

# Is Personal Selling As A Promotion Tool Still Effective In Pharmaceutical Sector?

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## Abstract

In today's competitive business environment, highly effective sales force facilitates the pharmaceutical companies in achieving their business objectives and sales targets. The field sales personnel are the backbone for the company in maintaining relationship with the stakeholders like doctors and channel members such as retailers and wholesalers thereby improving the business for the pharmaceutical companies. Among the various communication tools available, selecting the right one or a combination of tools makes all the difference as for any industry to survive. As far as the pharmaceutical industry is concerned, the objective is to promote and register the medicines' brand names among the doctors who in turn prescribe them to the patients. Here comes the role of medical representatives in coordinating with the doctors, chemists and the drug wholesalers. This research paper attempts to find out the role of personal selling as an effective tool and the factors influencing the pharmaceutical companies in improving their business.

**Key Words:** Personal Selling, Pharmaceutical Products, Promotion, Medical Representatives, Doctors, Prescriptions, Retailers, Wholesalers

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indian pharma industry is expected to grow at CAGR of 12% to reach \$130 billion during 2020-30 period from \$ 41.7 billion in 2020. Indian pharma companies supply over 40% of generics to US market, and about 25% of the

prescription drugs to UK market. India caters to over 60% of the global vaccine demand. India's share of export was 2.5% for the global formulations trade which is around \$652 billion (2019). Global generics trade is facing increased pricing pressure and competition today. Indian pharma companies are facing this

challenge in the global market. The global pharmaceutical trade is expected to reach a size of \$1-1.3 trillion by 2030, the aim is to get a global share of 6-7% by value to attain a size of \$73 billion. Innovation-led research and development, healthcare delivery (R&D), manufacturing and supply chain, and market access are the opportunities that have emerged to accelerate the growth of Indian pharmaceutical and healthcare industry. (EY FICCI report titled 'Indian Pharmaceutical Industry 2021: future is now.')

In pharma companies a medical representative plays an important role in detailing to the Doctors and in turn selling the pharma products to the channel members. The pharmaceutical companies are using personal selling as a tool for promoting products. Their role is to create demand for existing pharmaceutical products and launch new products in the market by building good relationship with the Doctors, retailers, and wholesalers.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Peter Drucker the legend and the father of Business Consulting once said: "Because the purpose of business is to create a customer, the business enterprise has two- and only two-basic functions: Marketing and Innovation. Marketing and Innovation produce results; all the rest are costs. Marketing is the distinguishing, unique function of the business." Excellent customer relationship helps the organisations in achieving their sales targets and business goals.

The pharmaceuticals industry promotes

its products heavily (Hurwitz and Caves 1988) and these promotion efforts can help differentiate products, enhance brand loyalty, and check price competition (Rizzo, 1999). There are other reasons too for a higher level of promotions: fewer number of blockbuster drugs (brands whose sales potential in excess of \$1 billion) in the firm's new product pipeline, pharma firms find it difficult to find new drugs that can sustain growth and to balance the lost revenue, and finally, new products have greater compressed product life cycles (Spiller & Wymer, 2001). There is a significant impact of pricing and promotional activities towards prescription choice behaviour and price sensitivity (T Fusun F. Gonul and others, 2001). Branding coupled with the marketing process can provide information about products that helps create a distinction for the brand among the competitors of that product category. However, the product positioning of a drug will depend on its characteristics such as indications for which the drug is used, safety, efficacy and tolerability (Schuiling & Moss, 2004). Strategic requirements and pressure from customer end have made it imperative for the organisations to focus on strengthening salesforce performance (Piercy N.F, Cravens D.W and Lane N, 2007). Studies have found that there is a strong positive link between exposure of products to a physician and their prescribing behavior (Kremer, Bijmolt, Leeftang, & Wieringa, 2008; Tsakiridou, Boutsouki, Zotos, & Mattas, 2008) and consequently, promotion becomes crucial for pharmaceutical firms. Thus, an important role of promotional inputs

