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One District One Product as a Market Access Lever for Regional Food Brands: A Founder-Led Case Study from India's Premium Snacks Segment

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ABSTRACT

India's One District One Product (ODOP) initiative, coordinated by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, seeks to identify, brand and promote one distinctive product from every district of the country. The programme has been discussed at the level of policy design and district economies, but very little published work examines how an individual firm actually experiences ODOP: what onboarding involves, what the scheme offers a small brand in practice, and where its design assumptions sit uneasily with how modern consumer businesses are structured. This paper addresses that gap through a single case study of Patang, a bootstrapped premium snacks brand that sources ten products from seven kitchens located in their districts of culinary origin, and which was onboarded onto ODOP through Invest India in 2026. Drawing on participant observation by the founder, internal company records and programme documentation, the study traces the onboarding journey, including product-to-district mapping and the use of ODOP identity marks on packaging. Three findings emerge. First, the scheme's principal near-term value to a young brand is legitimacy: state recognition functions as a trust signal in buyer conversations, particularly in institutional and gifting channels. Second, alignment costs are negligible for firms whose sourcing is already place-anchored, which suggests that ODOP currently rewards a supply chain design choice rather than inducing it. Third, the programme's single-district framing fits producers rooted in one location but fits awkwardly with portfolio brands that aggregate products across many districts, a structural gap with implications for scheme design. The paper closes with recommendations for policymakers and for founders of provenance-led brands considering enrolment.

Keywords: One District One Product (ODOP); market access; regional food brands; place-based branding; MSME policy

Subject Area: Management (Entrepreneurship; Small and Medium Enterprises; Business Strategy and Policy)

INTRODUCTION

Policy interest in place-based economic development has a long history, but its most visible recent expression in India is the One District One Product initiative. The idea is simple to state: select, brand and promote at least one product from each district of the country so that every district can participate in manufacturing growth and exports rather than leaving these to a handful of industrial clusters (Invest India, n.d.). Under the national initiative led by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, 1,102 products have been identified across 761 districts, chosen by states and union territories on the basis of existing ecosystems, export potential and geographical indication status.

Most writing on ODOP looks downward from the policy level: how districts were selected, what infrastructure support exists, how exports have moved in states such as Uttar Pradesh where the programme originated in 2018. What is largely missing is the view from inside a firm. How does a small brand come to be part of ODOP? What does participation actually consist of? Does it open markets, reduce costs, or mainly confer a badge? And what happens when a firm's structure does not match the programme's implicit picture of a producer rooted in a single district?

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These questions matter because the firms ODOP most plausibly helps, micro and small food businesses with regional products, rarely document their own policy interactions. Founders are busy, the sums involved are small relative to the effort of writing, and the details of onboarding live in email threads rather than reports. This paper is an attempt to put one complete experience on the record. It follows Patang, a Delhi-based premium regional snacks brand, through its onboarding onto the ODOP programme via Invest India in 2026, and asks what the scheme delivered, what it cost, and where its design could better serve firms of this type.

The paper makes three contributions. It provides one of the first firm-level accounts of ODOP participation by a consumer brand. It identifies a structural mismatch between the programme's single-district unit of analysis and the multi-district portfolio structure of modern provenance-led brands. And it offers practical guidance, grounded in lived experience rather than scheme brochures, for founders weighing enrolment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From One Village One Product to its Asian diffusion

The intellectual ancestry of ODOP runs through Japan. The One Village One Product movement began in Oita Prefecture in 1979 under Governor Morihiko Hiramatsu, itself building on the earlier New Plum and Chestnut movement in the town of Oyama. Communities were encouraged to develop one competitive, high value product each, with the prefectural government providing technical and marketing support rather than direct subsidy (Igusa, n.d.). Mukai and Fujikura (2015) identify three principles behind the movement's durability: local yet global, self-reliance and creativity, and human resource development. Their evaluation of OVOP-inspired aid projects across more than thirty countries finds that projects honouring these principles tend to sustain themselves, while those that reduce the idea to product selection plus subsidy tend not to.

