketing strategies; pomegranate marketing challenges; multi-channel marketing approach.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pomegranate is an essential fruit in India. It is called Wonder Fruit because of its excellent health benefits. One pomegranate contains about 40 percent of the daily requirement of vitamin C. Pomegranate fruit is popular because of the refreshing winey flavor of its juicy seeds known as arils. The name "pomegranate" is derived from the Middle French "*pomme grenade*," - which means "seeded apple." Pomegranates have been symbols of prosperity, hope, and abundance in every part of the world. Pomegranate fruit has significant demand as fresh fruit, powder, juice, concentrate/pulp, seed oil, and other pomegranate-derived products in food & beverage, pharmaceutical, and cosmetics industries across the globe.

In the production of pomegranates, marketing plays an important role. When the farmers cultivate this fruit crop mainly for markets, they are attentive to knowing the profitable crop at the prevailing prices in the market at which the produce would be sold. Maharashtra state is popularly known as the 'fruit bowl' of India. (Khunthe, 2006). Pomegranate is the leading fruit crop grown in Maharashtra state. Pomegranate is mainly cultivated in Maharashtra state's drought-prone areas, including Solapur, Sangli, Nashik, Ahmednagar, Pune, Dhule, Aurangabad, Satara, Osmanabad, and Latur districts. The state has a pomegranate growing area of over five lakh acres, while the all-India area is about 15 lakh acres. Ganesh, Bha1gwa, Ruby, Arakta, and Mridula are some popular pomegranate varieties produced in Maharashtra. The local market in Pune and Mumbai have been flooded with the arrivals of pomegranate fruit for around 12 months. Also, a large share of the pomegranate production in the state is exported to Arab countries, European countries, and Western countries.

Pomegranates are commercially cultivated in Solapur, Sangli, Nashik, Ahmednagar, Pune, Dhule, Aurangabad, Satara, Osmanabad, and Latur districts in Maharashtra. Nashik was the leader in the list of pomegranate production districts in 2016. According to the data provided by Times of India on 13 April 2016, the pomegranate production and cultivation area in various districts of the state are as below:

Table -1: Majorly pomegranate production districts in Maharashtra, 2016

Sr. No.	Name of District	Cultivation Area (in Hectares)	Production (in Tonnes)
1	Nashik	48,527	6,79,378
2	Solapur	20,033	1,69,798
3	Ahmednagar	16,113	1,62,096
4	Pune	12,010	1,08,061
5	Dhule	8,308	1,08,004
6	Sangali	7,656	1,14,841
7	Aurangabad	7,300	31,800
8	Satara	3,947	43,618
9	Beed	2,845	12,345

10	Osmanabad	2,550	24,790
11	Jalna	2,424	19,100
12	Buldana	842	5,479
13	Latur	571	7,705

Source: Times of India

In pomegranate farming, factors like the market, producer, and consumers decide the marketing cost of pomegranate fruits. Therefore, growers necessarily get benefits as per the production cost. However, growers get less profit due to a large number of marketing intermediaries in the marketing process.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the marketing challenges faced by pomegranate farmers in Maharashtra?
2. Which traditional/physical marketing techniques are used by pomegranate farmers?
3. Which digital marketing techniques are used by pomegranate farmers?
4. How can a multi-channel marketing approach be used for pomegranate fruit?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research paper is based on secondary data analysis, majorly focused on studying the Maharashtra pomegranate market with traditional/physical and digital marketing scenarios. The researcher has collected data from the Times of India, Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), and Google Scholar, among other secondary sources.

4. SCOPE OF STUDY

The scope of the study is limited to understanding the traditional/physical and digital marketing scenarios of the pomegranate market in Maharashtra. The secondary data used for the purpose is from 2016 to November 2022. The pomegranate growers in Maharashtra have been considered a focus area for the study.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Major marketing challenging factors faced by pomegranate farmers in Maharashtra

According to (Ekhande & Patil (2015), most of the pomegranate produced in Maharashtra is concentrated in Western Maharashtra. Therefore, marketing strategies are majorly involved in selling fruit, as producers face various marketing challenges for their pomegranate production.