is to help to build brand equity (Osinga, Leeftang, Srinivasan, & Wieringa, 2011). Pharmaceutical companies need to find methods to communicate the benefits of the drug to the customers and this can be usually accomplished by a mix of promotional inputs such as detailing, advertisement in the medical journal, conference participation, continuing medical education (CME), symposium, drug sample, etc. (Nath Sanyal, Datta Saroj, & Banerjee Asok, 2013). In pharmaceutical marketing, the promotion "P" is very important, perhaps more important vis-à-vis the other Ps (such as price, product and physical distribution) of marketing (Stros and Lee 2015). Building the brand is vital to a firm's success, due to a large number of drugs available for prescriptions. Hence, branding can play a leading role in product differentiation (Moss, 2016).

### III. METHODOLOGY

The perception of doctors on their relationship with the pharmaceutical marketing executives, i.e the medical representatives has been measured with the help of 46 statements. Scoring of perception is based upon "Likert Type Method". To secure the total perception score five points are given for "Always", four points for "Frequently", three points for "sometimes", two points for "Rarely" and one point for "Never" response. Thus the total perception score of physician was obtained by adding up the scores of all the 46 statements. In this section, an attempt has been made to extract the important dimensions which influence the relationship and pharma industry. In the study 46 statements relating to

doctors' relationship with medical representatives and pharmaceutical industry have been selected so as to identify the significant and important factors with the help of factor analytical technique.

### 3.1 Doctors Relationship with Medical representatives and Pharmaceutical Industry

The Rotated Factor Matrix for the variables (46 items) relating to the relationship of doctors with medical representatives and pharmaceutical industry included in the study is given in Table2.

Before extracting the factors, to test the appropriateness of the factor model, Bartlett's test of sphericity was used to test the null hypothesis that the variables are uncorrelated in the population. The test statistic for sphericity is based on a Chi-square transformation of the determinant of the correlation matrix.

Another useful statistics is the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy<sup>1</sup>. This index compares the magnitude of the observed correlation co-efficients to the magnitude of the partial correlation co-efficients. Small value of the KMO statistic indicate that the correlation between pairs of variables cannot be explained by other variables and that factor analysis may not be appropriate. Generally, a value greater than 0.5 is desirable.

The correlation matrix was

examined carefully and the two tests namely Bartlett's test of sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test were undertaken to test if it was judicious to

proceed with Factor Analysis in the present study. The computed results are given in Table 1.

**TABLE 1 MEASURES OF SAMPLING INADEQUACY**

Measure	Estimated Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0.7514
Bartlett's test of Sphericity	2261.24*
Degrees of freedom	185

\*Indicates the significance at 5 per cent level.

It is understood from Table 1 that the approximate Chi-square statistic is 2261.24 with 185 degrees of freedom which is significant at 5 per cent level. The value of the KMO statistic (0.7514) is also large ( $> 0.5$ ). Thus the factor analysis may be considered an appropriate technique for analyzing the data.

Factor analysis was run with 46 variables (items) by Orthogonal Varimax Rotation and the factor loadings received by the factor  $F_1$ ,  $F_2$ ,  $F_3$ ,  $F_4$ ,  $F_5$ ,  $F_6$  and  $F_7$  for Doctors are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 exhibits the rotated factor loadings for 46 statements (variables) for doctors' relationship with Medical representatives and pharma Industry. It is inferred from the Table 4.14 that all the 46 statements have extracted seven factors namely  $F_1$ ,  $F_2$ ,  $F_3$ ,  $F_4$ ,  $F_5$ ,  $F_6$  and  $F_7$ . These are the factors which influence the Doctors relationship with Medical

representatives and pharma industry.

### **Factors I ( $F_1$ )**

Among the statements of Doctors relationship with Medical representatives pharma Industry, 'regular visit', 'common sense', 'sincerity', 'product knowledge', 'influencing ability', 'effective communication', 'value system', 'committed person', 'time management', and 'company image', have high loadings on Factor I. All these statements represent the behaviour actions of field force to promote relationship of Doctors to pharma Industry. All the characteristics of field force ensure the cordiality between the Doctors and pharma Industry in the study region. Hence, Factor I can be named as "**Field force Approach**".

