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## On Achieving Strategic Fit for Suvidha Sanitary Napkins distributed under Pradhan Mantri Janaushadhi Program in India

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### Abstract

In this research paper, we discuss the transformation of India's menstrual hygiene product (MHP) market and the challenges faced in achieving a strategic fit for the Suidha scheme within the Pradhan Mantri JanAushadhi program. The paper analyzes the misalignment in marketing and supply chain strategies with respect to the overall competitive strategy, and proposes optimal strategies for different consumer segments. It draws insights from Roger's diffusion model to target various adopter categories effectively. The paper emphasizes the need for continuous assessment, collaboration with stakeholders, and adaptation to ensure the scheme's success in providing affordable and eco-friendly sanitary napkins.

### Keywords

Strategic Fit, Strategies, Jansuidha, Women health

### Cover Page Footnote

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# On Achieving Strategic Fit for Suvidha Sanitary Napkins distributed Under Pradhan Mantri Janaushadhi Program in India

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## Abstract

In this research paper, we discuss the transformation of India's menstrual hygiene product (MHP) market and the challenges faced in achieving a strategic fit for the Suvidha scheme within the Pradhan Mantri JanAushadhi program. The paper analyzes the misalignment in marketing and supply chain strategies with respect to the overall competitive strategy, and proposes optimal strategies for different consumer segments. It draws insights from Roger's diffusion model to target various adopter categories effectively. The paper emphasizes the need for continuous assessment, collaboration with stakeholders, and adaptation to ensure the scheme's success in providing affordable and eco-friendly sanitary napkins.

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## 1. Introduction

Currently, the India's menstrual hygiene product (MHP) market is undergoing significant transformation. This transformation is aided by factors like heightened awareness, affordability, and emerging sense of environment responsibility. Several governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) have played a pivotal role in this transformation by developing focussed programs and initiatives. At its core, is the sanitary napkin, which is regarded as a fundamental element of women's health and hygiene during menstruation.

The Indian MHP market has shown a remarkable growth (CAGR) of 14.92 % since the year 2018 and is currently estimated at INR 58.62 billion. At present, sanitary napkins account for 73 % of the consumption. Further, an estimated 30 % women only have access to the sanitary napkins, majority of whom reside in urban pockets. The challenge of uneven

adoption is deeply rooted in the urban-rural divide. Urban areas exhibit higher adoption rates due to enhanced accessibility, affordability and the availability of sanitary napkins. Conversely, rural regions predominantly rely on traditional cloth pads due to limited access and the affordability of disposable sanitary napkins. Remarkably, nearly 70 % of Indian women lack access to affordable sanitary napkins, underscoring the pressing need for broader accessibility and education.

This MHP market (catering to only 30 % of the eligible population) comprises of intimate wipes, panty liners, tampons, and sanitary towels/napkins. Multinational companies' products like Whisper, Kotex, Stayfree, Carefree, and Essity Libresse are dominant, and occupy 40 %, 25 %, 15 %, 5 %, and 2 % respectively of the market share<sup>1</sup>. These leading brands are perceived as premium options, competing on dimensions like price, packaging, advanced technologies for enhanced benefits, and effective promotion and communication strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wateraid.org/in/sites/g/files/jkxooof336/files/2022-03/Designed%20Version%20-%20Menstrual%20Product%20Landscape.pdf>.

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The market of sanitary napkins has already triggered a major environmental crisis, which is evident from the staggering volume of the non-biodegradable waste generated. With an estimated 355 million menstruating women in the country, the use of approximately 10,000 pads per woman over her lifetime results in a colossal monthly disposal of around 1.2 billion non-biodegradable pads. Each of these pads, composed of about 90 % plastic, which can take 500–800 years to decompose, contributing to a plastic pollution crisis that annually accumulates over 12 billion discarded pads. This widespread waste further exacerbates marine contamination, as nearly 70 % of plastic waste finds its way into water bodies, threatening aquatic ecosystems<sup>2</sup>.

