

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE ADOPTION OF OMNICHANNEL MARKETING IN PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY OF INDIA

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Abstract

A major trend in the pharmaceutical industry nowadays is digitalization. Digital technology influences external and internal aspects of the pharma business operation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmaceutical companies have been compelled to transfer their focus to digital marketing and more personalized customer targeting. As the objective of omnichannel marketing is to provide a consistent, integrated, and personalized experience for the customer regardless of the channel or device used. We aim to add to the discussion on understanding omnichannel in the pharmaceutical market congruently. Our goals are to understand the following-

1. Factors that drive the adoption of omnichannel marketing in the pharmaceutical industry

2. To identify the challenges and barriers involved in the adoption of omnichannel marketing in the pharmaceutical industry.

In the first phase of the study, we identified the drivers and challenges through semi-structured telephonic interviews with pharma professionals.

In the second phase, qualitative research was conducted in addition implications as well as the prospective research propositions were discussed.

Keywords – Omnichannel, Pharmaceutical Marketing, digitalization, drivers, challenges, COVID -19.

1. INTRODUCTION

The pharmaceutical industry in India is undergoing significant transformation driven by factors such as intense competition, patent expiration, and evolving regulatory landscapes. This dynamic environment has prompted pharmaceutical companies to reevaluate their marketing strategies to maintain competitiveness and relevance in the market. As a result, there has been a notable shift towards omnichannel marketing, a customer-centric approach that integrates online and offline channels to deliver seamless and personalized experiences.

Pharmaceutical firms are increasingly leveraging digital technologies to engage with healthcare professionals and patients across multiple channels. Omnichannel marketing facilitates interaction via social media, email, websites, mobile apps, and in-person encounters, enabling personalized experiences. This strategy aims to enhance customer engagement by ensuring seamless interactions across channels, fostering stronger relationships, brand loyalty, and trust.

Additionally, omnichannel marketing provides valuable insights into customer behaviour and preferences. By tracking interactions across channels, companies gather data to tailor marketing messages and campaigns, driving higher engagement and conversion rates through relevant, personalized content.

Despite the benefits of omnichannel marketing, implementing this approach in the pharmaceutical sector comes with its challenges. One major challenge is the complexity of integrating data across multiple channels. Pharmaceutical companies must ensure that customer data is collected, stored, and analysed in a secure and compliant manner. Additionally, regulatory restrictions may limit the types of communication and information that can be shared with healthcare professionals and patients, further complicating the implementation of omnichannel marketing strategies.

In conclusion, omnichannel marketing presents a substantial opportunity for pharmaceutical firms to boost customer engagement and foster business expansion. By harnessing digital tools and merging online and offline channels, companies can craft seamless and tailored experiences for their clientele. However, addressing obstacles like data integration and regulatory compliance is pivotal for effective omnichannel marketing implementation in the pharmaceutical sector. Through our research article, we endeavour to delve into these challenges and offer insights to aid pharmaceutical companies in navigating the shift to omnichannel marketing, thus harnessing its potential to propel success in the ever-evolving healthcare arena.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Pharmaceutical Industry

A trillion-dollar industry, the pharmaceutical sector creates goods that enhance the lives of billions of people.(1)
The pharmaceutical industry has thrived due to advancements in science and technology. With global revenues reaching \$1.42 trillion in 2021 and projected to hit \$1.48 trillion in 2022 (Statista), India emerges as a key player, boasting the second-highest number of US FDA-approved plants globally. India leads in vaccine and generic drug production, meeting a significant portion of global demand and contributing 60% to the vaccine output. With over 500 APIs produced and a strong presence in international trade, India remains a top player in the pharmaceutical sector, offering affordable medications globally and presenting lucrative investment opportunities.(2)

The Indian pharmaceutical industry, with a CAGR of 9.43% over nine years, ranks third globally in output volume. It encompasses key sectors like generic drugs, vaccines, biosimilars, and biologics, with around 500 USFDA-compliant API facilities, representing 8% of the global API market. (ibef)

2.2 Pharmaceutical Regulations and Evolving Marketing Practices

The pharmaceutical industry has been growing and evolving over the years and so therefore the regulatory changes in the system and legislation are under continuous improvements strengthening the Indian pharmaceutical industry (3,4)

Past regulatory history back when most of pharmaceuticals were foreign imported and various foreign manufacturer flooded the Indian pharmaceutical market with adulterated and spurious drugs led to start of enormous production and it called for requirement of a comprehensive legislation in India. (5–7) With this the Indian government came up with different policies designed to facilitate productions of drugs in India and making it self-sufficient and independent. This eventually led to development of Indian drug regulatory authorities and framework setting up Acts, laws and regulations having defined structure and functions. and with this the Indian pharmaceutical industry became one amongst the highly regulated industry.(4,8)