The model travelled widely. Thailand's One Tambon One Product programme is the best studied adaptation; Natsuda, Igusa, Wiboonpongse and Thoburn (2012) show how a community-driven Japanese idea became a considerably more top-down instrument in Thai hands, with mixed consequences for sustainability. Denpaiboon and Amatasawatdee (2012) reach a similar conclusion in their comparison of Japanese and Thai best-practice communities. Haraguchi (2008), writing for UNIDO, catalogues replications across Asia and Africa and cautions that the movement's soft elements, particularly local initiative, are the hardest to transplant. Schumann (2016) draws out the workforce development dimension, arguing that the movement's lasting effect in Oita was as much about building capable people as about selling shiitake or barley shochu.

ODOP in India

India's adaptation began in Uttar Pradesh in January 2018, where the state government mapped one product to each of its 75 districts and built supporting schemes around common facility centres, marketing assistance and credit access (Invest India, n.d.). The idea was subsequently taken national through two parallel tracks. The Ministry of Food Processing Industries embedded an ODOP approach within the PM Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises scheme, under which micro food units receive a credit-linked capital subsidy of 35 percent of eligible project cost up to Rs 10 lakh, with preference for units producing the designated ODOP product of their district (Ministry of Food Processing Industries, n.d.). Separately, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade runs the national ODOP initiative focused on identification, branding and market access, including government e-marketplaces, state emporiums, trade shows and the Unity Malls now being developed as dedicated retail hubs for ODOP and GI-tagged products.

Published assessments of the Indian programme are mostly institutional: government portals, consulting commentaries and press coverage of export growth. Academic treatment is thin, and firm-level accounts are, to the best of the author's knowledge, absent from the literature. This is the gap the present study addresses.

Place-based branding and the small firm

A separate stream of work on provenance and place-of-origin effects in food marketing suggests why a scheme like ODOP should interest brand builders at all. Products carrying credible regional identity command attention

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and often price premiums, because origin functions as a shorthand for authenticity and taste heritage. For a small firm, however, claiming origin is easier than proving it. State-backed recognition of a product-district link is one of the few low-cost proof mechanisms available, which is precisely what ODOP offers, whether or not that was its primary design intent.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses a single case design of the kind described by Yin (2018), appropriate where the phenomenon is contemporary, the boundaries between phenomenon and context are unclear, and the researcher has unusual access. Access here is complete: the author is the founder of the case firm and conducted the ODOP onboarding personally. This brings the obvious risk of bias, addressed below, and the equally real advantage that nothing in the account is second-hand.

Three sources of evidence are used, in line with the triangulation logic of case research (Eisenhardt, 1989). First, participant observation across the full onboarding period, recorded contemporaneously in working notes and correspondence. Second, internal company records: sales data, channel performance, packaging artwork files and the product-to-district mapping submitted to the programme. Third, programme documentation from Invest India and the Ministry of Food Processing Industries. Findings are reported as analytical themes rather than as a chronological diary, and claims that depend on the author's judgement rather than on documents are flagged as such.

A note on reflexivity is in order. A founder writing about his own firm's policy experience cannot claim detachment. What he can do is confine claims to what the evidence supports, report inconvenient findings alongside convenient ones, and make the limits of generalisation explicit. All three disciplines are attempted here, and the limitations section returns to the point.

Case Background

Patang (registered as Pep and Pop Private Limited) is a bootstrapped premium snacks brand founded in Delhi and positioned around regional Indian provenance. Its founding ethos is that iconic regional snacks should be made at their place of origin: bhakarwadi from Pune, sev from Ratlam, chanachur from Kolkata, rather than generic renditions from a single central factory. At the time of ODOP onboarding, the brand operated ten stock keeping units sourced from seven manufacturing kitchens located in the products' home districts.

