

ONLINE INSTRUMENTS USED IN PHARMACEUTICAL MARKETING

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Abstract

Internet and IT&C (information and communications technologies) such Web, multimedia are transforming the pharmaceutical market in a continuously developing dynamic market. In relation to the intended goals, the online marketing plan may consist in online advertising, direct e-mail, designing websites and e-distribution applications usage, also considering a particular characteristic of this field, in the sense that, the pharmaceutical industry does not produce drugs that can be picked out by the patients as they like, in this case, the decision to purchase being influenced by several factors. Google AdWords is a tool which allows companies to advertise on Google and on its partner website network. But, besides SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and AdWords, there are also other topical techniques by which a pharmaceutical product can be promoted online.

Rezumat

Internetul și tehnologiile informației și comunicațiilor IT&C precum tehnologia Web, multimedia, transformă piața farmaceutică într-un mediu dinamic. Planul de marketing online, în raport cu obiectivele urmărite, poate fi compus din publicitate online, direct e-mail, proiectarea website-urilor și utilizarea aplicațiilor de distribuție economică, ținând totodată seama de o particularitate a acestui domeniu, în sensul în care, industria farmaceutică nu produce medicamente care pot fi alese de către pacienți după bunul plac, în acest caz, decizia de cumpărare fiind influențată de mai mulți factori. Google AdWords este un instrument care permite firmelor să își facă publicitate pe Google și în rețeaua sa de site-uri web partenere. Dar pe lângă SEO (*Search Engine Optimization*) și AdWords există și alte tehnici de actualitate prin care un produs farmaceutic poate fi promovat online.

Keywords: pharmaceutical marketing, online instruments, online communication

Introduction

Pharmaceutical medicine is the scientific medical discipline that deals with discovery, development, assessment, recording, monitoring and medical aspects of marketing the medicinal products for the benefit of the patients and the health condition of the community.

"A combination of new medical technology and new information technology means that public health needs can now be identified and addressed in a way they could not in previous generations" [6].

The pharmaceutical market consists in the aggregate consumers and distributors interested in the exchange of a pharmaceutical product or service. The economic agent, based on its activity focused on fulfilment the identified needs for medicinal products and pharmaceutical services, intends, through marketing actions, to achieve the objectives and maximize the profit of the organisation. At the same time, although the pharmaceutical sector suffers by various regulations and restrictions with regard to the advertisement

message, the marketing activities maintain the commercial content and approach [4, 9]. Because it contains highly specialized pharmaceutical services provided by specialized personnel in the field, the pharmaceutical marketing has a more extended meaning than the marketing of medicinal products, the focus being on the pharmaceutical care services provided to the patient. In the last few years, the pharmaceutical industry has been greatly expanded, showing it increased importance both in our country and at European level. The implications of the pharmaceutical industry in the medical field have led many experts to turn their attention to this area and to observe how the communicational activity has the ability to influence patients [12]. On the other hand, strong competition in this field and the diversification of patients' needs and desires have led many companies operating in this industry to carve its new strategy to take into account the purchasing of smaller companies or merging with them [2].

“Medical educational services conducted online bring a number of benefits to users, giving them the possibility of acquiring new information and knowledge in a very short time and with minimal cost” [13].

With increased use of the Internet more people access medications and health supplements online [3, 7]. From the marketing perspective, the Internet is the most modern way to communicate an advertising message. The advantages of online communication are multiple: it provides a great volume of information, it has an interactive character, and the information can be used at any time. Also, it can generate a direct response, providing the possibility of direct interaction with the end user. “The competition level on the pharmaceutical market is high and continues to increase. It is becoming more difficult to increase or even to maintain the market share. According to Cap Gemini Ernst & Young, the medical representative shall spend up to 75% of its type with non-promotional activities: travelling, waiting and complying with the administrative tasks (the studies show that the administrative tasks covers 1 - 2 hours per day in order to be completed)” [8]. In this regard, the digital environment is an excellent promoter, which facilitates direct answers, being a highly accessible channel and an environment in which the relationships with patients and collaborators can be easily built. The online marketing is different from the traditional marketing by costs, time and availability, the virtual space through its interactivity feature, creates and maintains a firm relationship with the patients.

