

# Relevance and impact of digital marketing in Indian pharmaceutical industry with specific reference to super specialists doctors

Manoj Kumar<sup>1</sup>, Prof. (Dr.) Bhausaheb Londhe<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Scholar, <sup>2</sup>Professor

<sup>1,2</sup> Department of Management Studies, Amity University, Mumbai - Pune Expressway, Bhatan, Post – Somathne, Panvel, Mumbai, Maharashtra, 410206

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**Abstract:** Indian pharmaceutical market is has a significant share in the world market. Digital marketing like other markets has made a wide impact on the pharmaceutical industry too. Digital marketing helps the organizations reach the target population hassle free. Digital; marketing, has been utilized to capture attention, develop emerging brands and brand equity. Many companies are opening up to digital marketing as it provides maximum outreach and scientific data for business analytics. These scientific data provide a platform comprising of scientific detailing to develop newer algorithms for the specialist doctors for an improved insight into the problems.

This is a study of 50 Super-specialists doctors who had DM/ DNB degree, with an in-depth interview format was used. A total of 50 websites of various super specialists' doctors were inspected and researched in the study. Survey conducted also included top 15 pharmaceutical companies, 12 leading chain of hospitals and 16 stand-alone hospitals.

Among the specialist doctors included in the study, very few had their own website. Whereas, the hospitals had full-fledged websites. Though the primary objective of these websites was to book appointments, only a few had blogs and of interactive nature. On the contrary the pharmaceutical companies had well managed websites, with up to the mark content. Based on results of the study we can mention that, despite the fact that digital marketing in being used in the pharmaceutical companies, but it has a lower acceptance rate and its potential is yet to be utilized completely.

In India, the use of digital marketing in pharmaceuticals and allied fields in particular the specialist doctors and application products, it is underutilized. In this tech savvy times, Digital marketing can be of great importance in creation of a brand value and raising equity. The authors highly recommend digital marketing as an effective tool to gain a maximum outreach and gain better outcomes for both the pharmaceutical industry and the super specialists doctors in coordination with minimal efforts and maximum outputs.

**Keywords:** Digital marketing, super specialist doctors, Indian pharmaceutical industry, novel methods of marketing.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

With the various developments in the field of science and technology, the world underwent innumerable changes. The same has been with the pharmaceutical industry and its allied parts. There has been many innovations, in the technologically evolving world, which has lead to the developments of the new and improved global scenario. This industry has gained much significance over the years globally, with a major contribution from the Indian Pharmaceutical market. According to a report by Equity Master, in terms of volume, the pharmaceutical market is the third largest accounting to 20 percent [1] and ranks 13<sup>th</sup> in terms of value when the Global Pharmaceutical Industry is taken into consideration. Also to be noted that, India has a significant position in the pharmaceutical sector worldwide. [2]

With the world becoming increasingly tech savvy, the presence at the digital platform is becoming an essentiality, hence, the world of marketing have also been transformed and evolved into its digital form. The term, "Digital marketing", was first invented in the year 1990 and was used in that very same year. [3] The businesses with those from pharma sector as no exception have started marking their presence in the digital world by various means. Presently, digital marketing is overflowing with continuous available opportunities helping the organizations to promote their products and services for maximum outreach and overpowering the traditional marketing world. It must be noticed, on the basis of present evidences, that a digital wave is brushing across the Indian pharmaceutical industry which is worth \$17,000,000,000. [4] The companies related to this sector are drifting away from the old school techniques of marketing and are embracing the new shift. It comprises of digital presence with scientific detailing for the super specialist doctors. It also provides newer algorithms for more improved insight into the problems. [5] The trend compliments the switch alike in China prominent over the previous years. A study by Indigene, states that the pharma industry would touch INR 220 crores on the digital platforms. [4]

With the digital marketing wave, pharmaceutical companies have started venturing newer aspects to take over the attention of the target markets, create cutting edge brand engagements and clock brand equity with health care professionals. [6] There have been many publications citing the utility of digital marketing in pharmaceutical promotions. Though its complete potential is yet to be defined with a special reference to the super specialist doctors and pharmaceutical sector. Hence, this study attempts to gain a understanding of digital marketing, in Indian pharmaceutical industry with relation to the practice of super specialist doctors to assess the loop holes. We also want to analyse and find out the current usage of websites by clinicians, hospital chains, pharmaceutical and healthcare industry along with the research analysis of digital strategies used by the super specialists' doctors.