Several Regulations and acts set pertaining to marketing practices were also made, henceforth the pharma marketing practices has been evolving over the period of years, starting from production era where the only focus to produce enough quantity of products in the market which has high demand and no completion, followed by sales concept when the domestic market became highly competitive and demand was decreasing and focused to convince customers to buy their product through personal selling.(4) After the World War II, hard selling no longer could drive the sales of company and customer bought selective products which met their need, with this pharmaceutical organization adopted marketing concept focusing on the changing need of customer. (9,10) Traditionally used drug positioning strategies for pharmaceutical products using various promotional tools i.e. physician samples medical equipment as gift, regular visits of medical representative, journal subscriptions, sponsorship for personal trips, textbook presents, firm participation in CMEs and conferences, online and SMS advertising, sponsorship for conference lodging, etc.(11) With digitalization the pharmaceutical promotional strategies have changed utilizing various digital platform and channels to position their product and are trying to build a fine customer engagement and customer experience

2.3 Digitalisation

Digital technologies must be incorporated into all facets of an organization's operations, including its business procedures, goods, and contacts with its clients. (12)It has the power to change how businesses are run, invent new business models, and upend established sectors.(13)

Digitalization streamlines business processes and creates new value and engagement opportunities, making it essential for competitiveness in the modern economy. In the pharmaceutical industry, it accelerates drug discovery through big data analytics and AI while streamlining clinical trials for improved efficiency and cost-effectiveness.(14) The pharmaceutical industry has undergone significant digital transformation in marketing and sales approaches, leveraging channels such as social media, email marketing, and digital advertising to reach healthcare professionals and patients more effectively. Digitalization has enhanced patient engagement, enabling activities like health tracking, medication reminders, and interactions with healthcare providers through patient portals and mobile health apps. Furthermore, digital technologies have revolutionized regulatory compliance, facilitating process automation, data tracking, and real-time compliance insights. Overall, digitization has improved efficiency, production, and patient outcomes in the pharmaceutical sector, paving the way for further innovation and transformation as the industry continues to embrace digital technologies.(15)

2.4 Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic not only negatively impacted human health but also had adverse effects on major industries, including pharmaceuticals. It significantly altered interactions between physicians and pharmaceutical companies, leading to a reduction in face-to-face interactions due to travel restrictions and social distancing measures. Consequently, there was a notable shift towards virtual interactions such as teleconferences and webinars. Organizational marketing and spending strategies were heavily affected, with many companies cutting back on promotional events and marketing activities to manage costs. In response to these challenges, companies turned to omnichannel marketing as traditional techniques became ineffective during the total

lockdown.(16)

Amidst digital expansion, the pharmaceutical sector prioritizes personalized content via omnichannel marketing, tailoring messages to individual preferences. With COVID-19 accelerating digital reliance, the industry aims for seamless customer engagement across platforms. This crisis prompts reevaluation, urging pharmaceutical firms to adopt omnichannel strategies for future success. (15)

2.5 Multichannel

Multichannel has garnered a great deal of attention in marketing research.(17) There are numerous descriptive definitions of multichannel marketing in the literature, and they vary considerably. Rangaswamy & van Bruggen (2005) may provide the most exhaustive definition: "offering their customers and prospects information, products, services, and support (or any combination of these) through two or more synchronised channels."(17)

The interactions between Indian healthcare providers and patients are evolving, which is affecting the Indian pharmaceutical industry. The most recent market trends are closed-loop and multi-channel marketing(18)

Multichannel marketing is a popular topic in the pharmaceutical industry, with its promise of increased productivity yielding commercial benefits to the bottom line. In this regard, multichannel marketing may be what the pharmaceutical industry needs to redefine its relationship with healthcare stakeholders, such as physicians, nurses, payers, and patients.

Numerous social media campaigns in the disciplines of oncology, geriatrics, oncology, and pregnancy have been identified, indicating that the Indian pharmaceutical industry must modify its advertising strategy.(19,20)

Implemented correctly, multi-channel approaches work well for both parties; the customer receives the information they require in a manner that suits them, and pharma companies can recognise efficiencies by not wasting resources, resulting in relationships that are much stronger and mutually beneficial.(16,20)

2.6 Omnichannel marketing

Omnichannel marketing is a marketing approach that takes multichannel marketing to the next level by creating a seamless and integrated customer experience across all channels digital as well as non digital.(21)

Omnichannel marketing is designed to provide customers with a consistent and personalized experience, regardless of which channels they use to interact with a company

The phrase "omni-channel" refers to the combining of many communication channels into a unified system. In omnichannel marketing, all channels are connected and work together to create a cohesive customer journey.(22)

2.7 Difference between omnichannel and multichannel marketing-

Multichannel marketing focuses on individual channel performance, while omnichannel marketing prioritizes seamless integration across all channels. Unlike multichannel marketing's tendency for inconsistent messaging, omnichannel marketing ensures uniform messages across all touchpoints, providing a seamless customer experience. Omnichannel marketing also emphasizes personalization and technology investment to meet diverse customer needs and preferences. Additionally, omnichannel marketing involves a single team managing merchandising across all platforms, ensuring cohesive operations and customer engagement.