### **Factor II ( $F_2$ )**

The second factor consists of 'moderate price', 'Economical price', 'product packing size', 'product presentation

look' and 'premium price', with significant positive factor loadings. The pharmaceutical Industry has to introduce their product with good looking pack and affordable price so as to increase the sale through the Doctors. Hence, the second factor  $F_2$  can be named as "**Good packing with affordable price**".

### **Factor III ( $F_3$ )**

The significant loading factors under third factor ( $F_3$ ) are 'sample product', 'offering medical journals', 'offering literature', 'conducting CME/CMTE, supporting for higher education / Research and patients education programmes.

The statement with high loading on Factor III refers to updating of knowledge in the medical field through supporting journals, sample, group meeting, supporting higher education and LBL with colourful charts and information to the Doctors. Hence, the third factor can be named as "**Providing samples and scientific supports**".

### **Factor IV ( $F_4$ )**

'Multinational company', 'Large size Indian Company', 'Research background company', 'company image at market place, and Medium size company, have high factor loadings on Factor IV. These variables reflect the area of operation and Research oriented pharmaceutical Industry. Large and medium size refer to the turnover of more than 50 crores and 10 to 20 crores respectively. Hence, Factor IV can be

termed as "**Multinational with large turnover**".

### **Factor V ( $F_5$ )**

It is understood that 'quality product', 'product faster resolution', 'production acceptance by patients', 'product dosage convenience', 'product strength and product delivery system are the variables with high factor loading on Factor V. All the variables loading under Factor V reflect the quality of the product. An effective quality not only provides the effective medicine but is also accepted by the patients. Hence, Factor V can be named as "**Patient accepted quality drugs**".

### **Factor VI ( $F_6$ )**

The sixth factor consists of 'sponsorship for clinical needs', 'sponsorship for IADVL conference travel', 'sponsorship for IADVL stay, 'Sponsorship for IADVL conference registration', 'sponsorship for International conference, and 'sponsorship for family member' and 'International membership' with significant factor loadings. Sponsorship has been extended by the pharma industry so as to establish and maintain relationship of Doctors to promote their products. Hence, the sixth factor can be named as "**Sponsorship from the company**".

### **Factor VII ( $F_7$ )**

It is comprehended that 'visiting physicians at their clinics', 'Fulfilling Doctors need in time', 'Technical supports providing', "interacting

Frequently", 'Greetings during important days', and 'contact through phone with high loading constitute Factor VII. All the statements loading under factor VII reflect frequent contact and support by senior personnel to Doctors. Thus, Factor VII could be

named as "**Regular visit and supports by senior managers**".

The variables with highest loadings for doctors' relationship with pharma Industry are presented in Table 2

**TABLE 2 VARIABLES WITH HIGHEST FACTOR LOADINGS FOR THE PHYSICIAN (MEDIUM VOLUME CONTRIBUTORS) WITH PHARMA INDUSTRY**

Factor	Newly Extracted Factor	Selected Statement (Variable with highest loading)	Factor Loadings
F <sub>1</sub>	Field force approach	Regular visit	0.7443
F <sub>2</sub>	Good Packing with Affordable price	Moderate price	0.7682
F <sub>3</sub>	Providing sample and supports	Samples (product)	0.7511
F <sub>4</sub>	Multinational with huge turnover	Multinational company	0.7314
F <sub>5</sub>	Patients accepted quality drugs	Quality of product	0.7121
F <sub>6</sub>	Sponsorship from the company	Sponsorship for clinical needs	0.7451
F <sub>7</sub>	Regular visit and support by senior manager	Visiting Physicians clinic	0.7241

#### IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

It is inferred from Table 3 that the statement, 'Regular visit with a factor loading of 0.7443, Moderate price with loading of 0.7682, samples (product) with a factor loadings of 0.7511, Multinational company with a factor loadings of 0.7314, Quality of product with a factor loadings of

0.7121, sponsorship for Clinics' needs with a factor loadings of 0.7451 and visiting Doctors clinic with a factor loadings of 0.7241 are the variables with highest factor loading under F<sub>1</sub>, F<sub>2</sub>, F<sub>3</sub>, F<sub>4</sub>, F<sub>5</sub>, F<sub>6</sub> and F<sub>7</sub>. Hence, these identified seven factors influence the Doctors' relationship with Medical representatives and prescription behavior.

