

Comparative Study of Marketing Strategies adopted by MSRs of Pharma Companies to connect with target customers during the COVID 19 Era

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ABSTRACT

Pharmaceutical marketing is an essential societal activity that ensures the availability of medicines at the right time and place. Pharmaceutical marketers also provide timely information, perform after-sales service in the distribution chain, and organize medical conferences and seminars. Thus, therapy and product updating, ensuring availability, and usage of medications are catalyzed by pharmaceutical marketers; this also ensures access to medicines in society. Medical representatives are critical elements – they inform and persuade adoption of various products for patient welfare. The recent outbreak of the COVID-19 has brought healthcare industry into spotlight, and subsequently wedged the Pharma-Healthcare Social Media Marketing market into picture. There is a severe shortage of critical medical supplies but the number of COVID-19 cases are rapidly increasing which have resulted into a revolution rather than evolution in the healthcare system. Accordingly, the impact is noticeable in the Pharma-healthcare Marketing. To complement and supplement the ground-level pharmaceutical marketing activity, a host of digital marketing initiatives is also accelerating the pharmaceutical marketing process. During pandemics like the COVID-19 infection, face-to-face pharmaceutical marketing approach is thrown out of gear and digital marketing has gained increased adoption. This article reviews the adaptive response of pharmaceutical marketers during COVID-19 times.

Keywords

Pharmaceutical Marketing, MSRs, Investment Procurement, Pharma-healthcare

Article Received: 10 August 2020, Revised: 25 October 2020, Accepted: 18 November 2020

Introduction

In the wide range of Information providers, Pharmaceutical marketing is the last component which transmutes research ideas into applied therapeutic models. Pharmaceutical marketing i.e. medico-marketing is a business of promoting the drugs to improve its sale. This system is well planned and is a broad information system which is used to update the physicians about safety, effectiveness, readiness, adverse effects and ways of use of medicine. Physicians felt that MRs prejudiced their prescribing habits and as per the research study, each MSR preferably should be regular and sincere in claiming and providing detailing about the product and have good education, good product knowledge. He should have capabilities of a salesperson viz, politeness, personality, and salesmanship. Hence, MSRs are very useful for successful pharmaceutical marketing strategies.

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. The general public infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate disease and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people those with primarily having medical problems like cardiovascular disorders, diabetes, chronic respiratory track disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. The technique to stop and reduce spread is to be informed about the COVID-19 virus, the disease it causes and the way it spreads. We should always protect ourselves et al from contagion by washing your hands often or using an alcohol based handwash frequently and by not touching your face. The COVID-19 virus spreads mainly through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes, so

it's important that we should always also practice respiratory etiquette and wear mask.

Objectives of the study-

1. To study various types of marketing practices adopted by MSRs of Pharma companies to convenience Physicians during the COVID 19 Era.
2. To compare various marketing strategies adopted by MSRs of Pharma Companies in India to connect with target customers during the COVID 19 Era
3. To analyze different types of social media platforms on which Pharma companies are creating content and campaigns to market their product to HCP & Patients during COVID 19 Era.

Research Question:

The recent COVID19 pandemic has created a whirlwind in the pharma industry so the main aim is in understanding marketing strategies adopted by pharma companies during the pandemic. Also to get an insight into what marketing strategies pharma companies adopt to surpass this pandemic and generate sales, how pharma companies are engaging with target customers during the COVID19 Era and also to understand what challenges MSRs face during pandemic and to check whether pandemic has led any effect on the prescription habit of the Physicians.

Conceptual Background:

The lockdown triggered by coronavirus disease (Covid-19) has caused disruptions all told sectors. Pharma sector has been jolted too but there's hope that things will ease and growth will resume. Pharma companies are deploying methods of “trimming the fat”, revisiting cost, searching for new sources of incomes from owned assets also as using digital mechanisms for meetings and conducting business. Doctors are preferring to urge information like medical updates, new treatment regulations, guidelines and everyone companies involved in manufacturing through online communication. Some of the digital tools, utilized include websites for each single product, a distant calling platform to attach with HCPs, webinar platforms, a digital asset management platform with a repository or library to access a good range of digital assets across the world. The Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA) and Boston Consulting Group (BCG) have come up with a report on the 'Future of Work'. it's been said that the healthcare ecosystem today is navigating uncharted territory with Covid-19 impacting all major stakeholders. Due to the nature of this pandemic, outdated channels of communication between patients, prescribers, healthcare companies and pharmacies are interrupted. Healthcare companies, meanwhile, started focusing on supporting prescribers and patients in novel ways. Results from the physician survey indicate that 98 per cent

prescribers remained on digital platforms like webinars organized by the top healthcare companies. Additionally, all prescribers that participated in our survey were contacted through phone or video by manifold healthcare companies. Firms have also contained the numeral way of executing internal processes and are intensive on competence building of their field force.