2.8 OM IN DIFFERENT INDUSTRIES-

Organisations that are focused on both products and services have embraced the omnichannel marketing approach. The shift from multichannel to omnichannel marketing has been facilitated by new technologies as well as changes in customer behaviour.(23) Customers increasingly demand seamless experiences across all channels, driving the growing significance of omnichannel marketing in all industries. In the retail sector, digital transformation has revolutionized customer-business interactions, enabling consumers to seamlessly transition between online and in-store experiences, receiving personalized recommendations via email or mobile apps.(24) The banking industry has undergone significant technological advancements, modernized service channels and investing in new technologies to meet evolving customer expectations. Customers now demand communication with banks across various channels and devices, highlighting the increasing importance of omnichannel marketing in the banking sector.(25) Omnichannel marketing is also used by the hospitality industry to enhance the guest experience. Hotels use smartphone apps to link guests with hotel personnel, offer personalised suggestions, allow guests to book rooms and order room service. Hotels and other hospitality organisations that use technology and data can provide visitors with more convenient and enjoyable stays, which can enhance customer loyalty and good word-of-mouth.(26) The automobile sector utilizes omnichannel marketing to offer clients a seamless car-buying experience through web research, mobile apps, and in-store technologies, providing personalized advice and convenience. With omnichannel marketing becoming prevalent across various industries, the pharmaceutical sector is poised for significant advancement and growth in the future, recognizing the vast opportunities it offers.

2.9 CUSTOMER CENTRICITY

The global pharmaceutical sector remains fragmented, with the top 10 producers representing only 35% of the market, and no company holding more than 5% market share (27). Companies are rethinking sales strategies due to challenges in gaining competitive edge through product differentiation (27). Traditionally, the industry has been more product-focused than customer-centric, overlooking the complexity of the customer network, which includes physicians, patients, and care institutions (28). Customer orientation primarily focuses on post-sales support, neglecting broader customer needs (27). Customer centricity, defined as prioritizing customers' interests in a firm's actions, is crucial for achieving competitive advantage and improving performance (29). Sales force productivity, vital for market share sustainability, faces challenges like rising competition for physician time, generic industry growth, and healthcare cost control initiatives (30).

Pharmaceutical companies tend to rely on traditional marketing models, mainly utilizing medical representatives to inform physicians about drugs, often ignoring customer needs (28). Transformational business models focusing on digital solutions are necessary in this industry, with omnichannel marketing emerging as an innovative solution. Omnichannel marketing prioritizes customer-centricity, recognizing that customers seek consistent experiences across various interaction channels (31). It allows flexibility and choice in customer interactions, with continuous analysis of feedback and data to enhance the customer experience (31). By utilizing consumer insights, omnichannel marketing can tailor interactions and offers to meet the preferences, behaviors, and needs of individual customers, fostering enduring relationships (31). In summary, omnichannel marketing delivers a customer-centric approach, emphasizing convenience, consistency, personalization, flexibility, and continuous improvement across multiple channels to better serve customer needs and preferences.

2.10 Benefits

Omnichannel marketing in the pharmaceutical industry enhances engagement, streamlines operations, and boosts efficiency by providing personalized experiences, gathering data, and informing future strategies. This customer-centric approach revolutionizes marketing, improving engagement, understanding, communication, and effectiveness.

2.11 Success factors of omnichannel marketing-

Designing a holistic omnichannel strategy which is aligned with the overall business strategy is a prerequisite for the success of omnichannel marketing. The goal of the strategy should be to achieve a competitive edge while simultaneously addressing the needs of the customer, which leads to customer satisfaction.(31) However, businesses must first remove internal obstacles, starting by gaining a more in-depth comprehension of the customer persona and how their customers view every available channel. The most significant opportunities for omnichannel integration become clear from mapping out the customer journeys across the channels. For the changes to stick, updated incentive structures to encourage collaboration, new performance dashboards, a transformation road map, and transparent communications is needed. Internal organizational structures, processes, organizational culture, managerial systems need to be reconfigured along with a change in people's attitudes and behaviours. The various functions of the organization (eg-Marketing and sales) should stop working in silos and a proper coordinated, channel integration should be established. (31) To analyse customer behaviour across all touchpoints, evaluate the success of marketing campaigns, and maximise promotional efforts, data analytics is crucial. Pharmaceutical firms must invest in tools and systems that support efficient data management and analysis, as well as have strong data analytics capabilities.(32) Businesses benefit as omnichannel marketing allows identifying and combining data from numerous channels, as well as studying cross-channel customer behaviour which assists in making strategic and tactical decisions(31) The ability to continuously review how the omnichannel model is operating, find areas for development, and translate those opportunities into new rounds of initiatives for execution is key to the success of omnichannel marketing.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND PARADIGM

A qualitative research design was used as an approach that is suitable for understanding the participants' perspective and deeper understanding of the subject to examine and determine the factors that drive the adoption of omnichannel marketing as well as to identify the challenges faced by them to incorporate omnichannel into the pharmaceutical industry and high level of transparency was maintained in the description of all phases of the study. (33)

Participants

For this qualitative investigation, purposeful sampling was used to recruit experienced professionals from the pharmaceutical industry, aligning with the research objective. Participants were identified via LinkedIn and interviews were scheduled with their consent. The response rate after excluding disconnected or declined calls was 50%, with interviews conducted in English. The final sample comprised 50 participants aged between 32 and 60 years.

