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Assessment of the impact of corporate branding of pharmaceuticals on purchasing behavior of consumer/patients

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Keyword

Corporate branding, Purchasing behavior, Consumer/patients, Pharmaceuticals, Positive impact

Abstract

Pharmaceutical industry is always considered as an evergreen market for economic contribution in the country, which is reflected true in the current scenario. Pharmaceutical branding is a vital approach to create awareness, generate interest, helps in differentiation of a product from competitors; it has become a critical element in organization's positioning strategy. The study was to assess the impact of corporate branding of pharmaceuticals on patient's purchasing behavior of consumer/patients. A survey was conducted among 119 patients in different regions of India using structured self-administered questionnaire. Overall, 66% of patients were satisfied with current performance of branded company medicines. Most relevant source of information to patients was through physicians/doctors especially for prescription medicines while pharmacist provide information mostly for non-prescription medicines. Patients trust & prefer to purchase branded company's medicine as a first choice and believed to have high quality, better efficacy, safety.

1. INTRODUCTION

The pharmaceuticals industry is one of the major contributors in the economy of the country (Lamptey D, 2017). Pharmaceutical branding is an important way to create awareness, generate interest, helps in differentiation of a product by setting it apart from others; it has become a critical element in the organization's positioning strategy (Anabila P et al., 2014). Pharmaceutical branding is a vital approach to make mindfulness and produce intrigue and expanded certainty among potential customers (Lamptey D, 2017). With a highly competitive background, each and every pharmaceutical company spends millions of money for promotions of their brands. However due to prevailing rules and regulations and also due to the complexity involved with most of the medicine, advertisements targeted to general consumers are unsuccessful as a promotional mechanism (Sriwignarajaa K et al., 2015). The pharmaceutical industry is facing a fierce competition with high cost and risk associated with R&D investments.

Differentiation is increasingly difficult therefore many companies are now pursuing a corporate branding strategy in order to create and sustain a competitive advantage. Huge amounts of money are spending on corporate communication and marketing activities that should help create the desired company image and improve the financial returns through enhanced customer loyalty. There are however, some challenges to branding in pharmaceutical industry as it is highly regulated and controlled, and direct to consumer advertising of prescription drugs is banned in Europe and Asia (Markova k et al., 2003). Good brand management brings about clear differentiation between products, ensures consumer loyalty and preferences and may lead to defending against competitors and building a great market share (Ali I., 2014). *Journal homepage: http://www.ijmrr.online/index.php/home*

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Branding has been known for ages and has evolved considerably over time and the evolution is still ongoing. Branding is moving away from being mainly related to stand alone products to a corporate branding strategy with focus on more intangible factors and the corporation itself. The building of strong corporate brands is a top priority in many companies as illustrated by several authors (Keller KL., 2011). Pharmaceutical companies have previously felt no real need to brand their corporation due to product patents, but the increased competition has forced companies to re-think their branding strategies (Jones PJ., 1998). A strong corporate brand is perceived to enhance customer loyalty also when products go off patent, to reduce the cost of launching new products, and to increase the speed of market acceptance (Kapferer JN,2008). Furthermore, brands are perceived to provide significant competitive differentiation, build relationship with customers, influence customer behavior and attitude, and attract customer loyalty.

The aim of the study was to investigate the importance and effects of corporate branding of pharmaceutical companies on patient's purchasing behavior and to identify the brand attributes that patients perceive the most important, and to what extent these have an impact. The study was based on a literature review taking into account the most recent and recognized theories and approaches of branding/corporate branding, and a field research based on survey and depth interviews with patients. The study was planned to explore the attributes that have an impact on purchasing behavior of patients and to what extent there is a relationship in patient's perception that links favorable corporate perceptions of pharmaceutical companies to their products and vice versa. By contrasting the literature review with the research findings it was expected that new insight will be provided into the effects of corporate branding in the pharmaceutical industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

For the pharmaceutical industry, "brands are the means by which the science is translated into a commercially viable reality". Pharmaceutical companies face a series of significant challenges that are affecting their ability to maintain growth and sustain earning levels. To operate and succeed in the complex and highly regulated competitive environment, pharmaceutical companies know that brands are more than just products and services.

