

OVER THE COUNTER (OTC) MEDICINES AND DIRECT-TO-PHYSICIAN ADVERTISING.

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ABSTRACT: *Healthcare is important. But where they live often determines how minor ailments are treated. Rural India and modern India put their thrust on self medication in treating minor ailments not as like in Europeans who put their trust in the neighborhood pharmacist, North Americans rely more on the advice of doctors. In countries where healthcare infrastructures and economies are developing, opportunities exist to lessen the considerable burden consumers currently put on doctors and help governments reduce their healthcare expenditure. Self medication using over the counter products in India is seen to be common. OTC Products Medico-marketing, is the business of advertising or otherwise promoting the sale of OTC pharmaceuticals or drugs. Evidences show that marketing practices can negatively affect both patients and the health care profession. Many countries have measures in place to limit advertising by pharmaceutical companies. This paper reviews current marketing practices in the pharmaceutical sector, and their impact on consumer and doctor behavior. It identifies negative impacts which include misleading advertising, disease mongering and rising costs. It argues the need to move from industry self-regulation to an independently monitored code of practice by doctors for pharmaceutical marketing. When a great and noble profession and the forces of globalization interact, drama is likely to happen. This has been true where the profession of medicine and the pharmaceutical industry are concerned. On display in the relationship between doctors and drug companies are the magnificence and weaknesses of the medical profession-- its noble aspirations and its continuing inability to fulfill them. Also on display are the power, social contributions, and occasional insincere of a very profitable industry whose products contribute in important ways to the health and long life of the people, but an industry that at times employs methods that are deeply troubling and even immoral.*

Key words: Self medication, over-the-counter drugs, healthcare marketing, minor ailments, Consumer

INTRODUCTION:

Doctors in India are considered nothing less than gods by most rural people. Their blind faith symbolizes the reverence a doctor holds in the Indian society. Using this powerful position, doctors can reach out to people directly and via media, whenever necessary, to enlighten them about the rational usage of drugs. Doctors can curb use of unethical and irrational drugs by educating patients. They play a vital role in influencing their patients' pattern of selecting and administering drugs. Doctors believe that people are not equipped enough to medicate themselves, some encourage people to inculcate self-medicative habits which will make people more responsible to claim good health care facilities and non-spurious and authentic drugs. They must inform and instruct people about responsible self-medication *Paninchukunnath. Ajith (2007)* The fact that doctors in certain rural areas themselves are ill-informed is a serious problem there have been instances where doctors have knowingly not informed the patients about the existence of an over the counter drug, in order to procure fees. It is the attitude of the doctors that needs to be changed. Poverty at times lures them to propagate and promote drugs that are given to them by pharmaceutical representatives, who give incentives for such promotion. Pharmaceutical drug companies spend corers of rupees promoting new drugs and distributing free samples to doctors, though such marketing devices have little impact on physicians and their prescribing behavior. (*Colin P. Bradley & etal 1998*) Direct-to-physician activities accounted for the bulk of spending, spent on a practice called "detailing" - visits to physicians by pharmaceutical sales representatives in order to promote their firm's drugs. Free drug samples distributed during these visits². As the cost of prescription drugs continues to increase, increased attention is being focused on the role of pharmaceutical marketing practices as a cause of higher drug prices.

The concern that pharmaceutical marketing practices compromise physician integrity and have increases in public health costs has prompted government actions at both the rural and urban levels. The key public policy issue is the extent to which the industry's promotional tactics lead to an increase in appropriate versus inappropriate use of drugs in a cost- effective manner.

In the study, researchers analyzed data for three widely prescribed drugs issued by some 100 physicians to investigate the effect of pharmaceutical sales representatives on physician prescribing behavior. For each of the drugs in the study, assessed the effects of changes in the numbers of sales calls and free samples on the number of new prescriptions the physician issued. (*SureshMadhavan1994*) A detailing visit typically lasts five to ten minutes, and information about a drug's composition, therapeutic value, proper dosage and potential side effects is communicated³. Although the effects of detailing and sampling differ across drugs, the effects of the marketing activities on physician prescribing behavior ranged from very small to modest for each of the drugs studied. For the three drugs in the study, results indicated that it would take, on average, from 1 to 10 more visits by pharmaceutical sales representatives to induce one new prescription.