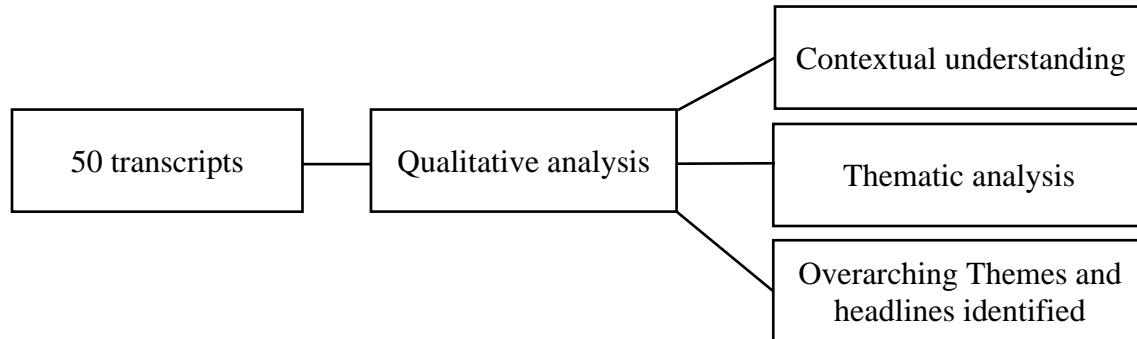
Data Collection

Data was gathered via telephonic semi-structured interviews with professionals. Prior to the calls, efforts were made to facilitate communication, schedule interviews, and book slots on a weekly basis.(35) Researchers formulated interview questions aligned with research objectives. In the semi-structured interviews, participants were encouraged to contribute additional insights based

on their understanding and experience.

The interviews were carried by 3 members via telephone. The research was carried out in the tenure from February –April. All the interviews were anonymized assigning them alphabetic code so encrypted and stored, and the audio were recorded and transcribed. All the interviews were encrypted and stored.

Evaluation Design



4. DATA ANALYSIS

With respect to our research question, the thematic analysis was ideally best suited since its directed to analyse narrative material of our participants along with it allows to work both descriptive manner and interpretive manner to create an integration of manifest and latent contents. (36,37). Thematic analysis method and framework for identifying analysis and reporting patterns within the data was utilized and analysis was done step by step as depicted in flowchart.

The entire analysis was split into three broad stages -

- a) The reduction or breakdown of the text
- b) The exploration of text
- c) The compilation of the exploration

STEP-1- DATA FAMILIARISATION & CODING-

Analysis began with familiarization of the data to obtain a complete view of them. firstly, the data was reduced by dissecting text into smaller understandable meaningful segments with use of coding. we have used color coding based on the research questions formulated earlier.

STEP-2 THEME IDENTIFICATION

Themes were abstracted having meaning similar units of the text were identified, Similar expressions were put together, sub-themes and later main themes were created. In doing so, they remained faithful to the participants' expressed perspectives(34) Quotes were also extracted to illustrate the results, indicating the participant's code at the end of each of these.

STEP-3 NETWORK COSTRUCTION

Arranging Broad themes, basic themes and latent themes and grouping them under separate heads, thereafter rearranging refining of themes such that it fulfils the research objective followed by final depiction as thematic network and verification of themes such that it reflected the data.

STEP-4 EXPLORATION AND SUBMMARIZE

Further reading the data through the themes generated and not in a linear way and present a summary of main themes and patterns so identified.

STEP-5 PATTERN INTERPRETATION

The key conceptual findings in the summaries of each thematic network, and pool them together into a cohesive story by relating them back to the original questions and the theoretical grounding of the research. (38)

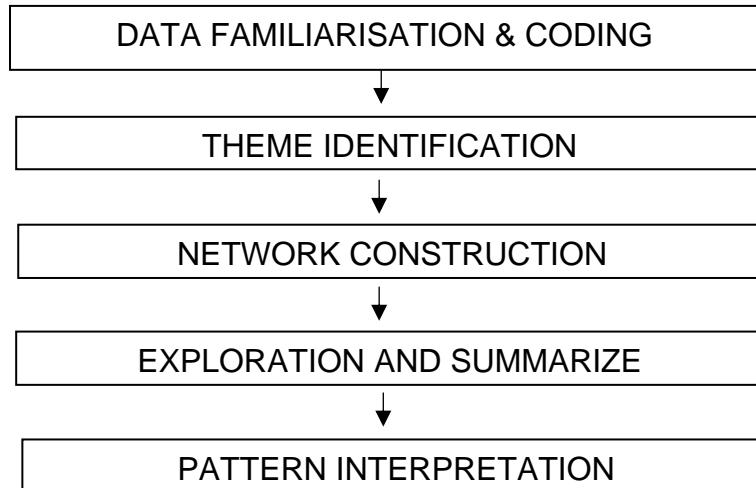


Table 1- Frequency table of barrier identified through transcripts by doing thematic analysis

