

Promoting Strategies and Its Ethical Aspect: An Application in the Pharmaceutical Industry

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the strategies followed in the pharmaceutical industry, their ethical aspect and the image effect of the pharmaceutical companies on doctors' prescribing habits. The image of pharmaceutical companies, their contact with stakeholders in the sector, the strategies they follow, their representatives' and managers' honesty and reliability are seen vital for the doctor and the pharmacists called on. Besides, due to the competition in the pharmaceutical industry, promoting strategies have become crucial. It is important to take the ethical aspect into consideration in this process.

In the study, frequency analysis is conducted. The data is collected from doctors, pharmacists, managers and representatives in pharmaceutical companies working in the four different cities in Turkey.

Results of the study reveal that; attention-grabbing small promotional items are the most frequently used promoting tools; pharmaceutical presentation is one of the most important promoting strategies that companies consider its ethical aspect in their marketing activities; drug samples are used by the patient; medical training is important for all the stakeholders in the industry; companies are giving more importance to promoting activities; goal-oriented marketing trends are rising; public relations enable the communication between the stakeholders; patient-centred view plays role in determining the promoting strategies; professionalism and honesty of the managers & representatives, and also the image of the company play role in doctors' prescribing habits.

Keywords: Pharmaceutical industry, promoting, ethics, marketing strategies.

1. Introduction

This study aims to evaluate the promotion strategies in pharmaceutical marketing in terms of doctors, medical representatives, pharmacists and company managers; the ethical aspect of these strategies; the effect of perceptions about pharmaceutical companies and their employees on the patient's treatment process; the companies' effect on the brand value.

Regarding the aim of the study, the data is gathered from 323 participations in the sector in four different cities in Turkey. According to the doctors, medical representatives, pharmacists and company managers, promotion strategies in pharmaceutical marketing, their ethical aspect and the effect of the communication between the pharmaceutical company and the doctor on the treatment process and the development of brand value are tested by frequency analysis.

The study consists of five parts. In the first part of the study, the problem – whether the promotion strategies in pharmaceutical marketing, their ethical aspect, perceptions on the pharmaceutical company and its employees effect the treatment process and brand value is given. In the second part, pharmaceutical marketing, promotions, and ethical aspect is given. In the third part, research methodology is given; in the fourth part, research analysis is given and the last part results and suggestions are given.

3. Literature Analysis

3.1. Promotion Strategies of Pharmaceutical Marketing

In pharmaceutical marketing, the first stakeholder is medical representatives. They represent their companies outdoors. They do not have any differences from other sales representatives; they give elaborate demonstrations on their company products to doctors, pharmacists and to those any other concerned by visiting them, they provide free samples of the products and give information on what aspect this product is superior to the others.

However, doctors, one of the stakeholders in pharmaceutical marketing, do not see the representatives as the source of information even though they trust the information that representatives share with them. Doctors, generally prefer keeping up-to-date with health care and pharmaceutical subjects via medical journals, scientific publications and by word of mouth. Customers, as another stakeholder, are the people who buy the products of pharmaceutical companies but have lack of information on the drug, so seeing the doctor and the pharmacist as the assistant during the drug sale. Wholesalers and retailers are the other parties who provide the drug flow between pharmaceutical companies and customers. These parties control drug stocks by tracking the drug sales from prescriptions and provide a rational drug flow through distribution channels.

Importers providing products of international pharmaceutical companies to different markets are also important stakeholders. In pharmaceutical sector, key idea leaders can be accepted as doctors who can affect other doctors due to their studies and success they obtain in a field. Treatment process they follow and drugs they use are followed by their co-workers. Another stakeholder in pharmaceutical marketing is pharmaceutical companies. Pharmaceutical companies are the stakeholders that work to improve life quality by offering products and related marketing activity (Sharma, 2013, p.66-87).

