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**Influence of Social Media Marketing in Indian Pharmaceutical Industry**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Social media marketing is entering in every prospective field and results are beyond imagination. Mckensey & Co. has predicted Indian pharmaceutical industry will touch 55 billion USD by 2020. Social media is definitely going to change the market dynamics. On 12th Feb. 2014 facebook celebrated its tenth anniversary with \$134 billion revenue. Many pharmaceutical giants such as Pfizer, Eli Lilly, AstraZeneca, GSK etc.(Beth Synder Bulik, 2011) had realized the potential of social media and therefore, a huge chunk of money is involved which is resulting into a wide shared network of consumers (i.e. doctors and patients), hospitals, healthcare portal and pharmaceutical companies. It enables pharmaceutical companies to gain market intelligence, obtaining real time customer feedback, spreading disease awareness and engage in brand promotion. This study is an attempt to understand the implication of social media marketing in Indian Pharmaceutical Industry and also to analyze the reason behind the acceptance of social media marketing in pharmaceutical area. The outcome of the study is that social media marketing had created a synchronized platform for doctors, pharmaceutical companies and patients (consumers) in more meaningful and coherent way. It not only creates the awareness about the disease but connects the patients of similar disease profile.*

**Keywords:** *Social Media Marketing; Healthcare Portals; Promotion; Indian Pharmaceutical Industry.*

**1.0 Introduction**

In present scenario, 120 millions of populations are the active internet users and 900 plus millions are mobile phone users [1]. Social Media Marketing (SMM) is unleashing huge potential in each industry ranging from a small retail store to a massive hospitality chain. According to Hubspot, 92% of marketers in 2014 claimed that social media marketing is one of the important part for their business and 80% indicated that their efforts increases traffic to their websites [2]. Social media marketing covers basically all activities related to social sharing of content, videos, images, feedback, awareness, knowledge etc. for marketing process. Companies are now targeting their specific products, consumers are able to share experiences and discuss idea and industry-consumer relationship is going beyond the point expected.

This can be only possible due to social media marketing. Presently, social media is not just a tool for companies to broadcast their own message but has transformed into a proper means in which pharmaceutical companies are able to provide overall care with the help of active monitoring and remote

diagnosis. Still traditional marketing strategy accounts for 17-20% of sales revenue but social media campaigns would not be more than 2-3%. It includes websites for doctors and patients, healthcare mobile applications and online information tools.

The drive of success has just entered into pharmaceutical industries and the consequences are unpredictable. Social media marketing has provided the best source of awareness, perception, attitudes, responses and expectations for doctors and patient population. Large general social networks like facebook, Ning and Myspace and health sites like HealthCentral, WebMD, Revolution health and speciality platforms like Cure Together, Patientslike Me, Inspire etc. has changed the view of consumers or customers. According to a new report, one third of patients seek health advice on facebook, twitter and other social media sites [3].

The first firm who started to encompass social media marketing was Merck, which in 2008, set up a page on facebook to promote its Gardasil vaccine that helps to protect human papillomavirus, which can cause cervical cancer [4]. Similarly, YouTube posted promotional videos such as GSK's restless legs awareness film [5].

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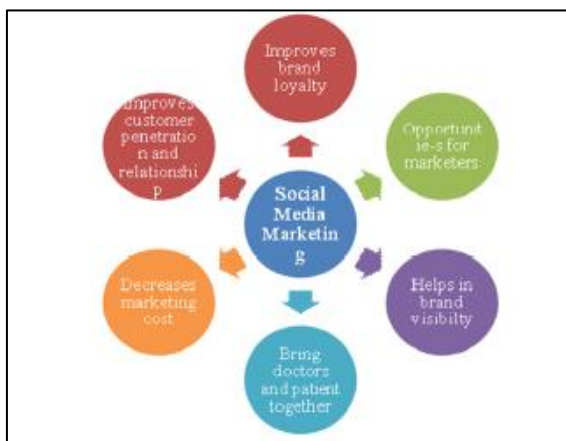
**Table 1: List of Companies Using Social Media Sites**

Face book	Twitter	YouTube
Astrazeneca	Astrazeneca	Astrazeneca
GSK	GSK	Eli Lilly
J&J	J&J	GSK
Merck	Merck	J&J
Novartis	Pfizer	Merck
LinkedIn	Flickr	Google+
Astrazeneca	GSK	Pfizer
Novartis	Novartis	Roche
Pfizer		
Roche		

**Source:** Pharma and Healthcare Social Media wiki:  
<http://www.doseofdigital.com/healthcare-pharma-socialmedia-wiki/>.

These pharmaceutical companies are maintaining their presence on social media websites for providing information on new drugs, to educate patients about their health issues and also deepening the relation with patients and healthcare professionals.