### **Digital Marketing**

Digital marketing includes all kinds of marketing that requires digital devices. [7] There are nine most important types of digital marketing. The main four includes Social Media Marketing, Search Engine Optimization, Pay per Click, Content Marketing, apart this other types of digital marketing are Public Relations, Affiliate Marketing, Viral Marketing, Influencer Marketing and Online / Website Marketing. It can be beneficial to the industries in relation to any field. [9]

### **Digital Marketing in Indian Pharmaceutical Industry**

Digital Marketing in Indian Pharmaceutical Industry is in the early stage of development. Pharmaceutical companies use technology based services, as it helps the patients to know more about their conditions and helps them in monitoring their health. It can also be useful to get an insight of the patients health to the doctors, any side effects for any particular product. These digital services also facilitate the doctors, to convey their message on certain health conditions to the patients with an ease. [9] Digital marketing have clearly simplified advertising, organization of awareness campaigns, and mass reach at low costs and efficient methods. The use of therapeutic pharmaceuticals varies across the world. In the developed countries cardiac diseases and hypertension are at a high. [10] While, in the developing nations have infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, typhoid and some other diseases prevalent. The companies based on pharmaceutical are running hard to keep pace with the changes brought about by digital technology. [4] The use of digital marketing in this industry in the recent years, have permitted companies to adopt a different approach in order to reach the patients, physicians and caregivers. [11] Some of the innovations that are transforming the healthcare industry involve mobile communications, advanced analytics, internet and the cloud. Although, most of the Indian companies have restricted its usage in company image creation, therapy update, simple guidelines on diet, nutrition, exercise etc. [4][6] Only a few companies dealing with products in the category of Over The Counter, Nutraceuticals are slightly aggressive in their exposure. Hence, it can be mentioned that, digital marketing has a vast potential yet to be utilized.

### **Impact of Digital Marketing on the practices of Indian Pharmaceutical Industry and Super Specialist Doctors**

With the evolution of digital tools, the patients before meeting the doctor, researches on the entire disease that they are suffering from, starting right from the diagnosis, symptoms till the management of the condition and possible cures available for it. As a result the patients become more aware regarding their rights and have more expectations from the service providers. This is the same applicable to the pharmaceutical companies. The end users search for the data available regarding the doctors, their work profile, ratings (if available), medicines prescribed, diagnostic costs, alternative drug options from the pharmaceutical companies listings etc. [12]

As the doctors being involved as the ultimate decision makers, is the major reason behind the more emphasize laid on the digital promotional efforts by pharmaceutical organizations. Moreover, influencing the doctors leads to increase in the sales of the products by the various pharmaceutical companies. The pharmaceutical companies thus spend a huge amount of money on marketing their products to the doctors. It has been further reflected a research study that the digital marketing has impactful results on the promotional factors which were identified and it is more influencing the activities of the medical representatives. [13] It also involves the rapport that the MRs have with the doctors, the drug samples provided by the MRs to the doctors and their personal characteristics.

Hence, the pharma companies, as well as doctors, including those in super specialty have started using the digital platforms for advertising, marketing and creating brand awareness. [9] There are various notable companies like WellDoc, Aetna, Sun Pharma, Abbott Healthcare, etc, who have undertaken various measures to implement digital marketing and promote the idea amongst its clients, by developing related mobile applications. [6][11]