“The pharmaceutical market is under continuous development, due to organizational and functional regulations” [1].

The pharmaceutical market consists in distributors, doctors who write prescriptions, patients and professionals with great reputation and visibility on media that can influence the healthcare decisions. Also the flow of information and technologies used in the pharmaceutical activity are contributing to the pharmaceutical market development. At the same time, the pharmaceutical market is a subcategory of the consumption market and a part of the healthcare service market. Previous studies have shown that the development of promotional activities within this area can improve the organization's activity and lead to increased profits. Moreover, by distributing promotional materials, pharmacies are able to attract a greater number of patients and make loyal the existing ones.

Several studies showed that the presence of pharmaceutical companies in the online environment offers patients the convenience of instant access to information about medicines [10].

As a particularity, in this case, the advertising material must not: suggest that the medical consultation is not necessary, transmit messages like the effects are 100% guaranteed and there are no side effects, focus the message on children, suggest the fact that the medicinal product is for regular consumption. In the pharmaceutical marketing, the actual benefits of the medicines must be presented to those concerned, in the capacity of the patients, but also to the prescriber in the field: doctors and pharmacists. The pharmaceutical marketing is different from others based on the fact that it refers to a medicinal product prescription for which the target is the doctor who prescribes and not the patient who has no decision power.

Research in this area has shown that pharmaceutical companies spend on drug promotion an amount comparable to that used for research and development, constantly seeking new ways to promote new drugs [14].

The traditional media are being replaced by the Internet, because of its accessibility: convenient time of the released information and the possibility of selecting news by patients [5].

The most popular ways of online promotion are: (1) website, on which the provided pharmaceutical products and services can be promoted; (2) content displayed on the homepage: is the identity card of a website; the information must be very well structured; (3) web banner: is a form of online advertising which places an announcement on a webpage; (4) sponsored links, SEO (Search Engine Optimization) and Google AdWords [11]; (5) e-mail marketing; (6) forums, blogs and social networks through which patients and doctors exchange information [15]; (7) content marketing: strategical marketing approaches focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and coherent information; (8) press releases, advertorials or guest posting; (9) classical infographics: these are representations of certain information (e.g. statistical data) in a graphical format conceived to understand data more easily; (10) viral campaigns; (11) affiliate marketing: a type of marketing used in e-distribution; it is a strategy by which it is intended to have access to a greater market through websites which are focused on specific groups of Internet users (e.g. Amazon.com where a wide range of products – books, electronics, pharmaceutical products, toys etc. – are marketed, having thousands of affiliated specific websites); (12) social distribution: it uses networks like GroupOn; it is a word that describes a marketing strategy which incorporates peer-to-peer social and/or communication networks in order to make the online distribution more efficient.

In this context, the aim of our research was to assess the attitude of patients regarding the development of the digital pharmacy.

Materials and Methods

We developed a marketing research using 150 patients aged between 20 years and 60 years old, affiliated to the pharmacies in Bucharest. The period of collecting data was 12 January – 24 February 2016 and it was used an online survey based on a questionnaire with 20 questions.

The scales used were semantic scale, Likert scale, nominal scales, and opened questions. The

statistical data was performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

The questionnaire contained items regarding the online marketing tools used in the pharmaceutical field, which apps experienced the patients and if they trust the online environment regarding pharmaceutical products, information and other marketing instruments and if those are influencing their behaviour.

Results and Discussion

Figure 1 depicts the demographic data of the sample considered.