It would take 20 to 73 additional free samples to induce one new prescription. Prescription drug spending by consumers is projected to remain the fastest growing sector of health care costs. On contrary to popular belief, (*Donald L. Sullivan, Stephen &etal, (1994)*) physicians are

not easy targets readily persuaded by salespeople,⁴ but rather are tough sells as evidenced by the minimal influence of sales activities on their prescribing behavior. the most important factor explaining the limited effect of sales representatives is that physicians know they have other sources of information. Scientific papers, (*Tracy Portner, Mickey C. Smith 1994*) advice from colleagues and a physician's own training and experience also influence prescribing practices and, most physicians view these sources as far more reliable and trustworthy than salespeople. Additionally, many physicians hold negative attitudes toward sales representatives, Physicians recognize that information presented is biased toward the promoted drug and is unlikely to be objective or even accurate. Thus, physicians often discount information received from a sales representative. (*Patricia Harrington 2002*)As physicians have access to alternative sources of information, which are more highly regarded, it is no wonder that the salesperson's influence is minimal.

Pharmaceutical marketing aimed directly at consumers might be expected to have greater impact and do this either the pharmaceutical companies should go from mass media advertising or switch their products to Over the counter,so that the marketing activities are centered on consumers only and the role of doctors become minimal ,but in (*Sanjeev Verma 2009*) country like India When OTCs have taken over prescriptions drug sales where customers recommend and obtain their own medication. This causes a great deal of problems for the medical fraternity be it allopathic, homoeopathic or ayurvedic.The study enabled the investigator to understand how the medical practitioner behaves in the face of an ethical dilemma (*Douglas Ws and Co-worker 2008*) when his/her importance has been substantially eroded by OTC sales. Doctors play an important role in marketing (*Bela. Ganatraa & etal.2005*) the pharma products. The main objective of this paper is to study role played by doctors in ethically promoting non-prescriptive drugs to the patients who visit in minor ailments also.Pharmaceutical companies are re-focusing their over-the-counter (OTC) strategies, as there is increased self-medication and consumer interest in wellness-focussed OTC products. In fact, the OTC segment is projected to have a higher growth rate than prescription medication. But OTC products require a different set of skills where doctors also paly a important role. Peak performance at work and job security are now more important to consumers meaning that preventive remedies, convenience OTCs, energy boosters, brain-boosting supplements and formulations for sight and hearing provide growth opportunities, along with contraceptives for women who want to work longer before having children.

The OTC product will need to be treated as a fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) product specially while communicating a benefit, ensuring distribution or ensuring consumer friendly packaging. The OTC pharma market is likely to grow at a higher rate compared to the overall pharma market. (*Sheth A & others 2008.*) The biggest challenge for pharma companies dealing in OTC products is that, unlike the traditional pharma model of “pushing generic products by selling to doctors, the OTC segment is more parallel to the FMCG segment. It is critical to invest in brand building that will create a “pull” for the product directly from the consumers.The Indian OTC market is estimated to be about Rs. 7434 crore in 2008 (\$ 1.8 billion).Segments such as cough & cold preparations, analgesics, vitamins & minerals and indigestion preparations account for a little over Rs. 2700 crore. The Indian pharma market in comparison is valued at about \$ 8.4 billion in 2009. It grew at about 12 percent CAGR from 2002 to 2007 while it is expected to reach \$ 20 billion by 2015 (CAGR of 16 percent from

2009 to 2015), as per ORG IMS estimates..Traditional medicine (Ayurvedic) accounts for approximately Rs 1600 crore+ while other segments such as medicated skin products, topical OTC medicines, plasters and bandages, anti-smoking aids, etc collectively account for over Rs 3000 crore.

Top ten Indian brands

Sr.no	Leading brands (Sales \$Million) India	2008 1638.9	2009 1813.4	Grth'09/08 10.7
1	Dabur Chyawanprash	75.8	84.5	11.5
2	Vicks	72.4	81.9	13.1
3	Boroplus	29	32.9	13.4
4	Revital	25.4	30.7	20.7
5	Zandu Balm	28.4	30.5	7.6
6	Dettol	23.7	26.4	11.2
7	Liv.52	25	25.8	3.4
8	Becosules	22.7	24.9	10.1
9	Hajmola	20.2	21.2	4.9
10	Iodex	17.6	20.7	18.2
<i>Data Source : Nicholas Hall's DB6 2010</i>				

In the world of ethical pharmaceuticals, the physician is still of prime importance as has been the case in the past. Now, however, (*Dineshkumar.B and etal 1995*) the new marketing efforts are being directed at the consumer. Prime-time television advertising and whole page newspaper ads are happening now, certainly unheard of in the past. For OTC pharmaceuticals, (*Greenhalgh T 1998*) the situation is reversed. While the consumer has been the primary focus in the past, and will certainly not be ignored in the future, campaigns to medical professionals are becoming more commonplace.

