

Role of Digitalization in Pharmaceutical sector

Ms Amruta Pawar¹,
Research Scholar, Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth, Pune
Dr. C. Sunanda Yadav²
Faculty and Guide Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth

Abstract:

Digitalisation has been spread in almost all the spheres of business & industries. Recognizing the benefits, the usage of digitalisation has been encouraged abundantly by the entrepreneurs in their ventures & business practices. Knowing the promising future of digitalisation, Government of India has also initiated 'Digital India' campaigning. In such scenario, no industry has left untouched from digitalization.

Pharmaceutical companies which operate in an extremely regulated environment with a number of promotional & marketing constraints; also dived into web selling. However, Pharma companies unlike of others deal with the products associated with people's health, ailment and on the whole their survival. Selling pharmaceutical products fall under the keen vigilance of legislative body. This is the reason why pharmaceutical business is not extensively promoted through online channels; as people are still susceptible towards the authenticity of healthcare products purchased online. However, the concept of e-pharmacy comes with several advantages such as the convenience of delivery, online record of e-prescription, return policy & feedback mechanism etc. This paper aims at analyzing views & counter views on the practice of digitalisation in healthcare business so as to determine how digitalisation is successful for pharmaceutical industry.

- **Keywords:-**Digitalisation, *Pharmaceutical industry, e-pharmacy, Digital India, success.*

Introduction

Digitalisation is an ever-evolving concept which has brought in the positive technological changes in almost every industry. With its plethora of benefits, digitalisation has amended the techniques & methodology of how any task; be it personal or professional can be performed in faster, convenient & cost-effective manner. Knowing this significance; every industry today is adopting digitalisation as a predominant tool for accomplishing work.

Let us first understand what digitalisation is exactly, and what are its various forms & merits—

Digitalisation encompasses both the internet-enabled sphere as well as the mobile one powered by wireless networks. Digitalisation is sometimes used synonymously with IT (for information technology); however, digitalisation is generally used to represent a broader, more comprehensive list of all components related to computer and digital technologies than IT.

The list of digitalisation components is exhaustive, and it continues to grow. Some components, such as computers and telephones, have existed for decades. Others, such as smartphones, digital TVs and robots, are more recent entries. Digitalisation commonly means more than its list of components, though. It also encompasses the application of all those various components. It's here that the real potential, power and danger of digitalisation can be found. Digitalisation's importance to economic development and business growth has been so monumental, in fact, that it's credited with ushering in what many have labeled the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Digitalisation also underpins broad shifts in society, as individuals en masse are moving from personal, face-to-face interactions to ones in the digital space. This new era is frequently termed the Digital Age.

For all its revolutionary aspects, though, digitalisation capabilities aren't evenly distributed. Simply put, richer countries and richer individuals enjoy more access and thus have a greater ability to seize on the advantages and opportunities powered by digitalisation.

The significance of digitalisation in business:-

For businesses, advances within digitalisation have brought a slew of cost savings, opportunities and conveniences. They range from highly automated business processes that have cut costs, to the big data revolution where organizations are turning the vast trove of data generated by digitalisation into

insights that drive new products and services, to digitalisation-enabled transactions such as internet shopping and telemedicine and social media that give customers more choices in how they shop, communicate and interact.

Digitalisation has revised various functions of business ranging from production, quality control, HRM, marketing and so on. If we further discuss precisely the significance of digitalisation for various business functions; marketing is one core area where digitalisation has shown the phenomenal spread. Today, Internet has become the most preferred tool through which the marketers can reach out to their desired & focused target audience. Websites, Search Engine Marketing (including SEO & PPC), Social Media Marketing are few digital marketing tools which have revolutionised the way products are being promoted and sold to the ultimate consumers. Internet has evolved into a self-organizing media, capable of multiple interactions within. Almost all companies dealing with the product categories such as food, fashion, home decors, electronics, healthcare, FMCG, financial services, telecom, are adopting digitalisation for reaching out the customers.

It's commendable that digitalisation is showing its prolific effect in several product categories which fall under the risk & susceptibility for consumers. One of such product categories is Pharmaceutical products. Pharmaceutical products include the generic drugs, branded medicines, dietary supplements, healthcare items, diagnostic equipments, and herbal products. All these are the life-saving or emergency products. E-pharmacy can be the apt example of practice of digitalisation in the pharma-world.

E-pharmacy (also termed as online pharmacy, internet pharmacy & cyber pharmacy) is concerned with selling pharmaceutical/healthcare products through digital medium; providing a variety of products (e.g. health and beauty products), generic drugs, branded medicines, dietary supplements, organic medicines, diagnostic equipments etc. Some pharmacies only dispense drugs with a valid prescription, some provide online consultations for prescribing and dispensing medicines, and some dispense medications without a prescription. There are a number of reasons that may lead patients to the use of the internet in search of medical care. It acts as a second opinion or second doctor for desperate patients. Also, it gives insight into patient problems, as well as the drugs that could cure them.

