

A Study on the Evolution of Pharmaceutical Marketing Communication Channels

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Abstract: Medicines are an integral part of health care and health care is unimaginable without medicines. The pharmaceutical industry is important both socially and economically for a healthy nation. The entire pharmaceutical industry is based on the shoulders of medical representatives since they were found to be the best media for the promotion of pharmaceutical products. Healthcare professionals are targeted through medical representatives for promoting medicinal products. Marketing communications are essentially a part of the marketing mix. The marketing mix defines the 4P's of marketing and promotion is what marketing communications are all about. It is the message the organization intends to convey to the market. Visits from medical representatives are associated with providing gifts, free samples, and advertising campaigns. Changes in the buying behavior of the doctors make it necessary to use new forms of marketing communication techniques. Limited direct contacts between the representatives and the doctors have generated a growing interest in e-marketing techniques as a tool for supporting marketing communications and to improve market share in the highly competitive prescription drugs market segment.

Keywords: Marketing communications, medical representatives, doctors, promotion, e-detailing

1. Marketing Functions

For a successful business organization marketing is the most important functions. A successful marketing program must have a quality product with a right price, an impressive promotion mix, and an extensive distribution network.

The American Marketing Association defines marketing as "Marketing is an organizational function and a set of process for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders".

1.1 Pharmaceutical Marketing

Pharmaceutical marketing is the business of advertising and promoting the sale of pharmaceuticals or drugs. Pharmaceutical marketing is not a static passive process, but a dynamic active process. Pharmaceutical marketing is the branch dealing with the managing of areas like manufacturing, sale, distribution, isolation, identification, and development of new drugs.

Smith (1991) defined Pharmaceutical marketing as "a process by which market for pharma care is actualized. It encompasses all the activities carried out by various individuals or organizations to actualize markets for pharma care."

According to Mahesh D. Burande (1999), "Pharmaceutical marketing is marketing of pharmaceutical formulations or fine chemicals into the market."

Pharmaceutical marketing is a subspecialty of marketing healthcare products and medicines to doctors. It is a specialized field with an objective of making profits by satisfying customer needs and wants in health care. To be successful the marketers have to understand the real needs, wants, belief and attitude of the doctors towards products

and services. They should focus on identifying major considerations of physicians to prescribe the drugs. For healthcare marketing, understanding doctor's needs, wants, and expectations would become the mantra for success in the years to come.

Unique aspects of marketing for prescription medicines

The pharmaceutical industry is a knowledge-driven industry and is heavily dependent on Research and Development for new products and growth. There are an estimated 20,000 pharmaceutical companies in India, competing for a market share in the Rs 1,300 crore market in annual sales, in a poorly regulated environment. The picture is complicated by an uneducated end user and customer base, in a highly privatized health care system.

Marketing is the driving force of the pharmaceutical industry. The restricted mass media usage becomes a major obstacle in pharma marketing. The use of conventional and established media like newspapers, magazines, radio, and television is not allowed in pharma marketing. Instead, they have to rely upon direct marketing specific to each doctor, one-to-one sales calls, medical journals and papers, sponsorships, sampling, gifts, and other promotional tools.

The controls maintained by regulatory agencies leaves very little room for creativity and even lesser for making an error. Whatever you communicate will ultimately affect the well being and life of a person and this makes pharmaceutical marketing a tough, responsible and challenging task. It makes the task more difficult. Pharmaceutical marketing is a highly specialized form of direct marketing which does not lend itself to mass advertising. Medical representatives form the backbone of the entire marketing effort. Pharmaceutical companies appoint medical representatives to promote their products directly to the doctors.

Unique aspects of pharmaceutical marketing are:

- 1) Influence of non-buyers on the buying habits of end consumers
- 2) Authorization powers of the physicians
- 3) Consumers need an authorized prescription to purchase a prescription drug
- 4) The importance of the disease in identifying, classifying and segmenting markets
- 5) Professional licensing required for stocking and selling pharma products
- 6) Records of every transaction are kept, specific to Patients, Physician, and Product.

Like any other sector of industry, the fundamental marketing concepts and principles are applicable to the pharmaceutical industry also. The marketing of the Over The Counter (OTC) drugs is similar to the marketing of consumer goods, and the marketing of prescription drugs shares some common characteristics with the industrial goods and consumer goods (Corstjens, 1991: 10). The similarity with consumer goods is due to the fact that the pharmaceutical drugs are often aimed at a large population of consumers, and the multiple roles played by the doctor as a business-buying center is similar to industrial goods (Corstjens, 1991: 10). The physician is like an industrial purchasing agent, i.e. the decision on drug therapy is not what to buy, but instead, what to prescribe (Smith, 1975: 63).

Laws and codes of practice that governs the promotion of medicines

In India direct-to-consumer promotion of prescription-only medicine is not permitted. It is aimed to prevent people from self-medication under the influence of misleading and exaggerated advertisements. Major emphasis is on conducting oneself responsibly, keeping the regulatory and code in perspective.

The import, manufacture, distribution, and sale of drugs and cosmetics are regulated by the Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 1940 (DCA) and the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules of 1945 (DCR). Advertising and promotion for a certain category of drugs are controlled by The Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act of 1954 and Rules of 1955. Drugs falling into the system of traditional medicine, such as Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Homeopathy, are also controlled by the Drugs and Cosmetics Act of 1940 (DCA) and the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules of 1945 (DCR).

Under the Drugs and Magic Remedies Act, the advertisement includes any notice, mailing, label, wrapper or other document and any announcement made orally or by any other means. The recent Code of Marketing Practice states that 'where a pharmaceutical company pays for or otherwise secures or arranges the publication of promotional material in journals, such promotional material must not resemble editorial matter'.

Information about medicinal products must be Up-to-date, verifiable and accurately reflect current knowledge or responsible opinion. It should be accurate, balanced, fair and objective and must not mislead directly or by implication and capable of substantiation.

One cannot advertise any ethical prescription medicines directly to the consumers by print, TV or other electronic media. Any education materials aimed at consumers should be distributed through a doctor only.

The OTC and DTC drugs have no legal recognition in India; hence regulations apply to all those drugs that are included in the list of 'prescription-only drugs'. For medicines not covered by the schedules of the drugs and cosmetics act, and for such OTC medicines, a company can directly advertise through print or electronic media.

The Department of Pharmaceuticals has formulated a voluntary Code of Marketing Practice for the Indian Pharmaceutical Industry. As per this code, all promotional material issued by a drug manufacturer must be consistent with the requirements of this Code.

Promotion mix

The promotion of pharmaceutical prescription drugs is different from other industries in that the product is not promoted directly to the public but to the medical practitioners only. The term 'promotion' means those informational and marketing activities, the purpose of which is to induce prescribing, supply or administration of medical products. Promotion is an exercise of providing information, persuasion, and influence a doctor. The promotion includes the overall coordination of advertising, selling, publicity, and public relations. Promotion is a helping function designed to make all other marketing activities to be more effective and efficient.

World Health Organisation's Ethical Criteria for Medicinal Drug Promotion (1988:6) defines pharmaceutical promotion as: "All informational and persuasive activities by manufacturers and distributors, the effect of which is to induce the prescription, supply, purchase and/or use of medicinal drugs."