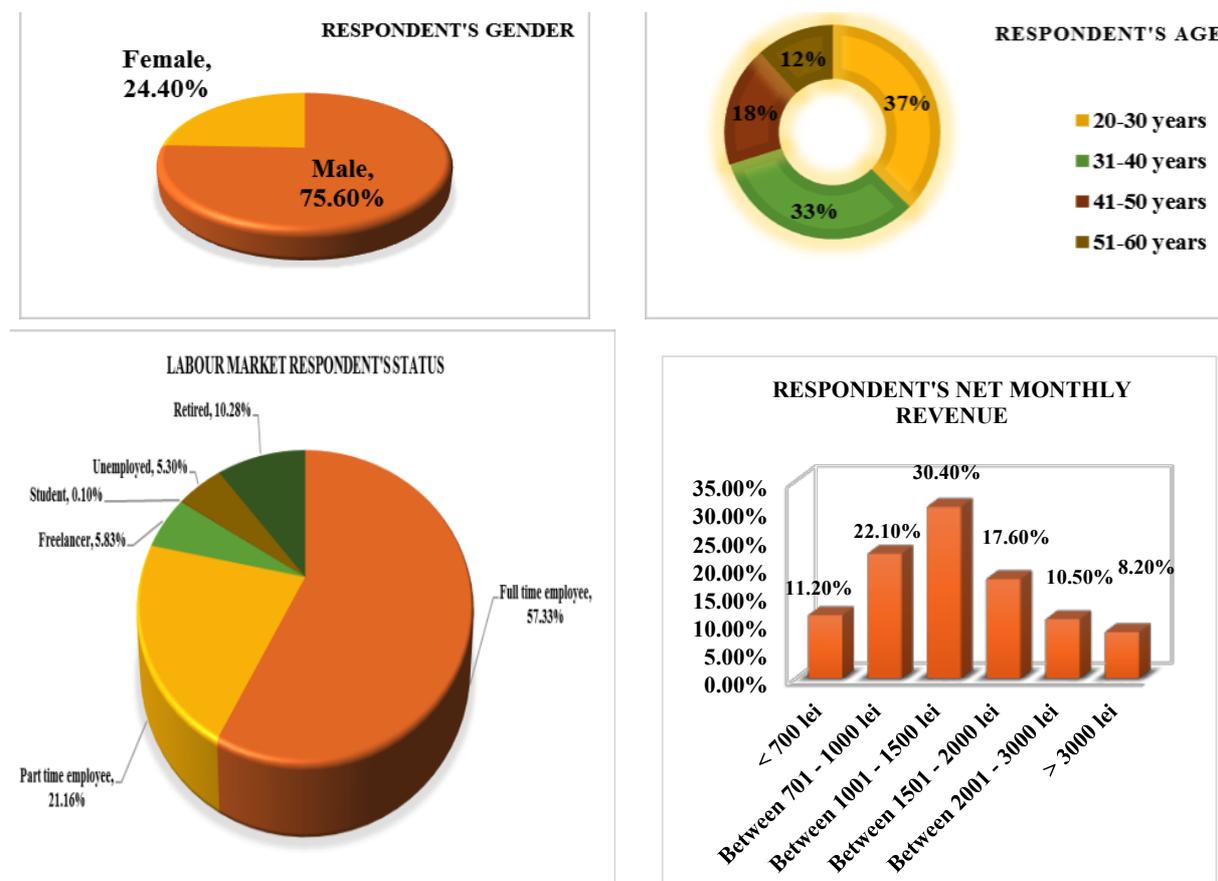


Figure 1.
Demographic data of the patients

Above, we can see all the demographic data that have been chosen like gender, age, labour market status and revenue.

Thus, from the 150 patients interviewed, we can conclude to these coordinates: 75.6% were men, and 24.4% were women; most of patients (37%) were aged between 20 - 30 years old, 33% were between 31 - 40 years old, 18% between 41 - 50 years old and a small percent of 12% were aged between 51 - 60 years old; for the labour market status, 57.33% were full time employee, 5.3% were unemployed, freelancers 5.83% and a very modest

record of 0.10% students; regarding the respondent's net monthly revenue: 30.4% between 1001 - 1500 lei, 22.1% between 701 - 1000 lei, 17.6% had the revenue between 1501 - 2000 lei, 11.2% under 700 lei, 10.5% between 2001 - 3000 lei and 8.2% had more than 3000 lei.