As suggested by a few authors, the pharmaceutical industry has experienced a quick growth with respect to the investments in online marketing that is 30.4 percent. [14] Some of the pharmaceutical companies are adopting new online media like electronic detailing relevant for the purpose of promoting medicines to physicians. Research authors have argued that some of the important pharmaceutical companies in India maintain a presence in the social networking sites but the level of active engagement with customers is quite low. [15] For instance, a results of a study of 40 companies only nine companies managed to use the social media platforms, eight companies have Face book page among India companies mentioned, 52% have active engagement in the Twitter page among the Indians and the famous social media site LinkedIn has 14% companies active. Hence, it can be argued that although there is a rise of various channels of marketing. The acceptance of such digital stage for the purpose of marketing is high in other industries in comparison with that of the pharma industry. Some researchers argued that 13.51% of population uses a well-defined digital marketing strategy in their own companies. [6][15] Although, online medical marketing has a low share, it allows the investigation of up-and-coming practices of digital marketing in established and large markets. [16]

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The doctors involved in the study had DM/ DNB in their respective fields viz. Oncology, Neurology, Transplant surgery, Nephrology, Intensive care medicine). An in-depth interview format was used to meet around 50 Super-specialists doctors who had DM/ DNB degree. They did super-specialization in their respective field before joining any major hospital or starting their own practice. This is a study of 50 Super-specialists doctors who had DM/ DNB degree, with an in-depth interview format was used. A total of 50 websites of various super specialists' doctors were inspected and researched in the study. Survey conducted also included top 15 pharmaceutical companies, 12 leading chain of hospitals and 16 stand-alone hospitals. All the study subjects were analysed on the basis of a detailed questionnaire on how, what and when are the subjects use the digital marketing tools, and what are the outcomes of the same.

## III. RESULTS

A total of 50 websites of various super specialists' doctors were included in the study. Other pharmaceutical companies, hospital chains, and stand alone hospitals were also researched for their presence and usage of digital technology. The details has been mentioned in to Table 1.

**Table 1: Participants details included in the study**

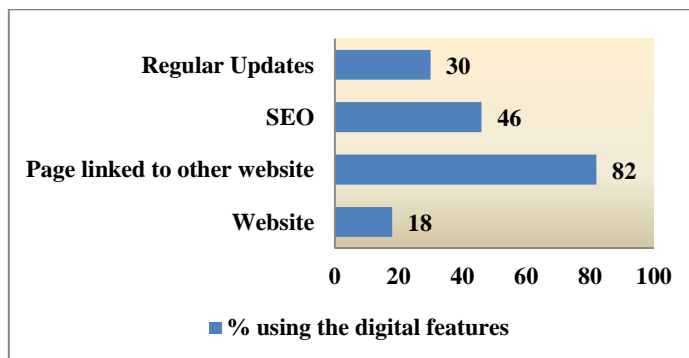
Participant type	N
Specialists' doctors	50
Pharmaceutical companies	15
Leading Hospital chains	12
Stand alone hospitals	16

The details of the specialties of the doctors included in this research study has been mentioned in table 2. Majority of the specialty doctors website included in the study belonged to Oncology stream and the least were from intensive care medicine.

**Table 2: Specialties of the doctors included in the research study**

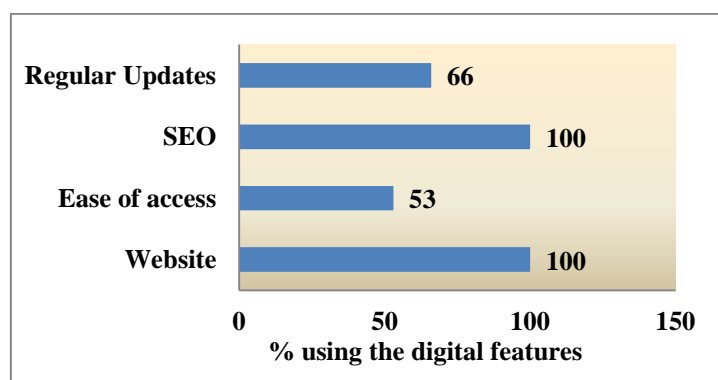
Speciality	N
Oncology	24
Neurology	12
Nephrology	11
Intensive care medicine	3

Only 18% of the doctors had their own website, others had a page linked to either a hospital's website page or to some other portals. Website of the specialists' doctors was majorly being used for booking appointments, and only a few had the information/ data to be shared with patients about the specific disease/ speciality the doctors dealt with. The use of SEO/ SEM was the most popular feature amongst these super specialists' doctors websites. (Figure 1)