"The key feature of influencing the demand for any individual product is the extent to which the product gains doctor acceptance. This will depend on a large number of factors, including the product's therapeutic value i.e. product quality, the state of art in medicine, and sales promotion undertaken by the manufacturer" (Slatter, 1977: 23).

Successful promotion, defined as brand preference or insistence, is as a result of an educational or learning experience that brings about a change in prescribing habits (Koekemoer, 1987: 483).

Marketing communications are essentially a part of the marketing mix. The marketing mix defines the 4Ps of marketing and promotion is what marketing communication is all about. It is the message the organization is going to convey to the market. Marketing orientation requires that communications and promotional activities should generate value exchange processes between the company and its environment. It is a form of social communication that serves to satisfy needs through the market offer in the broad sense.

Pharma marketing communications include the activities of medical representatives and all other aspects of sales promotion such as journal and direct mail advertising, participation in conference exhibitions, the use of audiovisual materials, drug samples, gifts and hospitality for the medical profession and seminars.

The pharmaceutical promotion of prescription drugs is designed to influence and create a favorable attitude towards a particular brand of drug. The most important objective is to bring about a behavioral change in the doctor to prescribe the particular brand of the drug being promoted. The whole marketing mix, not just the promotional mix, must be orchestrated for maximum communication impact.

Due to high competition in the industry, aggressive marketing strategies have been adopted by different companies. In this respect, the promotion has become an important and useful tool to fight competition. The aggressive pharmaceutical promotion can pose an ethical threat to professionalism because such activities may influence the prescribing behavior of physicians without benefiting the patients.

The promotion mix consists of the following major marketing tools

The following list shows the various promotional tools used by the pharmaceutical companies. Various forms of promotional methods support and complement each other. Sales promotion helps the selling activity.

1) Personal selling

Pharmaceutical representatives who visit medical practitioners.

Face-to-face interaction with prospective purchasers for the purpose of making sales.

2) Advertising:

- Any paid form of non personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor.
- Advertising in medical journals, medical chronicles, and newspapers.
- Direct mail advertising to targeted medical practitioners.
- Direct-to-consumer advertising.
- Corporate advertising in national periodicals and television.
- Product advertising gifts bearing the brand name such as pens, writing pads.
- Advertising handouts and literature were given to a doctor at the end of the detailing.
- Product advertising banners and posters at CME meetings and medical conferences.

3) Sales promotion

- Extra cash discount or free units and competitions for retail chemists and stockists
- Short-term incentives for consumers to encourage the purchase of a product or service

4) Publicity

Media articles on certain innovative drugs such as Viagra

5) Public relations:

- Sponsorships of CME meetings.
- Professional services.
- Programs designed to promote and protect the company's image or its products.
- Company sponsored workshops and seminars.

6) Direct Marketing

Use of mail, telephone and other nonpersonal contact tools to communicate with or solicit a response from specific customers and prospects.

All promotional material must include a succinct statement about the indications, contraindications, precautions, side-effects, and dosage. Besides, it should conform to canons of good taste. All companies of the Organization of Pharmaceutical Producers of India (OPPI) have to follow IFPMA (International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturer Associations) code. IFPMA code sets standards for the ethical promotion that member companies must follow [IFPMA, 2012].

Need for pharmaceutical marketing communication:

Pharmaceuticals satisfy the most important human need, i.e. health. Due to this fact, patients expect to receive comprehensive, reliable and credible information about a given drug, its properties, application, dosage, effects, and possible side effects. Such information may be provided by a doctor, a pharmacist, a leaflet, drug packaging, and advertising.

When a company develops a new product, changes an old one, and wants to increase sales of an existing product, it must transmit its selling message to potential customers. Companies must also communicate with the present and potential stakeholders.

One of the main roles of pharmaceutical research companies is to provide information about their medicines to health care professionals. This interaction between pharmaceutical representatives and health care professionals is often referred to as "marketing and promotion." Without it, health care professionals would be less likely to have the latest, accurate information available regarding prescription medicines, which play an increasing role in effective health care. Direct communication between healthcare professionals and pharmaceutical research companies is a part of the companies' mission of developing medicines that patients use to live longer, healthier, and more productive lives. This communication enables pharmaceutical research companies to inform healthcare professionals about the benefits and risks of their products, provide scientific and educational information about their use, and obtain information and advice about their medicines through consultation with medical experts.

Pharmaceutical marketing and promotion create value to physicians by providing FDA-regulated educational and scientific information about new medicines. However, the marketing of new medicines by pharmaceutical companies is only one factor considered by physicians. This marketing does not exist in a vacuum, physicians' judgment and experience, many other sources of information, formularies

and other utilization management techniques also play a large role in determining what medicine a patient receives.

While pharmaceutical marketing is far from the sole source of information for physicians, it plays an important role in providing information about branded medicines and helps to balance other factors. The branded drug information dissemination continues until the decision makers, i.e. the physicians get initiated at the company level of expectations.

The manner in which this information is presented depends on the type of pharmaceuticals, with the general division into prescription drugs and OTC drugs (Over The Counter).

In the case of prescription drugs, the buyer (patient) does not independently decide on their purchase and the only place authorized to sell them is a retail pharmacy. The marketing communications message is addressed mainly to doctors and pharmacists, while the communication channels used are more personal in nature.

Promotional activities on the OTC drugs market are different, as the consumer purchases such drugs in the same way as FMCG fast moving consumer goods. The marketing communications strategies used are aimed at reaching the patient directly. The tools include the mass media and sales promotion incentives to buy more drugs or buy them more frequently.

Elements of the communication process in pharmaceutical marketing:

Communication is a complex, multidimensional notion.

Marketing communication is defined as a set of information (signals) sent by the company from various sources towards not only its own customers, but also towards other entities in its marketing environment (suppliers, intermediaries, competitors, opinion leaders etc.) and a set of information gathered on the market (data on consumer preferences and needs, economic development trends). [Wiktor J. 2001, p. 10-11].

In business literature, marketing communications as a notion often used interchangeably with promotion, despite the fact that these two are not identical.

The elements in the communication process include Message sender, Message receivers, Content of message and Communication channels.

Message sender:

- Drug manufacturer
- Medical representative
- Doctor/hospital
- Wholesaler
- Pharmacy
- State authorities
- In charge of healthcare institutions

Message receivers

- Doctor
- Patient

- Wholesaler
- Pharmacist
- Competitors
- Non-Pharmacy Outlets

The content of Message

- Drug Properties
- Application
- Dosage
- Activity
- Effects- Desired or Adverse

Communication channels:

- Personal (Doctor, Medical Representative, Pharmacist)
- Non-Personal (Television, Press, Radio, Internet, Posters)
- Mixed Channels

Factors determining pharmaceutical market communications:

- Type of needs to be satisfied
- Type of drug promoted
- Buyer habits and preferences
- Laws in force
- Market and product globalization processes
- Increasing competition
- New communication technologies

Promotional activities in the pharmaceutical market are regulated by specific laws in force. Pharmaceutical laws expressly define what medicinal product advertising is and which products may be advertised, as well as lists forms of information activities excluded from the definition of advertising. [Michalik M. Pilarczyk B. Mruk H. 2008, p. 211-212].

Apart from the legal regulations governing promotional activities, such activities are covered by the industry's codes of conduct, comprising a set of ethical standards. The globalization of the pharmaceutical markets also affects marketing communications in this respect.