Pharmaceutical companies apply to various promotion strategies to activate sales within the marketing activity. In pharmaceutical marketing, promotion is a marketing effort which necessitates important sources. Promotion suggests an incentive to purchase products. While consumer promotion includes samples, coupons, cash money returns offerings, reduced prices, presents, free testing, warranties, selling point exposures and exhibitions; trade promotion includes reduced prices, advertisements, exposition expenses, and free goods. Business and sales promotion includes commercial exhibitions, congresses, competitions for sales representatives and social advertisements (Kotler, 2000, p.597). The use of promotion provides brand and product awareness, creates brand addiction, encourages consumers to buy the product again, expands the market, diversifies from opponents, provides value for consumers, focuses on more stock amounts by encouraging distribution channels, convinces to try the new product or the improved product again by costumers, creates cooperation with retailers and develops a strategy against the promotion activities of opponents (Erdoğan, 2014: 513; Ünüsan ve Sezgin, 2007: 285).

In pharmaceutical marketing; promotions should put forth results of clinical trials correctly and objectively, reflect obtained evidences; it should not contain wrong information and be deceptive. Promotions comparing products, the results of published scientific studies should be shown. Pharmaceutical companies should take ethical standardizations into consideration. In promotion strategy, it is injurious for reputation of company and medicine industry (IFPA,2013, p.1-8). In promotion strategies of pharmaceutical companies, being difference between promised service and presented service causes falling of customer's satisfaction level and injury of confidence to pharmaceutical company (Erdem, 2007 p.115; Fabien,1997 p.206).

Pharmaceutical companies makes various clinical trials to put forth the effectiveness and reliability of medicines. Doctors have positive or negative verdicts about pharmaceutical based on obtained results in consequence of using a prepared sample for new medicines by patients. If during treatment process, positive results could be get depending upon using of new pharmaceutical sample, results of market tests of pharmaceuticals are dedicated to be successful. Subsequently, in distribution channels to be commercial of these pharmaceutical of process starts and distribution of these pharmaceuticals is condensational. After this process, sales team of pharmaceutical company plan promotion activities towards these medicines and they come into effect with starting doctor visiting extensively.

In product life of pharmaceuticals periods, to be different from others of promotion strategies are seen. In introduction period; they concentrate on idea leader's opinions, brochures, clinical trials, seminars, panel discussions, advertisement on medical media, expensive presents and sponsors. And a lot of examples are presented about medicine test in this period. In development period; they concentrate on advertisements in which health officers make explanations about results, reminder brochures, reminder presents and sponsorship. In matureness period; they front to patients which uses occurred recipes by specific medicines during long treatment process, they concentrate on reminder process and present. Also, they focus on presenting more examples depending on request. In declension period; promotions are also intended for promotion for market share as much as possible (Ahmed,Sattar,Parmar,2014,p.681-686).

Promotions are practiced to representatives by pharmaceutical companies are intended for increasing sales figures in areas that these employees are responsible. Although customers are aware at promotion strategies of medicine companies, they cannot understand effects on them completely (Sharma,2013,p.66-87). Generally; promotions are presented by pharmaceutical companies are seen as visits,encourement,presents financing of

participation to conference, travelling and provision of free pharmaceutical samples. In clinical strategies, effective creating of promotion activities are seen individually besides admission of doctor's responses from promotion individually (Katz vd., 2003, p.448).

Analysis of marketing activities of pharmaceutical companies can be explained within patient treatment and effect on the medical researches. This marketing activities can reverberate patients negatively. Doctor-oriented promotions can be evaluated as a marketing activities which can damage to patients. Because they defend that promotion applications of pharmaceutical companies affect involuntarily doctors in the process of recipe preparation. In this situation, patient faces with risk in his/her health. Additionally; because of promotions are presented to doctors writing high price pharmaceutical on the recipe does not provide any healing on patient's health quality and also patient must pay more money (Chiu, 2005, p.89-94).