As we can see below the most popular apps in the pharmaceutical field by the patients were Epocrates (91%), Pharma Sahi Daam 2.0 APK (85%), Round Health (78%), Mychart (64%) and Red Cross First Aid (53%).

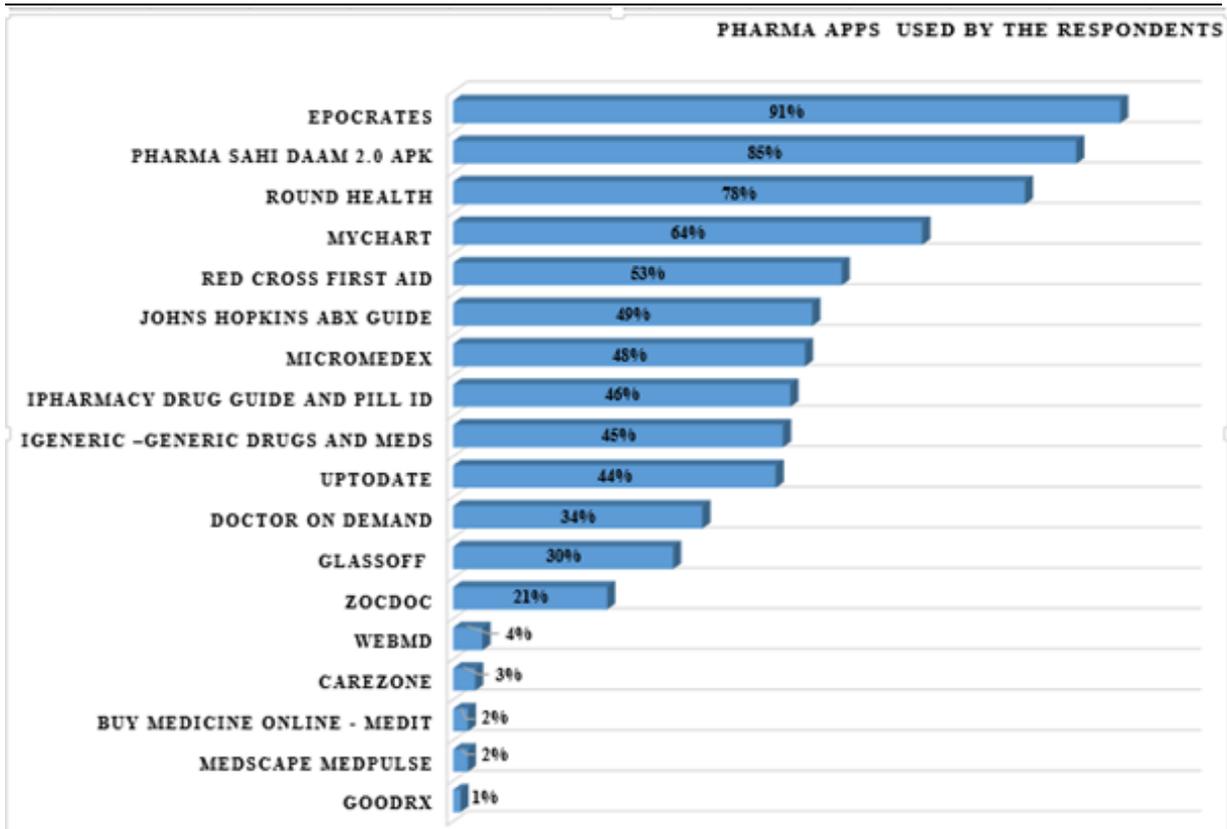


Figure 2.

Pharma Apps experienced by the respondents on their smartphones

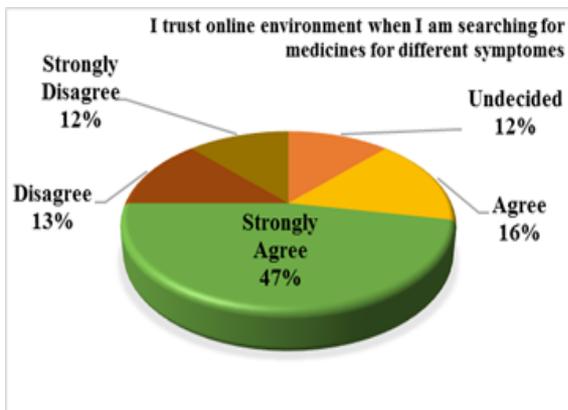


Figure 3.

