

Humanizing Branded Generic: Transforming Commodity Perceptions Through Patient-Centered Marketing Ecosystems

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INTRODUCTION

India: A Generic Giant

- India ranks 3rd in pharma production by volume, and branded generics dominate the domestic market.
- Branded generics are off-patent drugs sold under proprietary names, distinct from unbranded generics.
- They make up 70–80% of the Indian pharma market but are often viewed as low-cost, interchangeable commodities.
- Uniform marketing and overreliance on doctors have led to low brand differentiation and weak patient connection.

The Gap

- Prior studies focus mainly on doctors prescribing patterns and generic drug pricing.
- Limited understanding of how patients, pharmacists, and HCPs together perceive branded generics.
- Little exploration of how packaging, emotional storytelling, digital tools, and education influence brand trust.
- This dissertation addresses the gap by studying how marketing ecosystems can humanize and differentiate branded generics.

Research Objective

1

To evaluate the perceptions of patients, pharmacists, and healthcare professionals toward branded generics in the Indian pharmaceutical market.

2

To examine how packaging, educational initiatives, emotional branding, and digital tools influence trust, preference, and engagement across these stakeholder groups.

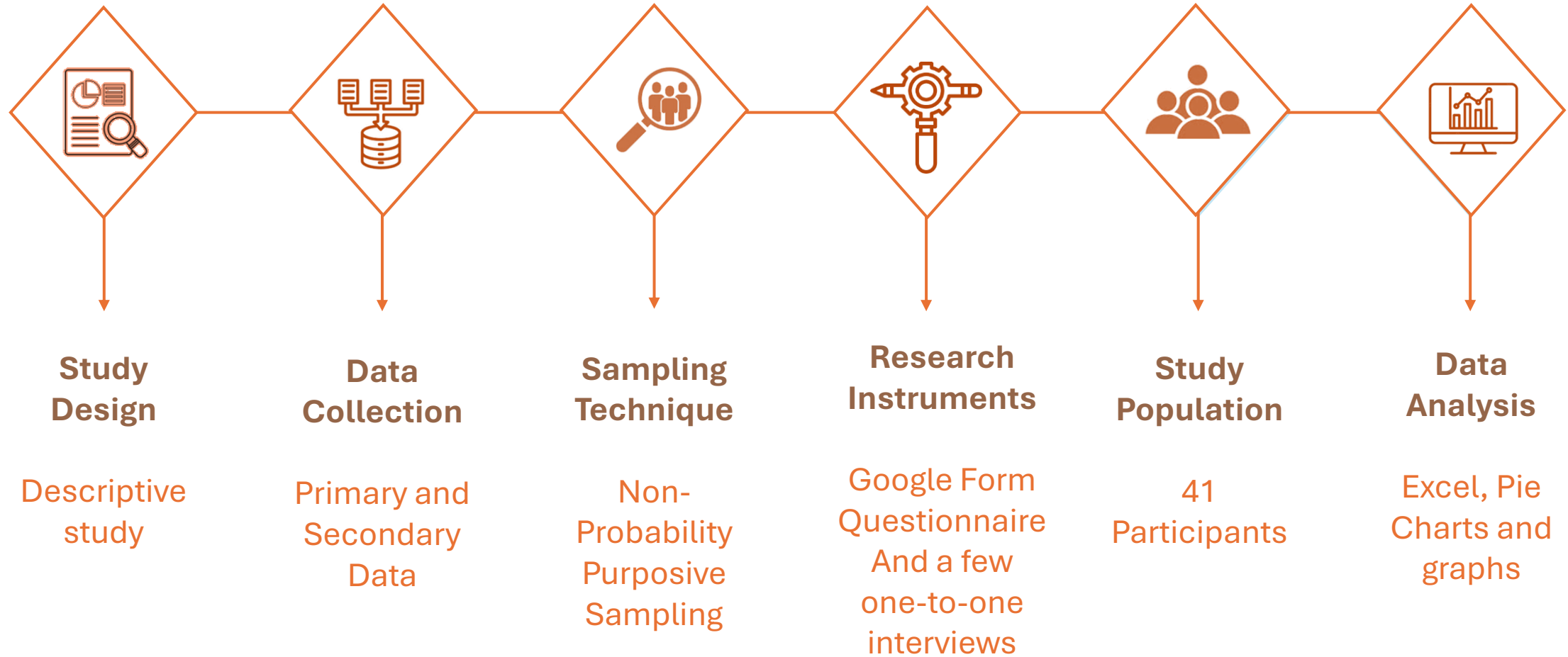
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To identify key differentiators between branded and unbranded generics from a stakeholder-centric perspective.