Brands and branding, as traditionally understood, were subject to continuous review and redefining. According to American Marketing Association, brand is "a name, term, sigh, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors" (Kotler P., 2009). A more universally applicable definition describes brand as a "cluster of functional and emotional values which promises stake holders a particular experience". In its simplest form, a brand represents the promises that the product makes. One way to explain the characteristics of the brand is through the brand triangle, shown on Figure 1 below, which is suitable for brands in different contexts. Using a laddering technique, the brand triangle shows how functional values are linked with emotional values, and the promised experience.

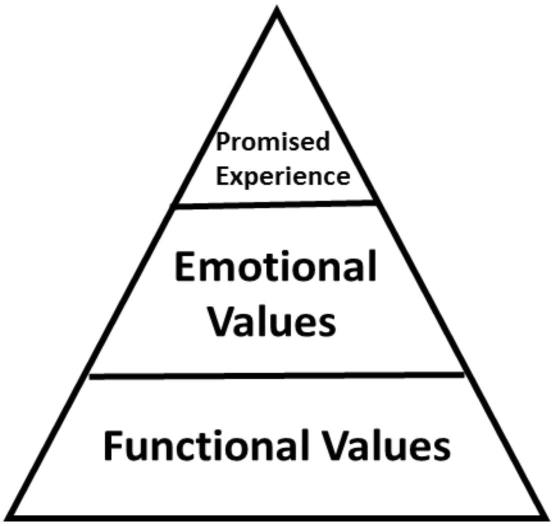

Figure 1: The Brand Triangle

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***Source**: Adopted from de Chernatony (2002). Would a brand smell any sweeter by a corporate name?*

The concept of branding has developed over the years. Within traditional branding model, the goal was to build the brand and to create brand image, which derived short-term results. The modern concept of branding can be applied to anything "from product and services to companies and even countries" (Kotler P., 2009).

2.1 The Role of Branding in the Pharmaceutical Industry

To thrive in today's complex and highly regulated competitive environment, pharmaceutical companies must be able to optimize the value of their brands for ethical drugs (delor K.,2004). Although companies are spending a lot of time and effort in improving the performance of sales and marketing (Doherty G., 2004). Therefore, managing brand equity has become major imperative in pharmaceutical industry. Brand equity and its set of assets —awareness, customer loyalty, reputation and perceived quality, differentiation, and relevance, linked to brand name - add value to pharmaceutical products, and thus giving customers a reason to prescribe, buy and use.

2.2 Branding of prescription drugs to the patients

Pharmaceutical branding for prescription drugs is an important way of creating awareness among the public of the potential benefits of medicines. The shift in patient power has created a push-pull dynamic, that changed the way in which pharmaceutical brand is brought to the market (Cleland R et al , 2004; Thomas G 2005). The more the patient is "involved" in the treatment decision the more brand has role to play. Patient pull can effectively extend the life of a product beyond its clinical differentiation (King W, 2005).

Although regulations in India don't allow the use of DTC websites, companies can still raise disease and treatment awareness without directly promoting a drug. Better-informed patients are more involved in the decision-making process of their treatment.

Building patient continuum- In order to build effective and long-lasting relationships with patients, pharmaceutical companies are providing them with valuable information during the different stages of their conditions.

Condition Awareness –Companies are providing relevant health information to help patients recognize symptoms. The more aware potential users are about their condition, the more likely they are to seek treatment. Treatment Awareness can help promote patient preference for a particular drug. Increase compliance and treatment success rates with educational programs that help patients understand why a drug should be taken regularly as prescribed.

Patient's word-of-mouth is one way to expand market coverage and generate further brand equity.