The firm is small by any measure. In its first eight months of recorded operations in FY26 it generated revenue of approximately Rs 32 lakh at a gross margin of 63 percent, serving 3,031 unique customers with a repeat rate of 14.4 percent and a blended customer acquisition cost of Rs 606. Distribution spans quick commerce platforms, the brand's own website, marketplaces, modern trade and a growing corporate gifting business. These numbers are reported not because they are impressive but because they locate the case precisely: this is the scale of firm, well below the threshold at which policy schemes usually attract academic attention, at which ODOP participation decisions actually get made.

Two features of the firm matter for what follows. Its supply chain was district-anchored before ODOP entered the picture, for brand reasons rather than policy reasons. And its product portfolio spans at least eight districts across seven states, which, as will become clear, is both its greatest alignment with the spirit of ODOP and its greatest mismatch with the letter of the programme.

The Onboarding Experience

Contact with the programme came through Invest India, the national investment promotion agency that anchors the DPIIT-led ODOP initiative, in [confirm: month] 2026. The onboarding sequence had three substantive components: eligibility and profile documentation, mapping of each product to its district of origin, and incorporation of ODOP identity marks into packaging artwork.

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The documentation stage was undemanding by the standards of Indian scheme paperwork: company registration details, FSSAI licensing, product lists and channel presence. The substantive work was the mapping exercise. Each product had to be tied to a specific district, and the claimed link had to be consistent with the district product lists maintained by states. Table 1 shows the mapping as prepared by the firm.

Table 1. Product-to-district mapping submitted during ODOP onboarding

Product	**District of origin**	**State**
Puneri Bhakarwadi	Pune	Maharashtra
Ratlami Sev	Ratlam	Madhya Pradesh
Calcutta Chanachur	Kolkata	West Bengal
Jamnagari Chiwda	Jamnagar	Gujarat
Bikaneri Jor Garam	Bikaner	Rajasthan
Amdavadi Methi Para	Ahmedabad	Gujarat
Jaipuri Hing Chana	Jaipur	Rajasthan
Darbhanga Makhana	Darbhanga	Bihar
Bambai Mixture	Mumbai	Maharashtra
Tapioca Chips	[confirm district]	Kerala

The mapping illustrates the firm's unusual position. A typical ODOP beneficiary is a producer inside one district making that district's designated product. Patang is the mirror image: a single brand carrying many districts' products to national and online shelves. The programme's forms, designed around the first case, accommodated the second without objection, but also without any category that recognised it. Logo tagging, the incorporation of ODOP marks on pack artwork, was underway at the time of writing, product by product rather than at brand level, which again reflects the programme's district-product unit of analysis.

Direct financial benefit played no role in the decision to enrol. The credit-linked subsidy under PMFME attaches to manufacturing units in their districts, not to a brand aggregating from seven kitchens it does not own. What the firm sought, explicitly, was market access and recognition: eligibility for government-backed marketplaces and emporium channels, visibility in official promotion, and the right to display state recognition of its provenance claims.

FINDINGS

Legitimacy is the near-term product

The clearest early return from ODOP participation is a signalling effect. In institutional conversations, with corporate gifting buyers, airline and railway catering prospects and modern trade category managers, the ability to describe products as ODOP-recognised changes the texture of the discussion. It converts a marketing claim (made at the place of origin) into something a government programme has examined and accepted. For a young brand without national advertising, third-party validation of this kind is scarce and normally expensive. The effect is difficult to quantify at this stage and no revenue is attributed to it here; what can be reported is that the

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recognition is now used in every institutional pitch, which the firm did not plan in advance and began doing because early conversations responded to it.

