

A Systematic Review on Community Pharmacy and Online Pharmacy Services

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Abstract- The rapid growth of the online pharmacy industry in India has transformed the way healthcare services are delivered, offering convenience and accessibility to a wide range of consumers. This report delves into the dynamics of this evolving sector, highlighting key players like IMG, PharmEasy, Medlife, Myra Medicines, and Netmeds, while also emphasizing the immense growth potential in the Indian pharmaceutical market. The comparison between online and offline pharmacies underscores the advantages and disadvantages of each, emphasizing the importance of patient safety and access to quality medications. Online pharmacies offer convenience, a vast product selection, and cost savings, but raise concerns about product quality and patient-doctor communication. In contrast, offline pharmacies ensure pharmacist oversight and personalized patient care but are constrained by limited product variety and operational challenges. Online pharmacies play essential roles in processing prescriptions, providing home delivery services, and offering tele-consultations, while grappling with challenges related to the dispensing of scheduled drugs and the involvement of registered medical practitioners. Community pharmacies, although facing competition from online counterparts, remain vital in providing patient-centered care, drug safety checks, and health education. Challenges such as market competition, government-supported competitors, economic impacts, decreasing sales, and staffing issues confront these community establishments.

Key words-Community pharmacy, Online Pharmacy, Growth Potential, Comparison, Tele-consultations, Economic Impacts.

INTRODUCTION

An Online Pharmacy system is the one that gives clients a place to buy prescription medications and E-services online, enabling the customer to receive the medications or services in the convenience of their homes in a short amount of time [1]. There are numerous major e-pharmacy players operating in this market at the moment, including Netmeds, IMG, mChemist, Medidart, Medlife, Pharmeasy, etc. During the years 2021-2026, the Indian E-Pharmacy is expected to increase at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 44.99% [4].

The most typical kind of pharmacy that gives the general people access to their prescriptions and health advice is a Community Pharmacy, commonly referred to as a retail pharmacy. The healthcare facility also referred to as a chemist, who oversees offering pharmaceutical services to a certain neighbourhood or geographic area. Community pharmacists are the most accessible health professional to the public, as they are available to provide personalized advice about health and medicine on a walk-in basis, without the need for an appointment. [31].

The Indian pharmaceutical market is anticipated to grow to \$65 billion by 2024 and \$130 billion by 2030. India's pharmaceutical marketplace is currently valued at \$50 billion. With nearly 2 hundred countries receiving Indian pharmaceutical exports, India is a considerable pharmaceutical exporter. India provides approximately 50% of the generics needed in Africa, around 40% of the generics needed in the US, and over 25% of all the medicines needed in the UK. India is a chief supply of the DPT, BCG, and measles vaccines and bills for over 60% of the world's vaccine demand. According to the WHO's advocated vaccination schedule, 70% of the organization's vaccinations come from India.[2]

INFORMATION OF ONLINE PHARMACIES IN INDIA

In 2015, 11 early start-up E-drug store organizations, including IMG, Netmeds, BookMEDS, mChemist, Medlife, PharmEasy, Medi-Dart, MedStar, Ziggy, SaveOnMedicals, and Savemymeds, established the Indian Internet Pharmacy Association. We shall briefly discuss these key central characters in this section.[22]

TATA IMG

One of the most well-known and reliable consumer healthcare platforms in India is IMG. It offers economical healthcare services as well as affordable substitutes. Additionally, it gives the general public the chance to learn more about their prescription therapy through a variety of E-consultation and E-diagnostic services. In order to offer customers and caregivers the best healthcare products and services at the most reasonable cost, the company is committed to promoting public welfare.[23] Gurgaon is the location of the headquarters.

The company was founded by Anurag Mundhada, Prashant Tandon, Vikas Chauhan, Gaurav Agarwal, and Sameer Maheshwari. It operates as a web portal and mobile app for Android and iOS.

PHARMEASY

Since its launch in 2015, PharmEasy has worked to bring dependable healthcare products and services to more than 1000 cities and 22,000+ pin codes.[44] They act as a liaison between a customer and a neighbourhood pharmacy and offer diagnostic services for complex medical requirements. PharmEasy's mission is to rapidly deliver high-quality medications at the greatest possible savings to every Indian resident.[24]

- Corporate Office: Mumbai
- Dharmil Sheth, Mikhil Innani, and Dhaval Shah are the founders.