Participant	Measurement parameter	Limited resource	Organizational issue	Implementation issue	Pharmaceutical regulation
P1					
P2					
P3					
P4					
P5					
P6					
P7					
P8					
P9					
P10					
P11					
P12					
P13					
P14					
P15					
P16					
P17					
P18					
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P20					
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P31					
P32					
P33					
P34					
P35					

P36					
P37					
P38					
P39					
P40					
P41					
P42					
P43					
P44					
P45					
P46					
P47					
P48					
P49					
P50					
Percentage	60%	52%	72%	82%	32%

Table 2-Frequency table of drivers identified through transcripts by doing thematic analysis.

Participant	Effective brand strategy	Dynamic business environment	Customer success	Customer centricity	Ease of operation	COVID-19
P1						
P2						
P3						
P4						
P5						
P6						
P7						
P8						
P9						
P10						
P11						
P12						
P13						
P14						
P15						
P16						
P17						
P18						
P19						
P20						
P21						
P22						

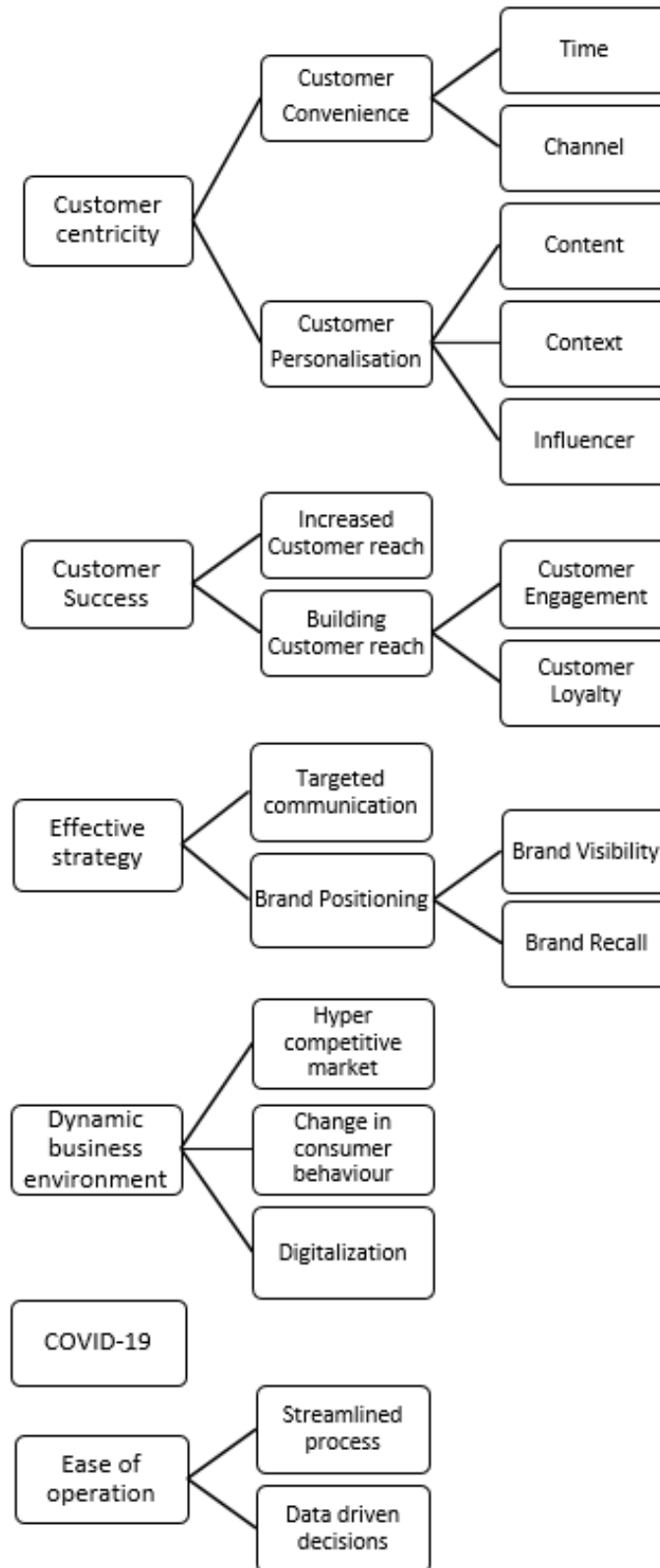
P23						
P24						
P25						
P26						
P27						
P28						
P29						
P30						
P31						
P32						
P33						
P34						
P35						
P36						
P37						
P38						
P39						
P40						
P41						
P42						
P43						
P44						
P45						
P46						
P47						
P48						
P49						
P50						
Percentage	68%	52%	72%	82%	32%	86%

RIGOUR

The study complied with credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability which ensures the trustworthiness of the qualitative research (Johnson et al.)