Though the marketing of drugs over the Internet is an inevitable outcome of the booming e-economy, it poses unique ethical, legal and quality challenges – the prime cause being the anarchic structure of the Internet. These challenges are important from the consumer, physician and regulator perspectives.

Different forms of e-pharmacy:

First, the online pharmacy may be an independent Internet company that has no physical pharmacy site for a consumer to visit. The online pharmacy may be a “clicks-and mortar” pharmacy, typically the online branch of a major pharmacy chain that has an actual storefront. Several chains have purchased online companies as a marketing strategy.

These partnerships have enabled customers to request refills of prescriptions through Web sites and have given customers the option to pick up the refill at a local branch of a major pharmacy or receive the refill in the mail. Finally, independent neighborhood pharmacies have formed networks and have built web sites to represent themselves.

Some online pharmacy web sites have “cyber doctors,” who evaluate patients via Internet communication and determine whether to prescribe medication based on this communication. The management and services of online pharmacies may be administered entirely in one state, may span several states, or may be located offshore.

Apart from these, digitalisation can contribute to Pharmaceutical marketing through following digital tools such as–

- Search Engine Optimization
- Pay-per-click
- Social Media Marketing
- Health apps
- Email newsletter etc.

Merits of e-pharmacy -

Internet pharmacies offer a host of benefits. They are convenient and allow customers to avoid nuisances such as going out in bad weather, parking hassles, standing in line, and the inevitable wait for the prescription to be filled. Patients with limited mobility or those living far from a pharmacy can benefit tremendously from legitimate Internet pharmacies by eliminating travel to a traditional pharmacy.

Potential customers of online pharmacies are attracted to these sites by the large-scale advertising campaigns of pharmaceutical companies on television in the press, by Internet advertisements, including spam, from the online pharmacies themselves, and by the reputed low prices. It can bring notable benefits in terms of saving time and money, but this is not always true. Sometimes medicines are more expensive than in usual drugstores. Online pharmacies have the potential to empower patients by providing information about new medications, adverse effects of medications, and health conditions.

Many Internet pharmacies offer overnight shipping, allowing customers to avoid the delay of regular mail. Another benefit is that some Internet pharmacies offer lower prices on medications than those charged by traditional pharmacies. One way lower costs are made possible is through an increase in competition. In addition, many Internet pharmacies lack fixed costs such as property leases, maintenance, and property taxes.

Furthermore, e-pharmacies can offer privacy that is often lacking in a traditional pharmacy. Many patients feel uncomfortable asking a pharmacist questions in front of other customers. Some Internet pharmacies have a licensed pharmacist available 24 hours a day to answer questions by phone or by e-mail. This allows patients to ask personal medication questions without fearing that their neighbors might overhear. A final benefit is that Internet pharmacies can offer perks not found in traditional pharmacies. Some companies send e-mail alerts when the prescription is due for a refill, such a reminder may improve patient compliance with drug therapies.

Online pharmacies have the potential to promote communication among pharmacists, physicians, and patients; whether this potential has been realized is debatable. For example, the option to send questions at any time of day about the adverse effects of medications may encourage patients to question pharmacists. In addition, the cloak of anonymity that the Internet offers may encourage patients to ask questions about some medications that they would be too embarrassed to ask in a busy pharmacy.

Shortfalls of e-pharmacy -

Two hazardous issues that go hand-in-hand are self-diagnosis and self-medication because consumers can purchase prescription drugs without ever speaking to a pharmacist or physician. In these days of managed care, it might be weeks before a patient can see a physician for non-emergency purposes. Patients might choose to treat themselves rather than wait for an appointment, or the patient simply may be too embarrassed to discuss the health problem with his physician. These dangers are especially significant given that numerous Internet pharmacies are willing to dispense prescription drugs without a valid prescription. When a patient utilizes an Internet pharmacy, which provides a medication, based on a cyber-consultation, or if the pharmacy directly dispenses the medication without a prescription, important safeguards are missed. Not only does the patient miss an examination by his physician, the possibility exists that a licensed pharmacist may never review the prescription. The patient bypasses the two professionals who traditionally inform patients of proper utilization, dangerous side effects, and drug interactions.

Another drawback to e-pharmacies may be cost, as some consumers pay more for prescription medications obtained over the Internet. High shipping costs and an inability to participate in many

insurance plans adds to the cost. Another area of concern involves the prescribing-physician's credentials.