Hence, initiatives led by organizations such as iCare, Saathi pads, and ZanaAfrica are gaining traction with their reusable and cost-effective sanitary napkins, particularly in rural areas. These initiatives serve a dual purpose—raising awareness about menstrual hygiene and providing manufacturers with a platform to bolster their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives while expanding their market reach.

In this context, it's important to highlight the Suidha scheme within the Pradhan Mantri JanAushadhi program. This scheme has a two-pronged strategy, namely 1) it attempts to increase the consumption of the sanitary napkins among the Indian women by providing sanitary pads at highly subsidized rate, and 2) it focusses on substituting the general sanitary napkins by biodegradable substitutes.

This program has the potential to significantly improve access to affordable and environment friendly sanitary napkins. However, it can also create supply chain complexities and distribution challenges due to the added layer of managing other subsidized medical products in the generic medicines supply chains for JanAushadhi stores. This could lead to issues such as mismanagement of inventory, delayed deliveries, and even the possibility of some regions facing shortages while others have excess stock.

Although many experts have identified various shortcomings associated with the scheme, and recommended strategies, which can be adopted to enhance the effectiveness of this scheme, we in this article focus on the management perspective of the scheme. We discuss how the marketing strategy and the supply chain strategy is not in sync with the overall competitive strategy of the product, hugely contributing to only limited success of the scheme.

### 1.1. Strategic misalignment of Suidha

Overall, competitive positioning of the Suidha sanitary pads can be clearly stated as providing low-cost biodegradable sanitary pads to women in rural and urban areas. With regular pads manufacturers (like P&G, Johnson and Johnson, etc), Suidha can compete on the environmental dimension as the urban women are very sensitive to environmental pollution. In this segment, Suidha has failed to convey its performance on the dimensions of comfort, quality, etc.

For the rural areas, low cost of the product is appealing but distribution challenges arising from supply chain deficiency coupled with societal taboos surrounding the menstruation has prevented Suidha scheme from getting traction. The misalignment of marketing and supply chain strategies with the overall competitive strategy can be further expressed explicitly as below –

### 1.2. Misalignment in marketing strategy

1. **Insufficient Comfort Assurance:** The marketing strategy falls short in effectively addressing concerns about the comfort and performance of Suidha napkins compared to regular pads. Potential users remain hesitant to switch, as they are unsure whether the eco-friendly option will provide the same level of comfort and reliability as their familiar choice.
2. **Neglecting Consumer Education:** The current strategy lacks an emphasis on educating consumers about the benefits of biodegradable materials and their positive impact on the environment. These educational campaigns should be an intrinsic part of its core marketing strategy.
3. **Promotion and Communication Channels:** Choosing the wrong communication channels can hinder the dissemination of information about the Suidha scheme. If the target audience predominantly uses certain platforms or mediums that are not being utilized in the marketing strategy, the scheme's benefits might not reach them effectively.

### 1.3. Misalignment in supply chain strategy

1. **Limited Distribution Reach:** The supply chain strategy currently faces challenges in effectively

<sup>2</sup> <https://counterviewfiles.files.wordpress.com/2021/06/menstrual-waste-report.pdf>.

reaching rural and remote areas, where the plastic waste crisis is most severe. Limited distribution networks in these regions hinder the product's availability, preventing it from making a meaningful impact on plastic waste reduction where it is needed the most.