5.1.1 Awareness of physical/traditional marketing strategies

Various ongoing Research and Development (R&D) activities are related to pomegranate fruit for enhancing the production and marketing of pomegranate fruit in Maharashtra. Word-of-mouth, newspapers, television, the Internet, and agricultural departments are some sources to increase awareness about this information among pomegranate producers.

The data below states that most marketing information is passed through word-of-mouth through sources such as friends, relatives, and the local community. On the other hand, the agricultural department, television, and newspapers are utilized at a moderate rate to get marketing information.

However, internet media has yet to be utilized to access marketing information, though the Internet can connect producers to potential audiences to market the fruit. Therefore, this factor interprets that there is a need to encourage farmers to effectively adopt information sources, including the Internet, for accessing marketing information related to pomegranates.

Table -2 Sources of pomegranate marketing information used by farmers

Sources of Information	No. of Farmers	Percentage
Internet	00	00
Television	19	6.3
Newspaper	37	12.3
Agricultural Department	58	19.3
Others/Word of Mouth	186	62.0
Total	300	100

Source: (Ekhande and Patil 2015)

5.1.2 Awareness of digital marketing strategies

Digital marketing practices for pomegranate fruits involve using digital technologies with the help of the Internet, mobile, digital content, cloud computing, social media, and others for advertisement, branding, digital customer engagement, and sales of pomegranates. Though there is widespread adoption of the Internet, telecommunication technologies, and social media, earlier generations of farmers have yet to adopt these technologies for the digital marketing of pomegranates. On the other hand, the upcoming generations of farmers are assumed to be tech-savvy and adopt digital marketing to expand their customer base. Digital Marketing has a vast potential for excelling in the sales of pomegranate fruits. In the Modern era, digital marketing is considered a powerful marketing platform to connect to a wide range of marketing strategies, including

food processing companies, retail traders, export companies, and direct consumers. The lack of awareness about digital marketing is a restraining factor for the pomegranate farmers to unlock better growth opportunities for the fruit.

5.1.3 Location of the nearby markets

The availability of centralized marketplaces near the pomegranate production areas is essential to reduce the cost of transformation, get access to various marketing strategies and get a better price for the fruit based on its quality. Not having access to centralized marketplaces acts as a restraining factor for farmers to get involved in the marketing of pomegranates, as they have to be dependent on pomegranate vendors/export companies/ agents for sales of their pomegranate productions. The availability of centralized marketplaces also allows farmers to communicate with other producers, share knowledge about production and marketing, and participate in marketing strategies for better outcomes.

Table -3 Most popular centralized pomegranate markets for farmers

Centralized Market	No. of Farmers	Percentage
Nasik	263	87.7
Solapur	37	12.3
Total	300	100

Source: (Ekhande and Patil 2015)

For farmers in Maharashtra, Nasik and Solapur are the most popular centralized physical markets for pomegranates. Most farmers only sell their products in these two markets, as they know the entire marketing and selling processes in these markets. (Ekhande and Patil 2015) Nasik is the most popular and preferred centralized pomegranate for farmers in Maharashtra. The majority of the pomegranate production is sold to the middleman, pomegranate export companies, marketing companies, and reselling companies in these markets. Farmers can get access to all these marketing strategies in centralized markets and can avoid profit sharing with marketing/commission agents. Thus, the availability of more marketplaces to farmers has the potential to lift the financial stability of the farmers.

5.1.4 Pomegranate pricing fluctuations

The supply of pomegranates in the market and pricing methods play a vital role in pricing the fruit in the market. Farmers usually plan production by considering the availability of resources such as financial budgets, labor, and weather conditions. These factors are responsible for the quality of the fruit. (Ekhande and Patil 2015) Found that most farmers need to get reasonable pricing for the fruit. However, only 31% of the farmers get reasonable pricing as

they sell their products in the APMC market. This is because farmers still need to decide the pricing of the pomegranate.