Marketing communications play a number of crucial roles in an increasingly tough communication environment. An understanding of the communication process is important to ascertain the determinants of an effective communication (Kotler and Armstrong, 2001:518).

It is important that the message organization gives in one medium should tally with the message provided in another medium. For example, one should use the same logo on the organization's website as the one used in email messages. Similarly, the television messages should convey the same message as blogs and websites. In 'integrated communication' the messages to be conveyed through different mediums always should be the same.

Pull and push strategy

The marketers can choose either a *push* or a *pull* promotion strategy (Kotler and Armstrong, 2001: 531). The promotional mix targeting the middlemen is considered a push strategy and that which targets the end users is called a pull strategy (Etzel *et al*, 1997: 451). Personal selling and

sales promotion predominates a push strategy, whilst heavy advertising and sales promotion predominates a pull strategy (Etzel *et al*, 1997: 451). The legislation controlling prescription drugs restricts the pharmaceutical companies to operate and adopt only the “push” promotional strategy (promotion to healthcare professionals only), and not directly to the general public, the “pull” strategy (Reast and Carson, 2000: 397).

Direct and indirect marketing concept:

Prescription based drugs marketing in pharmaceutical marketing is an indirect marketing method because the decision maker, in this case, is the physician and actual buyer or customer is the patient. In indirect marketing method, pharmaceutical products are promoted through medical representatives, implementing company’s marketing strategies and policies into the market. Most of the drugs marketed on the prescription basis only are critical like Anti-Hypertensive, Antibiotics, Anti-epileptic, Anti-cancer, and Anti-HIV.

OTC (Over The Counter) drugs are covered under direct marketing since the customer has authority to purchase their brand of choice from the chemist’s shop. Direct marketing of OTC drugs requires media advertising. Directly marketed OTC drugs include Anti-cold preparations, Analgesic, and Antipyretics.

Role of Product Life Cycle in pharmaceutical marketing:

According to each stage of the product life cycle of each drug, it needs various types of marketing inputs to sustain or maintain a longer life of the product in the market.

Introductory phase:

In the introductory phase, the product is introduced into the market and needs a lot of efforts to get a prescription from a doctor. This phase demands a lot of inputs like product detailing, physician’s sample and reference prints etc. In this stage, product sale is very low and availability is at the retail chemist level only.

Growth phase:

Growth phase involves the actual sale of the product and the number of prescriptions should be increased. To achieve maximum sale needs constant reminders to doctors and attractive gifts and arranging symposia. All these together helps to maintain a top market position. Here fear of competitors to enter and snatch the sale is more, that was not at the introductory phase.

The maturity phase:

The maturity phase is the phase where the product achieves optimum sales in the marketplace and future growth is extremely low. All potential customers are tapped and demand reaches a plateau. Maintaining the maturity phase requires finer strategies that may lead to a price war. Competitors are always keeping a watch on this and implement strategies like product differentiation, innovative packing and modified communication strategy to capture some share of the market.

The decline phase:

The decline phase is the terminal point of the product lifecycle. To avoid the death of the product, the marketer needs to prolong the process of maturity phase. In this phase, product innovation and changes in marketing strategies related to continuous hammering help to avoid this phase.

Extending product life cycle:

For extending the product lifecycle one needs to find out new uses and new indications under the same therapeutic class. Hence niche marketing concept, i.e. entering in micro level marketing or geographically uncovered market, product modifications like oral to injection or oral to inhalation or changing pack size, offering new flavors and colorful packing are adopted.

Pharmaceutical Product:

The foremost element of the marketing mix is the product.

Some important definitions for a product are as follows.

"Anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that might satisfy a want or need" (Kotler, 1991);

A product may be a service, or an idea consisting of a collection of tangible and intangible attributes that satisfies consumers and is received in exchange for money or some other unit of value. (Zikmund and D'Amico, 1996).

In general marketing terms, a product can even be a feeling of satisfying a psychological need with no tangible benefit whatsoever. However, in pharmaceutical terms, a product will only be termed as one if it helps in curing a disease or at least help in curing or improving the condition of a patient.

Drugs are the chemical substances used for diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of a disease. They are prescribed either by using a generic name or brand name. Pharmaceutical products can be in the form of capsules, tablets, syrup, injection, ointment, inhalers and sprays. A tablet might be preferred for an adult patient, syrup for children, an injection when quick action required and an ointment for skin diseases or localized pain.

Need for medicines:

Medicines change the way our body works. Medicines help us to get better when we are unwell. Medicines are an integral part of health care and health care is unimaginable without medicines. We need medicines to prevent or cure illnesses. Medicines will prevent epidemics and treat diseases, thus saving lives and promoting health.

Medicines or drugs are chemicals or substances (other than food) for internal or external use, and which are:

- a) Used for or in the medical diagnosis, cure/treatment, mitigation or prevention of any disease or disorder in human beings or animals.
- b) Intended to affect the structure or function of the human body or intended to be used for the destruction of vermin or insects which cause disease in human beings or animals.

Certain devices intended for internal or external use in the diagnosis, treatment, mitigation or prevention of disease or disorder in human beings or animals, are also categorized as drugs as per the law in India, such as diagnostic medicines, disposable syringes and needles, catheters, and I.V. infusion sets.

Since the word “drug” may sound like a misnomer and people may believe them to be substances used for illicit purposes, the WHO (World Health Organization) now prefers to use the word “Medicine”. These refer to legal drugs.

Core values and augmented values:

Product components can be distinguished in core values and augmented values. In pharmaceutical marketing, the product is identified as a branded medicine. In the case of drugs, except for the brand name, there should be no difference between branded drugs and generic drugs in both core values and augmented values.

A core value includes Efficacy, Safety, Tolerability, Speed of action, Quality and Cost.

Augmented values include Ease of use, Temperature stability, Shelf life, Patient education Physician Information, Patient association support, Mail delivery, Company Website, and Branding.

Classification of drugs:

The pharmaceutical industry comprises of four major branches

- 1) Ethical or Prescription-based
- 2) Generics
- 3) Over The Counter (OTC)
- 4) Surgical and Medical Instruments

Of these, the most important to study from a marketing perspective is Prescription-based and Branded Generics branch because of its high contribution and uniqueness in marketing methods.

Pharmaceutical products can be classified into two main categories:

- 1) Prescription products
- 2) OTC products

The criterion for this division is whether a product is marketed to the medical professionals or directly to the consumers. Drugs approved for marketing by FDA are categorized according to the manner in which they may be legally obtained by the patient.

What is a prescription?

A prescription is an important legal document. It is an order for medication, issued by a qualified physician, dentist, veterinary doctor, or a licensed medical practitioner, to a patient. The pharmacy honors the prescription by dispensing the medicines written on it to the patient.

Non prescription or Over the counter Drugs (OTC):

Drugs deemed to be safe enough for use by a layman in the self-treatment of simple conditions for which competent medical care is not generally sought. OTC Drugs are sold

over the counter without a prescription from a doctor. These drugs are sold directly to the consumers. They are used to treat minor ailments. Directly marketed OTC drugs includes Anti-cold preparations, Analgesic, and Antipyretics. OTC drugs are covered under direct marketing since the customer has authority to purchase their brand of choice from the chemist's shop. Direct marketing of OTC drugs requires media advertising.