2.3 Corporate Branding

With product branding, the product or service is synonymous with the brand. It strives to build trust in the brand by allowing the consumer to fit product perceptions and brand image into one (Aldersey WH., 2001). Enactment of the corporate brand, on the other hand, follows a different process which is attentive to the needs of stakeholders rather than just consumers (Aldersey WH., 2001). Corporate brand represents an organization that stands behind its products in spirit and substance (Aaker DA.,2004). Corporate branding as a "composite of all the experiences, encounters and perceptions a customer has with a company". It means that all communications - internal and external, are aimed at presenting a single, unified message (King W., 2005). An important difference from the consumer goods industry is that access to information about products is restricted to doctors and healthcare professionals. They act as the companies' brand ambassadors towards patients. A strong corporate brand clearly has some advantages - over time, a strong corporate brand can predispose doctors and consumers to use its products, potentially reducing the launch costs of new drugs and increasing the speed of market acceptance.

2.4 Current understanding of patients about pharmaceutical branding

In the olden days, healthcare professionals are the sole decision maker on the choice of medication for patients. However, the increased power of patients today and how this power has affected the pattern and behaviour of healthcare professionals' prescription. Hence, it is interesting to find out whether or not branding plays a fundamental role in the pharmaceutical industry when it comes to selection of pharmaceutical products among patients (Pei P et al.). Review of extensive literature suggested that not much emphasis has been given on consumers (patients) perspective of pharmaceutical brand. There have been couples of research done to understand the importance of branding in the pharmaceutical industry among healthcare professionals, however not much have dwell further to better comprehend the role of branding and the power it has on the patients. In India, the pharmaceutical industry mostly confined to ethical promotion for getting prescription from doctors. In India, prescription drugs are not advertised, the sources of awareness are prescribers and chemists and stockiest in case of expensive lifesaving drugs. Online information has improved the awareness (Srivastava R et al.,2014). This becomes more important as more and more patients are getting aware about medicines due to Internet. Since the focus is on patients and physicians, focused efforts need to be undertaken by marketers to design strategy by keeping patients too in mind. There have been couples of research done to understand the importance of branding in the pharmaceutical industry among healthcare professionals. However not much have dwell further to better comprehend the role of branding and the power it has on patients.

2.5 Problem Statement

The objectives will form part of the exploration and testing of the hypothesis: Corporate branding with a favorable corporate image have a positive impact on patients purchasing behavior.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research objectives: Looking at the literature review, main focus points of the study were

3.1.1 Primary Objective

To evaluate the impact of corporate branding of pharmaceuticals on purchasing behavior of consumer/patients.

3.1.2 Secondary objective

- To identify patient's perceived key attributes of pharmaceutical corporate branding

3.2 Sampling Techniques:

3.2.1 Sampling Units: Qquestionnaire was distributed to 119 patients from Metro cities of India from different regions i.e. north, west, east and south to cover all regions of India. Non – probability, convenience sampling technique was chosen.

3.2.2 Survey Method: Survey was conducted by direct method - face to face interview or telephonic follow up and indirect method - Online (email to patient's personal email and questionaries' was uploaded on survey link i.e. smartsurvey.uk) to generate faster mode of data collection.

3.3.3 Research area: Metro cities of India

3.3.4 Sources of data and questionaries' design

To meet the research objectives both primary and secondary sources of data were used. The source of secondary data was mainly from company website, reference books, journal, research papers and internet.

Primary data: From the background information in the literature related to corporate branding with patients prescribing behavior, more emphasis given on primary data to conduct the research program authentically. The questionnaire had prepared in order to better understand the current preferences and relationship between corporate branding and patient's purchasing behavior.

Data collection instrument: A questionnaire was prepared. In the preparation of questionnaire, different questionnaires used in previous studies were investigated (Sriwignarajaa K et al., 2015; Narendran, R et al., 2013).

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The primary data was collected through self-administrated structured questionnaires. The questionnaire consists of two parts. First part included personal information of the participant like gender, age, or education level. Second part included items related to corporate branding attributes, Individual perception of corporate branding etc. Second part included items which contains close-ended, dichotomous questions, multiple choice questions and open-ended questions filled by the participants. Close ended questions were designed with the use of a five point Likert statements to indicate their agreement on a five point Likert response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The qualitative type of research was applied by using open ended questions in questionnaire to find out their perception regarding performance, satisfaction and recalling of experience with pharmaceutical corporate branding.