MEDLIFE

One of the biggest online marketplaces in India, Medlife offers a one-stop shop for all of your healthcare needs. The organization's mission is to provide the greatest healthcare facilities to all Indian citizens. It offers a wide selection of goods but also authentic goods from trustworthy suppliers. Because of its discounted prices and alluring cash-back offers, it serves as a platform for attracting new customers. Its wide variety of services include keeping health records transparent and secure as well as providing access to healthcare specialists through E-consultation and Medlife labs. In the Indian subcontinent, Medlife currently provides services to clients in roughly 25,000 pin codes. Medlife received the "Hot Bangalore Brand" award, presented by Paul in the Young Organizations category.

MYRA MEDICINES

Myra Medicines is a startup company situated in Bengaluru. The difficulty locals in the area had as a result of being out of reach when they needed help inspired the founding principles of this startup. In India, Myra is connected to a network of 40 distributors. It was taking in about 1000 orders a day in 2017 and making lump sum payments. With almost 300 employees employed by the firm, Myra offers a sizable number of employment opportunities.[27] Medlife bought Myra in 2019 through an all-stock transaction.[28]

- Location: Bengaluru
- Faizan Aziz and Anirudh Coontoor are the founders.

NETMEDS

The distribution of over-the-counter and prescription medications is one of the services offered by the official online platform known as Netmeds. Currently, Netmeds serves about 5.7 million customers in 670 cities and towns. It offers a simple platform for online product purchases. A team of skilled pharmacists review the prescription that has been posted to the portal for legitimacy before dispensing the necessary dosage. Customers can purchase over 70,000 prescription medications for both chronic and transient illnesses on the Netmeds website. Nutritional supplements and other over-the-counter medications are also available.[29] Pradeep Dadha and Bruce Schwack are the founders. The headquarters are in Chennai.

Comparison of Online Pharmacy and Offline Pharmacy

We provide a brief comparison of the traditional pharmacy and the modern pharmacy in this part. Table 1 should be reviewed before we examine some of the industry's key segments.

Table.1 Comparison Between Online Pharmacy and Offline Pharmacy

ONLINE PHARMACY	OFFLINE PHARMACY
Rapid doorstep delivery of medications and ease of usage favored by elderly and physically handicapped people taking chronic medicine [13,14].	Limited product selection and stock shortages are frequent issues. To purchase the required item, customers must visit many stores.
Good pricing with added discounts Due to the integration of numerous retail pharmacies onto a single platform, they may provide a large variety of medications and services.[16]	A strict regulatory structure governs the production and distribution of medications throughout the country by offline pharmacies. At the time of purchase, customers are not required to disclose any personal information.[15]
A network of pharmacies is connected into a single platform, which lowers working capital and overhead expenses while raising margins.	Offline pharmacies experience low industry margins because of increased rivalry among physical storefronts.
E-pharmacies are expanding steadily. There are 250 online businesses now, and in 2022, it is predicted that the industry would grow at a CAGR of 63% and reach \$3.6 billion [18].	Due to its extreme fragmentation and intense price-control pressure, the retail pharmacy business faces uncertain stability and slow development.
Data security can be an issue because patients are required to disclose personal information, like their address, phone number, and disease profile.[17]	Customers don't provide any personal information in terms of buying medicines.

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ADVANTAGE OF ONLINE PHARMACY

- The benefits of using an online pharmacy are clear to patients.
- A practically infinite number of items are available, accessibility 24 hours a day, accessibility for the disabled or housebound, relative anonymity, which may encourage patients to express concerns about uncomfortable topics, and more inexpensive rates.
- Free information available, comparative shopping.

DISADVANTAGE OF ONLINE PHARMACY

- Absence of meaningful communication between doctors and pharmacists.
- Customers frequently aren't aware that products from internet pharmacies cannot be as high-quality as those from a retail pharmacy.
- Misdiagnosis and inappropriate use of medications. It is challenging to tell whether a website is real or not because it is challenging to tell whether drugs acquired online are fake, unapproved, or illegal.
- When dealing with unregistered and illegally run internet pharmacies, these drawbacks and risks are amplified even more.[9]

ADVANTAGE OF OFFLINE PHARMACY

- The pharmacist confirms that the prescription is valid, safe, and appropriate.
- The pharmacist makes sure that the right dosages of the medication are used along with the right counselling.
- The pharmacist clarifies the patient's understanding of the intended dosage and informs the patient of any drug-related precautions.