Research Methodology:

Type of Research: Exploratory Research

Sources of data collection:

a) **Primary Data:** Primary data was collected by an online survey questionnaire which consisted of 12 structured questions and the same was shared with FIFTY medical sales representatives (MSRs) of FOUR Pharmaceutical companies of Maharashtra and their responses were analyzed.

b) **Secondary Data:** Secondary data was collected from various Research papers available online and conceptual background was done on that basis.

Sample Unit: MSR (Medical Sales Representative)

Sample size: 50 MSR (Medical Sales Representative) of FOUR Pharmaceutical companies in Pune Region

Location: Mumbai, Pune, Satara, Goa

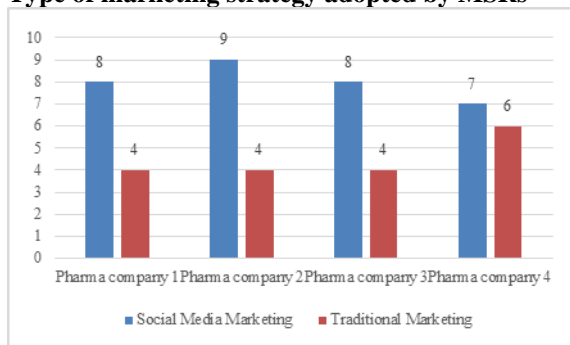
Sampling Technique: Convenience sampling which is a type of Non Probability Sampling

c) **Data Analysis:**

What type of marketing strategy Traditional or Social Media Marketing has been adopted by you (MSR) during COVID19 Era?

| Respondents | Social Media Marketing | Traditional Marketing | Total |
|------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| Pharma company 1 | 8 | 4 | 12 |
| Pharma company 2 | 9 | 4 | 13 |
| Pharma company 3 | 8 | 4 | 12 |
| Pharma company 4 | 7 | 6 | 13 |
| | | Total | 5 |

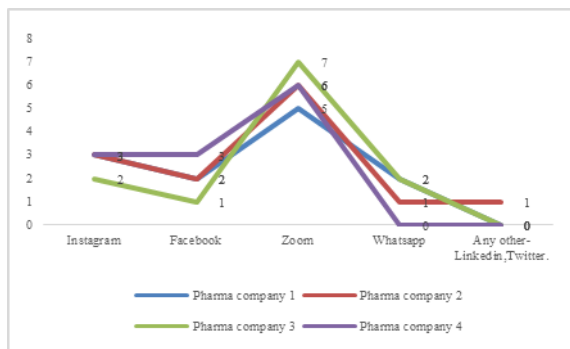
Type of marketing strategy adopted by MSRs



What are the different social media platforms used by you (MSR) to market your products during COVID19 Era?

| Social media platform used | Pharma company 1 | Pharma company 2 | Pharma company 3 | Pharma company 4 |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Instagram | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Facebook | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Zoom | 5 | 6 | 7 | 6 |
| Whatsapp | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Any other-Linkedin, Twitter. | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 12 | 13 | 12 | 13 |

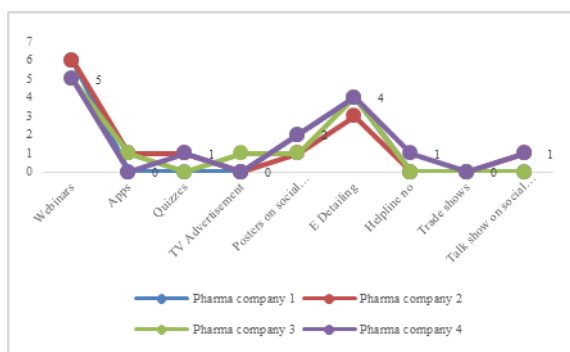
Social Media Platforms



What more do you think your pharma companies can do to connect with target customer during lock-down?

| Responses | Pharma company 1 | Pharma company 2 |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Webinars | 6 | 6 |
| Apps | 0 | 1 |
| Quizzes | 0 | 1 |
| TV Advertisement | 0 | 0 |
| Posters on social media account | 2 | 1 |
| E Detailing | 4 | 4 |
| Helpline no | 0 | 0 |
| Trade shows | 0 | 0 |
| Talk show on social media | 12 | 13 |