Prescription Drugs:

Prescription Drugs are the drugs that are obtained only by a physician's prescription. These are the licensed medicines regulated by the legislation. Chemist can't sell these to patients without a doctor's prescription. Generally, "Rx" is often used as a short form for prescription drugs. Prescription drugs that are considered useful only after expert diagnosis or too dangerous for use in self-medication are made available only on the prescription of a licensed medical practitioner. Most of the drugs marketed on the prescription basis only are critical such as Anti-Hypertensive, Antibiotics, Anti-epileptic, Anti-cancer, and Anti-HIV.

Worldwide, besides the allopathic or modern system of medicines, there are a wide variety of systems of medicines often referred to as traditional or alternative or complementary systems. In India, various systems of medicine are practiced, and medicines of various systems are available.

The following are the recognized systems of medicine in India:

Allopathic (modern medicine), Ayurvedic, Siddha, Unani and Homoeopathy. Most of these can usually be distinguished easily by looking at the label.

There are around 80,000 brands of various drugs available in the Indian market. On the other hand, the WHO lists a little over 270 drugs which can take care of an overwhelming majority (over 95%) of the health problems of a country. A majority of the estimated 80,000 products in the market are either hazardous or irrational or useless.

Interdependence and common aim of the drug industry and the medical profession:

The drug industry, the medical profession, and the patient have a unique relationship. The industry makes products which it cannot sell to the patient (consumer) directly. On the other hand, the medical profession cannot treat the patient without drugs produced by the industry. Thus the industry and medical profession are interdependent with a common aim. One should be able to evaluate them according to the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, patient autonomy, and justice. The industry must provide drugs to the patient, not manufacture drugs that have harmful effects. It must make reasonable profits and to help in the research of new drugs. The primary objective of this joint effort is to alleviate pain and suffering. The secondary objective is to be rewarded for this effort. The drug industry expects a profit and the physician expects a suitable reward. There is nothing improper in these objectives.

Role of Physicians (Doctors) in pharmaceutical marketing:

A physician, medical practitioner or medical doctor is a person who practices medicine and is concerned with maintaining or restoring human health through the study, diagnosis, and treatment of disease and injury. This is accomplished through a detailed knowledge of anatomy, physiology, diseases and treatment and its applied practice the art or craft of medicine.

The physician is the crucial link between the drug manufacturer and the patients. A physician decides which drug molecule, what brand and how long to be consumed by the consumer as patients possess less scientific and clinical knowledge, i.e. pharmacology of disease, pharmacokinetics, dynamics of the drug and therapeutics.

The pharmaceutical market is unique in the importance of the influencer a non purchaser on the purchasing habits of the ultimate customer. The prescription drug market is only one of its kind because the ultimate users of the drugs have little role in the ethical selection of drugs. The medical practitioners can also be viewed as "businesses" since the patients are the final consumers of the medications (products) and the prescribing doctors are the "middlemen".

Doctor as a surrogate consumer and buyer:

Surrogates are a type of marketing intermediary who helps the actual consumers in purchase decisions. The surrogate is professional or agent who is retained by a consumer to guide, direct, and or transact marketplace activities on behalf of a consumer. Consumers use surrogates because they may not have the time, inclination, or expertise to go through information search and decision making. The surrogate is compensated for this involvement.

Characteristics of surrogate buying:

- 1) Formal relationship of occupation-related status
- 2) Information exchange in the form of formal instructions and advice
- 3) They are hired and paid for the services
- 4) Search and screening of alternatives are more rigorous
- 5) May not have used the end products or services for their personal consumptions
- 6) Specialized in a product or service category

In a normal business, there will be many participants in the buying decision-making process. These participants include: the users of the product, the influencers who often provide information for the evaluation, the deciders who approve the final purchase, the actual buyers of the product, and the gatekeepers who control the access of information and/or the salesperson to the others (Kotler and Armstrong, 2001:219).

In the case of the medical practitioners, they have unique and often multiple roles in the buying-decision of pharmaceutical products (Piu and Nel, 1988). The various roles of a medical practitioner as identified by Piu and Nel (1988) are, the role of a user (when purchasing syringes and needles for the process of administering injections), the role of an influencer (when advising the patient on over-the-counter /non-prescription medication), the role of a buyer (when purchasing the medication for injection purposes), the

role of a decider (when deciding which medication to prescribe or dispense), and the role of a gatekeeper (access to and control of important information).

The prescription of a drug is an event in which the doctor is the decision maker for the ultimate user, the patient. The understanding of these various roles played by the medical practitioner is of paramount importance to the marketers of prescription drugs.

Categorization of doctors:

Categorization of doctors is based on their potentiality, history and how to approach them.

Not all doctors are visited by the representatives at the same frequency. Doctors with high patient load are always preferred by the representatives. Medical representatives categorized doctors based on their 'potentiality', determined by the number of patients visiting a doctor on any given day, which is a function of prescriptions that can be generated.

'Loyalty' of the doctors towards a company and brand, inclination to prescribe drugs of a particular company are also important factors for determining the frequency of representative visits. During busy hours, the representatives would drop in to exchange social greetings with the doctors as an effective brand reminder which could result in a prescription soon after.

MCI guidelines

MCI (Medical Council of India) has introduced its new code of conduct for doctors for taking gifts, taking the sponsorship for attending seminars and conference in India or abroad from any pharmaceutical company.

Product chain and Prescription chain process:

Prescribing of medication usually ends the consultation process. When a patient consults a doctor, he/she expects the doctor to do something about his/her problem. In most cases, this involves the prescribing of medication. The patients, therefore, expect some tangible benefits from the doctor's service. At the end of the consultation, the doctor is required to fulfil the patient's expectations of taking the necessary steps to alleviate the patient's symptoms.

The public is becoming more knowledgeable about pharmaceutical drugs and diseases, which in turn have increased their expectations of the treatment by their doctors (Reekie and Weber, 1979: 42).

The Product chain

This starts with the selection of molecules and ends in the hands of the patient. This chain is somehow intensive as it starts from the selection of molecules, then the molecules are critically screened, after the screening of molecules the source of raw material is identified then the pilot batch manufacturing process starts and clinical trials are worked out. Once the pilot batch is successful, then it starts with the commercialization of the drug. At this stage, promotional and pricing strategies are finalized and the drug goes to distribution channels and then it reaches the retailers. After the patient's diagnosis by the doctor, patient purchases that drug from the retailer.

The Prescription chain

Prescription chain process starts with the knowledge given to doctors by pharmaceutical company's medical representatives. They give the material in various ways such as; through in-clinical promotional activities and out-clinical promotional efforts. Then the doctor if is satisfied prescribes the medicine to the patient and patient purchase that medicine. Both product chain and prescription chain are linked to the core-marketing objective.

The significant role of Medical Representatives in pharmaceutical marketing:

People who see the physician, dentist, pharmacist, and nurses with the purpose of influencing these healthcare professionals to buy, recommend, or prescribe a product. They are called as Medical Representatives (MR) / Pharmaceutical Sales representatives (PSR) / Pharmaceutical Company Representatives (PCR).

Medical rep is the vital communication link between the drug manufacturer and the medical professional. He is the most reliable source of feedback on what is happening to a company's product in the competitive market, the customer's perception, and sales strategies. Medical representative act as a link between a company, stockiest and customers and ensures the smooth working of the entire network.