**Fig 1: Depicting Social Media Marketing Benefits**



These benefits had made social media as the integral part of online business. Social media tries to give the opportunity to develop a healthy relationship with the customers and learn about positive and negative experiences that the company had with their products or services and further make improvements to the key areas of their business.

Co-creation is a recent phenomenon now-a-days in marketers and consumers interaction. Social media had given the wings to the concept of co-creation. Social media is not only a channel for the sales representatives to shout and beat the drum aggressively to sell their products but is about to connect and collaborate with individuals and treating the patients properly. It is all about delivering a promise and providing customers with high quality products and services as Sanofi has used face book and twitter for creating a community of 4000 diabetic patients [6]. There is a clear opportunity for pharmaceutical companies towards social media marketing and with the high rate it is increasing day by day. Henceforth, social media marketing has become important for listening and learning about consumer behaviour, market perceptions and massive new opportunities.

Indegene lifestystem is a leading global provider of clinical, marketing and commercial solutions .had explored and exercised various possibilities for encashing the benefit of Social media marketing in pharmaceutical industry.

**2.0 Literature Review**

Now-a-days, increasing fleet of net savvy patients and smart phone addicted doctors in India is giving rise in the usage of social media initiatives by pharmaceutical industry. Health has been projected as one of the super seven areas of explosive growth, according to August 2012 comscore webinar on “The Rise Of India’s Digital Consumer”. In this regard, number of studies had been conducted [6].

P Gupta (2011) had proved that increase in positive response of key consumer groups are patients and doctors, especially in young age group market [4]. The use of social media marketing is basically targeting to young age group because now-a-days the young age doctors and patients frequently use internet and they spend at least 10 minutes daily on internet [7].

Henceforth it is very important to create awareness among society and influence opinions in marketer's favor. IMS (2007) revealed that near about 40% pharmaceutical promotional spending was on consumers and at present time it is further increasing with the help of various media like detailing, internet, conferences, seminars, television etc. [8] Further, Ernst and Young in 2009 anticipated that the Indian pharmaceutical industry has now entered in “Parma 3.0” or one can say that the era of health outcomes [1]. Pharmaceutical industry should move towards digital and interactive media and from 2009 to till date industry has adopted the social media or digital media offering the possibilities as online

conversations with doctors and patients. In an article entitled “Demystifying social media” in April 2012 edition of McKenzie report, it was highlighted that social media still accounts for less than 1% of an average marketing budget but chief marketing officers want to increase this to 5% [6].

According to IBM (2012) pharmaceutical companies can use social media for brand monitoring and gaining valuable customer views to make the marketing innovative. Thus pharmaceutical companies can embrace the social media for better relationship with patients [9]. Many a times it becomes difficult to rely on the advertisements in the pharmaceutical market but WHO (1998) has not addressed any problem related to advertisements shown in electronic media. Mr. Perak Hoar, Associate, TMT law Practice at Nishith Desai Associates has said that, “social network content is mainly in the form of user generated content. It is very important on behalf of patients creating right information regarding their diseases, brand name, contraindications, adverse effects etc. [10]. Ms. Gowree Gokhle, Partner and Co-head, Pharma Practice has pointed to section 43A, section 72, section 72A, and section 79 of India’s Information Technology (amendment) Act 2008 regarded as country’s cyber law which may be considered relevant in this case [10]. These sections have their own advantages in their respective way as section 72 comprises the Penalty for breach of confidentiality and privacy. Similarly other sections have also such type of relevant information for the sake of confidentiality for the users. India has Magic Remedies Act 1954 which has only one relevant clause i.e. clause 4, on misleading advertisement which directly or indirectly gives the false impression regarding the true nature of drug or if otherwise there is any false or misleading in any particular material [11].

Further, Hitesh Galatia, Executive Director, KPMG India concluded that customers must be educated prominently on social media to follow the principle of “Caveat Emptor-Buyer Beware”. Buyer must always beware about the information related to its health and medicines as well [10]. It is the responsibility of the pharmaceutical companies not to endanger the life of human safety in any way and in any condition just because of the lack of disclosure or clarity regarding the diseases or another type of information which is beneficial for the consumer at any cost. In this way, social media marketing is not only increasing the pharmaceutical industry engagement with its stakeholders (healthcare practitioners and patients) but also becoming an important tool for real time market feedback.

### **3.0 Factors Accelerating Momentum of Social Media Marketing in Pharmaceutical Industry**

There are various factors which affect the growth of social media marketing. Although, Pharmaceutical industry is a highly controlled industry, still rise in diseases is leading to more involvement from patients. This change is leading to acceptance of more social media marketing in pharmaceutical industry. Some of the factors are as follows-

- 1) Rise in digital communication
- 2) Rise in e-patient
- 3) Change in the outlook of Indian Healthcare practitioners
- 4) Use of health portals
- 5) Adaptation of multi-channel and closed loop marketing
- 6) Holistic pharm value chain
- 7) Reduction in cost for information storage and sharing

#### **3.1 Rise in digital communication**

Social media has come out as a key influencer and medium for patient and healthcare practitioner's engagement.