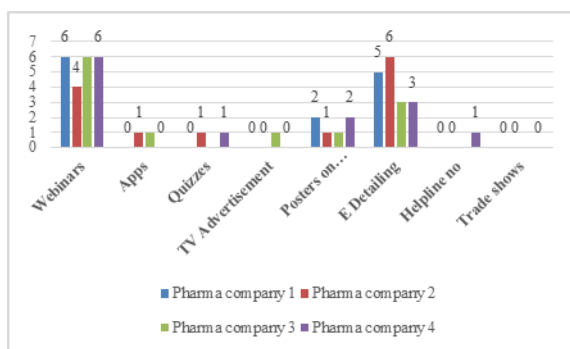
Marketing Strategies to be adopted during Lock-Down



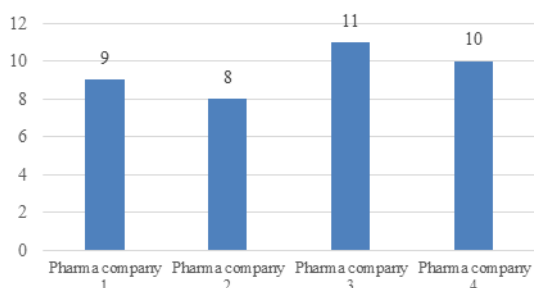
What more do you think your pharma companies can do to connect with target customer after lock-down?

| What more can pharma companies do to connect with target customer? | Pharma company 1 | Pharma company 2 | Pharma company 3 | Pharma company 4 |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Webinars | 6 | 4 | 6 | 6 |
| Apps | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Quizzes | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| TV Advertisement | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Posters on social media account | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| E Detailing | 5 | 6 | 3 | 3 |
| Helpline no | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Trade shows | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Talk show on social media | 12 | 13 | 12 | 13 |

Marketing Strategies to be adopted after Lock-Down



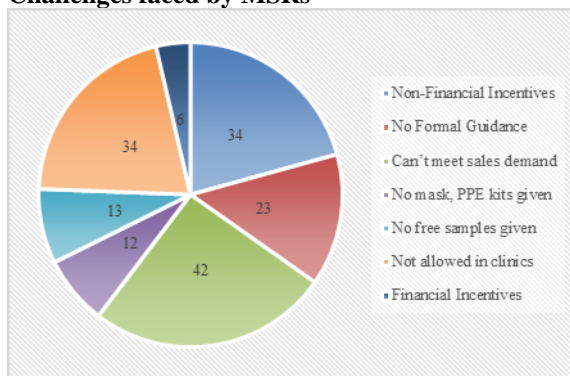
Do you create content & campaigns to engage with your community of users during lock down?



What were the challenges faced by MSRs during lockdown?

| Response | Respondents | Percentage |
|--------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Non-Financial Incentives | 34 | 68 |
| No Formal Guidance | 23 | 46 |
| Can't meet sales demand | 42 | 84 |
| No mask, PPE kits given | 12 | 24 |
| No free samples given | 13 | 26 |
| Not allowed in clinics | 34 | 68 |
| Financial Incentives | 6 | 12 |