2. **Inefficient Logistics:** Logistical inefficiencies contribute to the inability to reach underserved areas. These inefficiencies can stem from inadequate transportation infrastructure, poor coordination, and suboptimal warehousing practices, which collectively hinder the timely and cost-effective delivery of Suvridha napkins.
3. **Supply Chain Complexities:** The supply chain may lack the necessary flexibility to accommodate the unique challenges of delivering to different geographical areas. The uniform approach to distribution might not effectively address the varied logistical requirements of reaching urban versus rural markets.
4. **Inventory Management:** Misalignment occurs when inventory levels are not managed optimally in the Suvridha scheme. Excessive stockpiling ties up resources and capital, while inadequate inventory can lead to shortages and patient dissatisfaction.
5. **Communication with Suppliers:** Lack of effective communication and coordination with suppliers can lead to delays in the procurement of Suvridha sanitary napkins and medicines. A misalignment here can disrupt the entire supply chain.
6. **Technology Integration:** If technology is not effectively integrated into the supply chain strategy, it can result in manual errors, delays in information sharing, and inefficient tracking of inventory.
7. **Capacity Planning:** Misalignment can arise when the supply chain strategy does not adequately plan for scalability. As the program expands or faces unexpected demand surges, the supply chain should be prepared to accommodate these changes.

To address misalignment in the marketing and supply chain strategy of the Suvridha scheme, it is crucial to continuously assess the strategy's performance, collaborate with key stakeholders, and continually monitor and adjust the strategy based on real-time data and feedback. A holistic and adaptive approach to marketing, and supply chain management for achieving strategic fit will help ensure the program's success and scheme's objectives in delivering affordable sanitary napkins and medicines to those in need while minimizing disruptions and inefficiencies.

## 2. Review of literature on models and framework for achieving strategic fit

### 2.1. Strategic fit

Strategic fit is defined as the degree to which a firm structure, strategy culture, and resources are aligned to the firm's external environment (Xu et al., 2006). When the strategic fit is observed as a linkage between firm peripheral environments, it indicates how the organization acclimatizes, alters, and reconfigures itself to attain a state of fit (Venkatraman, 1989). If a firm fails to act in this context then it becomes difficult for the firm to respond to the changing marketing environment, apparently leading to risky business decisions and performance anomalies. Therefore, firms must adhere to the changing market environment, the capacity to adjust and adapt becomes the strength of the firm and entails a competitive edge. (Li & Liu, 2014).

### 2.2. Existing models for measuring strategic fit

Davies and White (2006) have proposed a framework to understand the relationship between environmental incentives and strategic choice and how resource allocation is done in this context. The authors suggested that choice and external incentives might be important but not a necessity to explain the representation of strategic choice. Another study conducted by Kaliappen and Hilman (2017) stressed the relevance of competitive strategy model (Porter, 1997), market orientation framework (Narver & Slater, 1990), and innovation strategy model (O'Sullivan & Dooley, 2010) and their implication on designing a strategic fit for hoteliers. They further propose a mixed-framework for excelling in cost leadership and differentiation. Few authors (Zajac et al., 2000) have studied the dynamics of strategic fit by developing a normative approach to strategic change. The authors developed a model that is normative, multivariate, and dynamic in nature. The study highlighted both environmental and organizational factors that can help to predict strategic fit for a specific industry.

Menon (2022) has extended the concept of strategic fit to the service supply chain. His study defines service supply chain fit as the premeditated consistency between the operational resources of the firm and its supply chain. The study further establishes that there is a positive linkage between service supply chain characteristics such as efficiency and responsiveness and operant resources of the firm and both together affect the firm's performance. In the normative model of strategy

formation, strategic fit has become a core competency. Lin et al. (2019) has developed a strategic fit model for servitization and its impact on the manufacturing sector. The model proposed in the study highlights the relationship between strategic orientation and firm strategic capability and its effect on firms' performance. In another model of strategic fit, the authors established a relationship between innovation strategies and a firm's performance where environmental competition and dynamism played a moderating role. Integration of innovative and competitive strategies affects the firm's performance therefore organization while designing strategies should develop an interface to align both types of strategies. This will help the organization to deal with any kind of uncertain environment and manage the business turbulence to create a competitive environment. (Prajogo, 2016).