To ensure credibility, a continuous review process during analysis involved steps like data reading, coding, and interpretation. Detailed descriptions enhanced transferability, while rigorous reviews ensured dependability. Confirmability was maintained through reflective practices like using field notes during interviews.(39)

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



DRIVERS OF OMNICHANNEL

Pharmaceutical firms are transitioning to omnichannel marketing to differentiate themselves and offer personalized experiences, driven by factors like customer centricity, changing business dynamics, operational efficiency, and the impact of COVID-19. This shift signifies more than just a trend but a strategic pathway to success.

EASE OF OPERATION

Omnichannel marketing simplifies operations by integrating multiple channels, facilitating easier planning and execution of strategies. Participants stressed its role in streamlining processes through centralized data management and task automation. Data centralization enables campaign management from a single location, while automation minimizes manual tasks, reducing delays and errors.

“Uh, there are, you know, different marketing, uh, automation platforms. That help you drive the whole automation process where the person does not have to, like, once you make the whole flow, you put it in that marketing automation platform and it goes properly open.” (P5)

Data driven decisions

The participants appreciated the power of omnichannel marketing in generating tremendous data that assists in taking data driven decisions. It allows organizations to map the customer journey and behaviour. The insights derived from the analysis of the data help in taking better marketing decisions, developing strategies, and optimising customer experience.

“So they used to see what is the journey of a customer that, where, what are all the platforms they used to visit and what, how much time they spend and everything they used to analyse. Mm-hmm. Okay. And accordingly, they made their touchpoint to set set of customers.” (P18)

“Because these businesses are very large businesses. Right. These. Global businesses, it is hard to keep a track of so much data. So that, uh, that, you know, data analysis is also very easy with omnichannel.” (P23)

EFFECTIVE BRAND STRATEGY

The participants stated that a marketer's success is based on developing an effective brand strategy and omnichannel marketing is the best possible methodology to achieve the same. Omnichannel marketing helps in better brand positioning and targeted communication of the brand which helps in achieving the marketing objectives of the organizations effectively.

BRAND POSITIONING

Participants highlighted that brand positioning, the strategic establishment of a brand's distinct identity in a competitive market, is effectively facilitated by omnichannel marketing. It involves defining how a brand wishes to be perceived and differentiating it from competitors based on various attributes. Omnichannel marketing simplifies brand positioning in alignment with organizational goals. Moreover, it enhances brand visibility across multiple channels, ensures content consistency, relevance, and fosters brand recall.

“So you, you take the share of mind of the doctor with this omni channel, the more you get deeper into the mind of the doctor, the more your brand is recalled. You ask me a question, why? What is the need? So, if you ask me, it is about recall. It is about recall; it is about interest generation. It is about desire; generation and it is leading the doctor to take an action” (P2)

TARGETED BRAND COMMUNICATION

Pharmaceutical organisations can utilize omnichannel marketing for focused brand promotion of their products. These Brands could be categorised according to different therapies and then devise engagement with HCP's

This will help in building targeted brand focussed strategy that considers specific therapy segment aligning with therapy-shaping activities

“You can establish on the therapy. Okay. Right. For an example, if you are having any anti hyper brand, you can create a therapy awareness program on, uh, like, uh, hypertension. and you can like, uh, uh, have the, uh, social media awareness mm-hmm. for therapy awareness. Right. Uh, apparently you can have, uh, some, uh, omni marketing programs, uh, for the scps ins.” (pushkar sir)

CUSTOMER CENTRICITY -

The pharmaceutical firms are rethinking about their product centric approach and are moving towards being customer centric by focussing on customer convenience and customer personalisation. This eventually helps the pharmaceutical organisation to provide smooth customer experience.

CUSTOMER CONVENIENCE

Participants discussed pharmaceutical company find it difficult to communicate their product to the customer. The physician has less time for personal interaction and there are numerous firms doing the same activity thereby shortening the time allocated to individual firm.

But with the help of omnichannel strategy the pharmaceutical company can utilize the time best suitable for the customer through most preferred channel.

“You know customer preferences, like channel of their preference, and suitable time to approach with them will give you enough time for interaction.”

CUSTOMER PERSONALISATION

They also acknowledged that pharmaceutical firms with the help of omnichannel strategy can customise their services to understand the unique needs and preferences of individual customer. Pharmaceutical companies can identify Key opinion leader (KOL) for each customer and do Personalisation of content specific to the need of the customer and aligning the context with it. “with Omnichannel we can identify the KOL’s they follow and can create content which fits that context and personalise it with specific needs

DYNAMIC BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

HYPERCOMPETITIVE MARKET

Participants stated that due to increasing competition among domestic companies, many companies have developed and implemented new ways of interacting with customers and providing them with engaging content. They also stated that implementing omnichannel strategies gave the company a competitive edge, which helped them to stay in business for long by ensuring the proper maneuverability of the strategies, being effective, and generating a strong impression in the minds of individuals.