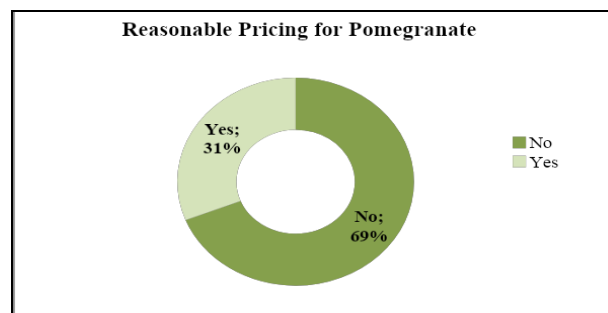


Chart -1: Number of farmers get reasonable pricing for pomegranates

Source: (Ekhande and Patil 2015)

Most farmers sell their products through APMC, where bidding is a widely opted method for deciding the pricing of the fruit. Considering the pomegranate market, the demand decides the value of the fruit. The excess supply of pomegranates in the market could reduce the pricing of the fruit. In the supply-driven market, the pricing of the fruit is significantly controlled by the adequate supply of pomegranates in the market throughout the year. Thus, adequate crop management based on the market demands holds the opportunity for farmers to minimize pricing fluctuations and maintain the average selling price of the pomegranate.

5.1.5 Knowledge about the export standards and process

The international market has a considerable demand for pomegranate fruit. The Indian pomegranate industry has various export companies to address the pomegranate demand of the international market. (Ekhande and Patil 2015) found that most farmers do not engage in pomegranate export activities due to a lack of knowledge about export procedures and scope on international markets. Moreover, it is observed that the farmers have various myths in mind related to the loss and damage of export shipments.

Table -4 Most popular centralized pomegranate markets for farmers

Export Status	No. of Farmers	Percentage	Type of Export
No	285	95.0	-
Yes	15	5.0	Through Mediators
Total	300	100.0	-

Source: (Ekhande and Patil 2015)

The above data shows that there is a need to increase the knowledge of farmers related to export activities, required product quality, scope in international markets, and export standards set by WTO. The export of pomegranate can be done directly or through mediators. The international market has the potential to provide the highest value to the pomegranate. Nevertheless, the need for export process knowledge is restraining farmers from entering an international pomegranate market.

5.1.6 Lack in adoption of technologically advanced management systems

The emergence of digital technologies such as cloud computing, mobile technologies, social media, the Internet of Things (IoT), video surveillance, and recognition technologies has benefited the marketing of pomegranate fruit on a global level. Developed economies such as the USA, UK, Germany, and Australia have adopted technologically advanced management systems to market pomegranates. Nevertheless, these systems are in the introduction phase in the Indian market, especially in Maharashtra. These management solutions help farmers during all phases of pomegranate marketing, such as advertisement, customer engagement, tracking of export shipment, post-harvest infrastructure management, physical security and surveillance of pomegranate farming resources, irrigation management, integrated pest, and disease management, real-time tracking of pomegranate pricing, remotely controlling marketing processes, and many more. The current generation of pomegranate producers is facing the challenge of a need for more awareness about these technologically advanced management systems. However, this challenge's impact is expected to be reduced if the next tech-savvy generation of pomegranate producers adopts these management systems for pomegranate marketing.

5.2 Physical/traditional marketing strategies used for pomegranate

A physical market is a setup where buyers can physically meet the sellers and purchase the desired merchandise in exchange for money. Shopping malls, department stores, and retail stores are examples of physical markets. Physical/Traditional marketing strategies include media such as television, radio, print advertising, and word-of-mouth.

5.2.1 Word-of-mouth marketing

Word-of-mouth marketing directs potential customers to pomegranate growers/sellers based on testimonials from existing customers. Word-of-mouth marketing strategies exist offline, as friends talk to one another and recommend a particular seller or product.