As we can see there are many changes in the roles of physicians and patients ways. There are many issues (*Vinay R Kamat and Mark Nichter 1998*) like how to build consumer preferences towards the OTC products. There are various ways through which the preferences could be altered. This could be done through the effective brand building of the OTC product. The second issue could be on how to build a strong brand identity(*Neeraj Dixit 2008*) for the OTC product.¹³ The role of advertisements, celebrity endorsements and the concept of brand management in building an effective brand image of the OTC product.¹⁴

OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the attitude of the Doctors towards the OTC products as compared to the Rx products.
2. To find how effective is advertising campaigns and other sales promotion tools for OTC products.
3. To understand the Physicians behavior and the influence of various factors like Brand, Media and Advertising and promotional schemes etc towards OTC products

METHODOLOGY: The instrument used was a questionnaire survey that was administered to collect empirical data. The Doctors responses were kept confidential in order to encourage

openness and disclosure. The demographic data collected included gender, age, specialty, education, income and location of clinic.

The attitude of the DOCTORS towards the OTC products as compared to the Rx products asking them how frequently they OTC Products are marketed to them. The list of different tools of marketing was created keeping in mind the more popular OTC products. The respondents rated the questions on YES OR NO. Therefore, the items for the instrument were adapted from the various previous studies quoted above according to their relevance in the Indian context. A total of 200 Doctors were surveyed on their area of specialty and location (Rural, Semi Urban and Urban. questions were included asking respondents to indicate their agreement on the variables in the questionnaire .

The sample for the questionnaire was administered to a non-probability sample of 200 Doctors from different parts of Sangli and Miraj area. The sample of 200 doctors in Sangli and Miraj area were surveyed. The location of doctors available in Urban areas 88 which was more than in Semi-Urban area 64 and in rural area 48 Thus it was revealed that the doctors were more in Urban area then in Semi-Urban area and lastly in Rural area. (Calder, Philips and Tyhout 1981, Sproles and Kendal 1986).

1. Demographic profiles of doctors.

Area	No. of Doctors	
Urban	88	44.00%
Semi-Urban	64	32.00%
Rural	48	24.00%
Total	200	100.00%

2. Doctor's permitting OTC drugs in minor ailments

Minor Ailments	Recommend OTC		Recommend Non-OTC		Total	
Headache	136	68%	64	32%	200	100%
Fever	129	64.50%	71	35.50%	200	100%
Cough/Cold	142	71%	58	29%	200	100%
Acidity	110	55%	90	45%	200	100%
Pain	133	66.50%	67	33.50%	200	100%
digestive	112	56%	88	44%	200	100%
Skin Disorders	143	71.50%	57	28.50%	200	100%

A set of minor ailments which didn't require medical supervision ,doctors of all strata permitted OTC drugs to be used. minor ailments such as Headache the recommendation of OTC is 68% and Non-OTC is 32%, for Fever the recommendation of OTC is 64.50% and Non-OTC is 35.50%, for cough/Cold the recommendation of OTC is 71% and Non-OTC is 29%, for Acidity the recommendation of OTC is 55% and Non-OTC is 45%, for Pain the recommendation of OTC is 66.50% and Non-OTC is 33.50%, for Digestive the recommendation of OTC is 56% and Non-OTC is 44% and for Skin Disorders the recommendation of

OTC is 71.50% and Non-OTC is 28.50%. Thus it was revealed that use of OTC drugs in minor ailment as first line of defense is permitted by doctors.