Presentations presented to doctors by pharmaceutical companies provide development of relations between two contractors. Yet, when pharmaceutical promotions cause tendency of doctors to the specific way, doctors are perceived arrantly by public and public funding (public money) is exploited. Also medical profession can come up against risk of losing to patients and public. Doctors should earn trust of patients, they should have reputation on patient's eyes and they should run the best treatment for their patients. In this process, doctors can determine treatment process and pharmaceutical which they use in this process with effect of promotions of pharmaceutical companies but this situation creates distrust on patients and it causes injury relations between patient and doctor (Jain, 2007, p.4).

In pharmaceutical promotions, approaches which are not ethic can be followed. Suggesting wrong and incorrect claims about pharmaceuticals, deliberately hiding side effect and contained risks of medicine, ignoring to be health-oriented, using promotions which are pharmaceutical sales increasing-oriented are evaluated as moral problems in pharmaceutical promotions. These applications can cause improperly to use pharmaceutical of patients and coming up against risks which can be fatal. Therefore, these strategies ignore developed informing services of medicine management to provide consciousness and increase about health and then immoral pharmaceutical promotions strategies causes negative results with regard to patients health and safety. On the other hand; most of doctors do not see promotion activities ethic problem and among doctors, evaluation differences are identified according as value and kind of presents are presented as promotion (Ahmed vd. 2011, p.215-221).

Wazana asserts that pharmaceutical managements spend a lot of money for promotions in every year, endowed presents within promotion are efficient on prepared recipe and these expenditures increase health expenses (Wazana, 2000, p.373-379). Gibbons vd. puts forward that patients compared to doctors think that presents are more efficient on recipe preparation and they do not approve presents in Gibbons' work in which difference of perspectives of patients and doctors intended for presents are presented as promotion in pharmaceutical sector. Most of patients joining this studying do not approve this kind of presents because patients think that presents are effective on prepared recipes. This result in work, patients can be effective on perspective to medical profession and perceptions of patients intended for this profession front to negative point (Gibbons vd., 1998, p.151-154). Cinaver's work in which he evaluates marketing ways of pharmaceutical companies emphasizes doctors learning information about new pharmaceutical from medicine representative accept new medicine as a new progress, they prefer more this medicine and they give more place on recipe compared to other doctors. Also, depending on doctor's meetings with medicine representatives and increasing of confidence level between them, doctors' prescription rate increases, prepared recipes are affected by presents which are taken by doctors. Accordingly, this situation creates an idea on patient's mind that it affects treatment quality and cost (Cinaver, 2014, p.33-39).

On the other hand Rosenthal vd. puts forth that promotions doing in health care services do not cause exhibition of positive attitude to specific medicines by doctors or doctors do not make impression about giving place to unsuitable pharmaceutical on prepare for treatment of patient. Also, he asserts that advertisements which are for patients are important and these success of advertisements are observed in increased sales. Effects of advertisements which are made directly to customers depend how customers perceive these advertisements. In this work; thanks to advertisements, a thumping majority of customers are aware recipe pharmaceuticals and they discuss with their doctors about pharmaceuticals. Even if advertisements are not related with recipe pharmaceutical substitute doctor-oriented promotion studies, day after day more using is emphasized. Also, advertisements ensure customer's acquisition of knowledge about pharmaceutical and its price and it explains that these advertisements help for joining more consciously for process in determination for patient the most suitable way (Rosenthal, 2002, p.498-205).

3. Research Methodology

Pharmaceutical marketing is in interaction with many other stakeholders. Tendencies in pharmaceutical marketing, promotion strategies and the ethical aspect of these activities are gaining more significance. Furthermore, perceptions on pharmaceutical companies and their employees are significant for the brand value in pharmaceutical marketing (Gupta, P., Udupa, A., 2011:1-8; Lakdawala, H.M., 2003:25-33).

Regarding the aim of this study, the data is gathered from 323 participations - doctors, medical representatives, pharmacists and company managers- in one month in four different cities in Turkey by using convenience sampling.

