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A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE FACTORS AFFECTING THE PRESCRIPTION PREFERENCE OF DOCTORS IN GOA

CEDRIC THOMAS SILVEIRA
ASST. PROFESSOR
DON BOSCO COLLEGE
PANAJI

ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to determine the most effective promotional tool used by pharmaceutical companies to market their prescription products in the market. Since advertising is not possible in the prescription market unlike the over-the-counter products, it is imperative to learn as to what makes a doctor prescribe a prescription drug. The study made use of the Thurstone Case V scaling method involving 5 parameters such as with the rapport the medical representative has with the doctor, the samples which he gives to the doctor, the information which he disseminates, the frequency of his visits and gifts/sponsors which he gives to the doctor. If in the past a doctor relied totally on detailing, which is none other than the information of the product which the medical representative would disseminate to the doctor, today a number of other factors too have come into play. For convenience sake I have taken rapport to include all the characteristics of the medical representative such as grooming of the medical representative, his winability nature, his speech and his effectiveness in detailing. The results showed that still detailing was number 1, followed by rapport, samples, frequency of visits and gifts/sponsorships. A chi square test was also conducted to find the relation between dispensing doctors and doctors preferring samples as a promotional tool. Dispensing doctors refers to the doctors who prepare prescriptions and/or sell medicines to the patients. The result was that the relation was statistically significant.

KEYWORDS

Detailing, prescription, advertising, over-the-counter, medical representative.

1. INTRODUCTION

For years altogether, the medical representative had been the main player in the dissemination of information to the doctor, and the influencer of the doctor's prescriptions. However in the early 90's a radical shift took place with India's leading pharmaceutical manufacturer, Cipla Ltd. starting a new trend of doing away with medical representatives and going solely on mailings to doctors. The mailings would contain samples as well as medical information about the company drugs.

However although this system was cost effective, and did away with the burden of the exorbitant salaries of the medical representatives, apart from the complications of unionism, it fell flat on its face. The reason being that the personal chord of the doctor-medical representative which touched the heart of the doctor was missing.

Many other companies seeing the benefits of not having a medical representative also plunged into this strategy and suffered the same fate as Cipla.

To get a doctor to pen a company's products it involves a number of factors, starting with the rapport the medical representative has with the doctor, the samples which he gives to the doctor, the information which he disseminates, the frequency of his visits and gifts/sponsors which he gives to the doctor.

Gifts or sponsors could extend from some basic gifts like a pad/pen/penstand, to fancy gifts like a TV, scooter/ Air Conditioner. Sponsors too could extend from sponsoring a doctor's registration to attend a conference to sponsoring a doctor's registration at a conference plus his accommodation and meals, and travel.

Going by the amount one spends to enter private colleges, a doctor practically runs a business today. In order to make up the costs spent during his education, many a time he is under immense pressure to make up for it even by fraudulent means at times. This means that when a doctor is sponsored, he is under pressure from the sponsoring company to prescribe their products, and give prescriptions to the tune of the amount sponsored. If the company does not have quality products, the patient will not improve and the doctor's name too will be ruined. Many fly by night companies have resorted to these gimmicks and have left renowned doctors in the lurch. However with the IMA, Indian Medical associations becoming increasingly strict, doctors are reluctant to fall into the hands of companies desiring to sponsor them.

In order to find out what makes a doctor prescribe a product, or a brand from hundreds of brands, the doctors were asked to rank from a series of alternatives as to which alternative they considered to be the most important for them while prescribing. A Thurstone Case V scaling technique was used in this regard. The doctor had to rank from 1 to 5 the following variables: A- Rapport B- Samples C-Frequency D- Gifts/Sponsorships E- Detailing

A chi square test was also conducted to find the relation between dispensing doctors and doctors preferring samples as a promotional tool. Dispensing doctors refers to the doctors who prepare prescriptions and/or sell medicines to the patients.

2. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted to find out which promotional tool would be most effective for promoting a prescription product. The study also determined if the relation between a dispensing doctor and his desire to receive samples was significant.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Today few doctors consider detailing as an important tool for prescribing a product unlike in the past, and are indulging to a large extent to gifts/sponsors to prescribe a product.

4. OBJECTIVES

1. To find out which mode of promotion was the most effective while promoting a product to a doctor.
2. To find out if any relation existed between considering samples as important and being a dispensing doctor

5. HYPOTHESIS

The chi square hypothesis was made use of in analyzing whether the relation between being a dispensing doctor and considering samples as an effective mode of promotion were statistically significant. The Null hypothesis states that no difference exists between two variables A & B.

Formula:
$$\frac{f_1 - F_1}{(f_1 - F_1)^2 / 50}$$

A
B

Where A & B are the variables, f_1 is the observed frequency, F_1 is the theoretical frequency, and $(f_1 - F_1)^2 / 50$ is the final result. The final result of both A and B are added together to arrive at the calculated chi sq value. If the calculated chi sq is less than the tabular chi sq at $(k-1)$ degrees of freedom where K stands for number of variables and at 95% confidence level, then the null hypothesis is said to be true.

Thurstone Case V Scaling was also used whereby the 5 variables are compared with one another. These values are then divided by the sample size and the values of the fractions are then found from the cumulative normal distribution curve – values of probability. The lowest value is then added or subtracted to itself to make the lowest value zero and this value is added to the other variables. The resulting values are potted on a one dimensional scale.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A random, direct, structured questionnaire was utilized wherein a personal interview was conducted on 100 doctors of different specialties spread across Goa. The research design was of an exploratory design.