CHANGE IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR –

Participants also affirmed that we are entering a new world of customer preferences in which the customer's behavior and preferences is constantly changing and they have become technologically savvy. They stated that companies are no longer bound by traditional practices and that they are now entering and exploring new options regarding how they interact; therefore, companies must comprehend consumer behavior.

DIGITALIZATION –

Participants said that when we are Comparing companies that have implemented digital technologies to those that have not, they stated that digitalization has the ability to provide a significant competitive advantage. Implementing omnichannel has made it simpler for pharmaceutical companies to interact with consumers in a seamless and unified manner as a result of digitalization.

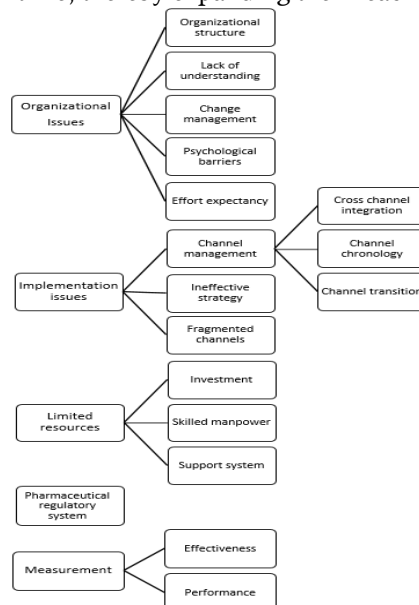
COVID-19 –

Participants responded that during COVID 19 the F2F interactions decreased, which prompted pharma companies to develop new methods since they had no other choice to interact with customers. Here, omnichannel came into focus, as pharma companies had no other choice to interact with customers. Many participants agreed that during COVID-19 omnichannel accelerated significantly and was implemented widely which increased non-personal interaction between pharma companies and directly with customers.

CUSTOMER SUCCESS

BUILDING CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP- Omnichannel marketing employs interactive techniques to engage customers, fostering strong relationships by prioritizing customer needs. It enhances customer engagement by adapting to evolving preferences, leading to loyal customers through meaningful connections and exceptional experiences.

CUSTOMER REACH - Participants stated that MR can only reach a limited number of customers in a limited period of time using conventional approaches. Using digital techniques and an omnichannel platform, pharmaceutical companies can reach a large number of customers in a brief period of time, thereby expanding their reach.



CHALLENGES OF OMNICHANNEL

Measurement Parameters: The lack of well-defined marketing metrics poses a challenge, hindering the assessment of omnichannel marketing success. Determining ROI and evaluating channel effectiveness remain difficult, impeding the establishment of comprehensive performance measures.

Implementation Issues: Implementing omnichannel strategies proves challenging due to organizational and operational complexities. While the strategy is achievable, aligning it across various channels and managing implementation effectively emerges as a major hurdle for pharmaceutical firms.

Fragmented Channels: Channel fragmentation complicates omnichannel efforts, with numerous online and offline channels operating independently rather than in an integrated manner. Synchronizing these channels becomes essential for cohesive omnichannel marketing.

Ineffective Strategy: While formulating omnichannel strategies is feasible, executing them poses difficulties due to the absence of well-defined processes and roadmaps. Maintaining consistency in strategy delivery presents additional challenges for pharmaceutical companies.

Channel Management: Effective omnichannel marketing relies on proper channel management, encompassing channel selection, sequencing, content integration, and smooth transitions between channels. Achieving seamless customer experiences across channels requires meticulous planning and execution.

Cross-Channel Integration: Ensuring cross-channel integration is crucial for omnichannel success. Coordinating content distribution and channel sequencing enables a cohesive customer journey, enhancing engagement and brand experience.

Channel Chronology: The sequence of channel interactions plays a vital role in omnichannel marketing. Proper channel sequencing ensures that customer touchpoints align with their journey, optimizing engagement and communication effectiveness.

Channel Transition: Smooth transitions between channels are essential for maintaining customer engagement and providing seamless experiences. However, challenges arise in seamlessly shifting between channels, impacting the overall effectiveness of omnichannel strategies.

Organizational Issues: Resistance to change within pharmaceutical organizations poses a significant challenge to omnichannel adoption. Strict adherence to traditional models and hierarchical structures hampers innovation and inhibits the implementation of new marketing strategies.

Organizational Structure (Ownership and Leadership): Hierarchical structures and traditional decision-making processes limit innovation and hinder omnichannel initiatives. Resistance from upper management to embrace digital transformation further exacerbates challenges in implementing omnichannel marketing.

Misconception: Misunderstandings about omnichannel outcomes and the perceived impact on business growth hinder adoption. Overcoming these misconceptions requires education and a shift in mindset towards embracing digital marketing strategies.

