



An Exploratory Study on the Role of Continuing Medical Education (CME) in Influencing Drug Prescription Patterns

By-

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Abstract

Introduction

Interactions between healthcare professionals (HCPs) and pharmaceutical representatives influence prescribing behaviors but often raise ethical and credibility concerns.

Objectives

- To assess the frequency and nature of HCP–pharma representative interactions
- To explore ethical concerns and credibility of shared information
- To identify factors influencing prescribing decisions

Methodology

A questionnaire-based study was conducted among 100 cardiologists and pulmonologists. It focused on interaction patterns, ethical concerns, trust in pharmaceutical literature, and key prescribing factors.

Results

- Over 50% reported frequent, unrestricted interactions.
- 69% acknowledged ethical dilemmas.
- Most HCPs rarely used pharma-provided literature; only 7% found it extremely credible.
- 69% believed pharma companies influence treatment decisions.
- Efficacy, cost, safety, and patient feedback were top prescribing factors.

Conclusion

Frequent interactions exist, but ethical and credibility issues remain. Transparency and evidence-based promotion are essential to improve trust.

Keywords

HCPs, pharmaceutical representatives, ethics, credibility, prescribing behavior, influence.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly influenced consumer behavior, including the way medicines are purchased. Online pharmacies provide convenience, cost-saving, and broader accessibility, whereas conventional pharmacies offer personalized services, physical counseling, and immediate drug availability. In the Indian context, especially post-COVID, both models have seen considerable growth. This study aims to assess consumer perceptions and preferences regarding online and offline pharmacies and analyze the factors influencing their decisions.

Literature Review

Several studies have explored the growth and perception of online pharmacies:

1. **Frost & Sullivan** highlighted India's expanding e-pharmacy market and outlined its potential growth trajectory.
2. **Chordiya & Garge** compared online and conventional pharmacies, focusing on operational models and consumer trust.
3. **Aithal & Shabaraya** examined user perspectives toward online pharmacies in Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities.
4. **Lostakova et al.** investigated the purchase behavior of online pharmacy clients through quantitative surveys.

5. **Montoya & Jano** discussed safety and regulatory issues associated with online pharmacies.
6. **Desai (2016)** raised concerns about unregulated e-pharmacy practices and emphasized the risks of counterfeit medications.

These studies collectively show that while online pharmacies offer convenience and discounts, issues like trust, counterfeit risks, and lack of counseling limit their widespread acceptance.

Objectives

- To analyze consumer perception towards online and offline pharmacies.
 - To identify factors influencing consumer choice of pharmacy.
 - To evaluate awareness about online pharmacy risks and benefits.
 - To understand future preferences and recommendations regarding e-pharmacy usage.
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Methodology

- **Study Design:** Descriptive cross-sectional study
- **Data Type:** Primary data collected via a structured questionnaire
- **Sample Size:** 145 respondents

- **Study Area:** PAN India
 - **Data Collection Tool:** Google Forms
 - **Data Analysis:** Microsoft Excel
 - **Target Respondents:** Medicine consumers across age groups and demographics
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Expected Outcomes

- Offline pharmacies are still widely preferred due to trust and counseling.
 - Consumers choose online pharmacies for price discounts and convenience.
 - There is moderate awareness regarding illegal online trading and drug quality.
 - Despite concerns, many consumers are likely to use and recommend online pharmacies in the future.
 - Insights from the study can inform better regulation and integration of online and offline pharmacy systems.
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Timeline

Week	Activity
1–2	Literature Review and Topic Finalization
3	Questionnaire Design
4	Pilot Testing of Questionnaire
5–6	Data Collection Phase I
7–8	Data Collection Phase II
9	Data Cleaning and Preliminary Analysis
10	Data Interpretation and Thematic Evaluation
11	Report Writing and Final Compilation

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Questionnaire (Key Questions)

Demographics

- Age Group: 18–25, 25–40, 40–55, 55+
- Gender: Male / Female

Medicine Purchase Behavior

1. How do you purchase medicines?
 - Always offline
 - Always online
 - Both
2. If online, what motivates your purchase?
 - Discounts
 - Convenience
 - Local unavailability
 - No prescription required
3. If offline, what are the reasons?
 - Counseling
 - Trust

- Delivery delays online

4. Types of medicine bought online:

- Prescription / Non-prescription / Both

5. Quality of online-purchased medicines:

- Poor / Reasonable / High

6. Awareness of illegal online trading:

- Yes / No / Maybe

7. Will you order medicines online in future?

- Yes / No / Maybe

8. Will you recommend online pharmacy?

- Yes / No / Maybe