

**DIGITAL MARKETING: A PARADIGM SHIFT IN  
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Author****Balekari Umamahesh**University College of  
Pharmaceutical Sciences,  
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Over the past decade, pharmaceutical companies have successfully capitalized the global digital expansion as a platform for the pharmaceutical marketing. Digital marketing has proved to be economical, wider acceptability, increased accessibility to physicians and with the advantages of representative detailing. Information accessibility at the convenience of physician generated wider usage in

physicians. Digital marketing improves the patient experience, access to trusted information about drugs. Future advancements in digital marketing technologies further provide opportunities for manufacturers, physicians and patients to enhance the harmony in medical marketing.

**KEY WORDS:** Pharmaceuticals, digital marketing, e-detailing, eHealth, physician.**INTRODUCTION**

In the past decade, the technology advancements have made a significant impact all around the world in day to day life. As life styles are being affected, these progressions have led to the drastic changes in the marketing world; however pharmaceutical marketing has no exclusion from this technological evolution. Pharmaceutical companies are capitalizing this technology for digital marketing.

Conventional pharmaceutical marketing practices are involved with face to face contact between sales representative and medical professional for the drug promotional activities. However, drug companies are increasingly turning to electronic detailing or e-detailing for help in marketing their products. This has become a wide spread practice in the

developed countries and emerging in developing countries.<sup>[1]</sup> E-detailing includes diverse strategies, such as videoconferences, the provision of electronic education modules, and the use of email and related technologies as prompts and to promote two-way communications. It has been used for disease-awareness campaigns, and for ‘customer relationship management’. Apart from flexibility in terms of various modes of communication and detailing strategies, e-detailing has proven its significance in terms of wider acceptability by the physicians, less time and economy in the operations per an active call along with increments in the revenues. In this front, this manuscript presents the influence of digital drift on pharmaceutical marketing.<sup>[2, 3]</sup>

## DIGITAL DRIFT IN PHARMACEUTICAL MARKETING

### Physician’s perspective

In traditional marketing practices, pharmaceutical companies efforts were aimed towards entry of their product on to the prescription pad of the physician. For this very reason, the pharma companies used to provide product information and free samples to the medical practitioners. Doctors used to rely on offline materials like journals and references for the knowledge on the newer products.

Digital drift has led to changes in the pharma companies view on the promotion, reach and relations with physicians. E-detailing customers are not an emerging group, as the customer group is saturated with the easy access to technology everywhere in health care and regular usage of internet by physicians.<sup>[3]</sup> Now physicians have the access to all product information resources on a one touch. The companies are also providing the required latest information of the product, to stay abreast of the latest knowledge in their area. For physician, pharmaceutical companies are providing online customer services such as customer service portals, live video detailing by reps, interactive detailing, and e-sampling.

From a study by Manhattan research, the internet spending time by physicians have been significantly increased from 2.5 hours (in year 2002) to 8 hours (2010).<sup>[4]</sup> Though, the eight hours may not be too big, but when it terms of physician it is worth enough to capture by marketers. This trend in shifting to digital is predicted to rise, with physicians reporting that they expect to increase their use of online resources in the near future. Professional content that have been feeling “the shift” the most are clinical textbooks/references, journals, conferences, news, and continuing medical education (CME). A data from Google and Hall & Partners found the internet was the top priority place doctors looked for information on

health, medicine or prescription drugs. They access such information both at work, from home and via mobile devices. Mobile technology has been playing a vital role in the enhanced physicians' dependency on online resources, rather than usage of personal computers. Physicians are acclimatized to advanced online activities like podcast and social media. For work 86% of physicians use a smart phones, 53% use a tablet for work, and most use a computer. There are evidences even for prescribing apps along with drugs to help the patients in managing chronic diseases and other ailments. Digital product and service market has an enormous potential for growth. The mobile health market expected to reach \$26 billion by 2017; moreover, about 20,000 health-related mobile apps on Apple iTunes,<sup>3</sup> and remote patient monitoring devices are one of the fastest growing markets.<sup>[5]</sup> In view of this pharma companies are offering a huge focus on their digital marketing services in newer areas and further strengthening in already ventured segments.

### **Consumer's perspective**

Over the recent years, the Internet has evolved significantly as a top source of health information for consumers. Digital health (eHealth) has been emerging rapidly as a result of the digital advancement and affordability of the digital devices to the common man. The trend in eHealth usage in consumers is following a growth trend similar to physician e detailing. e-Health resources enable consumers, patients, and informal caregivers to gather information, make healthcare decisions, communicate with healthcare providers, manage chronic disease, and engage in other health-related activities. Consumers depend on the healthcare websites and other informative resources to educate themselves about the disease conditions and treatment options. Recently, this dependence on online using digital devices has been increased. According to Cybercitizen Health® U.S. 2013 study, 45% of U.S. adults with a chronic condition feels that the Internet is necessary to manage their disease or condition; 44% of online consumers agrees that the Internet is useful for their health and medical decision making.<sup>[6]</sup>

However, this enhancement in consumer shift to digital marketing is expected to grow, as the segment of consumer digital market is not yet saturated and the adoptability of consumers for digital marketing information was not similar to the physicians.<sup>[7,8]</sup> Consumers of all ages are keen to use the Internet as a tool to support their healthcare decisions. In developed countries, individuals contribute health-related social media content through blogs, message boards, chat rooms, online patient support groups and other networks. Such types of online healthcare

tools are helping consumers to compare experiences and become more empowered in their personal healthcare decisions; and impact the physician-patient interaction too. This empowerment result into a two way conversation between the patient and physician to further strengthen the interaction and faith towards treatment options.

## CONCLUSION

The shifting paradigm in the pharmaceutical marketing towards digital is expected to be improved further for strengthening the relationships between physician and manufacturer; physician and patient. For physicians, digital marketing proved to be useful in providing wider acceptability, flexibility and as continuous source for latest updated. The patient centric digital marketing empowers the patient towards the disease management and treatment options. The continuous enhancement of digital marketing technologies further provides opportunities for manufacturers, physicians and patients to enhance the harmony in medical marketing.

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