The responses given to the questionnaire are analyzed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) 15.0 for Windows. In data analysis, the participants' demographic characteristics, their responses to the statements in the questionnaire are analyzed with frequency analysis and percent value statistics.

4. Research findings

4.1. Research Findings on the Participants' Demographic Variables

Table 1. Demographic Variables of the Participants

Demographic Variables		Participants	
		Frequency	%
Occupation	Doctor	87	26,9
	Medical Representative	126	39,0
	Pharmacist	72	22,3
	Company Manager	38	11,8
	Total	323	100
Age	21-35	174	53,9
	36-50	137	42,4
	51 and above	12	3,7
	Total	323	100
Working period	1-10 years	186	57,6
	11-20 years	105	32,5
	21-30 years	31	9,6
	31-40 years	1	0,3
	Total	323	100

In Table 1, research findings on the participants' demographic variables are given. As it is shown in Table 1, %26,9 of the participants are doctors, %39 of them are medical representatives, %22,3 is pharmacists and %11,8 is company managers. Besides, %53,9 is between 21-35 years of age, %42,4 is between 36-50 and %3,7 is 51 and above. %57,6 of the participants have been working for 1-10 years, %32,5 has a period of 11-20 years, %9,6 has 21-30 years and %0,3 has 31-40 years in the sector.

4.2. Research Findings on the Participants' about Drug Marketing

Table 2. The Most Common Promoting Tools

The most common promoting tools pharmaceutical companies use		Samples	Gifts	Remarkable promoting products	Helping the patient	Sponsorship to congresses and seminars
	Doctor	21,8	9,2	41,4	-	27,6
	M.Representative	12,7	9,5	50,8	2,4	24,6
	Pharmacist	13,9	37,5	31,9	2,8	13,9
	Company Manager	18,4	2,6	55,3	2,6	21,1

In Table 2, the rates of the promoting tools in pharmaceutical marketing are shown. While doctors, medical representatives and company managers choose the “remarkable promoting products” as the mostly used products, pharmacists choose the “gifts”.

Table 3. Factors on Drug Recommendation

The most important factor on drug recommendation		Company image	Mark-up	Personal relations	Evaluation of the drug brand	Recent literature research
	Doctor	4,6	-	8	8	79,3
	M.Representative	7,1	2,4	34,9	14,3	41,3
	Pharmacist	5,6	29,2	38,9	12,5	13,9
	Company Manager	2,6	7,9	21,1	57,9	10,5

In Table 3, the most important factors on drug recommendation are shown. Doctors and representatives choose “recent literature research” as the most important factor on drug recommendation whereas pharmacists choose personal relations and company managers choose “evaluation on the drug brand”.

Table 4. Resource Allocation for Marketing

Statement: Pharmaceutical companies are allocating more and more resource for marketing efforts.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
	Doctor	12,6	18,4	34,5	21,8	12,6
	M.Representative	9,5	30,2	27	23,8	9,5
	Pharmacist	8,3	20,8	38,9	22,2	9,7
	Company Manager	2,6	57,9	13,2	18,4	7,9

Table 4 shows the tendencies of resource allocation for marketing efforts. Doctors and pharmacists are undecided about the increasing resource allocation of pharmaceutical companies, but medical representatives and company managers disagree with the statement.

Table 5. Ethics in Marketing Activities

Statement:		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pharmaceutical companies pay attention to ethics in their marketing activities.	Doctor	6,9	18,4	25,3	40,2	9,2
	M.Representative	7,9	11,9	23	46,8	10,3
	Pharmacist	1,4	20,8	27,8	45,8	4,2
	Company Manager	-	-	21,1	65,8	13,2

In Table 5, opinions on ethics of pharmaceutical companies in their marketing activities are shown. All participants agree that pharmaceutical companies pay attention to ethics in their marketing activities.

