

Research Article

Perception and Impact of Social Media in Pharmaceutical Marketing and Promotion in Pakistan

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Abstract: Pharmaceutical manufacturers and importers spend millions of rupees annually on the promotion and advertisement of the pharmaceutical products and now these companies have started the use of social media for their product's promotion and advertising. In this cross-sectional study the perception and impact of social media in Pharmaceutical Marketing has been assessed. For this purpose the data was collected from 300 marketing employees of national and multi-national pharmaceutical companies of Karachi. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 20. It has been observed that companies which are using social media for their marketing and promotions having more sales value as compare to the companies not using social media for Pharmaceutical Marketing and Promotions. Also there is an awareness of social media for Pharmaceutical Marketing and Promotions in pharmaceutical marketers and they believe that it can be a potent tool to maximize the market share and flourish the business Hence, it is concluded that there is an Impact of social media on pharmaceutical marketing and promotion which could be helpful to increase the sales value.

Keywords: Social Media, Pharmaceutical marketing, sales value.

INTRODUCTION

Pharmaceutical manufacturers and importers spend millions of rupees annually now on the promotion and advertisement of the pharmaceutical products. Now the techniques and principles of Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) product's marketing is also transfer into the Pharmaceutical promotion to some extent[1]. Because nowadays customer's (i.e. doctors and also patients) required an ample of information regarding the products and the diseases therefore, in order to continue in touch with the customers regarding their queries and specifically to promote pharmaceutical product direct to the consumers, pharmaceutical companies start use of social media for their product's promotion and advertising [2, 3]. The use of social media as a pharmaceutical marketing tool is not new in many parts of the world. However in Pakistan, many pharmaceutical companies are not much aware about this[4]. But for the optimum use of this new, exciting medium, it is pertinent that the medical professionals be taken into confidence and their insecurities answered. Strict regulation of the content of such sites is mandatory to ensure maximal benefit to patients and doctors[5, 6].

Social media differentiates from traditional/industrial media in many aspects such as reach, frequency, usability, immediacy, permanence and quality. The appeal of social media is all too perceptible, social media possess the ability to transmit different artificial boundaries which can play a major role in strong brand recognition. Of course spending on direct-to-consumer advertising has continued to increase recently in absolute terms and as a percentage of pharmaceutical sales in spite of pressure on manufacturers to curtail such advertising. Promotion to physicians continues to be the dominant marketing strategy, but there are some drugs in a majority of the top-selling classes that are promoted by such advertising [7-9].

Spending on outpatient prescription drugs in the US is accelerating rapidly. Although numerous factors are driving this trend, attention has recently focused on the role played by the marketing, promotion and advertising of pharmaceuticals, in particular direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising[10]. A significant amount of research has been produced in Canada on direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) of prescription drugs in general, Health Canada has reaffirmed that existing DTCA regulations apply to new Internet and

social media technologies, there are several unique features of these technologies that make the application of existing regulations an uncertain process. Further, regulators should not simply be limited to regulating online DTCA; social media is equally available to government for use in health promotion[11]. Another study in 2011 on social media analyzed over 3400 tweets generated by attendees at a major global scientific conference in order to better understand the actual extent and nature of pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry discourse via Twitter. This first-in-kind analysis uncovers key best practices for compliant pharmaceutical and biotechnology social media utilization that can enhance the overall attendee experience at major academic and clinical meetings[2].

It is therefore very much evident now that the transformation of information and the emergence of the engaged patient has demonstrated the increased importance of social media in the broader healthcare context. For the healthcare industry, it is becoming increasingly important to be able to react quickly and decisively to events on social media. The objectives of this study is to determine the impact of social media in the Pharmaceutical marketing and promotion through comparative analysis of Information Medical Statistics (IMS) sales data between social media users and non-users pharmaceutical companies and to determine the perception about the use of social media for the pharmaceutical marketing and promotion among pharmaceutical marketing professionals.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