DISADVANTAGE OF OFFLINE PHARMACY

- Local pharmacies take a lot of time, especially when you visit without an appointment. There is so much chaos when buying from the offline store that it irritates after a point and also can cause other pains instead. Local stores generally have more margin percentage than online stores so it becomes more expensive to buy from offline stores.
- You can't choose the recommended drugs if you want a cheaper one thus there are limited options; • If you are alone and sick, you don't want to drag yourself to the local stores and buy medicines by yourself. There are no savings on medications at pharmacies that are not online. You have much less access to high-quality medications.[12]

ROLES OF ONLINE PHARMACY

Processing the ordered prescription:

Checking the prescription for the order received from the customer for appropriateness dosing form.

Home delivery

Online pharmacy gives doorstep delivery which makes customers more convenient and time-saving, especially for geriatric patients.

Tele-conformation

Online pharmacies offer Tele-calling for confirmation of prescription-based medications and to give further advice.

CHALLENGES OF ONLINE PHARMACY

1. Dispensing Scheduled Drugs

Online drug sales provide a significant danger of selling Schedule X substances and drugs listed on Schedule H to clients is illegal to provide drugs that are listed on either of the two schedules to customers without a prescription. An accurate customer record must be kept as a record of each Schedule H and Schedule I patient, including name, address, and medical practitioner. The drugstore sold Scheduled X medications. Multiple medicine deliveries can be made with just one prescription. through several online pharmacies. The urgent need for a proper regulatory framework to resolve this complex issue is important since it may increase the prevalence of drug usage in India [37,38].

2. Selling Drugs without a Registered Medical Practitioner

It is extremely apparent from the Drugs and Cosmetics Act and Drug and Cosmetics Rule that the drugs are not to be marketed unless they have been examined by a registered medical professional (RMP). If there are medication orders placed online, trying to determine whether they've appointed an RMP will be quite challenging [39].

ROLES OF COMMUNITY PHARMACIES

The traditional responsibility of the neighbourhood pharmacist is to fill prescriptions for patients' medications. The function of the pharmacist has changed significantly, though, and they are now actively involved in many different health projects [31]. One of a community pharmacist's many responsibilities can be:

- Prescriptions are processed by reviewing the doctor's order and providing the drug for the patient.
- Checking for drug interactions entails ensuring that the dosages and prescriptions are right for the patient, taking into account their health and other medications.

- drug dispensing involves properly labelling the drug and providing the patient with directions on how to take it.[34]
- Medication disposal involves removing unnecessary drugs from patients and carefully discarding them.
- Giving advice: Educating patients on their health and medications and providing the right guidance.
- Promotion of a healthy lifestyle involves helping patients make better decisions, such as increasing their nutrient intake, increasing their exercise frequency, or quitting smoking.[33]
- Since patients frequently see community pharmacists as their primary healthcare providers, they are crucial to the ongoing [32].

CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY PHARMACIES:

Market Competition

Market competition is very high because of the increasing of new community pharmacies especially those opened by inexperienced pharmacy is of major concern.

Emergence of government-supported competitors

The permission given by the government for opening community pharmacies in the surroundings of public hospitals was another source of dismay.

Economic Impacts

Many of the community pharmacies experiencing a slowdown in business due to increasing Goods and Service Tax [GST], high foreign exchange rates, and uneconomic fluctuation.

Decreasing Sale

Due to shift of customers to online pharmacies as they offer more discounts and doorstep services has impacted the sales of community pharmacies.

Staffing problems

In most of the pharmacies the respondent work as sole pharmacies in their community pharmacy which lead them to be mentally tired over long hours and have less time to spend with family and have difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff for a longer time.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that online pharmacies can also increase the convenience of purchase of medications and also economically beneficial for many customers. But on the other side substandard quality pharmaceuticals are sold through online pharmacies compared to the community pharmacy. Additionally, the pharmacist-patient interaction is restricted which could subsequently result in misinformation and medication errors. Community pharmacies have direct access to the patient wherein they can counsel the patient about their medications, adverse effect, route of administration and so on. However, there are also challenges to overcome which can be fixed through adequate education and training, enforcing rules and policies, collaboration and implementing newer technologies.

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