Change Management: Pharmaceutical firms' adherence to stringent standard operating procedures impedes change management efforts. Overcoming resistance to new methodologies and technological advancements requires effective change management practices and a culture of innovation within organizations. *"To adopt omnichannel marketing, first of all, you need to have the providers, first of all, the company has to overcome its own, intrinsic SOPs of the organization and think of improvising it with newer technologies"* (VIVEK KHAVINKAR)

Psychological barrier: Pharmaceutical firms' reluctance to embrace omnichannel marketing stems from differing perceptions and a psychological resistance to change. Stakeholders, entrenched in traditional methods, exhibit a fixed mindset, skeptical of new strategies despite shifting business landscapes. Trust in the effectiveness and ROI of omnichannel approaches is lacking, further impeding adoption efforts.

"Pharma is still struggling because of a certain mindset where they say that, you know, the, all the sales and everything has, is being driven only by the sales step and digital as such does not have any, uh, you know, significant contribution towards sales or promotion or, you know, visibility of the pharma company or anything. Okay then. So first there is a very mindset difference between pharma MNC and Indian pharma companies."(P32)

Pharmaceutical regulations: Regulatory constraints, like the Magic Remedies Act prohibiting prescription drug ads, hinder full omnichannel use in pharmaceuticals. Adapting omnichannel strategies within regulatory boundaries poses a significant challenge for firms. *Then secondly, there are lot of rules and regulations where about reaching out to the doctor, about sharing information about, you know, products, brand. You cannot do direct marketing. So there. Uh, lot of speed breakers for us* (P5)

Limited resources: Implementation of an effective omnichannel strategy requires several resources. Resource constraints can impact omnichannel marketing negatively. The participants stressed the importance of adequate investment, budget allocation, skilled workforce, support system for omnichannel marketing success. To reap the benefits of omnichannel marketing, organizations need to consider the availability of multiple resources at the right time.

Investment: The participants believed omni-channel approach requires investment in several areas, including Human resource, IT infrastructure, Marketing technology. Lack of investment majorly in the above-mentioned sectors was found to be a significant challenge in implementing an effective omni-channel marketing strategy. They also emphasized the problem of insufficient budget

allocation towards omnichannel marketing.

“The change in the COVID times with this current world, there is a lot of budget limitations for many companies. So, so companies are not able to navigate those funds toward this future. Because the current problems are very big to address. Right. So, so there they cannot resolve a lot of funding on this project.” (P3)

“Investment right in the time. So, the, uh, the omnichannel, it is about it, it's a big change. The digital transformation is a big change. It's about investment in lot of, uh, investment of people. Sorry. Investment in, in, uh, recruiting the right kind of people, and investing the money as well. Uh, and, and then giving enough time for the egg to hatch. So everything is a challenge” (P5)

Skilled Manforce: The participants also believed that a lack of skilled workforce can be a significant challenge in implementing an effective omni-channel marketing strategy. They emphasised that an omni-channel approach demands a workforce with a varied set of abilities, but it might be difficult to identify and hire qualified people with the necessary competencies and experience.

“Second most limiting thing is the right people's skills. Right. Okay. So, people's skills are not available in the hierarchy. The marketing teams, they have not time tested or have evidence about this kind of a Omnichannel experiences or maybe a digital touch experiences for them, they have a lack of experience basically. So absolutely the right people are not there. Indeed” (P16)

Support system: Participants stated that third-party providers who specialize in omni-channel marketing to supplement their resources and expertise are limited. Without a strong support system in place, it can be difficult to foster omnichannel marketing effectively *“When we compare it from other country partners and India, uh, the agencies which are there in India, are very mini, minimal, and they don't really give that kind of an analytics outcome to assess the impact of the omnichannel.” (P4)* *“Okay, so external world also, those capabilities are not available. Okay? Internal is not available, but in external also, they are not that good capability people available who can really offer that omnichannel service” (P8)*

Other findings and discussion

All The respondents stated that omnichannel marketing is not completely adopted in the pharmaceutical industry and the challenges found through the research justified it. They mentioned that although organizations are well aware about the benefits of omnichannel but it will take some time for complete adoption.

IMPROVEMENTS

They also suggested ways to improve the omnichannel acceptance in the pharma industry where a greater emphasis on increasing awareness regarding digital options was stated. Besides, the participants focused on having to change the mindset of the people of the organization and a need to consider omnichannel as not just a onetime campaigning event but an ecosystem which will eventually give returns.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITY

Omnichannel has several future opportunities as it will increase the customer reach drastically. Today if 25 medical reps can approach 200 doctors there is a huge chunk which remains untapped which could be explored using omnichannel marketing.

6. CONCLUSION

We should expect to see even more omnichannel marketing in the future, with a focus on customer convenience and personalization as well as increased interaction across online and offline channels. Although the pharmaceutical industry has historically been slow to adopt new technologies, the move towards digital transformation is starting to pick up speed. Future pharmaceutical businesses' omnichannel marketing and sales strategies are likely to develop in several ways, including by putting a greater emphasis on patient centricity, integrating digital channels, using AI and machine learning, and adhering to regulatory requirements. Businesses who can quickly adapt to these changes will be in the greatest positions to prosper in the changing omnichannel landscape.

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