### 2.3. Application of Roger's diffusion model in the context of Suvidha

Roger's diffusion model is appropriate for the present context as the Suvidha is new innovative product for both the segments it is currently targeting i.e. the urban women who are using regular pads and not the biodegradable pads, and rural women who are not using pads at all. From the perspective of the model, users are classified under various categories as under –

#### 2.3.1. Innovators

Innovators in the Suvidha context would be the eco-conscious activists and early environmental adopters in urban areas. These individuals are driven by a strong commitment to sustainable practices and actively seek innovative solutions to address environmental challenges. Innovators would readily embrace Suvidha pads due to their proactive stance on plastic waste reduction and their willingness to experiment with novel menstrual hygiene alternatives.

In rural areas, women leading the self-help group could be the potential early innovators.

#### 2.3.2. Early adopters

Early adopters of Suvidha pads would include eco-conscious trendsetters and influencers within their social circles. These individuals are respected for their opinions and often lead by example. Early adopters would see the value in Suvidha pads' eco-friendly attributes and would be eager to share their positive experiences, encouraging others to follow suit.

In rural areas, early adopters can be local health workers who are trusted sources of information and guidance.

#### 2.3.3. Early majority

The early majority for Suvidha pads would comprise individuals who are concerned about the environment and are keen to adopt sustainable practices but prefer well-established options. These individuals would require evidence of the product's effectiveness and comfort from their peers and trusted sources before transitioning from their current menstrual hygiene methods.

The early majority among rural women might be those who are cautious about change but value the opinions of their peers. A woman who hears positive feedback from her friends or neighbors about the effectiveness and comfort of Suvidha pads could be motivated to try them for herself, seeking the assurance of practicality and reliability.

#### 2.3.4. Late majority

The late majority segment for Suvidha pads consists of individuals who are more risk-averse and adopt innovations only when they become mainstream. They would be influenced by the widespread adoption of the product and the assurance that it has proven effective for a majority of users.

In rural contexts, the late majority may be women who are more resistant to change and prefer to stick to traditional practices. An elderly woman who has used cloth for menstrual hygiene throughout her life might adopt Suvidha pads only when she sees many others in her community successfully using them and experiencing benefits.

#### 2.3.5. Laggards

Laggards in the Suvidha context might be those who are deeply rooted in traditional practices and are resistant to change. Overcoming their reluctance to adopt Suvidha pads would necessitate comprehensive education, addressing cultural norms, and showcasing the long-term benefits of the product.

Laggards in rural areas could be those who are deeply attached to customary practices and hold strong cultural beliefs. Overcoming their resistance might require engaging community leaders and conducting educational workshops (Fig. 1).

## 3. Optimum supply chain and marketing strategy for Suvidha

At present the marketing strategy of the Suvidha sanitary pads is not congruent with what it is

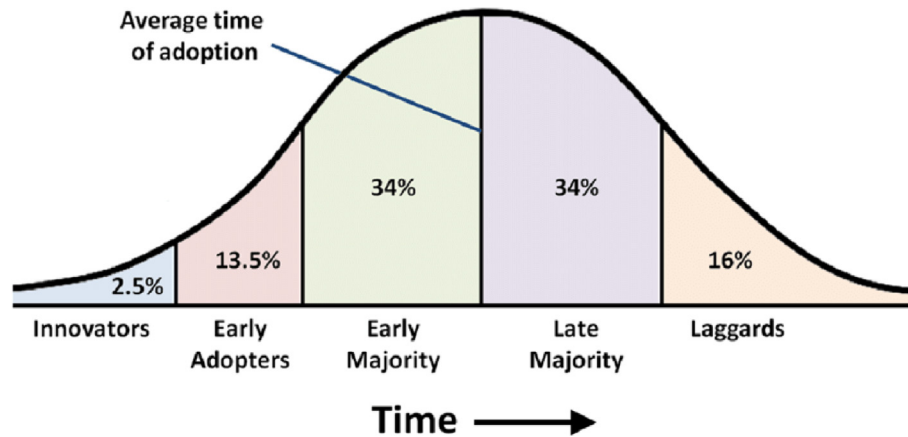


Fig. 1. Rogers innovation diffusion model. Source: Rogers innovation diffusion model (Research gate).

offering. For example, despite being biodegradable, packing is not eco-friendly. This sends a very inconsistent message to the urban consumers who would otherwise be willing to try the pads due to its biodegradable nature. Secondly, the packing, nor the promotion channels do not address the inferior quality concern which prevents some urban consumers from purchasing it.