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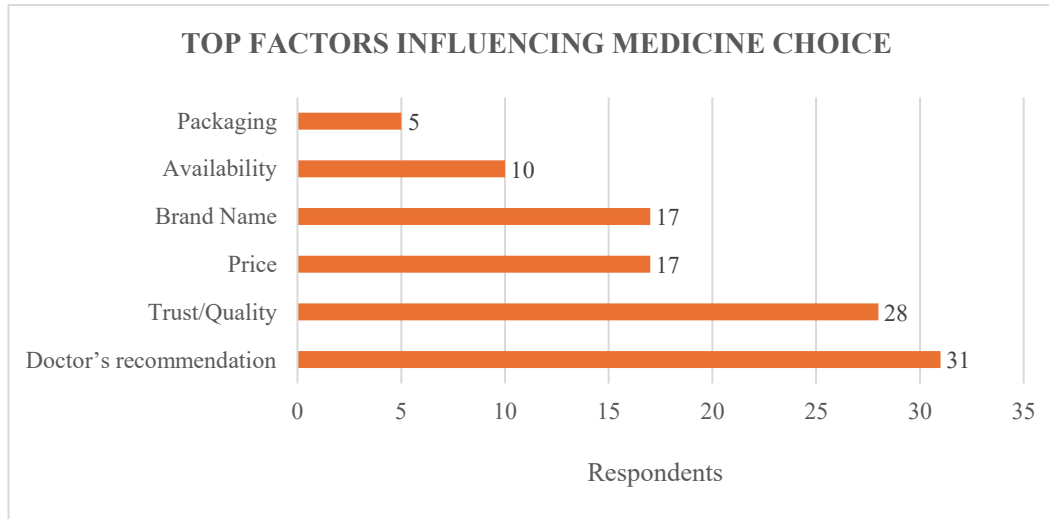
To design a patient-centered marketing model that builds trust in branded generics through insights from pharmacists and healthcare professionals.

Methodology



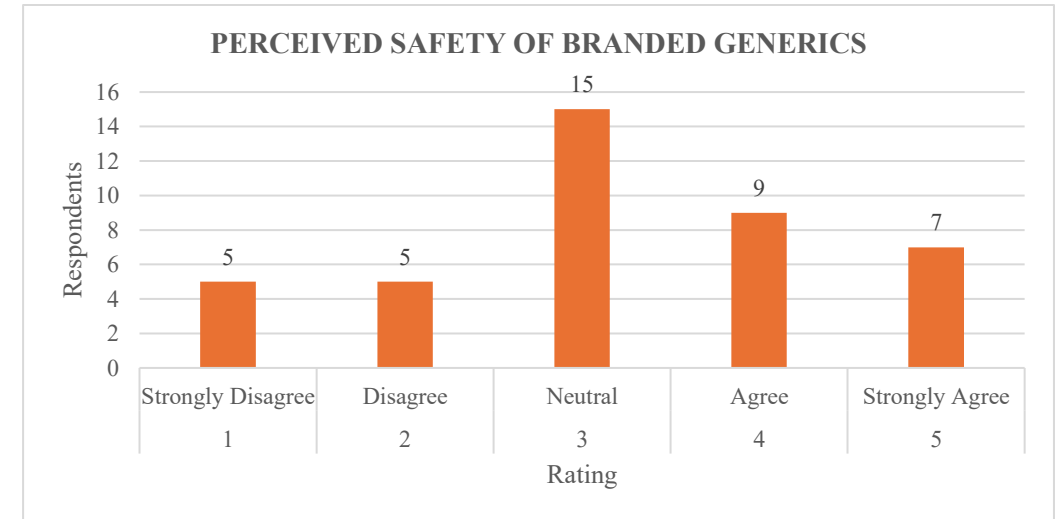
Result: Survey Analysis

Factors Influencing Medicine Choice



The analysis indicates that doctors' advice, trust/quality, and price are the main drivers of medicine selection. Although branding is secondary, trust can be established by building on clinical believability and emotional confidence through testimonials, anecdotes, and repeated design.