It is the cross-sectional study based on convenient sampling and the data has been collected from the marketing departments of pharmaceutical companies (both multi-nationals and locals) located in Karachi. In order to assess the perception among pharmaceutical professionals about the use of social media in Pharmaceutical Marketing and Promotion the data was collected from 300 pharmaceutical marketing professionals from the companies not using any social media for their product promotion and advertising. Individuals having an experience of less than one year were excluded from the study. For Impact of social media in Pharmaceutical Marketing and Promotions, 15 pharmaceutical companies using social media like having Facebook page, Google plus, twitter page, linkedin or any other social media website community to get in touch with audience where they advertise and promote their product have been selected by using convenient sampling method. **Error! Reference source not found.** IMS data has been used to compare the sales data of both social media user and non-user companies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Study was conducted in two parts; firstly, the impact of the social media on the companies using it for marketing and promotion was assessed by analyzing

the International Medical Statistics (IMS) data of top 15 pharmaceutical companies of Pakistan operating in Karachi using social media and it was compared with the data of top 15 companies not using social media for their marketing and promotions. In this comparison, number of products (fig 1) and the total market share (fig 2) were compared of both groups which show prominent differences as companies using social media having lesser number of product but huge market share as compared to companies not using social media. It has been observed that the top 15 Companies using social media for the marketing and promotion of pharmaceutical products have collectively 1144 number of products and it makes 48% of total market share while top 15 companies not using social media for the marketing and promotion of pharmaceutical products have collectively 1216 number of products but having only 19% of total market share.

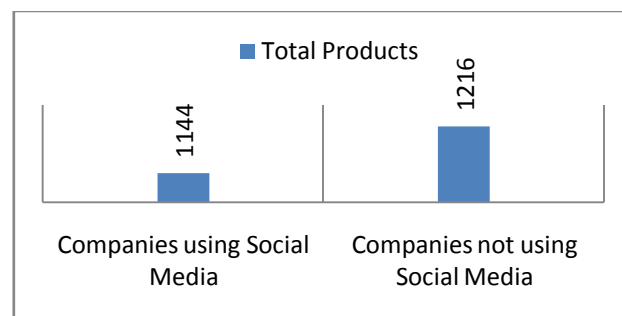


Fig-1: Total Products

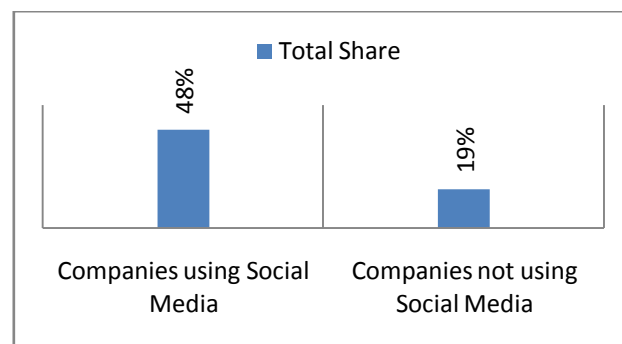


Fig-2: Total Share

Secondly, perception about the use of social media for pharmaceutical marketing and promotion was assessed among 300 marketing professional working in pharmaceutical companies through a self-designed questionnaire. The majority of the respondents were either Product Managers or Assistant Product Managers as shown in table 1. Most of the respondents (85%) having experience of 1 to 5 years showing initial phase of their professional careers whereas 15% have experience from 6 to 10 years. Table 2 shows the positive perception of respondents that is pharmaceutical marketers as mean value is more than 3 in most of the options with significant p value, which shows the positive perception about social media implication for pharmaceutical marketing and promotions by pharmaceutical marketers.