Table 6. Drug Sampling to Doctors as a Promoting Tool

Statement:		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Today one of the most effective promoting strategies is to do drug sampling to doctors.	Doctor	2,3	19,5	19,5	49,4	9,2
	M.Representative	5,6	15,9	18,3	43,7	16,7
	Pharmacist	4,2	9,7	31,9	43,1	11,1
	Company Manager	-	13,2	47,4	26,3	13,2

In Table 6, opinions on drug sampling to doctors are shown. Doctors, representatives and pharmacists agree with the statement, but company managers are undecided about it.

Table 7. Consumption of Drug Samples

Statement:		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
All drug samples provided from pharmaceutical companies are consumed by the patient.	Doctor	1,1	28,7	19,5	32,2	18,4
	M.Representative	6,3	19	22,2	40,5	11,9
	Pharmacist	6,9	12,5	34,7	29,2	16,7
	Company Manager	-	44,7	15,8	31,6	7,9

Table 7 shows the opinions of the participants on the consumption of drug samples. Doctors and representatives agree with the statement, but company managers disagree with it.

Table 8. Medical Training

Statement:		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Continuous medical training is very important for both medical unions and companies.	Doctor	1,1	3,4	19,5	47,1	28,7
	M.Representative	0,8	4,8	21,4	38,1	34,9
	Pharmacist	1,4	9,7	15,3	48,6	25
	Company Manager	-	-	5,3	21,1	73,7

In Table 8, the necessity of medical training is shown. Doctors, representatives and pharmacists agree with the statement, but company managers strongly agree with it.

Table 9. Promoting Activities

Statement:		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pharmaceutical companies are increasingly giving more importance to promoting activities which are continuous with medicine profession.	Doctor	12,6	18,4	23	29,9	16,1
	M.Representative	6,3	15,9	31	37,3	9,5
	Pharmacist	5,6	15,3	33,7	35,7	9,7
	Company Manager	5,3	60,5	10,5	5,3	18,4

In Table 9, the opinions on promoting activities which are continuous with medicine profession are shown. Doctors, representatives and pharmacists agree with the statement, but company managers disagree with it.

Table 10. Social Networking and Blogs

Statement:		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Social networking sites and blogs are becoming an effective promoting tool for pharmaceutical companies.	Doctor	1,1	16,1	35,6	33,3	13,8
	M.Representative	5,6	16,7	25,4	37,3	15,1
	Pharmacist	5,6	19,4	26,4	31,9	16,7
	Company Manager	-	21,1	7,9	60,5	10,5

In Table 10, the opinions on social networking sites and blogs as effective promoting tools for pharmaceutical companies are shown. As it is shown, doctors are undecided about it whereas representatives, pharmacists and company managers agree with the statement.

Table 11. Cause-related marketing

Statement:		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Within cause-related marketing, financing drugs through “economical health programs or providing disease awareness programs” has become an effective promoting tool.	Doctor	1,1	14,9	35,6	42,5	5,7
	M.Representative	7,1	27,8	23,8	27	14,3
	Pharmacist	2,8	23,6	29,6	31,6	12,4
	Company Manager	-	13,2	13,2	57,9	15,8

In Table 11, the opinions on cause-related marketing are shown. As it is seen, doctors pharmacists and company managers agree with the statement. However, representatives disagree with it.

Table 12. Public relations

Statement:		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Public relations is an effective promoting tool to reach the patient and doctors.	Doctor	3,4	10,3	25,3	50,6	10,3
	M.Representative	7,1	25,4	17,5	27,8	22,2
	Pharmacist	4,2	25	19,4	34,7	16,7
	Company Manager	7,9	44,7	18,4	23,7	5,3

In Table 12, the opinions on public relations’ activities are shown. As it is seen, doctors pharmacists and representatives agree with the statement. However, company managers disagree with it.