Respondents' trust in online environment regarding medicines

Regarding the trust of the respondents in the online environment 47% were Strongly Agree, but most of them were Undecided (12%). Patients declared that they were very influenced by all the information about medicines on the Internet and prefer to take into account online prescription, than going to a doctor (Figure 3).

Figure 4 shows that the attitude of respondents regarding the development of the digital pharmacy was Extremely Good (30%) which confirm the growing importance of the online environment for patients today.

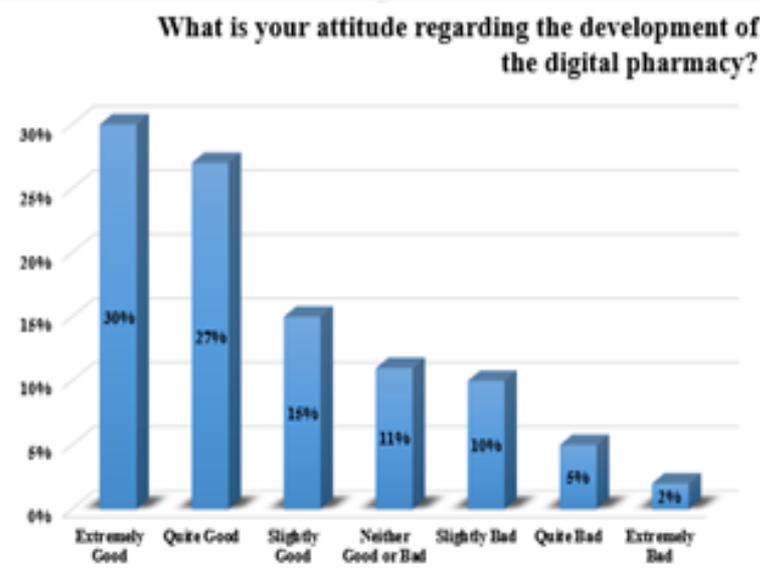


Figure 4.
Respondents' attitude regarding the development of the digital pharmacy

Conclusions

We can conclude that a majority of people turn on the web first when looking for information about health and drugs, before talking to their pharmacist or doctor. In a digital age, patients are much less dependent on their doctors for advice, increasingly able and willing to take greater control of their own health.

In the era of digital society, people must search for help on the Internet, but must be careful not to be cheated by small business that want to take advantage of the user offering them low quality medicines and prescription.

On the other hand, digitalization in the pharmaceutical field is a very good opportunity for Romania's healthcare system and also for the economy development or even for reaching a higher level of life quality.

Pharmaceutical companies are among the most active group of health app publishers.

The importance of developing new online marketing techniques is increasingly obvious in relation to numerous changes which occur on pharmaceutical market, like tight competition, increase of information degree [16]. Nowadays, the online communication activities are extremely important for the pharmaceutical industry. Within the marketing policy, the online promotion activities impose a range of strategies which are implemented online in an integrated manner to facilitate the pharmaceutical products and services promotion process, via Internet, to supplement the offline promotion work.

The evolving environment represents an opportunity for the pharmaceutical market to lead

the way on the process of approval of medical apps and devices.

Several opportunities for further development of the pharmaceutical field can be considered as follows: online repeat prescription services; tele-monitoring of compliance; live dose adjustment based on real time monitoring, through wearables; early diagnosis, therefore early prescription.

This paper reveals how the digital era has changed habits and patient's behaviour. Nowadays, patients use online to find information about disease, medicines, apps related to drugs, schedule, dictionaries related to active substances, all the accessibility to medicines around the world, and being online you can appeal online to a pharmacist and to get support because new technologies bring lots of benefits faster, with less time and money.

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