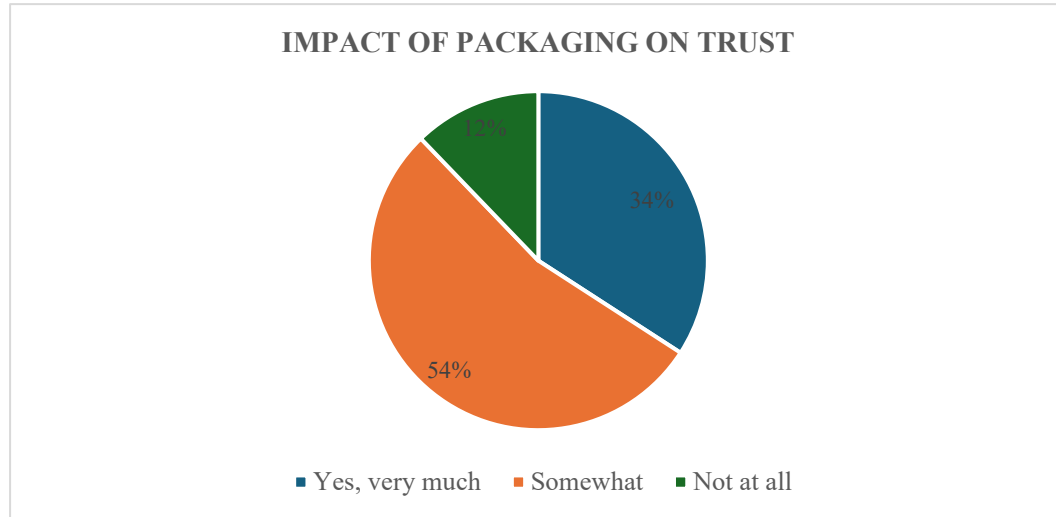
Perceived Safety of Branded Generics



Trust levels varied significantly among respondents, largely due to a lack of awareness about the difference between branded and non-branded generics. This divide shows that branding alone isn't enough—patients need layered reassurance through certification, clear communication, and relatable patient narratives to build true confidence.