The regulatory stance of the food and drug administration regarding e-pharmacies:

Under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, FDA has the legal authority to take action against:

- 1) The importation, sale, or distribution of an adulterated or misbranded drug;
- 2) The importation, sale, or distribution of an unapproved new drug;
- 3) Illegal promotion of a drug;
- 4) The sale or dispensing of a prescription drug without a valid prescription; and
- 5) Counterfeit drugs.

Implications of digitalisation in Pharmaceutical sector:-

Digitalisation has contributed to the growth of pharma industry remarkably. The most popular ways of using digitalisation for promotion of healthcare products & services are –

- website, on which the provided pharmaceutical products and services can be promoted;
- content displayed on the homepage: is the identity card of a website; the information must be very well structured;
- web banner: is a form of online advertising which places an announcement on a webpage;
- sponsored links, SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and Google AdWords ;
- email marketing;
- forums, blogs and social networks through which patients and doctors exchange information;
- content marketing: strategically marketing approaches focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and coherent information;
- press releases, advertorials or guest posting;
- classical infographics: these are representations of certain information (e.g. statistical data) in a graphical format conceived to understand data more easily;
- viral campaigns;
- affiliate marketing: a type of marketing used in e-distribution; it is a strategy by which it is intended to have access to a greater market through websites which are focused on specific groups of Internet users (e.g. Amazon.com where a wide range of products – books, electronics, pharmaceutical products, toys etc. – are marketed, having thousands of affiliated specific websites);

Medical education services conducted through digitalisation brought a number of assistances to users by giving them the opportunity of acquiring new information and knowledge on a very short time, in a convenient way with minimal cost.

Thus digitalisation has enabled the as a safe & sustainable alternative that breaks the barriers of traditional retail pharma outlets. Apart from consumers i.e. patients, it could also help doctors' fraternity to seek information and get connected to patients. Digitalisation in pharmaceutical industry has been lucrative to government by allowing endorsing the 'Jan Auhadhi Program', which is a primary part of country's plan to create awareness and enable access of affordable medicines to the general population across the country without compromising the quality of medicines. This program is a key part of the Digital Health Program under the Digital India and will be of immense benefits to the consumers.

Conclusion:

Pharmaceutical industry had and will have promising contribution of digitalisation for its growth & success. Pharmaceutical companies will in future will exceedingly acclimatize to digitalisation. Its various tools are making the pharmaceutical marketing easier & one-to-one. In today's world, where there is utmost competitions & vulnerability in consumers, digitalisation has proved itself the well-wisher of marketers by providing them new & focused ways to curb the competitions & reach out the targets. Pharma industry has also followed the path of digitalisation and capitalizes its advantages rightly to tap on the patients & medical practitioners as well. Looking at this spread of digitalisation we can ensure that traditional way relationship of the healthcare system will soon shift to two way relationships between medical practitioners & patients through digitalisation. Digitalisation enabled technologies such as mobiles, social media and other forms of digitalization will lead to a creation of valuable channels empowering patients to exchange information.

References:

1. <http://searchcio.techtarget.com/definition/DIGITALISATION-information-and-communications-technology-or-technologies>
2. www.cubex.co.in
3. Kapupara P. & Shah K., Digital Pharmaceutical Marketing : A Review, research journal on Pharmaceuticals & technology, vol. 9, 2015, pg no. 1.

4. Byrnes M., How Digital is shaping the future of Pharmaceutical Marketing, Manhattan research, Digital Health trends, &pharma marketing strategies resource guide, 2009
5. Tilak, G. Automation, Not Just Digitalization of the Publishing Industry.
6. Chaturvedi A. & Kumar A., Online pharmacy : An E-strategy for Medication, International Journal of Pharmaceutical Frontier research, 2015
7. Priyanka VP et al., E-pharmacy Regulation in India : Bringing New Dimension to Pharma Sector, Pharmaceutical regulatory Affairs, 2016
8. Tilak, G. (2019). Freedom of Expression in the Digital Age.
9. Radu A., et al, Online instruments used in Pharmaceutical Marketing, Farmacia, Vol. 65, 2017.
10. Sweet M., Pharmaceutical marketing and the Internet. Australian Prescriber, 2009.
11. Goundrey-Smith S., Information Technology in Pharmacy: An Integrated Approach. London, Springer Publishing, 2013.
12. Singh, D., & Tilak, G. (2019). Effect of Technology Devices on Health of Youth in Pune City.
13. Dobrescu A.I., Stoica I., Orzan M., User satisfaction regarding healthcare education services financed through the European Social Fund. Journal of Economic Computation and Economic Cybernetics Studies and Research, 2017; in press.
14. www.ibcf.org/industry/pharmaceutical-india.aspx