

# Social Media in Pharmaceutical Industry

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## Abstract

The Indian pharmaceutical industry is one of the largest and steadily growing industries. In spite of this growth, the method of traditional pharma marketing has not changed much. It has always focused on promoting their brands and products to the doctor, who is the centre-piece of this industry, through their medical representatives. All marketing efforts including communication channels, strategies, CRMs, policies etc are devised keeping the doctor in mind. However, with changing times of emerging media and technology in people's life, does this need to change?

**Keywords:** social media, social media marketing

## Introduction

### Influence of Technology on Marketing

With the advent of globalization in the 90's, the ball of digital revolution set rolling with the Internet boom followed by the entry of mobile phones in the late 90's. With a population of 1.20 billion people today, India boasts of over 900 million mobile phones in the country. Smart phones are fast replacing standard mobile phones and every single service provider is offering deals on mobile Internet connectivity with their 3G and 4G offerings. Consumers are thus increasingly exposed to a gigantic pool of information at their fingertips. Social platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube etc are playing an important role in how information is consumed. Therefore, it is extremely difficult for any industry to overlook social media as a means of communication with their consumers.

### Power of Social Media

As per a recent report, close to 400 million Indians is an active Internet user which is up 20 per cent from previous year. A year back we recorded the highest social networking growth of over 35 per cent. It is also estimated that India will have the highest Facebook population in the world. Interestingly, as

one delves deeper into the ocean of social media and specifically in healthcare, there are over thousands of pages dedicated to health on Facebook.

Another report suggests that nearly 16 per cent mobile Internet users in 35 top cities in India closely follow or use health related applications. With this awareness about wellness and lifestyle diseases, people are increasingly seeking more information about health and wellness. According to a study published in Social Marketing Quarterly, people above the age of 18 revealed that Health Pages on Facebook had positive influences on them and motivated them to engage in healthy behaviours. The study concluded that Facebook may be an effective medium to help people live a healthy and adopt a healthy lifestyle.

## **Objective**

The major objective of the paper is to study the terms social media marketing at different level.

- 1. Brand Awareness:** Pharmaceutical companies may use social media platforms to increase their brand awareness among the target audience in Indore. This can involve sharing information about their products, highlighting their company values, and engaging with the local community.
- 2. Education and Information Sharing:** Social media provides a platform for pharmaceutical companies to educate and inform the public about various health conditions, treatment options, and advancements in the industry. They can share relevant articles, videos, and infographics to increase knowledge and awareness among the audience in Indore.
- 3. Building Trust and Credibility:** By maintaining an active presence on social media, pharmaceutical companies can build trust and credibility with the local community in Indore. They can provide accurate and reliable information, address customer queries and concerns, and demonstrate transparency in their operations.
- 4. Customer Engagement:** Social media allows pharmaceutical companies to engage directly with their customers and the general public in Indore. They can respond to comments, answer questions, and provide support. This engagement helps in establishing a positive relationship with customers and gathering feedback.
- 5. Recruitment and Talent Acquisition:** Pharmaceutical companies in Indore may also utilize social media platforms to attract and recruit top talent in the industry. They can showcase their company culture, job opportunities, and employee testimonials to attract potential candidates.
- 6. Market Research:** Social media platforms provide a wealth of data and insights that pharmaceutical companies can utilize for market research

purposes. They can analyze discussions, trends, and feedback to gain insights into customer preferences, needs, and sentiments in Indore.

## **Methodology**

The study is Descriptive type and qualitative based exploration of data majorly from the secondary source which comprises of Research paper, articles, websites and Journals.

## **Evolution of Patients and Thus, Doctors**

Decades ago, patients would consult a doctor for their illness and when the doctor prescribed a drug for treatment, they would not doubt it. However, this phenomenon has undergone a massive transformation with the advent of 'Dr Google'. Now before consulting the doctor, most patients would have already made attempts to understand the symptoms by asking Dr Google and landed in frenzy about its interpretation.

Many patients search the prescribed medicine online to get convinced of its efficacy. Patients also have the weapon to make or break the image of the doctor and hospital with the help of several platforms that offer reviews and feedbacks of doctors. This rise of the e-patient is pushing the doctor ecosystem to understand the power of digital and adapt to it. Moreover, as the doctor-medical representative relationship too is getting digitised, it has opened an opportunity for the industry.

## **How Can Pharma Industry Score a Goal Here?**

The two important aspects of pharma communications are the direct customers i.e. doctor communication, and the end user i.e. the patient communication. Now beyond the medical representative as a channel, newer avenues are opening out such as creating focused groups of doctors on a closed but verified social media platform. Some pharma companies and healthcare start-ups have realised the power of creating their own communities and are working around this framework. Also, standard social media platforms like Facebook connects patients and doctors together, where the pharma industry can take advantage to leverage their image and branding in the minds of both the doctor and patient.

On the other hand, consumers including patients and their caregivers are increasingly talking about various health conditions, exchanging thoughts about a condition and increasingly influencing behaviour by leaving strong digital footprints. Focused groups in various health conditions including woman's health, diabetes, cardiovascular health and other lifestyle conditions are showing increasing conversations. There are very interesting communication threads of

healthcare questions and answers that run in hundreds of forums and discussion groups. Some of them have become referral points on various health conditions. With the newer algorithms on Google search engine crawlers, these are thrown up on top of search results and influence health behaviour as well.