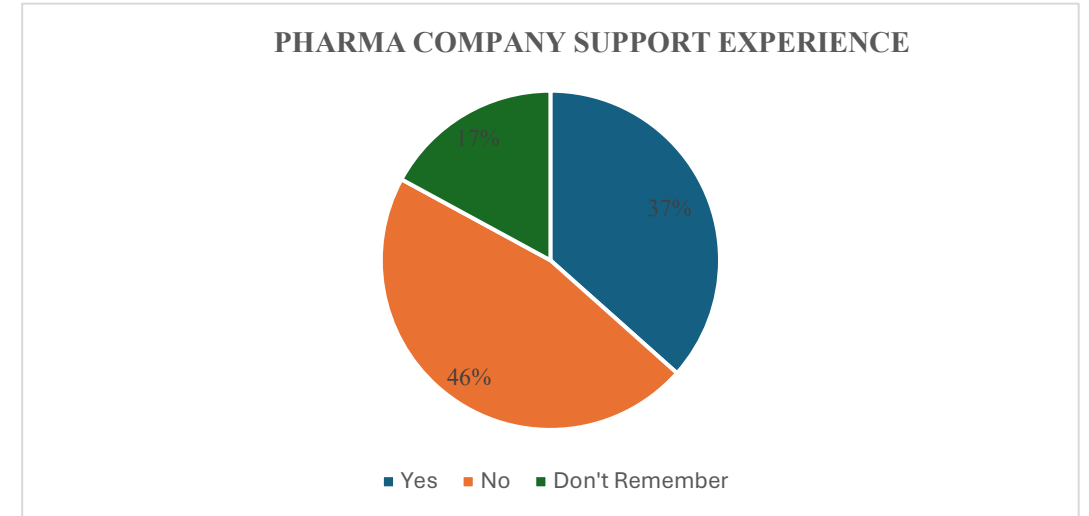
Result: Survey Analysis

Impact of Packaging on Trust



The respondents agreed that visual identity influences trust. Professional, clean, and informative packaging increases perceived quality. This finding justifies the move toward emotionally smart branding, where design signals such as color, symbols, and simplicity create familiarity and alleviate apprehension about taking medicine.

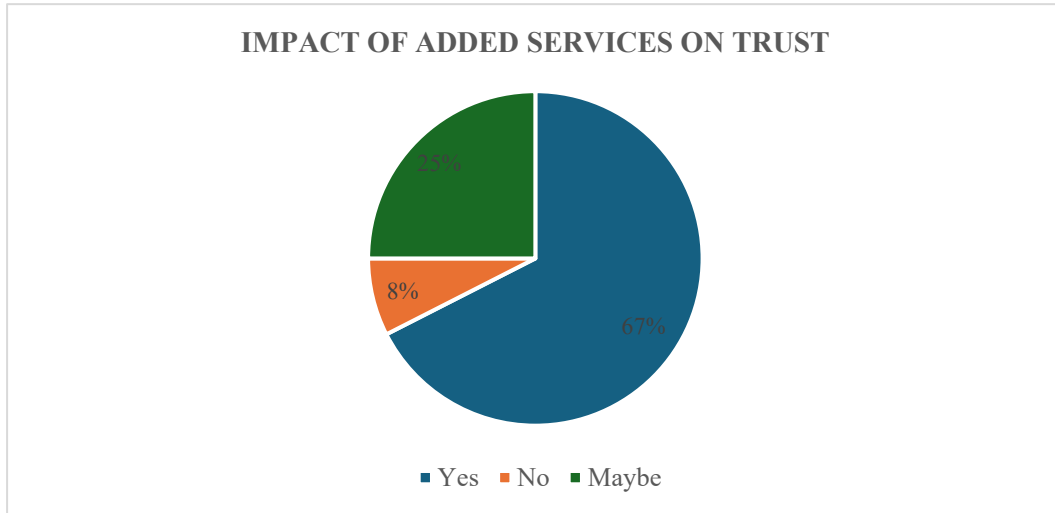
Pharma Company Support



The majority of participants stated that they had not received any educational material or patient support from pharmaceutical companies. This gap presents a possibility for branded generics to look beyond product delivery and enter patient advocacy, with helplines, mobile apps, or awareness campaigns serving as touchpoints for trust.