For rural areas, neither the distribution system is robust (pads are primarily sold through JanAushadhi Kendras which does not have a prominent presence in the rural areas), nor any effort is made to communicate the benefits of the Suidha pads over other substitutes like cloth, cotton, etc. In this context, optimum strategies for each class are described below –

- 3.1 **Innovators and Early Adopters: Marketing:** Collaborate with eco-conscious influencers and activists who are innovators and early adopters. Showcase their positive experiences with Suidha pads through social media platforms and awareness campaigns. This could inspire similar-minded individuals to consider the product.
- 3.2 **Supply Chain:** Focus on distribution through JanAushadhi Kendras in the urban pockets that cater to environmentally conscious consumers. This aligns with the preferences of innovators and early adopters who are actively seeking sustainable products.
- 3.3 **Early Majority: Marketing:** Focus on addressing concerns related to comfort, convenience, and reliability in rural contexts. Share testimonials from early adopters in both urban and rural settings to build credibility and show that the pads are suitable for different environments.
- 3.4 **Supply Chain:** Enhance distribution networks in semi-urban and rural regions, working closely

with local health workers and women's self-help groups. These intermediaries can help facilitate the availability and accessibility of Suidha pads in areas where the early majority resides.

- 3.5 **Late Majority and Laggards: Marketing:** Collaborate with community leaders, local influencers, and health workers to conduct workshops and educational sessions. Use relatable narratives and testimonials from individuals who have overcome cultural barriers and adopted Suidha pads. Address concerns related to disposal methods and cultural norms.
- 3.6 **Supply Chain:** Establish partnerships with rural cooperatives and organizations that are already engaged in community development activities. Leverage their existing networks to ensure that Suidha pads are accessible even in hard-to-reach areas.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Suidha scheme within the Pradhan Mantri JanAushadhi program holds both promising potential and important challenges. While it strives to make biodegradable and quality sanitary napkins accessible and affordable to a wider population, the program must navigate through various complexities to achieve its objectives effectively. The scheme's emphasis on affordability and accessibility aligns with the overarching goal of providing equitable healthcare opportunities for menstrual hygiene across the nation. By offering subsidized product, the Suidha scheme addresses a critical need for individuals pertaining to sanitary towels/napkins who might otherwise struggle. This initiative stands as a testament to the commitment of the government towards ensuring the well-being of its citizens. However, the success of the Suidha

scheme depends on the careful synchronization of marketing, supply chain, and execution strategies. Misalignments in these areas can impede the program's effectiveness and impact. Therefore, it is essential to continually reassess and fine-tune these strategies to ensure that the intended beneficiaries receive the benefits intended by the scheme. Moreover, collaboration and communication with all supply chain stakeholders, including pharmaceutical companies, suppliers, healthcare service providers, regulatory bodies, distributors, and the customer, are indispensable. The continuous assessment of the marketing and supply chain strategy's performance will foster a cohesive environment for addressing challenges, sharing insights, and refining the scheme over time. Flexibility in adapting to changing circumstances and evolving needs will enable the Suvridha scheme to sustainably serve the women and make a lasting impact on women hygiene and healthcare accessibility.

At last, the Suvridha scheme embodies a commitment to holistic women menstrual hygiene and social welfare. By learning from challenges, optimizing strategies, and engaging in collaborative efforts, the Pradhan Mantri JanAushadhi program can truly make affordable sanitary napkins an attainable reality for all, contributing to the well-being and progress of the nation.

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### Conflict of Interest

We confirm that there is no conflict of interest.

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