3.3 Statistics

It represents an interpretation of respondent's answers. Responses analysed using tables, formulas. The analysis of the questionnaire was undertaken using statistical program SPSS for Windows - statistical software (Version 19) for descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. A coding scheme has been devised to facilitate the analysis of data.

4. RESULTS

Scale reliability: It was a tool which was used to check reliability & acceptability of developed questionnaire. The Chronbach's alpha value of different items of questionnaire was found α value ~ 0.7, which indicate items covered under the questionnaire used in study regarded as sound and reliable.

Response rate: Response rate is the indication of success of a survey-based study, also called return rate. 119 questionnaires were distributed to patients; 103 questionnaires were returned back with 86.6 % respond rate (table1).

Table 1: Response rate of responders

	Questioners distributed	Returned questioner	Response%
Patients	119	103	86.6

Demographic details: Part 1 of Questionnaires contains demographic details of responders shown in table2 indicate equal distribution of male and female responders in study.

Table 2: Demographic details about responders in the study

	Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Patients	Male	46	44.7
	Female	57	55.3
	Total	103	100.0

➢ **Patients purchasing frequencies of medication during the past 12 months**

The question required the interviewee to purchasing frequency of the medication during past 12 months to identify the usage rate of medication. The results obtained were as follows-

Table 3: Patient's purchasing frequencies of medication

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Once a year	7	6.8
Once every six months	10	9.7
Once every three months	13	12.6
Once every month	31	30.1
More than once per month	42	40.8
Total	103	100.0

Nearly 71% of the respondents were frequent user as they scored high at usage frequency in once every month or more than once per month. These includes both the categories of medicines, Prescribed and non-prescribed.

➢ Patients source of information for brand awareness

The question required the interviewee to identify the source of information of branded medication which influences to purchase of prescribed or non-prescribed medication. The results obtained were as follows-

Table 4: Patient's source of information for brand awareness

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Pharmacist	28	27.2
Physicians	29	28.2
Online-Direct marketing	18	17.5
Advertising	8	7.8
Family/Friends/Relatives	20	19.4
Total	103	100.0