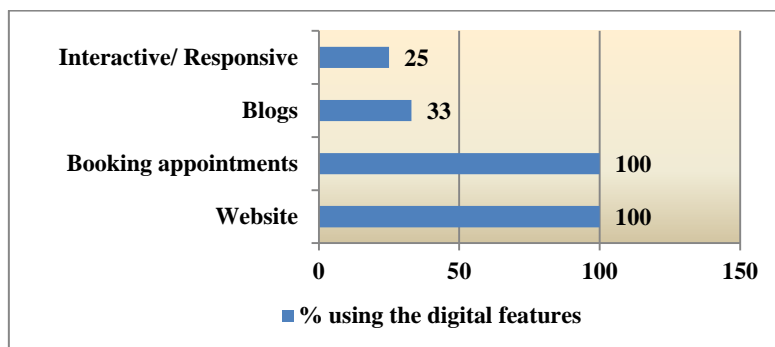
**Figure 1: Digital features utilized by Super specialists' doctors**

Amongst the 15 top leading pharmaceuticals websites were also been analysed in the study. Most of the pharmaceutical companies websites were found to be updated from time to time. Maximum of these websites were interactive and user friendly. The details regarding the utilization of the features by the websites of the pharmaceutical companies have been shown in Figure. 2. Pharmaceutical companies had well managed websites. Barring a very few most had a proper website with all the relevant information such as products, reports, media updates, manufacturing facilities, accreditations, etc.



**Figure 2: Digital features utilized by leading pharmaceutical companies**

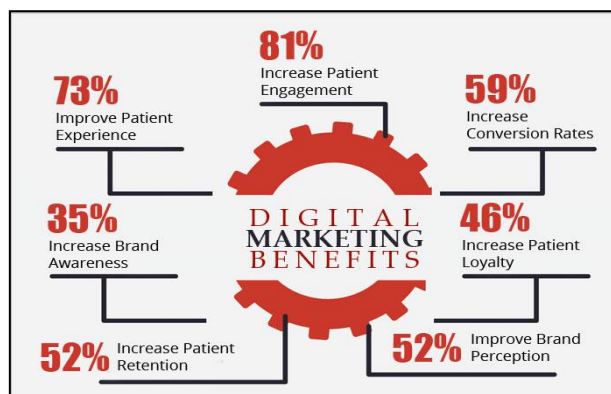
Hospital chains were found to have full-fledged websites. The primary objective of most of these sites was booking appointments for the patients. And only 33% out of the total surveyed websites of this category, had blogs with 25% of the them being interactive.



**Figure 3: Digital features utilized by leading hospital chains**

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Digital marketing is one growing branch of marketing that provides several advantages to the users points out that the global market of drugs has grown and developed from \$950 billion to \$1.2 trillion in 2016 and is expected to grow much more in the coming years. [5][11][17] With the observations of this research study, it can be concluded that digital marketing in pharmaceutical industries not only benefits, the companies but it also provides a great benefit to the end users. Digital marketing thus, is being used by one and all with this field as no exception. It is used simultaneously by patients, doctors, caregivers and pharmaceutical companies. There are various means of using it, awareness campaigns either online or offline being a part of it. [9] Pharmaceutical companies, hospitals, and doctors, have at least their Face book page, in order to advertise and engage with customers effortlessly. Digital marketing helps the industry to gain more revenue, and decrease the marketing costs, and gain a better target audience. In this era of digitalization, patients too, try to get information from various online resources, about the doctors reviews, diagnosis, mode of treatments, drug alternatives etc. [7][12] The benefits of digital marketing in the above mentioned scenario, have been shown in the figure 4 below. [12]



**Figure 4: Impact of digital marketing in medical practice [12]**

In spite of many benefits mentioned, digital marketing is yet to be utilized to its complete potential. It has been observed by other researchers too. Research studies have stressed the fact, that the manufacturers of biopharmaceuticals, use social media platform at a negligible rate and the websites available are poorly maintained. Most of the websites are not built properly, lacking proper information, and also not well managed. [14] This has also been reflected in the results of our study. The authors of this study on the basis of the results observed mention, that there is a lack of proper implementation of the digital marketing concept in the Indian pharmaceutical industry, with the reference to the specialists doctors medical practice too. The observations from this study, shows that there is a lacuna in relation to the complete utilization of the digital platform in the current Indian scenario. There are quite a few people working in this field with a up to the mark knowledge on the platform.