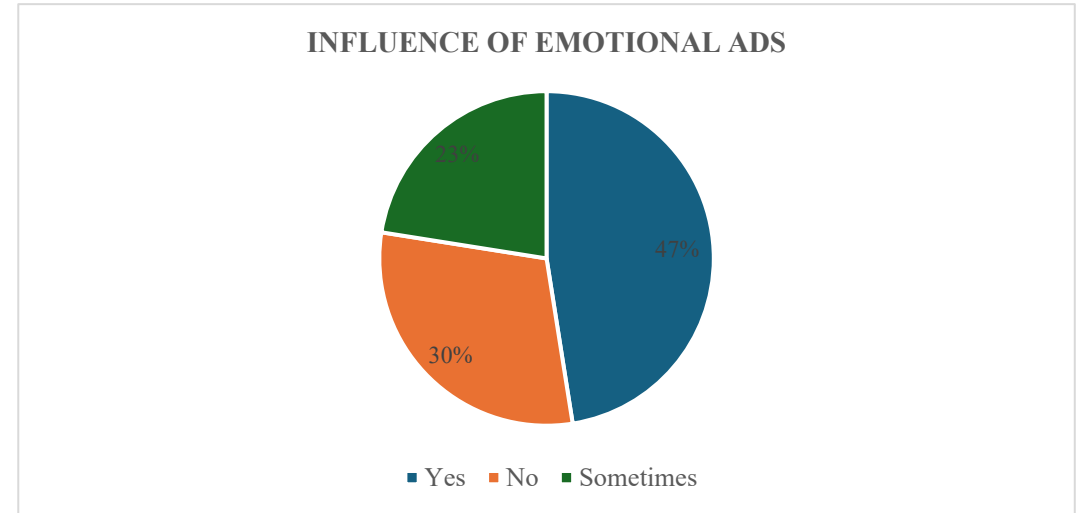
Result: Survey Analysis

Impact of Added Services



Most said they would trust brands more if they offered free health education, digital aids, or helplines. This presents a strategic opportunity to brand humanize generic drugs by integrating them into a patient-centric service ecosystem, thereby converting them from transactional products into continuous care companions.

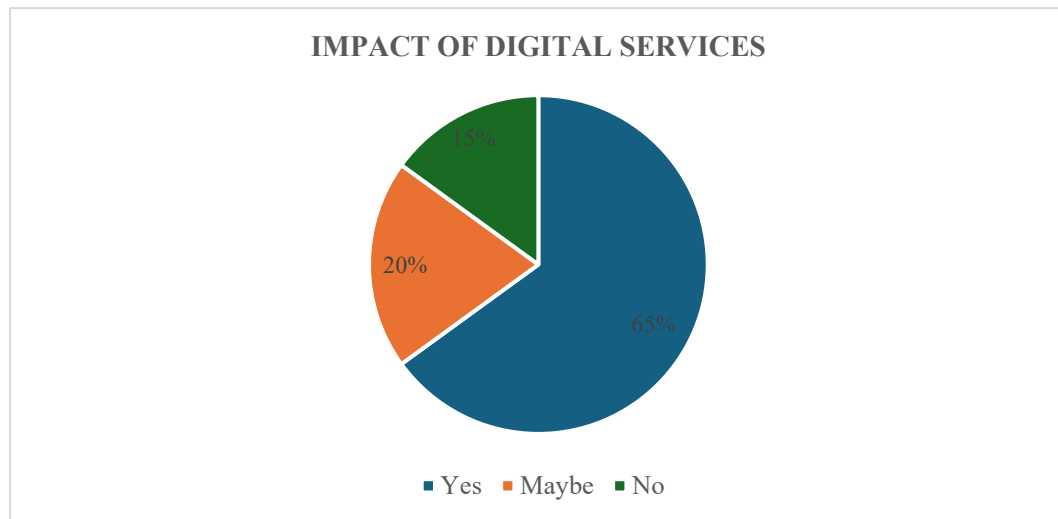
Influence of Emotional Ads



Emotional storytelling has a moderate influence on perception, particularly among young respondents. Used sincerely, storytelling can redefine the perception of generics from clinical commodities to personal, empathetic decisions—above all, therapeutic categories that involve emotional depth (e.g., chronic disease, mental health).