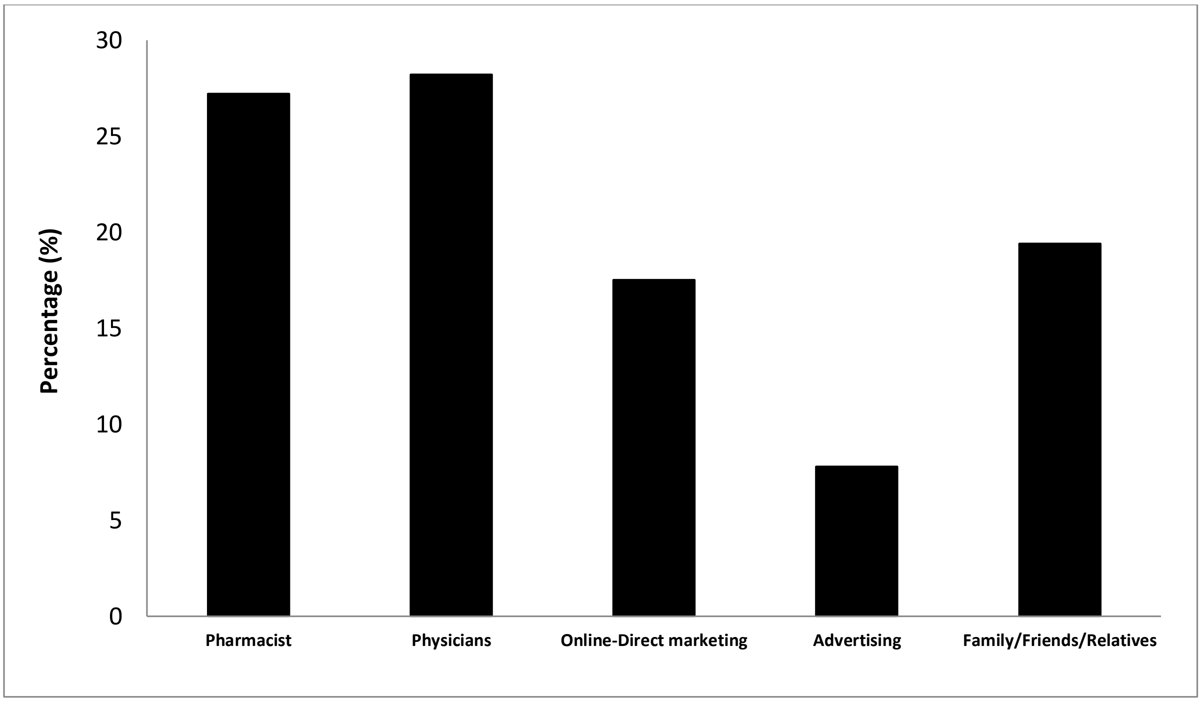

Figure 2: Patient's source of information for brand awareness

The above represents various sources of information and its impact on consumer. 28.2 % of respondents agreed that most relevant source of information was through physicians/doctors especially for prescription medicines while 27.2 % of respondents showed that pharmacist provide information mostly for non-prescription medicines.

19.4% respondents opined that friends and relatives were the sources of information while 17.5 % of respondent receive information through online direct marketing through pharm related mobile application, internet and web portal. 7.8 % respondent opined that other means of advertisement like television, newspaper, store display, free sample distribution influence a little on purchasing of medication.

➢ Patient awareness of pharmaceutical corporate branding

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This question required the respondents to rate various attributes of patient's awareness of pharmaceutical corporate branding. The question required the respondents to rate the statements associated with branding on Likert's five point scale of disagreement/agreement where 1=strongly disagree, 3=neutral and 5=strongly agree (CronBach's alpha=0.840)

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of patient's perceived attributes of patient's awareness of pharmaceutical corporate branding

Descriptive Statistics				
Questions	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
When the drug is prescribed to me I look for the company name	103	4.02	1.12	1.25
I ask the doctor to prescribe me medicines of the particular company	103	2.35	.82	.68
I share the knowledge of the medicine with the physician	103	3.25	.93	.86
I ask a doctor about the side effects	103	4.05	1.11	1.22
I update myself with the new formulations	103	2.16	1.01	1.01
I am willing to pay 100% more for branded drug	103	4.04	1.10	1.21
Branded drugs are more effective than over the counter drugs	103	3.95	1.27	1.62
I purchase on pharmacists' recommendation	103	1.40	.90	.81
I will purchase the same brand for the same symptoms	103	3.66	1.37	1.87
I feel branded drugs are more effective	103	4.34	1.18	1.40
After I read or see an advertisement, I ask physician about it	103	3.22	.94	.88
After I read or see an advertisement, I purchase it next time when in need of a drug	103	2.82	.84	.70
I feel branded drugs are more expensive	103	4.27	1.17	1.38
I purchase the same brands of the medication that I have purchased historically	103	3.85	1.29	1.67

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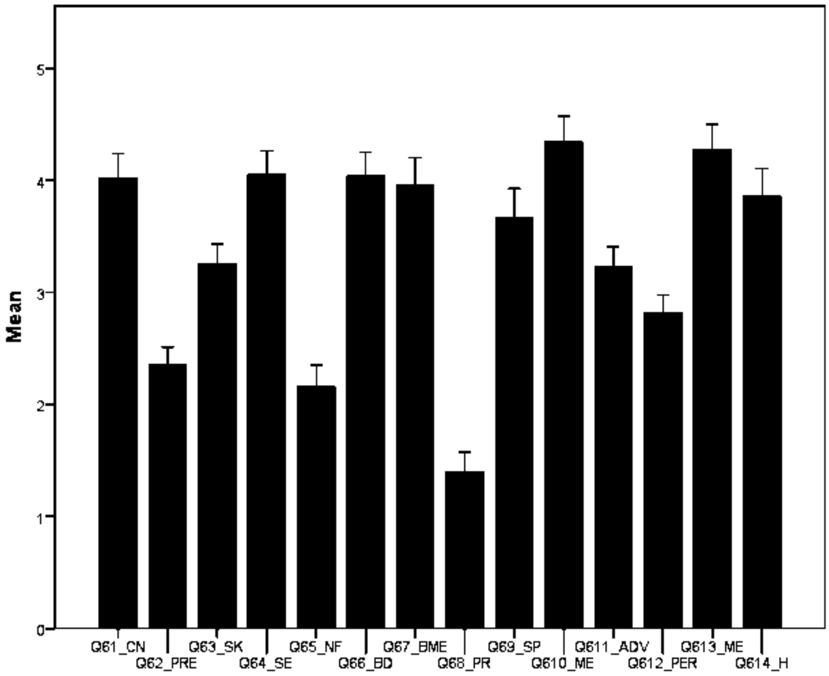