**TABLE 3 ROTATED FACTOR MATRIX FOR DOCTORS RELATIONSHIP WITH MEDICAL REPRESENTATIVES**

Sl. No.	Variables	Rotated Factor Loading							h <sup>2</sup>
		F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	
1.	Regular Visit	0.7443	0.4039	0.3211	0.2714	0.0762	0.0145	0.0066	0.89
2.	Common sense	0.7141	0.3771	0.2618	0.1478	0.1118	0.0969	0.0075	0.7644
3.	Sincerity	0.6121	0.4211	0.3714	0.1077	0.0965	0.0148	0.0149	0.7113
4.	Product Knowledge	0.6833	0.2511	0.1314	0.1177	0.0731	0.0602	0.0068	0.5701
5.	Influencing Ability	0.6418	0.3514	0.2277	0.1921	0.0965	0.0621	0.2005	0.6775
6.	Effective Communication	0.5921	0.3214	0.2141	0.1861	0.0865	0.0118	0.0065	0.5420
7.	Value system	0.5514	0.4011	0.2514	0.1822	0.1273	0.0263	0.2012	0.6187
8.	Committed person	0.5318	0.3791	0.2415	0.1821	0.0968	0.0178	0.4011	0.6886
9.	Time management	0.5141	0.4145	0.1821	0.0981	0.0762	0.0115	0.3141	0.5835
10.	The company he/she works	0.5009	0.4118	0.3848	0.2715	0.0073	0.0016	0.3341	0.7539
11.	Moderate price	0.2714	0.7682	0.2070	0.1635	0.0965	0.0174	0.0065	0.7430
12.	Economical price	0.3008	0.7311	0.2815	0.1732	0.0765	0.0178	0.0037	0.7404
13.	Product packing size	0.3016	0.6919	0.2633	0.0975	0.0613	0.0564	0.0079	0.6556

14.	Product presentation look	0.4004	0.5525	0.2838	0.1463	0.1008	0.0968	0.001 5	0.587 1
15.	Premium price	0.3965	0.5228	0.2911	0.0615	0.0508	0.0095	0.001 1	0.521 7

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16.	Sample (product)	0.2718	0.2114	0.7511	0.1375	0.0965	0.0866	0.0075	0.7259
17.	Offering medical journals/books	0.3775	0.1346	0.6988	0.1008	0.0613	0.0075	0.0049	0.6629
18.	Offering literature	0.3013	0.2714	0.6624	0.1618	0.0917	0.0065	0.0037	0.6379
19.	Conducting CME/CMTE	0.2713	0.1965	0.6106	0.0965	0.0612	0.0562	0.0077	0.5013
20.	Supporting higher education/research	0.0412	0.1811	0.5699	0.3712	0.0012	0.1077	0.3037	0.6009
21.	Patient education programme	0.3965	0.1738	0.5124	0.2141	0.0961	0.0615	0.0077	0.5089
22.	Multinational company	0.2861	0.1965	0.1075	0.7314	0.0091	0.0075	0.3005	0.7574
23.	Large size Indian company	0.3711	0.1475	0.1415	0.6858	0.0965	0.0865	0.0074	0.6667
24.	Research background	0.2912	0.1465	0.1115	0.6276	0.0072	0.0064	0.0038	0.5891
25.	Company image at market place	0.3771	0.2411	0.1042	0.5814	0.0965	0.0076	0.3008	0.6491
26.	Medium size company	0.4473	0.3005	0.1071	0.5141	0.0071	0.0032	0.2102	0.6104
27.	Quality of product	0.2511	0.1172	0.1009	0.0973	0.7121	0.0073	0.0031	0.6036
28.	Product faster resolution	0.0013	0.1965	0.0045	0.0142	0.7119	0.0068	0.0012	0.5184

29.	Product acceptance by patients	0.3761	0.2511	0.173 5	0.0612	0.6131	0.0095	0.0013	0.614 3
30.	Product side-effects	0.3965	0.2013	0.176 8	0.0717	0.6008	0.0088	0.0022	0.595 2
31.	Product dosage convenience	0.6125	0.2214	0.096 5	0.0148	0.0834	0.1822	0.2811	0.552 9
32.	Product strength	0.3965	0.2731	0.196 5	0.0468	0.5118	0.0068	0.1774	0.566 1
33.	Product delivery system	0.4215	0.2175	0.161 5	0.0966	0.5015	0.0145	0.2016	0.552 7

Cont...

