
Digital Marketing in Pharmaceutical Industry – An Overview and Assessment

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ABSTRACT

This article revolves around the concept of digitalisation in pharma marketing and its effectiveness. A primary survey was conducted among consumers and secondary survey was done for customer i.e. doctors and a result was obtained. It was found that digital marketing does have a positive impact on both the customers and the consumers and it helps to create an impact on both. In fact, modern trends such as Instagram stories have also become an effective tool to influence people. Pharma companies should increase their focus on digital marketing in their future strategies in order to keep up in the competition.

Keywords: Digital marketing, pharmaceutical marketing, marketing trends, social media marketing, e-DTCA in pharma marketing.

INTRODUCTION

What is Pharma Digital Marketing?

The use of online social medias like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, online video platforms like YouTube etc for marketing of pharmaceutical brand is known as pharma digital marketing. The \$17 billion Indian Pharmaceutical Industry is being swept through a digital surge. Research says: Conventional marketing is being scrapped by businesses, for digital marketing. This latest technology ranges from: basic knowledge for physicians to the use of advanced technologies to better understand problems such as compliance with patients. Mobile apps and social media are expected to play a greater role in this development. They will help India catch up with tech-savvy emerging-market peers like China, where nearly half the companies are projected to devote more than a quarter of their marketing budget to digital marketing by 2020.

Indian Pharmaceutical Firms

have already started moving to use of new

technologies, as recent launches reveal. Earlier this year, Sun Pharma launched a smartphone app called RespiTrack for patient awareness of asthma and for ensuring that they stick to care regimen. Others such as Abbott Healthcare see India as a platform for incorporating technical advances that can be repeated around the world. This launched multiple devices for vertigo treatments, Knowledge Genie-a heart and liver application. Some of these developed on augmented and virtual reality to interact with physicians and patients alike.

LITERATURE REVIEW

'Digital' has been a major part of everyday life. All the sectors were moving more rapidly to the digital age. The pharmaceutical industry, but other than the internet, has not been able to embrace digital marketing entirely. In this era more pharmaceutical firms are using social media sites or ecommerce sites as a medium for digital marketing[1]. Pharmaceutical companies have spent so

much money in conventional detailing which, in effect, has also generated high returns. However, as growth slows, they need to use technologies such as business intelligence and analytics to help them reach a large number of consumers and keep them in line with business objectives[2]. Communication to doctors means brand publicity. How this exposure becomes an increase in sales and how much it affects the prescription of the customer habit will depend on the strategies evolved and involved by the pharmaceutical companies. The significant change in mentality to make a quantum leap in the business lies in answering the questions-What exactly wants and needs a customer has? How do we meet those needs?

Unique Selling Point and Specific Perceived Advantages are the methods embraced by pharmaceutical firms who see the industry as an operation that never ends. While RCPA identifies customer potential, segmentation and targeting on the other hand help in the preparation of the Master Call List. Traditional approaches such as "personal selling" and new strategies such as e-detailing and digital marketing "operate concurrently in order to achieve the objective. Daily Call Report allows for improved sales team monitoring, management and transparency. It becomes a reliable feedback to evaluate their effectiveness without which a far-fetched dream can remain a quantum increase in sales (the ultimate goal of fruitful communication)[3].

Given that illicit online pharmacies continue to proliferate and target patients globally with misleading and fraudulent eDTCA forms, multi-stakeholder governance efforts need to be created to address this dangerous form of cyber and public health crime effectively[4]. Webinars/webcasts, despite limited use,

have had the greatest influence on changes in clinical practice. There is scope for greater use by Pakistan's pharmaceutical industry of digital marketing strategies[5]. Web 2.0 tools are widely used by healthcare practitioners and consumers and are growing rapidly.

If properly leveraged, pharmaceutical companies can use blogs, podcasts, social media, and wikis to actively engage physicians and patients and reinforce collaborative efforts[6]. For example, through social networking platforms Pfizer is active and responsive to the customers. To communicate with clients, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter were used. Johnson and Johnson were among the first companies to launch a channel on YouTube. Quantum Pharmaceuticals and The Specials Lab, offer online ordering of special medicines that promote e-commerce and digital marketing[1].

METHODOLOGY

A primary survey was conducted online in the month of April as restrictions were there for travelling during the covid-19 pandemic. Survey was made on Google-forms and circulated online through social medias such as WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn, *etc.* A total of 242 responses were obtained. Majority of the questions were close ended, however a few of them were left open. After obtaining enough responses, they were exported to an excel sheet where they were analysed and graphs were obtained.

The primary survey could only obtain the data from consumers. However, the data from the pharmaceutical customers *i.e.* the doctors was also needed. As covid-19 made it impossible to obtain their opinions, a secondary research was conducted to know about their opinions too. At last data was combined from both and a report was prepared.