Figure 3: Mean of patient's perceived attributes of patient's awareness of pharmaceutical corporate branding

Data revealed that branded drugs are more effective and expensive with higher mean values score of 4.34 and 4.27 respectively. Other important factors were whether the patients were interested in knowledge about the products, its side effects, which is reflected through high mean score (4.05). Patients were willing to pay 100% more for prescribing a drug (Mean value 4.04), which indicates that branded products from reputed company are preferred (mean values 4.02).

➢ Patients perceived Quality of corporate brand

The question required to identifiy the consumer perceived quality of corporate branded medicine. The question required the respondents interviewee to rate on Likert's 5 point scale of agreement/disagreement where1= Very Dissatisfied, 3=neutral and 5= Very Satisfied. The observations made were as under-

Table 6: Patient's perceived Quality of corporate brand

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	5	4.9
Disagree	8	7.8
Neutral	16	15.5
Agree	8	7.8
Strongly Agree	66	64.1
Total	103	100.0

Table 7: Descriptive statistics of patient's perceived Quality of corporate brand

Descriptive Statistics				
Question	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
Q7_T	103	4.18	1.23	1.52

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Nearly 71.8% of the respondents rated quality of the branded medicine play an important role in building a brand image for companies as ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ level on the 4 or 5 point scale. Finding was further confirmed by higher mean value i.e. 4.18.

➢ Patients perceived brand Image of corporate brand

This question required the respondents to rate various attributes of patient’s perceived brand image of pharmaceutical corporate branding. Respondents has to rate the statements associated with branding on Likert’s five point scale of disagreement/agreement where 1=strongly disagree, 3=neutral and 5=strongly agree (CronBach’s alpha=0.714)

Table 8: Descriptive statistics of patient’s perceived attributes of brand image of pharmaceutical corporate branding

Descriptive Statistics				
Questions	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
Some characteristics of pharmaceutical company come to my mind quickly	103	3.35	1.65	2.72
I can recognize company quickly among other competing brands	103	3.42	1.68	2.83
I like the brand image of pharmaceutical company	103	3.59	1.35	1.81
Some pharmaceutical company has very unique brand image, compared to competing brands	103	3.57	1.56	2.42
I like and trust the branded company and its products	103	4.13	1.30	1.68
I consider myself to be loyal to branded company	103	2.93	1.27	1.61
When buying medicines, branded company would be my first choice	103	3.91	1.37	1.88
I will keep on buying from branded company as long as it provides me satisfied products	103	3.59	1.57	2.46
I am still willing to buy from branded company even if its price is a little higher than that of its competitors	103	3.82	1.37	1.88
Even if another brand has the same features as products from branded company, I would prefer to buy from branded company	103	3.62	1.55	2.39
I would love to recommend some branded company to my friends	103	3.62	1.57	2.45
Availability of having medicines/appliances in stock influences the brand image of company in my mind	103	3.66	1.47	2.15