5.2.2 Business-to-Business marketing

B2B marketing strategies apply to companies whose clients are other businesses. For instance, pomegranate wholesalers might market to supermarkets, or customer relationship software (CRM) vendors might market to retail companies. This type of marketing usually involves personal relationships and a pre-prepared marketing pitch replete with data metrics, case studies, and testimonials.

5.2.3 Marketing via community goodwill

Sometimes the best way to draw positive attention to a pomegranate seller is to drop any sales message and focus on creating bonds within their community. Volunteering, sponsoring local teams, distributing print media, and participating in community events can increase familiarity between the seller and its local target market.

5.2.4 Television and radio

With all the different marketing strategies now available, it can be easy to overlook traditional marketing strategies, such as a T.V. and radio ad campaign. While not as cost-effective as other forms of marketing, T.V. and radio ads still reach many people and can leave lasting impressions on users.

5.2.5 Retail stores

Some marketers choose to reach potential customers at the point of consumption by marketing in stores. For example, if a customer has been inside a store and seen a booth with a sales representative demonstrating a pomegranate product, he/she has seen retail store marketing in action. Other tactics include offering special coupons redeemable for specific products at specific stores.

5.3 Digital marketing strategies used for pomegranate

Digital platforms are gradually replacing traditional markets. Digital marketing is the component of marketing that uses the Internet and online-based digital technologies such as desktop computers, mobile phones, and other digital media and platforms to promote agricultural products and services. Digital marketing strategies include email marketing, social media influencer marketing, and pay-per-click (PPC) ad campaigns.

5.3.1 E-commerce Website

Developing an e-commerce website is the best way to boost sales for the pomegranate business, as the prospects can explore and understand the pomegranate product right from the comfort of their homes. A seller can display your entire range of pomegranate products for customers to view and buy on the website. This factor can prove very lucrative for

the pomegranate business as there are few agribusinesses with e-commerce websites. A seller can pick an excellent digital marketing agency that offers web development services to help you with the same. The website will help a seller reach a wider audience and generate brand awareness.

5.3.2 Social Media Marketing

Social Media Marketing uses social media platforms (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and LinkedIn) to connect with customers to promote the pomegranate fruit, boost sales, and generate website traffic. A seller can use social media platforms to showcase what pomegranate production is all about and display the products creatively and uniquely.

5.3.3 Pay-per-click (PPC) digital ads

It is common for buyers to purchase PPC display ads from either Google or Meta Platforms (which powers Facebook ads, Instagram ads, and more). These ads contain a small amount of text and sometimes a visual. They lead to the seller's website's landing page or an e-commerce platform.

5.3.4 Social media marketing

It is common for businesses to have a presence on social media platforms. Consider posting regularly to inform potential customers about new pomegranate production or to promote a sale. Pomegranate sellers can also solicit testimonials from social media influencers, who will tell their audiences about the products.

5.3.5 Search engine optimization (SEO)

A pomegranate seller can drive organic traffic to its website if the website routinely turns up on search engine results pages (SERPs). Strong SEO marketing efforts involve keyword research and rankings, substantive website content, and (when possible) backlinks on other websites that direct toward the own website.

5.3.6 Content marketing

Content marketing is another way to drive organic traffic to a pomegranate seller's online platforms. For example, websites that contain helpful blog posts, podcasts, or videos typically turn up more often in organic searches. Therefore, a pomegranate seller can also invest in content marketing on video and podcast platforms. In this iteration of content marketing, the seller provides a target audience with valuable content that increases their awareness of the fruit and may turn them into customers.

5.3.7 Affiliate marketing

In affiliate marketing, a pomegranate seller incentivizes others to promote your brand. Affiliates can be social media

influencers, other agricultural and food processing companies, or publications such as magazines and websites. A pomegranate seller gives affiliates a referral code (often a custom URL) that steers people to the website and gives the affiliate a cut of the purchases made using their code. Sometimes the customers get their incentive to go through an affiliate—like getting a special price if they use the affiliate's referral code.