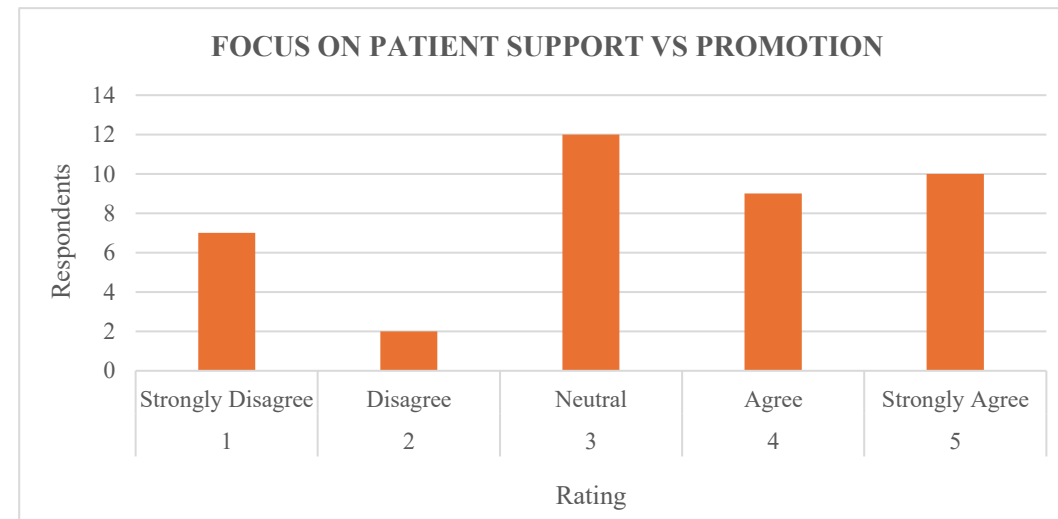
Result: Survey Analysis

Impact of Digital Services



Many respondents valued added services like medicine reminders and online consultations. This reflects evolving expectations where branded generics are not just judged by price, but by the ecosystem of care they provide. Integrating smart services fosters deeper relationships and long-term adherence.

Focus on Patient Support Vs Promotion



Most respondents ranked 3 to 5, reflecting a strong need for patient-centred approaches. This supports the core argument of the project, branded generics can break out of the "commodity" trap by positioning themselves along the patient's journey through education, empathy, and participation.

Key Findings

Youth & Students as Key Audience	The majority (60 %+) are young adults and students, highly responsive to digital tools and education-driven branding.
Significant Awareness Gap	40–50% lack clarity on branded vs. non-branded generics, highlighting a strong need for consumer education.
Trust Driven by HCPs	65%+ rely on doctors/pharmacists for trust, co-branded efforts with HCPs are crucial.
Packaging & Visual Identity Matter	70%+ trust is influenced by professional and clean packaging, supports the role of emotionally intelligent design.
Lack of Educational Support	80%+ had never received patient education, an untapped opportunity for branded generics to build trust.
Demand for Patient Services	75% want free health education, digital tools, and support services, clear need for ecosystem-driven branding.
Emotional & Humanized Branding Needed	Mixed trust levels and strong storytelling impact among youth affirm the need to humanize branded generics beyond price.

H2H Marketing Approach

H2H Marketing is a customer interaction strategy that emphasizes developing real, emotional, and personalized relationships between brands and individuals. Differing from B2B (Business-to-Business) or B2C (Business-to-Consumer), H2H acknowledges that human beings with feelings, needs, fears, and values stand behind every purchase.

How H2H Humanizes Branded Generics

Empathy

Address patient concerns through education and reassurance.

Emotional Storytelling

Share real patient experiences to build trust.

Transparency

Clearly explain branded vs. non-branded generics.

Personalized Support

Offer apps, reminders, and helplines for real care.

Two-Way Engagement

Use feedback tools to listen and improve.

Humanized Branding

Design packaging that feels warm, clean, and trustworthy.

Example

THE ECONOMIC TIMES | MUMBAI | TUESDAY | 27 MAY 2025 | WWW.ECONOMICTIMES.COM

Novartis Offers Payment Plan for High-cost Heart Medicine

ONE OF A KIND Ties up with Pine Labs to offer zero-interest EMI scheme for injectable drug

Rica Bhattacharyya
& Vikas Dandekar

Mumbai: In a first-of-its-kind pricing strategy in the pharmaceutical industry, Swiss drug major Novartis has introduced a financing scheme for its cholesterol lowering drug brand Sybrava (inclisiran) in India, as the company looks to expand the adoption of the new generation heart drug that has so far been restricted due to its high pricing.

Novartis has tied up with Indian payment technology company Pine Labs to offer a monthly instalment scheme for the twice-a-year treatment of the injectable drug used to reduce levels of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C), commonly called bad cholesterol.

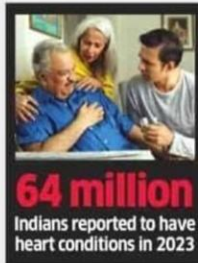
"We have recently launched a zero-interest EMI scheme with Pine Labs so that this treatment can be accessible to more patients," Amitabh Dube, country president & MD, Novartis India, said in an exclusive interview with ET.