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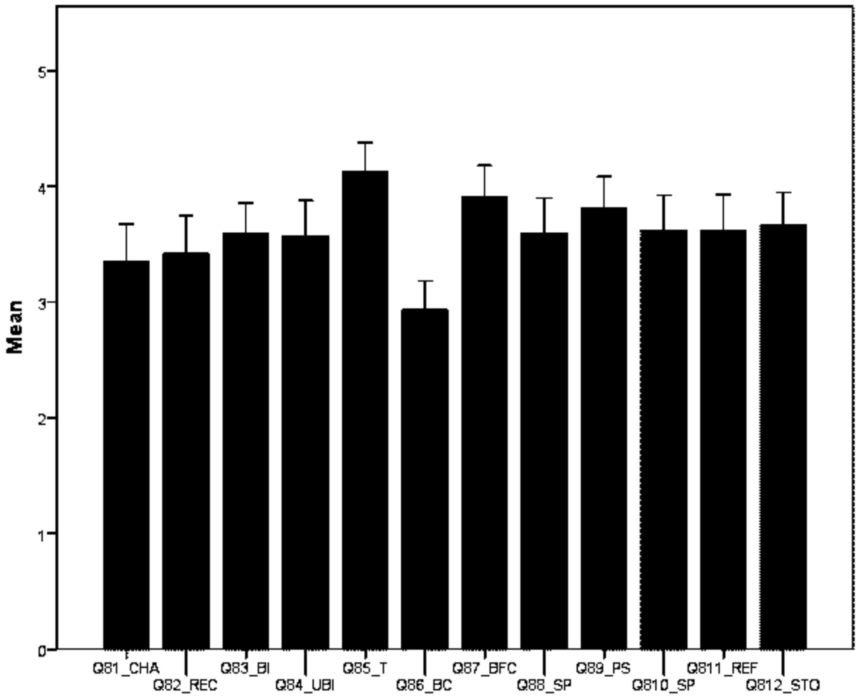

Figure 4: Mean of patient's perceived attributes of brand image of pharmaceutical corporate branding

As per patients perceptions regarding the attributes of organization which contributes more for strong corporate branding with higher mean values includes like and trust the branded company and its products (mean value 4.13) , branded company's medicine as a first choice which demonstrate with mean value of 3.91 and patients willingness to pay more for branded company even if its price is a little higher than that of its competitors with mean value 3.82. All these 3 factors indicate the patient's loyalty to purchase medicine of branded company.

- **Patients satisfaction level about the performance of branded company/medications**

The question required the respondents to rate on Likert's 5 point scale of agreement/disagreement where1= Very Dissatisfied, 3=neutral and 5= Very Satisfied. The observations made were as under-

Table 9: Patient's satisfaction level about the performance of branded company/medications

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	17	16.5
Disagree	12	11.7
Neutral	6	5.8
Agree	22	21.4
Strongly Agree	46	44.7
Total	103	100.0

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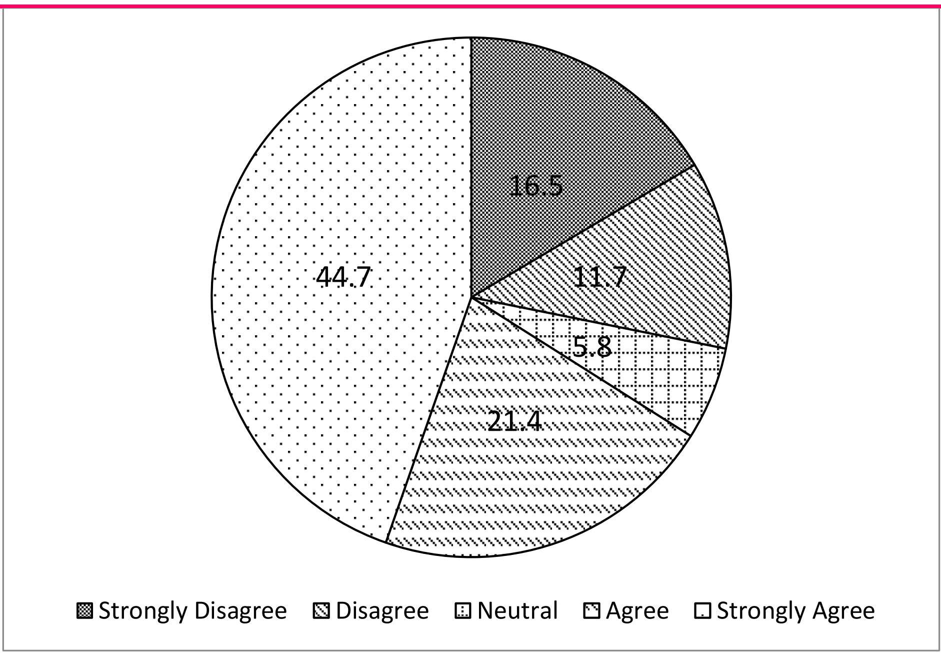