3 Doctor's opinion on increased level of relying on OTC drugs

	No. of docs out of 200			
Docs Opinion		Yes		No
Advertisement	154	77.00%	46	23.00%
Doctors Distrust	142	71.00%	58	29.00%
Easily Available	130	65.00%	70	35.00%
Educated Customers	131	65.50%	69	34.50%
Effective	152	76.00%	48	24.00%
Low Cost	136	68.00%	64	32.00%
Time Saving	144	72.00%	56	28.00%

4 Doctor's source of information on OTC drugs

Speciality of Doc/ Source of info.	Advertisement		Education		Magazine		Marketing Executive		Consumers		total	
Gynaecologist	6	26.09%	1	4.35%	1	4.35%	9	39.13%	6	26.09%	23	100.00%
Dermatologist	7	30.43%	3	13.04%	5	21.74%	6	26.09%	2	8.70%	23	100.00%
General Practice	38	44.71%	4	4.71%	1	1.18%	36	42.35%	6	7.06%	85	100.00%
Cardiologist	8	34.78%	2	8.70%	6	26.09%	7	30.43%	0	0.00%	23	100.00%
Paediatricians	7	30.43%	1	4.35%	5	21.74%	8	34.78%	2	8.70%	23	100.00%
Other	8	34.78%	2	8.70%	3	13.04%	8	34.78%	2	8.70%	23	100.00%

The sources of information on OTC drugs that normally doctors get from. It was found that most of the doctor got information from different sources. There was no significant difference between specialized doctors but a slight difference between General practitioners and Specialists doctor. It was found that Gynecologists were found to be positive on entertaining marketing executive 39.13% for information on OTC drugs as these drugs are said to be safe in treating minor ailments during onset of pregnancy, whereas television advertisements 26% seen by doctors, add information on OTC drugs and companies. Consumers 26.09% also tell doctors about the OTC drugs on their earlier experience with the drugs and demand the same.

5. Doctor's permitting OTC div. marketing executives to market OTC products

Speciality of Doc/Source of info.	Yes		No		Total	
Gynaecologist	5	22%	18	78%	23	100%
Dermatologist	4	17%	19	83%	23	100%
General Practice	75	88%	10	12%	85	100%
Cardiologist	3	13%	20	87%	23	100%
Paediatricians	4	17%	19	83%	23	100%
Other	8	35%	15	65%	23	100%
Total	99		101		200	

6. Doctor's opinion on OTC drugs marketing:

Opinion	Doctors Responses	
Feels Unethical	83	41.50%
Patients will doubt	52	26.00%
Doesn't Gifts	30	15.00%
Doesn't Samples	20	10.00%
Not required	15	7.50%
Total	200	100%

7 Doctor response on advertisements on OTC drugs

Speciality of Doc/Source of info.	Yes		No		Total	
Gynaecologists	2	9%	21	91%	23	100%
Dermatologist	3	13%	20	87%	23	100%
General Practitioner	43	50.%	42	50%	85	100%
Cardiologist	2	9%	21	91%	23	100%
Paediatric	4	17%	19	83%	23	100%
Others	2	9%	21	91%	23	100%
Total	93		107		200	

The above table no 6.81 presents the opinion of doctors on OTC Products television advertisements .as seen earlier the negative response to promote OTC product in any-way. Most of the products which are advertised on television are OTC. Doctors across the strata were found to be against advertising Drugs on any media. since it is observed that most of the drugs are advertised in health magazines a set of doctors irrespective of their spatiality have developed appositve attitude toward s the advertisements on Television. Thus it was revealed that doctors do watch television advertisements on drugs and were found to be of the opinion that advertisement will spread information about OTC products along with medical conditions. This will enhance the discussion with patients and build relationship doctors also opined that advertisement will educate consumers on Risk and benefits of the OTC drugs.