Medical representatives play the active role in the physical distribution of the drug across the channels along with the information dissemination like inventory control, merchandise delivery, the return of goods, new product launches, and support to the pharmacy. The medical representative is the pharmaceutical missionary salesperson. Health care professionals see the medical representatives with the tacit understanding that these people are being sent to influence them to use, recommend and prescribe their products.

According to Koekmoer (1987), the basic objectives of the medical representatives are to change the prescribing doctor's attitude to the pharmaceutical drug being promoted or to reinforce the existing favorable attitude. "The medical representative is to the ethical product what television and radio are to the consumer product" (Koekemoer, 1987: 467).

The main promotional thrust of the pharmaceutical industry is through its medical representatives. The meeting with a doctor and the rep leave little to chance. Reps profoundly affect the way a doctor prescribes. They have been aptly described as "stealth bombers" of medicine. Their bottom line is "prescribe my drug".

Medical Representatives are invariably polite and reasonably knowledgeable. Before meeting a doctor they study the doctor's prescribing habits on the basis of information gathered from local pharmacists and a preview of patients' prescriptions. They also get to know something about the doctor's likes and hobbies, family life and social interests and generally cultivate them.

The medical representative is the key source to implement marketing strategies for its most important customer i.e. the

doctor. The fieldwork strategy includes regular visits to the doctor as a brand reminder and convinces him to prescribe all promoted products. It has been estimated that it takes between one and two years before a practitioner can be prevailed upon to change practice.

The large pharmaceutical market is principally driven by the prescriptions of physicians. As such, the success of the pharmaceutical companies depends on the effectiveness and efficiency of their medical representatives. As most of the doctor's emphases on the usefulness of regular visits, the medical representative should get updated information, scientific data and technological changes about the product.

Medical representatives are mainly science graduates, recruited through a competitive process. After recruitment, they went through a structured training program which teaches, besides the technical details of relevant products and also included how to observe and assess doctors' personalities and preferences. They gather doctors' personal information such as family and lifestyle details, and personal interests which are termed as "history taking" by the medical representatives.

The pharmaceutical company's in-house training department provides 2-4 weeks training on the basic information which forms the bedrock of facts on which the detailing rests. A trained medical representative will be more effective with apt industry and clinical knowledge and it will be in-turn leads to increased access and offer greater value to the busy physician. One of the key reasons why physicians see the medical representatives is to obtain the technical knowledge of the prescription drugs.

The medical representatives are trained to act as a tool to achieve targeted market share through building the personal relationship with the physicians and catering to their needs and demands, expressed or otherwise, and fulfil their personal targets as part of gaining higher market share for the companies they represent. Some companies are hiring junior reps whose tasks largely involve dropping samples and maintaining contacts, while leaving the significant interaction with higher level reps.

Medical representatives play a critical role in carrying out the company's program, building up relationships with individual doctors, and also negotiating with chemists.

Representative's inability to meet doctors' needs:

Low product differentiation, stiff competition, and high market potential have led pharma companies to employ vast armies of field staff, often overlooking necessary qualification and expertise. Companies admit to hiring candidates from non-science backgrounds to meet their workforce requirements. *Currently, only 1/6th of all field personnel are post-graduates in pharmacy and also hold marketing degrees.* As therapies grow more complex and drugs become more niche, a large group of sales personnel is destined to fail. Poor adoption of digital solutions by their employers has also left the field staff get disappointed. Studies reveal that a majority of Representatives in India are not equipped with CRM systems, meeting schedules, digital medical content or closed-loop marketing solutions.

Unlike Certified Medical Representatives (CMR) Institute the US, there is hardly any institute in Indian context which provides formal training and certification to the medical representatives. Some of the top pharma players in India employ a field force of around 5000 and reserve close to 20% of their total outlay on hiring and training them. A whopping 60% of the total promotional budget is allocated to field force activities. In India, an estimated 1,40,000 medical representatives are given employment by the pharma industry.

There are some doctors who do not accept the concept of medical representative promoting drugs to qualified doctors. According to them the term "medical representative" is a misnomer. According to them medical representatives are non-medical persons. They do not have any qualification in medicine and do not represent a medical person or association. They are simply paid employees of a pharmaceutical company, employed by the company to induce doctors by whatever means legal or illegal, to prescribe the company's products and thereby increase the profits of the company. It is totally wrong that the so-called medical representatives impart medical knowledge to doctors. It is a shame that doctors should accord the status of teachers to salesmen. Doctors need to learn medicine from medical teachers, books, and journals, aided judiciously by the internet.

It can be concluded that medical reps are the major source of information to a majority of doctors and pharmacists. Medical reps have a role in helping practitioners to know about the drugs available in the market and their costs. It is the practitioner's duty to use reps while taking care not to be unduly influenced by their sales pitch.

Direct marketing to physicians:

Direct marketing to physicians is one of the most important marketing approaches used by the pharmaceutical industry in all the countries. Reps armed with gifts such as pens, cups, and samples meet with physicians and enjoy a high rate of success convincing physicians to prescribe their products. It is viewed as a constructive interchange between the physician and pharmaceutical company.

Personal selling

Personal selling can be defined as "the process of person-to-person communication between a salesperson and a prospective customer, in which the former learns about the customer's needs and seeks to satisfy those needs by offering the customer the opportunity to buy something of value, such as a good or service." The term may also be used to describe a situation where a company uses its sales force as one of the main ways to communicate with customers.

"Given the nature of pharmaceutical products, personal communication with prescribers is a key success factor in the industry" (Corstjens, 1991: 218). Corstjens (1991) further states that together with the quality of the pharmaceutical drugs, the strength of the pharmaceutical company's sales force is the most critical factor for successful product penetration and profitability.

Personal selling allows the pharmaceutical representative to vary the content of the message to different doctors as compared to the preset message conveyed by other promotional tools. One to one visits from the representatives has been proven to be the most effective way to promote drugs to physicians because they can identify the main motivators and decision-making styles of the person they are selling to and adapt to their approach accordingly.

"I automatically develop a soft corner for the representatives who visit me regularly. Then I try to prescribe 2 or 3 of his products. I think most of the doctors feel the same way."— A specialist doctor.

Resistance to "irresponsible" marketing practices is growing, and in May 2007, the member governments of the World Health Organization passed a resolution to enact or enforce legislation banning the "inaccurate, misleading or unethical promotion of medicines".

Detailing - the information and brand reminder:

Medical representatives have been the main channel for transmitting marketing information through "detailing" to physicians for the past 50 years, accounting for 60% of all sales and marketing expenditures.

The detailing is singularly the most important task that a representative has to perform. Ethically speaking, effective detailing with the help of a proper visual aid is the only way to increase prescription generation.

During the detailing process, the sales reps use various detailing and visual aids showing the superior benefits, greater efficacy, improved cost-effectiveness, the better safety of their brand of the drug as compared to the competitors' products, i.e. the sales reps emphasize the USP's. The detailing aids themselves can vary from a simple pamphlet to the sophisticated presentation on Digital Video Disc (DVD) player.

At the conclusion of the detailing process, sales reps will offer a small product-advertising gift such as a ball-point pen inscribed with the brand name. It is a common practice to offer sufficient samples of the drug along with an advertising pamphlet to the doctor.