Figure 5: Patient's satisfaction level about the performance of branded company/medications

Table 10: Descriptive statistics of patient's satisfaction level about the performance of branded company/medications

Descriptive Statistics				
Question	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Variance**
Q15_OS	103	3.66	1.54	2.36

From the frequency chart, graph and the results obtained through descriptive statistics, it was found that almost 66% of patients were satisfied with the performance of branded company medicines. Further results are supported by high mean value i.e. 3.66. Pharmaceutical company has to perform more effective branding practices to create awareness of pharmaceutical branding on patients.

5. DISCUSSION

Pharmaceutical industry was always considered as an evergreen market for economic contribution in the country, which is reflected true in the current scenario. As 71% of the respondents were frequent user of both the categories of medicines, Prescribed and non-prescribed with high score in usage frequency in once every month or more than once per month.

Most relevant source of information was through physicians/doctors especially for prescription medicines while pharmacist provide information mostly for non-prescription medicines. Friends and relatives and especially information received through online direct marketing through pharm related mobile application, internet and web portal are other important sources of information in present scenario. Other means of advertisement like television, newspaper, store display, free sample distribution influence a little on purchasing of medication. The findings are in line with previously reported results (Dadhich A et al.,2005).

Patients considered branded drugs as a more effective and expensive. Other important factors patients were interested is knowledge about the products, product Quality and its side effects. Patients were willing to pay 100% more for prescribing a drug with a branded product from reputed company which has high quality, low cost and more effective. The findings are in line with previously reported results (Srivastava R et al.,2014). Similar finding was seen with different questions, like and trust the branded company and its products-patients have made branded company's medicine as a first choice and patients willingness to pay more for branded company even if its price is a little higher than that of its competitors.

66% of patients were satisfied with the overall performance of branded company medicines. To take more competitive advantage, pharmaceutical company has to adapt more innovative and attractive ways of doing branding practices to create awareness of pharmaceutical branding on patients.

Hence from the above discussion, it has considered that corporate branding of pharmaceuticals affects the greater extent the buying behavior to consumer/patients.

6. CONCLUSION

Branding is like a big iceberg where the tip is 15% and the visual identity visible through for example a logo or the packaging. The remaining 85% which is under the surface is the company's philosophy and brand values. Brand building and positioning are the most important part of marketing strategy which should be consider by pharmaceutical industry. Branding is not just about the brand name or logo – it is about the sum of the customer experience. Patients consider corporate branding to be important for the pharmaceutical industry. Companies have successful in positioning to some extent, which is reflected in the image perception of companies amongst the respondents. Pharmaceuticals corporate branding with a favorable corporate image has a positive impact on patient's purchasing behavior.

7. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATION

Though the companies have been successful in establishing defined images in the mind of the patients, yet need to work more in this direction so that the patients realize the values of the corporate brand and make them link the product to the company and vice versa. The above results will help marketers to design the marketing activity and help pharmaceutical industry to improve the positioning and contribute to better health of society.

LIMITATION

Due to small sample size (N = 103) for patients survey and sampling techniques like convenience sampling, it cannot generalize results with authenticity to all the pharmaceutical companies operating in India. Self- rated instrument posed another limitation of this study.

8. FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Although there are many criticisms on the pharmaceutical company strategies on promoting medicine, it is evident from the study that these activities have to carry out continuously and the patients are influenced by the same. Future studies can be conducted to find out impact of generic or ayurvedic medicines effect on branded medicines by pharmaceuticals.

9. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest to declare for this publication.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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