Each instalment is priced at ₹15,000-16,000. "The first is a loading dose and the second dose is after 90 days, and then after 180 days. It will be a rolling cycle," said Dube.

Care Credit

More than **3,000** patients have currently been put on the drug

Each instalment is priced at **₹15,000-₹16,000**



64 million Indians reported to have heart conditions in 2023



Above-average death rate of **2,720** per million in India versus the world average of **2,350**

Cardiologists say post-Covid there are rising number of heart patients in **30s** and **40s**

Source: World Heart Federation

As per cardiologists, Novartis has come up with a one-on-one scheme where the second injection will be free on purchase of the first dose.

However, a patient has to pay full value of the first dosage through equated monthly instalment.

The drug was priced at ₹1.2 lakh per injection when it was launched in January 2024. In the US, sold under brand Leqvio, it is priced at \$3,373.4 per dose (about ₹2.9 lakh).

More than 3,000 patients have currently been put on the drug in India.

To expand the reach for inclisiran, Novartis has also entered into mar-

keting tie-ups with Mankind Pharma, JB Pharma and Lupin.

Mankind, which sells inclisiran under brand Crenzo, is also evaluating possibilities in terms of patient assistance programmes that can make the drug more affordable to the eligible patients in India, said Atish Majumdar, senior president-sales and marketing. Lupin has launched the drug under Tilpazan, while JB Pharma's brand is Izirize.

Lupin and JB Pharma did not respond to ET's query until press time on Monday.

In the one year since April 2024, in-

clisiran recorded sales of ₹7.7 crore among all three partners, according to data from PharmaTrac.

Inclisiran is not a replacement for statins, the most commonly used class of medications to lower cholesterol, but can be recommended as a line of treatment when statins do not work or if a person is statin intolerant. However, top cardiologists are divided over the widespread prescribing of the drug.

Some opine it is another addition to their armament of treatment. "It is a very important drug that has come into the market. It has the potential to be a very big game changer for blockages," said Dr Nihar Mehra, associate director, Department of Structural Heart Diseases, Jaslok Hospital & Research Centre.

However, others said its usage will be for a limited number of patients. Dr Ganesh Kumar AV, director of cardiology at LH Hiranandani Hospital Powai in Mumbai, said: "The medicine is good but it is being over-used. With the right usage there are not many patients who need it. My usage of inclisiran has not been much over the last one year; maybe less than 10 out of the about 2,000 patients with coronary artery diseases I treated".

Novartis has introduced a new payment model for its cholesterol-lowering drug, Inclisiran, in India. Partnering with Pine Labs, the company now offers a *zero-interest EMI payment plan*, aiming to improve affordability for patients. The cost of each SYBRAVA injection is above ₹ 1 lakh. The recommended dosage of Sybrava is 284 mg administered as a single subcutaneous injection: initially, again at 3 months, and then every 6 months.

This is an example of a patient-centered approach. Novartis has engaged a finance company in its patient-centered approach to marketing

Recommendations



- 1 Invest in storytelling & digital education
- 2 Train pharmacists as brand educators
- 3 Develop branded patient support platforms (apps, helplines)
- 4 Utilize emotionally intelligent strategies
- 5 Collaborate with healthcare providers for co-branding trust
- 6 Improve packaging and design
- 7 Monitor feedback and adapt

Expected Benefits



- 1 Builds emotional connections, improves consumer understanding, and shifts perception from commodity to care
- 2 Increases patient trust at the point of sale; pharmacists become advocates, not just dispensers
- 3 Enhances patient adherence, improves engagement, and boosts brand loyalty
- 4 Deepens patient empathy, especially in chronic and emotional health segments
- 5 Strengthens clinical credibility and aligns with trusted HCP advice
- 6 Increases credibility, visual trust, and shelf differentiation
- 7 Enables continuous improvement based on real patient needs and increases long-term relevance

Conclusion

Branded generics must move beyond price and connect with patients through trust, empathy, and support. By offering education, emotional storytelling, and digital services, they can shift from being just medicines to becoming trusted partners in health.



Thank You