Table 13. Patient-centred marketing activities

Statement:		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Patient-centred marketing activities are becoming an alternative promoting tool.	Doctor	3,4	16,1	31	44,8	4,6
	M.Representative	7,1	22,2	27,8	29,4	13,5
	Pharmacist	5,6	26,4	18,1	38,9	11,1
	Company Manager	2,6	50	23,7	21,1	2,6

In Table 13, the opinions on patient-centred marketing activities as an alternative promoting tool are shown. As it is seen, doctors pharmacists and representatives agree with the statement. However, company managers disagree with it.

Table 14. Effects of partner relations

Statement: Pharmaceutical companies working as partners (stakeholders) with supporter groups serve not only for dispensing but also for brand-value.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
	Doctor	-	11,5	34,5	47,1	6,9
	M.Representative	3,2	10,3	20,6	49,2	16,7
	Pharmacist	-	13,9	30,6	38,9	16,7
	Company Manager	-	5,3	15,8	73,7	5,3

In Table 14, the opinions on pharmaceutical companies working as partners (stakeholders) with supporter groups effect to their brand-value are shown. As it is seen, all participants agree with the statement.

Table 15. Effects of reliable product information

Statement: Product information from a reliable resource affects doctor's dispensing.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
	Doctor	-	4,6	5,7	47,1	42,5
	M.Representative	1,6	0,8	7,9	46	43,7
	Pharmacist	1,4	1,4	9,7	52,8	34,7
	Company Manager	2,6	2,6	2,6	65,8	26,3

In Table 15, the opinions on product information from a reliable resource affecting doctor's dispensing are shown. As it is seen, doctors strongly agree with the statement, but pharmacists, representatives and company managers agree with it.

Table 16. Image resources

Statement : The image on the doctor of the product and company is directly related to the honesty and professionalism of the medical representative and company manager.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
	Doctor	1,1	1,1	8	39,1	50,6
	M.Representative	1,6	4	11,1	30,2	53,2
	Pharmacist	-	6,9	9,7	43,1	40,3
	Company Manager	-	2,6	-	18,4	78,9

In Table 16, the opinions on the image resources are shown. As it is seen, doctors, representatives and company managers strongly agree with the statement, but pharmacists agree with it.

Table 17. Doctors' perceptions of company image

Statement :		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Doctors are generally influenced by the image of the company.	Doctor	1,1	10,3	16,1	44,8	27,6
	M.Representative	3,2	5,6	7,1	41,3	42,9
	Pharmacist	2,8	1,4	16,7	41,7	37,5
	Company Manager	-	5,3	2,6	65,8	26,3

In Table 17, the opinions on doctors' perceptions of company image are shown. As it is seen, doctors, pharmacists and company managers agree with the statement, but representatives strongly agree with it.

5. Conclusion & Suggestions

In pharmaceutical marketing, all stakeholders should serve to improve the sector creditably with a customer-oriented perspective. It is seen that pharmaceutical companies are applying promotion activities increasingly to be more effective in today's competitive environment. Effective and ethical promotion activities play a significant role in the development of company brand value. Moreover, reliable relations of stakeholders in the sector are necessary for the improvement of both the patient treatment processes and pharmaceutical companies.

In this study, the promotion strategies in pharmaceutical marketing in terms of doctors, medical representatives, pharmacists and company managers working in four different cities in Turkey; the ethical aspect of these strategies; the effect of perceptions about pharmaceutical companies and their employees on the patient's treatment process; the companies' effect on the brand value are evaluated.

The research findings show that; all stakeholders - doctors, medical representatives, pharmacists and company managers- pay attention to ethical rules in marketing activities, continuous medical training is important for all stakeholders, partnership of pharmaceutical companies with support groups is effective both in prescription and brand value processes, information from a reliable resource is positively effective in prescriptions, the image on the doctor of the product and company is related to the degree of honesty and professionalism of the medical representative and company manager, doctors are generally influenced by the company image, and those findings show that there is a synergy among the stakeholders in the sector as well.

Further research can be done with the other stakeholders in the sector such as customers, intermediates, etc.

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