All this offers various opportunities to pharma companies, lets look at some of them:

### **Social Media Listening**

There are literally millions of health conversations on the web and they are increasing each day. These conversations can give an excellent insight into understanding patient psychology. There are discussions around various categories, pharma brands, their associated conditions, side-effects etc and interpreting this data will give the pharma industry an opportunity to fine tune and customise their brand strategy. Detailed analysis using tools can throw up various trends from various perspectives including geography, age-groups, gender etc. Analysis of this data and drawing insights will be key in the future.

### **Closed Loop Marketing**

Another excellent way to engage the doctors and patients is with the help of closed loop marketing (CLM) which is slowly gathering speed within the industry. Here, the company can engage the end users as well as doctor with customised information and if planned and strategised well and integrated with the field force efforts, closed loop marketing can deliver impressive results.

### **Digital Marketing**

This actually means marketing in the digital world. Right from mobile phone applications to right usage of digital tools, digital marketing can integrate well with the existing marketing efforts. From tools that help in counting calories to keeping a track on the amount of steps taken in a day, from being the first in providing doctors personalised information of their interest areas like the latest articles online to their smartphone to creating an active group, there is a lot that pharma companies can do get in close touch with their customers and consumers. If pharma can give a helping hand to the doctors by partnering with them in providing customised information to patients, it can help save doctor-patient interaction time. Understanding the space and creating solutions around it is an opportunity.

## **Social Media Community Building**

With the increasing online users, pharma can partner to build and own a community around their interest health condition. So, all the patient education initiatives can turn social. If the effort is taken with empathy to give real world solutions, the engaged community itself can help grow the community and take it to the next level. Also running campaigns on social media platforms to increase awareness about a particular disease or illness is an opportunity to drive traffic to doctors and expand the market. Various category leaders need to look at this opportunity to bring in patient-centricity in its true essence. By celebrating health days such as World Cancer Day, World Diabetes Day etc, pharma companies can help spread information about wellness to consumers with subtle branding.

With help from domain experts in the field of social media marketing, pharma companies can easily take their brand strategy to the next level with excellent ROI.

### **A Social Media Campaign that Made an Impact**

#Finding60inIndia is a good example of using social media to convey information about Progeria – a ultra-rare pre-mature ageing disease. The campaign, in association with the Progeria Research Foundation was aimed to build awareness about Progeria, as well as identifying the 60 estimated kids throughout India. A digital platform was created with the help of the hashtag #Finding60inIndia. Simultaneous Twitter and Facebook campaigns with Progeria survivor and fighter Nihal Bitla gave headway to bring this campaign in public attention. Nihal became the face of the campaign as Team Nihal and was backed by social media initiatives. From print to radio to online portals, all came together to spread the word about the campaign and this fatal disease. This led to a solid penetration of the campaign in people's mind so much that five more kids suffering from Progeria were located from remote places of India. This campaign not only helped find several kids suffering from Progeria, but also gave a sense of security to the parents of these kids that they are not alone. This campaign has undoubtedly been a success and recently the Delhi Government announced to form a sub-committee to develop policy to tackle rare genetic diseases such as Progeria. If an ultra-rare disease can have this impact, imagine what opportunity lays in managing lifestyle diseases.

### **Making Healthcare Exciting with Digital Support**

Social media cannot be looked into isolation. A complete e-Marketing initiative with a strong digital strategy needs to be drafted. At the same time, it is very

critical to understand the regulatory framework and work within the defined protocol and social media guidelines. Working with 'Responsibility' and 'Care' is critical while defining digital strategies that can oversee regulatory issues like Adverse Event Reporting etc.

Moving ahead, further penetration of smart phones and Internet and increased focus of pharma companies on social media, will lead to more interactive platforms coming up in this space. Companies like Abbott, Boehringer, J&J, Novartis, Pfizer, Sanofi, etc have taken the initial lead and there will be a lot to watch out for in the near future.

Social media is here to stay and has just gone through its infancy stage and will grow in the next few years. How pharma marketers decide to take advantage of it, is for them to decide. Clarity of objective with a clearly defined ROI, will help shape up the future of pharma marketing in digital as well as social media. While the younger marketers may want to adopt for the glamour in it, if that is supported with the marketing experience of the grey hairs, pharma marketing will undergo a paradigm shift in the time to come.

## **Conclusion**

The use of social media in the pharmaceutical industry in Indore has become increasingly prevalent and impactful. It has proven to be a powerful tool for communication, marketing, and engagement with various stakeholders, including healthcare professionals, patients, and the general public.

Social media platforms offer pharmaceutical companies in Indore a unique opportunity to disseminate information about their products, share updates on research and development, and address concerns or misconceptions. Through social media, companies can engage directly with their target audience, build brand awareness, and foster a sense of trust and credibility.

Furthermore, social media enables pharmaceutical companies in Indore to gather valuable insights through data analysis and monitoring of user feedback. This information can be used to enhance product development, tailor marketing strategies, and improve overall customer satisfaction.

However, it is crucial for pharmaceutical companies in Indore to adhere to strict regulatory guidelines when utilizing social media. Given the sensitive nature of healthcare information, companies must maintain patient privacy, comply with advertising regulations, and ensure the accuracy and transparency of the information they share.

In conclusion, social media has emerged as a powerful and influential tool in the pharmaceutical industry in Indore. When utilized effectively and responsibly, it can contribute significantly to the success of pharmaceutical companies by enabling them to engage with their target audience, enhance brand awareness, and gather valuable insights for continuous improvement.

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