Digital media is helping in spreading disease/brand awareness, facilitate emcee for doctors, provide real time interaction between doctors and patients and covers a wide geographical area.

#### **3.2 Rise in e-patient numbers-**

Now-a-days, patients in India are hooking to internet and social media platforms for getting additional information on the prescribed drugs. This rise of e-patients is forcing doctors and pharmaceutical players for changing their strategy for building relationship with the patients.

These interactions are not only restricted to seeking and sharing information and leading to discussions, opinions and creating a pool of online data for people to refer.

Patients are also using social media to validate the cost related with treatment, information on reimbursement and enquiring insurance benefits related with treatment.

#### **3.3 Change in the Outlook of Indian Healthcare Practitioners**

50% of the population in India is less than the age of 30 years, these new breed of doctors are having different psychology in grasping the knowledge.

Therefore, they are adopting social media marketing more rapidly.

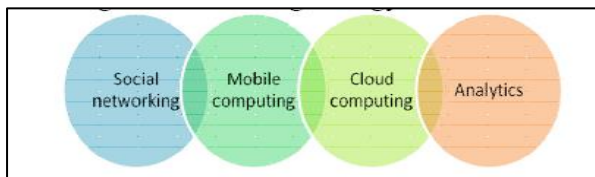
**3.4 Use of health portals**

Health portals like emedworld, mylifecare, kare4u etc. helps the patients to interact and communicate with doctors about health, diseases, medications etc. health portals helps both consumers and providers by increasing efficiency and productivity respectively.

**3.5 Adaptation of multi channel and closed loop marketing**

Pharmaceutical industry in India is facing the change in the Indian healthcare provider and patient interaction. Closed loop marketing and multi-channel marketing are the new flavours in the market. Closed loop marketing engages the patient (end user) with customized information through blogs, live chat discussions, video steaming etc. whereas multi-channel marketing is indicating the wide usage of health apps. Many successful social media campaigns were found to be in the area of pregnancy, childcare, oncology, geriatrics etc. that proves Indian pharmaceutical industry has to change their marketing strategy.

**Fig 2: SMAC Model**



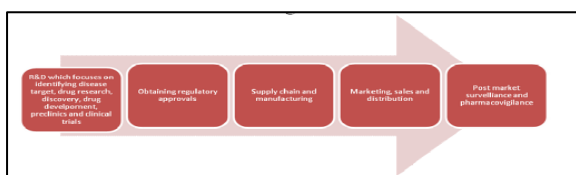
Source- Pharma Summit 2013 [http://www.pwc.in/assets/pdfs/publications/2013/c/Changing-landscape-of-the-indian-pharma-industry.pdf]

The convergence of these 4 key technologies that is social networking, mobile computing, analytics and cloud computing (SMAC) will boost innovation, customer service and interaction [12].

**3.6 Holistic Pharma value chain-**

A typical value chain of pharma companies starts from sourcing of raw material and it ends to post market surveillance. Social media synchronises all these stages and results into sustainable advantage of to customers.

**Fig 3: Pharma Value Chain**



Source- Pharma summit 2013 [http://www.pwc.in/assets/pdfs/publications/2013/changinglandscape-of-the-indian-pharma-industry.pdf] Holistic value chain will drive operational efficiency and reduce cost.

**3.7 Reduction in Cost for Information Storage and Strategy**

Social media technologies help in cutting cost for information storage and sharing pertaining to drug or disease builds in effective communication. This will be further beneficial if social media should be clubbed to traditional marketing mix of pharmaceutical industry.

**4.0 Conclusion**

Social media marketing is bringing a new revolution to pharmaceutical industry. The triangular linkage among doctors, pharmaceutical companies and patients is scaling new horizon. In long run, the pharmaceuticals market will be largely driven by the social media marketing. According to a report published in The Times of India (2014), online medical consultation is becoming popular in which new options like online appointments, video calls with doctors, getting knowledge from social media is at higher side [13]. It can be concluded that holistic social media marketing can stimulate more innovation by touching multiple stakeholders.

It creates a sustainable ecosystem that can change customer (doctor and patient) and employee experience. As quoted by Manish Gupta, CEO, Inde Gene Lifesystems, “For pharma/ medical firms, social media has become a channel that they cannot afford to miss, given that many patients these days look up the Internet to understand their symptoms and the disease they (or their family members) are suffering from before consulting a doctor” Pharmaceutical industry need to take a 360-degree approach for engaging better with patients and healthcare providers (doctors) with their products and services.

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