The detailing is still a very important communication tool in many developing nations. In China, for example, nearly three-quarters of the information doctors receive about new medicines comes from meetings with sales representatives and conferences. It is a fact that the quality of the drug information given to Indian doctors is poorer than that given to our western counterparts. While various studies have established the importance and quality of promotional information made available to doctors in India, little has been written on promotional practices as a whole.

Glaxo introduced the concept of flip charts in 1972 and the company doubled its sales in one year. Some representatives stated that whereas the earlier doctors would receive "detail card" containing comprehensive information on the drug's benefits and potential adverse effects, they are now showing

a flip chart which is not given to the doctor even if asked for. The books and flip charts are confidential and every two-three months they are recalled by the company and destroyed.

Some representatives noted that often there were inconsistencies between what they had been told to tell the doctor, what was written in the flip charts and what was in the detailed literature. Representatives said they received cursory training in drug information; the flip chart was their main presentation aid.

Most of the doctors believe that they received information on new drugs primarily through visits by representatives who use flip charts for this purpose. "These flipcharts show the benefits of their drugs over the drugs of other companies. They also provide results of studies carried out by them on the drug's efficacy." According to some doctors, representatives rarely mentioned drug interactions and adverse reactions but they were otherwise generally satisfied with the information provided and accepted the representative's role. "Everything is told in a precise way... medical representatives are well versed with their products and quite capable of answering the doctor's questions."

Studies show that the limits placed on the flow of relevant medical information from any channel will affect physician decision-making unless that physician can easily replace that lost information through another channel. Drug sales representatives provide timely, convenient and regulated clinical information used by physicians and nurses.

Supporting the need for free flow of information to the medical profession, the US Supreme Court recently ruled in a 6/3 majority judgment that a Vermont law that limits detailing to physicians as unconstitutional, as it is restricting the distribution of prescriber information from pharmaceutical companies and sales representatives to the doctors. The Court's majority opinion also noted: "If pharmaceutical marketing affects treatment decisions, it does so because doctors find it persuasive. Indeed the record demonstrates that some Vermont doctor's view targeted detailing based on prescriber-identifying information as "very helpful" because it allows detailers to shape their messages to each doctor's practice."

Advertisement and pharmaceutical industry:

There is an old advertising joke "I know my advertising works, I don't know which half."

The word 'advertise' is derived from the Latin word '*advertere*' which means 'to turn towards'. Most of the leading drug companies now spend more money on marketing than on research and development. Though the contemporary pharmaceutical marketing practices are sometimes believed to be a modern phenomenon, they are in fact a direct continuation of 19th century patent medicine advertising. "Nostrum-mongers" were the leading spenders and foremost originators of the printed advertising technique. The Nostrum sellers pioneered the use of trademarks and distinctive packaging, the "pull" or demand-stimulation strategies.

Advertising is generally regarded as a legitimate means of fostering the competition that drives a free market economic system. The moral justification is that the consumers will get the benefit. Consumers are presumed to benefit from advertising because it is aimed to broaden their choice and maximize their chances of getting the most value for their money. Businesses that satisfy consumers will prosper at the expense of those that do not.

Yet, advertisements by their very nature contain an element of potential deception. Virtually any advertisement is capable of misleading. No business enterprise would spend money unless it is sure of getting something in return. If the advertising does not influence, a lot of people are wasting a lot of money and time.

WHO has resolved: "The advertisement of pharmaceutical products should be truthful. There should not be any wrong statement regarding its contents and their percentage. It should provide full details regarding the actions and uses, proprietary name as well as the generic name, dosage form, mode of administration, side effects and treatment of toxic effects, precautions and contraindications. The above statements should be truthful, scientifically correct and proved."

The purpose of advertising in the ethical pharmaceutical market is the same as that for any other product, but there are many restrictions on it. A customer (patient) cannot use a medicine without a proper prescription of a physician. The majority of pharmaceutical products are ethical products and their direct advertisement is prohibited according to the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act 1954 and 1955. However, general and home remedies products such as pain balm, inhalers, antiseptic creams, and other products which do not require a prescription for their purchase hence can be advertised by direct popular advertisement media.

Branding:

A brand is defined as any name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller and to differentiate them from those of the competition (Kotler, 1980).

A brand is characterized by a unique name, visual mark, trademark, and copyright that are combined to confer a distinguished appearance and personality to a product. Furthermore, through a consistent, painstaking, and expensive branding effort, the brand is made to "contain" a distinct informational content that clearly identifies the product attributes, benefits, values, and users. The competitive strength of a brand is measured by its brand equity, a term that refers to awareness, acceptability, loyalty, preference, price premium, and unit volume.

As branding is the key to the consumer goods' positioning, it is equally applicable to pharmaceutical products and it can really provide added value to the consumer. A pharmaceutical branding policy can have direct benefits to the prescriber, patient, payer, and manufacturer of the product.

Direct-to-consumer (DTC)

Direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising is the other big weapon in pharma marketing artillery. Only two countries the US and New Zealand currently allow companies to market their medicines directly to consumers.

Pharma industries spending on DTC advertising accounts for about US\$5 billion, which is 14% of its total marketing budget. But DTC failed to deliver all that the industry expected. In January 2008, the US House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce initiated an investigation into the misleading and deceptive advertising of medicines, after several flagrant cases of abuse of the rules.

Free samples

Free samples of the products are very powerful promotional tools. Most of the doctors who receive samples from representatives will give them to their patients. When free samples eventually run out and when the prescription needs to be written, often doctors write the prescriptions for the same drug even though they might have actually considered a different drug.

Gifts as reminders

Gifts have become a central part of the drug company's marketing strategy, so integral to the drug rep-physician relationship that the gifts are often not considered as gifts. In a review of all the studies that had been published about the impact of drug company gifts on physician behavior, Dr. Ashley Wazana found that the practice is pervasive and highly effective.

The pharmaceutical companies used two approaches for offering gifts. In the proactive approach, some inexpensive gifts were given to the doctors each month along with free samples of drugs during regular promotional visits of the representatives. Brand names were usually inscribed on these gifts so that it worked as reminders for the doctors. The other approach involved offering inducements based on doctors' demands, i.e. "whatever she/he wants as gifts." This culture of inducement has even been extended to the family members of doctors, especially the younger members.

The doctor-drug company relationship is cultivated through tokens such as brand reminders, as well as through gifts which are more obviously incentives to prescribe. Medical representatives gave gifts to doctors to persuade them to prescribe their company's drugs, and many doctors seem to accept these incentives. Gifts seem to have become more expensive over the years, and more clearly incentives than tokens. Gifts are commonly used tools in marketing, from stationeries to household items to overseas trips to attend conferences, to motivate physicians to write prescriptions. Acceptance of these gifts, especially the expensive ones, obliges them to return a favor by changing established prescription norms and increasing sales.

Representatives were required to give small gifts to doctors, to keep their brand in the doctor's memory. These "brand reminders" varied from desktop items to minor medical equipment, including prescription pads. It was also reported that some companies employed marketing professionals to

build a personal rapport with the doctor by remembering occasions such as birthdays. Pharmaceutical companies did not differentiate between qualified and unqualified physicians in their promotional practices.