RESULTS

A whopping 90.9% of the surveyed people believed that they were exposed to digital marketing more compared to only 9.1% of the people who believed they were exposed to traditional marketing more. Digital marketing included social medias like Facebook, WhatsApp, twitter, Instagram etc. while traditional marketing included newspaper, billboard etc. People encountered the highest advertisements on social media platform which is obvious given the inclination of today's generation towards social media. Followed by social media was YouTube.

Given the popularity, YouTube has and the number of viewership it generates, it is an excellent media for marketing. Search engines stood third while emails stood fourth. 65.2% of the people believed that social media marketing had a greater impact on them. Followed by YouTube which got a 19.7% vote share. Search engines came in 3 with 13.6% of people saying that it had a greater impact on them while e-mail came in last with only 1.5%. Hence pharma firms should target social media and YouTube more and more.

Coming to the different types of advertisements, Video advertisements had the highest impact on people (39.4%) as we know videos are better at engaging audience than picture. Next followed In-video advertisements at 22.7% people believing it had a greater impact on them. In-video advertisements are commonly found in between YouTube videos, however other platforms such as Facebook have also started utilising In-video advertisements. 21.2 % people believed that Facebook/insta/snapchat stories had a greater impact on them. This is a new revolution in marketing. Given the increasing popularity of Instagram and snapchat among youth, they are emerging as an excellent advertising media. 15.2% believed that picture advertisement had a

greater impact on them while the rest 1-2% believed that emails had a greater impact on them.

Frequency of advertisements also has an impact on consumers . 68.2% people believe that repeated advertisements generate an interest in them while 31.8% people were less likely to be affected, no matter how many advertisements they encountered. A total of 16.7% of people developed a very strong interest after viewing an advertisement of pharmaceutical product online. They wanted to get it prescribed in their next meeting with the doctor. 59.1% of the people developed a strong interest after viewing the advertisement. They did search it online and tried to know more about the product. Rest 24.2% of the people didn't develop any interest after viewing the advertisement online. 60.6% of the people denied of asking the physician for a particular online advertised drug while 39.4% accepted that they did ask the physician for a particular drug that they saw advertised online. 40.9% of the people believed that it was the use of the advertised product in the advertisement that caught their attention. 25.8% of the people believed that it was the brand name that caught their attention. This shows the importance of brand name in the success of the product. 19.7% of the people believed that it is the tagline that catches their attention. Catchy phrase always helps to get the product viral. 7.6 % people were caught by the price in the advertisement while the rest 6.1% got hooked due to the opening scene.

Out of the surveyed people, a total of 72.7% believed that, "yes" a mere company's or a brand's name made them click on the advertisement. This shows the importance of brand management and company's image in the success of the product. The rest 27.3% said that they didn't click a particular advertisement just

because of the brand or the company name. 68.2% of the people agreed that they tried an OTC product after viewing its advertisement online. This shows the effectiveness of advertisements specially in the OTC category which doesn't require a prescription and the patient can buy if he feels the need for it. While 31.8% denied that they have never tried any OTC product after viewing its advertisement online.

From the secondary survey it was found that most physicians (76.2 %) reported using Facebook as their desired social media network while 71.9 percent and 41.8 percent of physicians used WhatsApp and YouTube, respectively. In addition to this, the use of Instagram (18.4%), Twitter (18.0%), and ResearchGate was also observed (9.3 per cent). Just 16 doctors did not use any digital media that included social elements. Half of the participants (50.1 percent) used social media for less than one hour during working hours, while 23.7 percent used social media for 1 to 3 hours. Only 19.6 percent of them during working hours reported never using social media. On WhatsApp, 44.4 per cent of doctors interacted with their patients when asked about digital doctor-patient interaction, while 28.6 per cent and 13.1 per cent of doctors preferred simple messaging service (SMS), a text messaging service component of most mobile device systems, and Facebook, respectively[5].

CONCLUSION

People have started to encounter digital marketing more in their life compared to traditional marketing so the companies must start to adjust their budget accordingly. Even doctors spend a considerable part of their day on various social medias. So pharmaceutical firms must start to make targeted ads over there. Social Media and YouTube are two of the best platforms for digital marketing

according to the people. Even the Instagram/Snapchat stories are a new trend nowadays. Also, Instagram sponsored ads are a new effective way to target the people. Frequency of advertisements also has a positive effect to create an image in the minds of people and help them remember the drug next time they go for consulting. So, companies can apply this strategy to increase their brand awareness.

WhatsApp detailing is also an effective strategy to build a healthy relationship with the doctor and increase the sales. Video advertisements have more impact on the consumers as it is more engaging than picture advertisements. Brand name has an important role in the success of the product and also in the advertisement. The same holds the true for the company's name. Use of the product advertised is an important element of any advertisement. Companies must not miss out on it. It creates an interest in the customers. Overall digital marketing in pharma is the next revolution which the companies must start to adopt for success in the future. Also, doctors hold the power in prescribing the medicines, especially in India, so more emphasis must be given on them if companies plan to include digital marketing in the strategy.

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