Some other impacts of digital marketing on the medical practices for both the doctors and super specialists show that majority of the patients are available online at one or the other digital platform. [5][ 8][13][18] According to a survey in 2016, it has claimed that around 54 percent of the patients look for a local doctor through online portals on a monthly or weekly basis. No matter what specialty medical practices operates in it is critical to create an online image that appeals to

existing and potential patients. The digital image can help gain a popularity among the existing patients and gain the attention of the new ones. [12][18] Thus, with the help of digital marketing, super specialists doctors, medical representatives, pharmaceutical companies, and the marketing agencies can target the markets anywhere across the world. Also, Digital marketing has made it easier for the consumers to know more about a brand and industry. [13][19][20] For an example, providing digital prescriptions could save time of these super specialist doctors, and also serve the environment by saving paper and benefit the patient by making it easily accessible anywhere as and when required. In the current study, we found that the doctors as well as the pharmaceutical companies were not up to the mark in their digital presence and were not interactive with the potential users, thus losing the benefits of the same.

The digital marketing has been influencing the promotional factors and also influencing the medical representatives. [13][19] On the other hand, some Indian pharmaceutical companies have implemented digital marketing yet the level of active engagement is very low. As referred by Mangrolia A., in the current scenario in our country, digital marketing is cost effective option for one and all, as many practitioners and the pharmaceutical companies do not have significant marketing budgets. [20][21] Hence, digital marketing being cost effective has an impactful result and it provides equal opportunities to all in terms of size, location or budget. [21][22] In context to Indian pharmaceutical industry with special reference to the super specialist doctors, on the use of digital platform, there is a need to be aware of the use of all the available and appropriate tools and services as search engine optimization also referred as SEO, search media marketing (SMM) and other such newer tools that can help creating their presence and develop their brand online. [4][13][19] These new age digital marketing techniques provide good impactful results on the medical practices for both super specialists and general physicians. With the help of promotions and advertisements as part of digital marketing pharmaceutical companies and the super specialist doctors, can target the right audiences and thus improve the potentiality of the lead results. [12]

The acceptances of the digital platform marketing methods have led the Indian pharmaceutical industry, towards fast paced growth. [4][22] It is also observed that a few pharmaceutical companies have started using digital marketing in order to promote medicines to physicians as well as to customers by electronic detailing of their products. [18][19] There is also a lower acceptance rate of the application of digital marketing in pharmaceutical industries in India. Hence, proper management is recommended for implementing digital marketing in the Indian scenario. [22][23]

## V. CONCLUSION

People today are extremely busy and spend most of their time on mobile, computers or digital devices, thus digital marketing is gaining popularity day to day. It can be concluded on the available research data that digital marketing is important in all the industries with Indian pharmaceutical industry as no exception with a special reference to Super specialist doctors. Digital marketing helps the industries to grow at a fast pace. It has become a strong pillar for marketing and also has made marketing methods easier and way more effective. Only a few of the digital marketing methods are popular, and the others of them are on its way to be. However any type of digital marketing is easily approachable and saves a lot of time, energy, efforts and money. The Indian pharmaceutical companies and the super specialist doctors to keep a pace with the modern digitalized world have started adopting these newer technologies. Yet, the adoptability of these methods has been limited to having websites, face book page, LinkedIn profile etc. Although these are poorly managed and not up to the mark in terms of information provided. The same has been reflected in our study too. The websites or online portals have been widely used by these super specialist doctors, stand alone hospitals and hospital chains mainly to book an appointment. The websites of pharmaceutical companies, too were also not quite updated, and were not user-friendly in terms of interaction with the end-users. Hence, the Indian pharmaceuticals, hospitals be it stand alone or hospital chains along with super specialist doctors need to improve and adapt digital marketing for better business and vast reach with cost and resource efficient technology.

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