Both doctors and medical representatives said that brand reminders were increasingly being replaced by gifts of greater value than stationery. These range from jewelry to electronic items and even automobiles. Most doctors had no objection to receiving "brand reminders" though these are meant to influence the doctor's prescribing practice. A number of doctors felt that expensive gifts were acceptable. Interestingly, no physician believed that his judgment was influenced by incentives; however, all reported that other colleagues had succumbed to the pressure of incentives; a phenomenon termed the "illusion of unique invulnerability"

The type, quantity, and quality of the inducements offered to the physicians depend upon his/her capacity to produce prescriptions. The physicians, willingly or unwillingly, become part of the system with few exceptions. Though the pharmaceutical companies initiate the unethical marketing practice, physicians are responsible for its continuation. The manufacturers stated that "me too" drugs, or variations of existing drugs, required aggressive promotion while innovative drugs were promoted on the basis of their scientific importance. They stated that doctors were more likely to demand incentives for prescribing the former.

Katz et al remark that food, flattery, and friendship are powerful tools of persuasion, more so when they are combined.

e-pharma marketing and modern forms of marketing communications:

Changes in the doctors buying behavior in the pharmaceutical market make it necessary to use new forms of marketing communications. The changing role of medical representatives and legal regulations aimed at limiting direct contacts between representatives and doctors have generated growing interest in e-marketing techniques as a tool in supporting both marketing communications and to gain market share in the prescription drugs market.

Today's doctors have a plethora of online resources to learn about new drugs. *In the e-Pharma Physicians Annual Study*, 51% of doctors said that they are already aware of the drug information that representatives provide. They now expect representatives to go beyond the basics and deliver higher value to their practice.

Pharma marketing must evolve into a "fish where the fish are" mentality in order to survive. Digital communications are not just a channel; it's an entirely different way of doing business, influencing everything from gaining strategic insights to tactical execution. A coordinated approach is essential, and digital is the connecting point with all stakeholders. There is a need to balance the paid, owned, and earned digital media to be truly effective. The object is to target the audiences with key messages at every touch point. The ID model is also an example of how pharma marketers are embracing new ways of engaging physicians on their terms.

Like all other consumers, physicians are also changing their media habits and taking advantage of technology through mobile devices and social media, forcing marketers and sales reps alike to alter promotion strategies. Sales reps have been the main channel for transmitting marketing information through “detailing” to physicians for the past 50 years, accounting for 60 percent of all sales and marketing expenditures. However, the number of doctors willing to see reps has declined about 20 percent since 2008, according to ZS Associates, a consulting firm that maintains a database tracking physician meetings with reps.

As the money spent on face-to-face promotion is increasingly disproportionate to the return on investment, interest in the potential of e-detailing continues to grow. First introduced in the early 90’s and pioneered by pharma giant such as Merck, digital or virtual detailing is now increasingly sophisticated, effective and embraced.

As a cost-effective and growth- intensive strategy, e-detailing will eventually evolve to include more interactive features such as videos, web chats, and information from key opinion leaders, helping to further advance the changing landscape of pharma sales and marketing. Instinctive Data (ID) is a new innovative platform that grants pharma marketers unprecedented access to a health care provider’s practice while aiming to improve healthcare providers education, based on specialty and patient population utilizing real-time patient-level data.

Time is everyone’s most valuable resource and it’s especially true for today’s healthcare providers. Tens of thousands of healthcare providers across all specialties utilize MD On-Line (MDOL) daily to transact their business. Through ID, a feature located on the provider’s MDOL web portal, pharma companies are able to integrate sponsored, sophisticated, and targeted communications seamlessly into the healthcare provider’s daily workflow. The information delivered is valuable, meaningful and simple to share. Tools such as “Forward to a Friend” encourage the health care provider to email interesting and relevant content to colleagues with the click of a button, helping to turn paid media into earned through word-of-mouth and possible online buzz.

Additional features such as “Search for Patients” and “Print a Reminder for Patient’s Chart” allow the health care providers to take immediate action with their patient population to drive behavior change. These tools help to trigger the health care provider to discuss key information with patients during visits, further promoting the earned media potential of ID. These types of marketing solutions not only seek to improve the quality of care and enhance the doctor-to-patient relationship but also hold the potential to ultimately change the health care provider’s perception of the pharma industry for the better.

The medical representatives themselves are an unhappy lot, as the representatives are living in uncertain times, fearing professional redundancy and irrelevance. *Digitization is a medical representative’s friend, not foe!* In reality, digitization helps take their personal relationship with doctors to the next level by equipping them with analytical

insights leading to more fulfilling interactions. Neutral digital platforms like *Docplexus* helps pharma companies to “listen” doctors with unbiased opinions and maintain a continuous engagement. However, Indegene’s Digital Savvy Healthcare Sales Rep 2017 Report notes that the Indian pharma industry is way behind its western counterparts in adopting digital solutions.

Some pharma marketers mistakenly equate digitizing with e-detailing. e- detailing is just one element of a broader, more comprehensive digital strategy. Digital should become a mindset across functions and hierarchies for it to truly benefit pharma-physician engagement. Docplexus’ digital marketing solutions such as product launches, webinars, and continuing medical education programs have added to the efforts of its clients’ field force.

While the medical community has grown comfortable with digital tools, many pharma companies are *yet* to come up with a comprehensive digital plan that also integrates with field force activities. This has left doctors extremely dissatisfied.

The role of e-detailing as a communication tool in the promotion mix:

Over the past few years, the notion of e-pharma marketing has emerged, describing essentially virtual communications on the Internet. e- detailing is a flexible tool that provides unlimited opportunities for creating the promotional message and at a relatively low cost makes it possible to reach a wide audience of doctors with an interesting and attractive message.

The introduction of e-detailing into the promotion mix used by pharmaceutical companies means using an attractive form of communication that enables its users to shape the marketing message in a variety of ways and affect most of the senses and emotions, with the aid of flash animations, 3D presentations or video webcasts. The involvement of doctors in the message and interaction makes communication more effective.

e- detailing is a communication process using interactive multimedia presentations posted online to emphasize the properties and advantages of a given pharmaceutical product. Such a presentation should cause doctors to change their opinions and decisions regarding the prescription of specific medications. This is possible due to the simultaneous use of interactive promotional activities (presenting marketing and substantive content) and access to analytical data (observing a given doctor’s behavior and quickly modifying the communication strategy). At the drug introduction stage, it can serve as a tool for raising awareness among doctors, at the product growth and maturity stage it can reinforce the traditional promotional tools and increase market penetration.

The popularity of the e-detailing tool is growing along with the growing interest of doctors in gaining access to medical information online. Research has demonstrated that around 88% of doctors are interested in such access, while of those approximately 47% are open to the idea of e detailing,

whereas around 50% believe that the effectiveness of this form of promotion hangs on combining it with traditional visits by medical representatives. [www.medscape.com 2007].

e-detailing is largely based on the idea of Closed Loop Marketing and places particular emphasis on investigating the doctor's needs and expectations and on interaction, i.e. the involvement of the doctor in the message presented. CLM has already gained popularity abroad.