Challenges faced by MSRs



Has the prescribing behaviour changed of HCP and

Prescribing behaviour of HCP has changed during

| <p>Consumers during COVID19 Era?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Respondents</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Strongly agree</td> <td>3</td> <td>6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agree</td> <td>35</td> <td>70</td> </tr> <tr> <td>May Be</td> <td>12</td> <td>24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>50</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Response | Respondents | Percentage | Strongly agree | 3 | 6 | Agree | 35 | 70 | May Be | 12 | 24 | Total | 50 | | <p>COVID 19 Era</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> <th>Respondents</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>May Be</td> <td>24</td> <td>12</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Agree</td> <td>70</td> <td>35</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Strongly agree</td> <td>6</td> <td>3</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Response | Percentage | Respondents | May Be | 24 | 12 | Agree | 70 | 35 | Strongly agree | 6 | 3 | | | | | | |
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| Response | Respondents | Percentage | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Strongly agree | 3 | 6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Agree | 35 | 70 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| May Be | 12 | 24 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 50 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Response | Percentage | Respondents | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| May Be | 24 | 12 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Agree | 70 | 35 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Strongly agree | 6 | 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>Whether are you able to procure the investment made in any of the marketing strategies used by you during pandemic?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Ranks</th> <th>Responses</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1 Yes</td> <td>3</td> <td>6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2 May be</td> <td>14</td> <td>28%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3 Mostly</td> <td>31</td> <td>62%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4 Slightly</td> <td>2</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5 No not at all</td> <td>0</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total-</td> <td>50</td> <td>100%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Ranks | Responses | Percentage | 1 Yes | 3 | 6% | 2 May be | 14 | 28% | 3 Mostly | 31 | 62% | 4 Slightly | 2 | 4% | 5 No not at all | 0 | 0% | Total- | 50 | 100% | <p>Investment Procured</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Rank</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1 Yes</td> <td>6%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2 May be</td> <td>28%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3 Mostly</td> <td>62%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4 Slightly</td> <td>4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5 No not at all</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Rank | Percentage | 1 Yes | 6% | 2 May be | 28% | 3 Mostly | 62% | 4 Slightly | 4% | 5 No not at all | 0% |
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| 2 May be | 14 | 28% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 Mostly | 31 | 62% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 Slightly | 2 | 4% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 No not at all | 0 | 0% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total- | 50 | 100% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rank | Percentage | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 Yes | 6% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| 3 Mostly | 62% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 Slightly | 4% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 No not at all | 0% | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>If you happen to advertise on TV, Is it worth spending your money on TV advertisement during pandemic?</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Yes</th> <th>May be</th> <th>No</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Respondents</td> <td>5</td> <td>35</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Percentage</td> <td>10</td> <td>70</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | | Yes | May be | No | Respondents | 5 | 35 | 0 | Percentage | 10 | 70 | 0 | <p>Spending your money on TV advertisement</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Response</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Yes</td> <td>10</td> </tr> <tr> <td>May be</td> <td>70</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Response | Percentage | Yes | 10 | May be | 70 | No | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Yes | May be | No | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Respondents | 5 | 35 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Percentage | 10 | 70 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Response | Percentage | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Yes | 10 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| May be | 70 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| No | 0 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Findings & Discussion:

I) Major:

Objective-1) To study various types of marketing practices adopted by MSRs of Pharma companies to convenience Physicians during the COVID 19 Era.

- A) The respondent’s i.e. MSR were from well known Pharma Companies in Maharashtra and marketed products during the pandemic period.
- B) Most of the products marketed were OTC and few were other products like sanitizer and mask. No companies marketed prescribed medicine since prescribed medicine can’t be marketed through social media according to Drugs and Cosmetic Act 1940.
- C) The COVID -19 pandemic has put forth a demanding situation for players in Pharma And Healthcare Social

Media Marketing market. The widespread of the pandemic and the humanitarian toll taken by it is making it challenging for market players to respond.

Objective-2) To compare various marketing strategies adopted by MSRs of Pharma Companies in India to connect with target customers during the COVID 19 Era

- A) During Lockdown MSRs feel that pharma companies should conduct more Webinars and E detailing followed by quizzes, TV add, poster on social media and helpline no to connect with target consumers.
- B) After lockdown MSRs feel that pharma companies should connect with target consumers through TV adds followed by webinars, quizzes, poster on social media, apps and helpline no.

Objective -3) To analyze different types of social media platforms on which Pharma companies are creating content and campaigns to market their product to HCP & Patients during COVID 19 Era.

A) It was observed that Zoom was the most widely used social media app by pharma companies to market their product. Since mostly the engagement of pharma companies with target consumers during pandemic has been through webinars. Not far behind is Instagram, followed by Facebook, Whatsapp, and other apps like LinkedIn and Twitter.

II) Minor:

A) The top challenges faced by MSRs was that no proper formal guidance was given to them by their managers in ways to interact with doctors and patients during pandemic and no free samples was given to them to give doctors in order to create good will in their minds.

B) The other challenges faced by MSRs were- no mask and PPE kits given to them, can't meet sales demand, doctors not allowing in the clinic and financial incentives.

C) It was observed that few companies are willing to spend and market their products using TV add.

D) From the responses of MSRs it was found that pharma companies are able to procure investment they have made in the marketing platform used.

E) It was observed that majority of MSRs agree that there is a change in the buying behaviour of HCPs and Consumers during the COVID19 Era.

Conclusion:

As we all know this year, it has been an unprecedented year due to the pandemic, everything has gone digital. Even the pharma industry has been able to acclimate to this new trend. From online consultations to ordering medicine online the pharma industry has truly adopted to the new normal.

It was seen that many Pharma companies have used the digital marketing truly for their advantage and because of that they have been able to survive and sustain during this pandemic period in which HCP marketers are facing the challenge of communicating with physicians without the ability to visit them in person .

In summary it can be said that digital marketing is the new trend that has emerged and a lot of pharma companies are opting for it as it's more convenient than the traditional way of marketing.

Further Research:

The research can help pharmaceutical retail market to explore the opportunities for Pharmaceutical Distribution Channel - Online retail and Offline retail which further assesses the global pharmaceutical retail market by independent/standalone outlets and organized chains.

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