34.	Sponsorship for clinic needs	0.2514	0.1472	0.0966	0.0813	0.0612	0.7451	0.0093	0.6598
35.	Sponsorship for IADVL Conference Travel	0.5002	0.1743	0.0668	0.0043	0.0072	0.6015	0.0063	0.6469
36.	Sponsorship for IADVL conference-stay	0.3113	0.1973	0.0962	0.0072	0.0008	0.6015	0.2003	0.5471
37.	Sponsorship of IADVL Conference –Registration	0.3315	0.1761	0.1006	0.0066	0.0012	0.5791	0.2008	0.5267
38.	Sponsorship for International conference	0.4514	0.1012	0.1113	0.0072	0.0033	0.5008	0.2124	0.5224
39.	Sponsorship for family members	0.4002	0.3113	0.0072	0.0012	0.0016	0.5176	0.3376	0.6390
40.	Sponsorship for International Membership	0.3492	0.1173	0.1003	0.0173	0.2098	0.5012	0.3211	0.5443
41.	Visiting doctors clinic	0.3541	0.2218	0.1008	0.0965	0.0066	0.0012	0.7241	0.7184
42.	Fulfilling doctors need in time	0.3815	0.2815	0.0015	0.0013	0.0005	0.0003	0.7125	0.7324
43.	Technical support providing	0.3814	0.1815	0.0165	0.0108	0.0118	0.0004	0.6815	0.6434
44.	Interacting frequently	0.3514	0.1175	0.0965	0.0712	0.0731	0.0062	0.6231	0.5453
45.	Greeting during important days	0.3714	0.1975	0.0681	0.0608	0.0212	0.0013	0.5915	0.5739
46.	Contacting through phone	0.2763	0.3141	0.1745	0.4121	0.0076	0.1008	0.5275	0.6638
		8.60	6.43	3.45	3.89	3.36	2.88	76.16	

Note: The principle factor method with orthogonal matrix rotation is used to estimate factor

## V. DISCUSSION

From these research findings, it is found that the field force approach in terms of regular visit to the doctors, wholesalers and retailers, good packing with moderate price, providing sample to the doctors, multinational company image, quality of product, sponsorship for clinical needs, regular visit by senior company executives to the physicians' clinics are some of the factors which will influence the prescription behavior of doctors and brings in higher sales for the company. This requires effective salesforce with the required competencies such as product knowledge, good communication and selling skills followed by positive attitude. Now the market is flooded with so much of competition. Especially after the liberalization process in India, the country has become the hub for quality generic medicines. Production of drugs has been considerably taken over by the small and medium enterprises (SME) sector even maintaining the stringent quality control measures. A same medicine, is being produced and marketed by many firms and the doctors are really in a dilemma to choose the medicines because all are equally good in terms of efficacy, dosage convenience, price etc. Here comes the role of personal selling. The medical representatives of the respective pharmaceutical companies try to maintain good relationship with the doctors, chemists etc. This helps the companies to maintain a decent market share for their products.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In pharmaceutical industry personal selling is an important tool in promoting the existing products and launching new products. Here the medical

representatives connect with the doctors, retailers and wholesalers and create awareness and preference for the companies' pharma products. The findings of this study provide insights into the role of personal selling in promoting the pharma products among doctors, retailers and wholesalers. Medical representatives play an important role in influencing the prescription behavior of the doctors. It is imperative for the pharmaceutical companies to recruit right sales force and provide suitable training to achieve the sales targets and business goals thereby attaining sustainable growth.

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