5.3.8 Email marketing

Some pomegranate sellers build up email lists of existing and potential customers who may have provided an email address somewhere along the line. These sellers send periodic email blasts designed to showcase new pomegranate production and announce special sales. Such emails can also enhance the customer experience by offering handy tips, videos, and articles—the content their subscriber base might genuinely care about.

5.3.9 Direct mail/print media marketing

Some customers still enjoy learning about the upcoming production/stock through the postal service. They order from catalogs and read direct marketing letters or print media sent to their address. Addressing such customer needs by trying direct mail marketing helps sellers send information to them in the mail rather than through online intermediaries.

5.4 The approach of multi-channel marketing for pomegranate

A marketing technique or strategy is a conduit to get the pomegranate seller's message to potential customers. A pomegranate grower can achieve a better income through the marketing mix technique. A marketing mix is a blend of strategies, typically drawing from physical and digital marketing conduits. Each marketing strategy has its pros and cons but combining the various marketing strategies would help to attract the target market for pomegranate effectively.

Multi-channel marketing gives pomegranate growers more ways to showcase the features of the fruit or build brand awareness within a target market. Even if a potential customer needs to engage with specific marketing strategies completely, they may be able to discover the brand or pomegranate production through other strategies. The awareness about the quality of pomegranate might drive the customer to ask for a sample product or buy the fruit, resulting in a direct engagement. The multi-strategy approach also helps reduce travel and communication costs, resulting in reduced overall marketing costs. Word-of-mouth, printed media, eCommerce platforms, social media, and mobile marketing could be effective multi-channel marketing to improve pomegranate marketing and sales for pomegranate growers.

6. SUGGESTIVE MEASURES FOR FUTURE POMEGRANATE MARKETING

The adoption of digital communication channels has created multiple opportunities for pomegranate growers to reach an untapped market. Using only physical/traditional marketing strategies is not allowing the growers to market pomegranates with a large potential customer base in national and international markets. The lack of awareness and practice of digital marketing is an essential challenging factor for the economic growth of the farmers. There is a need to change the approach to implementing marketing strategies and direct sales from pomegranate producers to the consumer for immediate benefit. Some suggestive measures are as under:

- Identifying and addressing marketing challenges through educational programs
- Market intelligence and information centers at Taluka/district level to educate pomegranate farmers
- Implementing cooperative post-harvest facilities to increase the price of fruit
- Identifying and categories target customers into marketing strategy-wise clusters
- Use of physical marketing for local/short-distance customers
- Adoption of digital marketing for national and international customers
- Understanding export standards and processes to gain a high return on investment
- Direct selling the pomegranate through local mandies, e-commerce platforms, social media, and mobile marketing

7. CONCLUSION

Maharashtra is a significant contributor to Indian pomegranate production. Agricultural marketing is very complex as it involves a lot of components, such as producers, mediators, wholesalers, retailers, and many more. So, marketing pomegranates at a large scale is itself a complex process. Pomegranate growers have been facing various challenges related to the marketing of pomegranates. Some of the challenges are the need for more awareness about marketing, especially digital marketing, pomegranate pricing fluctuations, knowledge about export standards, and a lack of information about nearby pomegranate markets. The marketing challenges result in the slow economic growth of growers, lower fruit rate, negligence for direct pomegranate export, and ineffective marketing and sales process of fruit. The knowledge and

exercise of pomegranate marketing strategies could help the growers to overcome the challenges and improve the pomegranate income per year.

Pomegranate buyers are always more inclined to buy products they find exciting and different in terms of quality, color, weight, freshness, packaging, and, most importantly, price. If a pomegranate grower tries to market the fruit differently, he can catch the attention of buyers before anybody else. Grasping the attention of potential customers, engaging them through fruit quality and service assurance, and completing the sale of the fruit are the significant steps in marketing the pomegranate. Digital marketing also would help enhance the customer journey for pomegranate buyers, resulting in a large customer base irrespective of the location of the buyer. Combining physical/traditional and digital marketing can help to reach out to a significant customer base, retain the customer base, and reduce the overall marketing cost of fruit production.

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