7. FINDINGS

a) **Thurstone Scaling** was used to find out which attribute ranked the highest by the doctors. The attributes included A) Rapport with doctor B) Samples given C) Frequency of visits D) Gifts/Sponsors and E) Detailing/ Information imparted . The following above variables were subjected to a paired comparison. For example how many times B ranked higher than A? It was found to be 40 times out of 100. Similarly how many times does A rank higher than B ? The answer is 60 times.

A. PAIRED COMPARISON

| | | | | | |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | A | B | C | D | E |
| A | 0.5 | 40/100 | 40/100 | 16/100 | 64/100 |
| B | 60/100 | 0.5 | 32/100 | 16/100 | 64/100 |
| C | 60/100 | 68/100 | 0.5 | 40/100 | 76/100 |
| D | 84/100 | 84/100 | 60/100 | 0.5 | 76/100 |
| E | 36/100 | 36/100 | 24/100 | 24/100 | 0.5 |

B. THE ABOVE RATIOS WERE THEN CONVERTED INTO FRACTIONS

| | | | | | |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|
| | A | B | C | D | E |
| A | 0.5 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.16 | 0.64 |
| B | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.32 | 0.16 | 0.64 |
| C | 0.6 | 0.68 | 0.5 | 0.4 | 0.76 |
| D | 0.84 | 0.84 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.76 |
| E | 0.36 | 0.36 | 0.24 | 0.24 | 0.5 |

C. THE VALUES OF THE FRACTIONS ARE THEN FOUND FROM THE CUMULATIVE NORMAL DISTRIBUTION CURVE – VALUES OF PROBABILITY

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| | A | B | C | D | E |
| A | 0 | -0.25 | -0.25 | -0.99 | 0.36 |
| B | 0.25 | 0 | -0.47 | -0.99 | 0.36 |
| C | 0.25 | 0.47 | 0 | -0.25 | 0.71 |
| D | 0.99 | 0.99 | 0.25 | 0 | 0.71 |
| E | -0.36 | -0.36 | -0.71 | -0.71 | 0 |
| Adding colu | 1.13 | 0.85 | -1.18 | -2.89 | 2.14 |
| Adding 2.89 to all column | 4.02 | 3.74 | 1.71 | 0 | 5.03 |

From the Thurstone Case V scaling it is evident that E- Detailing is 1st followed by A – Rapport, B-Samples, C- Frequency and D- Gifts.

ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

1. The findings were evident that detailing where the medical representative speaks about the nature of the product , its uses, its dosage and its cost, is still considered the most effective too for prescribing a product. Although we are in the internet age where one can easily look up the internet for all these characteristics, the information coming from the company representative is still considered as most important.
2. Rapport with the doctor is considered to be the second most important factor with rapport including all the characteristics of the medical representative such as grooming of the medical representative, his winability nature, his speech and his effectiveness in detailing. In short the X factor of the medical representative still counts.
3. Samples is 3rd in the list of factors affecting prescriptions with doctors still preferring samples to try out on a patient before prescribing.
4. Frequency of visits was found to be 4th on the list of factors with a medical representative who visits more often being rated better.
5. The last ironically was gifts/sponsors with most doctors ranking it last. Perhaps there was a bias in this answer with most doctors not wishing to reveal their preference for the same.

b) Chi square test:

To find out if any difference exists among being a dispensing doctor and considering samples as an effective mode of promotion was statistically significant.

Null Hypothesis: There is no difference among being a dispensing doctor and considering samples as an effective mode of promotion

Of the 32 doctors who considered samples as an effective mode of promotion (had ranked samples as either 1 or 2 in the Ranking quation), 60%(A)were dispensing doctors while 40%(B) were not dispensing doctors

| | | | | | |
|---|-----|----|---------|---------------|----|
| | f 1 | F1 | f 1- F1 | (f 1-F1)2/F1 | |
| A | 60 | 50 | 10 | 100/50 | =2 |
| B | 40 | 50 | -10 | 100/50 | =2 |

=4(computed calculation)

At k-1 degrees of freedom and at 95% confidence (.05), the null hypothesis will be true if the probability of getting a chi square less than 3.84 is seen in the computed calculation. Since the calculated value (36) is more than 3.84, we can conclude that the **Null hypothesis is false** and a statistical difference exists between dispensing doctors and these doctors desiring samples as a mode of promotion.

ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

It is seen from the chi square test that a statistical difference exists among dispensing doctors and these doctors desiring samples as a mode of promotion. This means that dispensing doctors desire samples to test on their patients perhaps before purchasing bulk amounts to dispense.

8. CONCLUSIONS

1. Detailing was considered to be the most important factor in influencing a doctor to prescribe a product, thus showing that even in the internet age belief on what the medical representative talks is still valued.
2. Rapport was considered to be the next most important aspect. One a rapport builds up it is often difficult for a doctor to refuse prescribing a product.
3. Providing samples comes third in importance since samples can be used for testing a drug on a patient.
4. The frequency of visits is next in importance as more the visits, the more the recall of the product and as a result more will be the prescriptions of it.
5. The last was gifts/sponsors. This could be on account of doctors not wishing to disclose that they indulge in accepting gifts or sponsors.

6. The relation between a dispensing doctor and a dispensing doctor favouring samples was found to be statistically significant thus proving that dispensing doctors need samples to test their efficacy before going in for bulk purchases of the same.

9. LIMITATIONS

- a) The study was conducted on only 100 doctors of Goa
- b) Bias may have been present in answering the questions on account of not wishing to disclose information.

10. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

A year later a study can once again be undertaken and the preference factors for prescribing a product could be checked for any change.

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