Factors contributing to the important role of e-detailing;

The growing importance of the internet in marketing communications in the pharmaceutical market can be attributed to the following factors:

- The search for alternative forms of communication
- Increasingly restrictive laws governing pharmaceutical advertising
- Expanding range of various online promotional activities
- Greater credibility of online advertising as compared to other forms
- Growing specialization of marketing agencies

e-pharma marketing usually includes the following tools:

- Websites (including thematic portals, medical portals, product cards)
- Databases (medical registers)
- e-mailing (enabling the application of viral marketing techniques)
- e-knowledge (e-learning, e-CME)
- Online PR (press media on the Internet, word of mouth marketing)
- e-communities (web 2.0, web 3.0)
- Advergaming
- Video-conferences
- SEM (Search Engine Marketing)
- SEO (Search Engine Optimization)
- e-detailing
- CLM (Closed Loop Marketing)

Advantages of the e- detailing:

- The opportunity to customize the message during the session
- The chance to learn about the product and the treatment at the time chosen by a doctor and convenient (i.e. on the doctor's terms)
- Lower costs of reaching the audience as compared to other marketing communication activities
- Learning more about the doctors and pharmacists and their preferences
- Increasing the quality and attractiveness of visits by medical representatives

e- detailing presentations may take the form of:

- Multimedia presentation
- Video presentation
- Static presentation with interactive elements

e- pharma marketing activities:

New forms of communication have also been influenced by the development of the broadband Internet, which provides

advertisers with an opportunity to use interesting audiovisual effects in their messages [Taranko T. 2010, p. 103]. Owing to technological progress it is now possible to use mobile devices in marketing communications, including mobile phones. Mobile marketing is the fundamental feature of modern communications, enabling interaction with the receiver, boosting customer loyalty and building social networks around the brand. The use of cutting-edge technologies in marketing communications in the pharmaceutical market is more common in the prescription drugs segment.

On one hand, e-pharma marketing activities reinforce face-to-face meetings with medical representatives, but on the other gradually make such meetings obsolete, due to the fact that:

- They are becoming more easily accessible
- They are gaining wider acceptance among the medical and pharmaceutical community
- They are recognized by the corporate and anti-corruption policies of pharmaceutical companies
- They do not take up the doctors' working hours

Websites for e-pharma marketing:

The creation of web communities is of particular significance for marketing communications. General Websites, including drug manufacturer websites and news portals, are important universal e-pharma marketing tools i.e. addressed both to doctors and pharmacists, as well as patients. They generate a relatively large volume of traffic by visitors searching for information or advice. Patients use the internet to find a solution to their problem, i.e. information about a given illness, available treatments, dietary advice, rather than specific pharmaceuticals or information on where such pharmaceuticals may be purchased.

Websites offer a platform for promotional activities, using non-standard promotional methods, which make the message more attractive. These websites are divided into general medical portals. (e.g. Eskulap, Medycyna Praktyczna, Lekarze.com, Res Medica, MedSerwis) and specialist portals devoted to specific medical conditions and treatments

(www.gastrologia.pl, www.malaria.com.pl, www.ziołolecznictwo.pl, www.antybiotyki.pl). Doctors are becoming more and more active internet users, creating their own virtual communities and becoming involved in their operation.

Continuing Medical Education (CME)

In India, there is no legal requirement for continuing medical education or periodic recertification. Medical representatives are often the doctor's only source of information on the latest developments in therapeutics.

Continuing Medical Education is a promotional practice to finance educational programs and conferences. Individual doctors' travel, stay and conference fees were also paid for by drug companies. Most doctors had no objection to such support and said they could not otherwise afford these meetings that they described as informative. Drug companies state that funding medical conferences had become less cost-effective since conferences had moved out

of academic college auditoria to five-star hotels. Things have got to such a stage now with doctors actually demanding sponsorship from companies.

Use of Public Relation

Overuse of personal selling in pharmaceuticals via medical representatives and limitations on advertising pharmaceutical products presents an opportunity to explore the role of and exploit the Public Relations function in the pharmaceutical industry. Very few pharmaceutical marketers in India use public relations as a marketing tool. Some years ago, Cipla was forced to make use of Public Relation tools when its major communication medium, medical representatives turned uncooperative. This helped Cipla in building the one-to-one relationship with its customers.

Place of operations in pharma marketing:

In marketing the word place means the geographical area of marketing operations and distribution activity related goods and services to meet needs and wants of end users. It is a process of transfer of goods from the manufacturer to the consumer.

The wholesalers and the retailers form the backbone of the drug distribution system in India. Pharmacies are key stakeholders who could influence drug access by controlling the availability of the product in the retail market.

In recent years, the role of the pharmacist has turned from that of a dispenser to that of an influencer and an active participant in decision making during drug therapy. The report of WHO in 1997 highlighted new roles of the pharmacist as “as a caregiver, manager, decision maker, leader, communicator, lifelong learner, and teacher”. Over the years, the pharmacist’s role has expanded to include opinion giving and consultations.

Given this role, pharmacists have become important targets for marketing tools of pharmaceutical firms. Chemists are major players in this system, providing drug information directly to patients. Many people bypass doctors altogether and obtain scheduled drugs directly from chemists without a prescription.

Services such as bonus offers, cash discounts, timely delivery, proper order booking, and on-time claim settlement were found to be the popularly adopted trade sales promotional practices by the pharmaceutical companies across India.

The pharmaceutical distribution channel is indirect with three channel members i.e. Depot/C&F, stockiest and chemist. Pharmaceutical companies appoint one company depot or C&F agent in each state and authorized stockist in each district. Company Depot/C&F sends stocks to authorized stockist as per the requirement.

Retail chemists buy medicines on the daily or weekly basis from authorized stockiest as per demand. Patients visit chemists for buying medicines either prescribed by a doctor or advertised in the media.

The patient is the end customer and the doctor is a direct customer of any pharmaceutical company. For a doctor-patient is more important so he wants an effective supply chain management from the prescribed company. For pharmaceutical companies their customer is the doctor and is more important, that’s why they emphasize more on supply chain management. Ultimately end customer the patient is benefited out of this.

Price of medicines

Price is the most sensitive factor in the pharma industry as it deals with life and death. The price of the drug is an important consideration in the choice of prescription drugs. The patient initiates the demand for the medication. This demand is relatively price inelastic as the welfare of the patients is the most important consideration instead of the price of the medication. The patients do not automatically use more of the medication because it is cheaper.

However, the prescribing and dispensing doctor will take the affordability of the patient or the rules of the healthcare funders into consideration when selecting the medication for the patient. Generic drugs are cheaper than the ethical drugs as the company manufacturing the generic drug did not incur any research and development costs.

2. Conclusion

Effective communication will increase the chances of more successful promotion whilst ineffective communication will result in the failure of promotion. How well a drug is communicated to medical practitioners can mean a difference between its commercial success and failure. The future of pharma marketing is in engagement, interactivity and user control. Marketers will improve their profiling of healthcare professionals to deliver a more targeted and tailored experience. Through this evolution, companies need to keep a tight grasp on using multiple approaches effectively for their messages to be heard. To take advantage of doctors' increasing openness to digital communication channels, pharmaceutical companies have to use an integrated approach with several communication methods to gain and maintain doctors' attention. A mix of face-to-face communication with digital communication, orchestrated by the pharma sales rep is an emerging trend.

As marketers, it’s our imperative to understand how our customers will engage with each media type, and then blend a strategic mix into the pharma company’s communications strategy. The pharmaceutical industry is dynamic, evidence of its previous flexibility and strength suggests it will adapt and will continue to be successful.

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