8. Doctor's response on OTC products advertisements

1.Creating wrong picture of doctor						
Doctor	Total count	%	YES		NO	
Gynecologists	23	100.00%	19	82.61%	4	17.39%
Dermatologist	23	100.00%	16	69.57%	7	30.43%
GP	85	100.00%	34	40.00%	51	60.00%
Cardiologist	23	100.00%	20	86.96%	3	13.04%
Pedi.	23	100.00%	20	86.96%	3	13.04%
Other	23	100.00%	18	78.26%	5	21.74%
Total	200		127		73	
2.patients taking charge of health						
Doctor	Total count	%	YES		NO	
Gynecologists	23	100.00%	20	86.96%	3	13.04%
Dermatologist	23	100.00%	7	30.43%	16	69.57%
GP	85	100.00%	43	50.40%	42	49.60%
Cardiologist	23	100.00%	20	86.96%	3	13.04%
Pedi.	23	100.00%	7	30.43%	16	69.57%
Other	23	100.00%	5	21.74%	18	78.26%
Total	200					
3.Help seeking advertisements						
Doctor	Total count	%	YES		NO	
Gynecologists	23	100.00%	10	43.48%	13	56.52%
Dermatologist	23	100.00%	16	69.57%	7	30.43%
GP	85	100.00%	43	50.40%	42	49.60%
Cardiologist	23	100.00%	18	78.26%	5	21.74%
Pedi.	23	100.00%	16	69.57%	7	30.43%
Other	23	100.00%	20	86.96%	3	13.04%
Total	200		123		77	
4.Company awareness						
Doctor	Total count	%	YES		NO	
Gynecologists	23	100.00%	23	100.00%	0	0.00%
Dermatologist	23	100.00%	18	78.26%	5	21.74%
GP	85	100.00%	64	75.02%	21	24.10%
Cardiologist	23	100.00%	23	100.00%	0	0.00%
Pedi.	23	100.00%	23	100.00%	0	0.00%
Other	23	100.00%	20	86.96%	3	13.04%
Total	200		176		24	

The above table shows the set of doctors and their opinions on advertisements on television, radio and magazines, newspapers. It was revealed that most of the doctors were against the advertisements in any form during the survey. But as the questions about their opinion were analyzed discussions were found to be more positive and realistic. It was found that doctors irrespective of their specialty were found to be agreed that advertisements were creating a negative picture. It was found that Gynecologists 82.61%, dermatologists 69.57%, GP 40%, Cardiologists 86.96%, pediatrician 86% and others 78.26% were found to be accepting that OTC products advertisements do create wrong and unhealthy picture of doctors in OTC direct to

consumer advertisements, it was also found that doctors across the strata felt OTC drugs are safer in pregnancy and majority of patients will tend to buy these OTC products as they are readily available and under no medical supervision. It was also revealed that doctors were found to be of opinion that advertisements were just educating consumers, helping them to know about the health. It was found that doctors irrespective of their specialty were found to be agreed that advertisements on OTC drugs will motivate consumers to take charge of their ailments in treating their ailments while creating a negative picture of Doctor on the issue of Cost, waiting period, duration to cure etc. It was found that from the total surveyed doctors almost 86.96% Gynecologists 50.40%, Cardiologists 86.96%, and others 78.26% were found to be accepting that OTC products advertisements will motivate consumer in a wrong way and consumers will start avoiding doctors and take charge of their health whereas it was also found that 67.75% dermatologists, pediatrics 68.75% and others 78.26% were against the opinion that the consumers will take charge of health only after seeing advertisements as these advertisements were just a first line of defense and in minor ailments. It was also revealed that doctors were found to be of opinion that advertisements were just educating consumers, helping them to know about the health.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION:

The surveyed doctors perceived that OTC drug marketing strategies will make the drugs cheaper, easily available at stores and also information of the brand. This will encourage consumers to use OTC drugs as first line of defense and reduce cost on healthcare management.

Doctor's response was highly negative towards self medication through OTC medicines across the consumer strata. As they felt that self medication will lead to taking health in hands and will have detrimental effects. Few Gynecologist and dermatologist do not prescribe OTC brands in minor ailments as they were safe and easily available.

Doctors were of the opinion that consumers will get more involved in health management if more OTC Drugs are available in open market without prescription. This will decrease the footfalls at their clinic. Hence they were against OTC promotions by company representatives at their clinic saying that against their ethics.

The study showed that Doctors in age group and with different specialties were in positive frame of mind stating that OTC products will reach the areas where primary health care is question mark; private healthcare cost more even in minor ailment also so. The companies should bring down the cost of OTC products to reach the poor.

Thus OTC products are marketed and advertised freely so that maximum consumers are educated and treat minor ailments at home using OTC products as first line of defense. Since it can be expected that more Rx to OTC switch will increase number of drugs in OTC category in near future, it may be valuable to conduct more research on group of Consumer who consume OTC Products available to Counters freely and

either switch from the existing brand or continue to earlier brand. A study on marketing of OTC Products using post office and postman can also be a studied as a channel o marketing OTC drugs at national area.

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