Table-1: Designation of Respondents

Designations	Frequency	Percentage
Marketing executive	12	4
Assistant Product manager	54	18
Product manager	105	35
Group product manager	18	6
Senior product manager	24	8
Business manager	48	16
Marketing manager	9	3
Others	30	10

Table-2: Perception about the use of social media among pharmaceutical employees

	STATEMENT	Mean Score**	S.D	T value	P value
1	Pakistan regulatory authority should pass a law to allow pharmaceutical companies for usage of social media for Product marketing	3.03	1.097	0.421	0.674
2	Social media can help to create a specific product positioning for a specific target market	3.51	0.973	9.080	<0.001*
3	Social media may increase the chance of self-medication among patients	3.77	0.945	14.110	<0.001*
4	Social media can play an important role in making good relationship with health care providers by directly interacting with them	3.56	1.066	9.153	<0.001*
5	Social media can cause a direct and unethical targeting of particular competitors	3.73	1.017	12.435	<0.001*
6	Social media helps in effective segmentation and targeting of customers by inviting product specific patients and health care providers on social media page	3.54	1.143	8.184	<0.001*
7	Unlimited coverage, accessibility and convenience of social media usage make it a big tool for pharmaceutical marketers	3.61	1.011	10.455	<0.001*
8	Presence on social media can cause a maximum exposure in front of huge population of patients and health care providers which is very good for product promotions	3.65	0.992	11.413	<0.001*
9	Social media is helpful in getting competitive advantage by highlighting risk information of competitors	3.50	1.129	7.723	<0.001*
10	Success stories of any patients by using any specific medicine which share on social media can positively affect the sales volume of that specific product	3.67	1.018	11.454	<0.001*
11	Better understanding among the patients about the nature, prognosis and management of their current illness through social media can create a positive impact towards company	3.61	1.087	9.775	<0.001*
12	Social media serve as a path for keeping the doctors on their toes to constantly update themselves with recent advances offered by pharmaceutical companies	3.58	3.184	3.137	0.002
13	Patient can suggest doctors to prescribe that specific medicine which they have come to know through social media page of company	3.69	3.118	3.815	<0.001*
14	Social media is only suitable for the marketing of over the counter (OTC) medicines	3.94	0.950	17.079	<0.001*
15	(Opposite Variable) Social media is a perfect tool for the marketing of any type of medicine used in any disease	3.87	1.403	-1.646	0.101
16	Pharmaceutical marketing on social media specifically increase the usage of medications used in young ages because social media is heavily using by young population	3.76	1.020	12.846	<0.001*
17	Social media is a suitable medium for marketing research in order to develop and launch any product because from social media we can get customer's insights both doctors and patients for new product development	3.72	1.016	12.212	<0.001*
18	Pharmaceutical companies should embrace social media marketing as regular marketing activity in order to increase market share and maximize the exposure of company in general population	3.90	1.088	14.277	<0.001*

*P value is significant i.e < 0.05, **MEAN SCORE, Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5

It can be seen from table 2 that mean value in most of the questions indicated a significantly positive response regarding perception about the use of social media among pharmaceutical employees which is also a positive sign for the pharmaceutical industry. There are few similar research studies conducted worldwide on it but the main focus was on the direct to consumer advertising and very few specifically focus on role of social media. Like significant amount of research has been produced in Canada and New Zealand on direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) of prescription drugs in general, very little work has been undertaken specifically with regard to the role of social media and emerging Internet technologies[12, 13]. Further, given the difficulties Health Canada has faced in directly regulating DTCA in traditional media, there is significant skepticism around whether government regulators have the resources or political will to effectively monitor new digital media. Consequently, independent third party oversight and industry self-regulation may play an important role in regulating digital channels.

The study conducted by IMS that is Engaging Patients through Social Media found that among the top 50 pharmaceutical companies worldwide, nearly half actively participate in social media on Face book, Twitter or YouTube. However, only ten companies utilize all three of these major social networking services for healthcare topics[14]. Many companies are using social media primarily as a unilateral broadcasting channel to physicians and patients, with limited interaction or fostering of discussion. Smaller manufacturers with narrower therapeutic focuses and consumer health companies typically have the highest levels of social media patient engagement.

CONCLUSION

Social media has been embraced in our daily life routine and huge population worldwide using it for many purposes. It is also been used for the marketing purpose by many industries. The result of this study revealed that the pharmaceutical companies using social media for marketing in Pakistan right now progressing more rapidly as compare to the companies not using it. It has been also observed that pharmaceutical marketers have awareness regarding the role of social media for pharmaceutical marketing and promotions and this could be helpful to flourish their brands in the markets.

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