The scheme rewards prior alignment rather than inducing it

Patang's alignment cost was close to zero: its sourcing already matched the programme's geography, so onboarding consisted of documenting reality rather than changing it. This is worth dwelling on, because it cuts both ways. For the firm it meant ODOP was nearly free to join. For the policy it raises a selection question: if the firms that enrol are disproportionately those already organised around district provenance, the scheme's observed successes may reflect who joins rather than what the scheme changes. The present case cannot settle that question, one firm never can, but it illustrates the mechanism cleanly.

The single-district frame does not fit portfolio brands

The most analytically interesting finding is structural. Every instrument in the ODOP toolkit, subsidy eligibility, district product lists, logo usage, assumes a producer whose identity is one district and one product. A multi-district portfolio brand fits nowhere in this architecture, despite arguably doing exactly what the programme wants done: creating urban and export demand for many districts' products at once, under one consumer-facing brand with the marketing capability individual district producers usually lack. The firm experienced this as small frictions rather than obstacles: forms without a suitable category, benefits that attach to manufacturers rather than to the brand generating their demand, logo rules conceived pack-by-pack. None of these blocked participation. Together they indicate a beneficiary class the programme has not yet named.

Market access remains promise more than pipeline

Honesty requires reporting what has not happened yet. As of writing, ODOP participation has not by itself produced a purchase order. Government e-marketplace and emporium channels involve their own onboarding and commercial negotiation; Unity Malls are still being developed. The realistic near-term reading is that ODOP lowers barriers to channels that must still be worked individually. Founders expecting enrolment to function as a sales channel will be disappointed; those treating it as a credential and a door-opener will find it does that job well and cheaply.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

For policymakers, the case suggests one concrete design extension: recognise aggregator brands as a distinct participant category. A firm that carries ten districts' products to national shelves multiplies the market access the programme exists to create, and the international OVOP literature supports the intuition. Mukai and Fujikura (2015) found that projects sustained themselves where local production met genuinely external demand; the weakness of many replications was precisely the marketing capability that portfolio brands supply. An aggregator category could carry defined logo rights at brand level, a documented route into government retail channels, and eventually procurement preference where an aggregator demonstrably sources from designated districts.

For founders of provenance-led brands, three practical lessons follow. Enrol early, because the cost is low and the credential compounds through repeated institutional use. Do not build a financial case around subsidies unless you own manufacturing in the relevant district. And treat the mapping exercise seriously: the discipline of proving each product-district link to an external party is useful brand hygiene independent of the scheme.

For researchers, the case opens questions it cannot close. Whether ODOP recognition measurably shifts institutional buyer conversion is testable with a larger sample of participating firms. Whether the selection effect described above dominates the treatment effect is a natural evaluation design. Both would be well served by more firms placing their experiences on record.

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Limitations

The limitations are those inherent to a single insider case. The author's dual role as founder and researcher creates unavoidable bias risk, mitigated but not eliminated by documentary triangulation and by the deliberate reporting of null results such as the absence of attributable revenue. Findings generalise analytically, to the mechanisms described, not statistically to the population of ODOP participants. The observation window covers onboarding and the months immediately after; longer-run effects, including any commercial outcomes through government channels, are unobserved. Finally, the firm's atypical structure, which makes the case interesting, also makes it unrepresentative of the single-district producers who form the programme's core constituency.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to document, from the inside, what participation in India's One District One Product programme looks like for a small provenance-led consumer brand. The answer is unglamorous and useful. Onboarding is light. The immediate benefit is legitimacy rather than money, and it is real: state recognition of origin claims is a scarce asset for a young brand and ODOP supplies it at negligible cost. The immediate gap is structural: a programme built around one district and one product has no vocabulary yet for brands that aggregate many districts into one portfolio, even though such brands are natural carriers of the programme's ambition. Naming and equipping that category is a small design change with a plausibly large return. In the meantime, founders of regional brands should treat ODOP as what it currently is, a credential worth holding and a set of doors worth knocking on, and researchers should treat the firm-level experience of India's place-based industrial policy as the open field this study found it to be.

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