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Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices and Sales Representatives' Satisfaction: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

The pharmaceutical industry plays a vital role in the healthcare sector, and effective marketing practices are essential for promoting pharmaceutical products and achieving organisational goals. Pharmaceutical sales representatives act as a crucial link between pharmaceutical companies and healthcare professionals. Their satisfaction with marketing practices can influence their motivation, commitment, and sales performance. This study examines the satisfaction of pharmaceutical sales representatives towards various marketing practices adopted by pharmaceutical companies. The study focuses on product promotion, sales incentives, training and development, communication, promotional materials, digital marketing support, and performance management. Primary data will be collected from pharmaceutical sales representatives using a structured questionnaire. The study aims to identify the major factors influencing their satisfaction and examine the relationship between marketing practices and satisfaction. The findings may help pharmaceutical companies improve their marketing strategies and strengthen sales-force effectiveness.

Keywords: Pharmaceutical Marketing, Sales Representatives, Marketing Practices, Sales Force Satisfaction, Sales Performance.

1. Introduction

The Evolution of pharmaceutical industry can be traced from early 18th century. The growth of the industry is stable and faster in past three decades. The Research and Development in the pharma have given the man kind, a solution to various diseases which were chronic and life threatening. The discovery of new drugs has expanded wide market to the pharma industries and is evident by seeing very many companies competing in the market. Starting from Vaccines, Anti-biotic medicines and medicine for chronic disease have really increased the life span of human being. The discovery and development of potential drugs for various diseases is an on-going process that requires various approvals from regulatory authorities. Branding the product in the market is not an easy task and the companies should go with international standard and regulations.

India enjoys an important position in the global pharmaceutical sector. The country also has a large pool of scientists and engineers with a potential to steer the industry ahead to greater heights. Presently, over 80% of the antiretroviral drugs used globally to combat AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) are supplied by Indian pharmaceutical firm also, India is the largest provider of generic drugs globally. Indian pharmaceutical sector supplies over 50% of global demand for various vaccines, 40% of generic

demand in the US and 25% of all medicine in the UK. Globally, India ranks 3rd in terms of pharmaceutical production by volume and 14th by the value. The domestic pharmaceutical industry includes a network of 3,000 drug companies and ~10,500 manufacturing units. According to the Indian Economic Survey 2021, the domestic market is expected to grow three times in the next decade. India's domestic pharmaceutical market is estimated at US$ 42 billion in 2021 and likely to reach US$ 65 billion by 2024 and further expand to reach ~US$ 120-130 billion by 2030.India's medical devices market stood at US$ 10.36 billion in FY20. The market is expected to increase at a CAGR of 37% from 2020 to 2025 to reach US$ 50 billion. The pharma companies should aim to build good support and make the customer loyal towards their product.

India's drugs and pharmaceuticals exports stood at US$ 24.44 billion in FY21. India is the 12th largest exporter of medical goods in the world. The country's pharmaceutical sector contributes 6.6% to the total merchandise exports. As of May 2021, India supplied a total of 586.4 lakh COVID-19 vaccines, comprising grants (81.3 lakh), commercial exports (339.7 lakh) and exports under the COVAX platform (165.5 lakh), to 71 countries. Indian drugs are exported to more than 200 countries in the world, with US being the key market. Generic drugs account for 20% of the global export in terms of volume, making the country the largest provider of generic medicines globally. As the pharma industries have grown in size it is necessary to have a systematic marketing strategy with vibrant and smarter sales team. Pharma industries need to reveal their brand added value to the consumer so that it creates confidence in the minds of customer. The pharma companies should aim to build good rapport and make the customers loyal towards their product. The changes in the operational strategies will have a good market for the pharma industries. They should study the market and analyse the competitor strength, improve the sales team to stand in the market.

Customer satisfaction in the pharmaceutical industry is highly related to speed, accuracy and efficiency of a company's research response times. This paves a way for pharmaceutical companies to have a comprehensive medical information system. This would allow them to fulfil their legal, contractual and ethical obligations while supporting their sales and business partner relationships. The system must service a variety of communication methods in order to connect with a broad spectrum of customers with varied needs throughout their product life cycle, while enabling staff to deliver consistent, accurate and current information in timely manner.

In Relationship marketing, role of Medical representative is changing and challenging. Medical representative is the pharmaceutical missionary sales person, or drug representative who provides information on drugs and product samples to physicians. Also, it is the pharmaceutical representative who keeps an eye on the physician's prescribing pattern in a particular area and get back to their company with the details. Pharmaceutical representatives work for a single or a group of drugs and meet the physician's practicing in that specific field only.

A medical representative is logically expected to achieve the product-wise, unit-wise and value-wise sales target monthly and cumulatively and plays a vital role in communicating link between drug manufacturer and the medical professional. They are the only persons who can give the most reliable source of feedback on what is happening to company's products in the competitive market, customers perception and sales strategies etc. and also act as bias between company, stockiest and customers and ensures the smooth working of the network. Now days, Indian pharmaceutical companies are outsourcing a portion of their medical representative work force, in a bid to become more competitive. This move supports expansion into newer geographies in the domestic market and could be aimed at reducing the hold of trade unions.

Also, outsourcing medical representatives can prove to be cost effective as Pharma Company has a zero liability and moreover it's the medical representatives, who are responsible for sales through good relationships with medical practitioners.

The marketing strategies in pharma industry is a type of direct marketing, targeted to highly qualified set of customers (doctors), who can make a decision of prescribing a particular brand for their patients. Hence the marketing strategies are required to be designed very carefully, which should be convincing & resulting in the form of prescriptions from the targeted doctors. The 4 P's of marketing mix (Product, Price, Place and Promotion) are simultaneously used by the pharma companies while promoting their brands to the doctors. Hence a brief idea about how pharma companies do their marketing in India is required to be understood. Every pharma company appoints the sales people like MR's, Sales Managers who actually work in the field, they identify the desired set of doctors after doing a detailed RCPA (Retail Chemists Prescription Audit) which help them to study the potential of the doctors for the products they are dealing with.

Then the frequency of visits to the selected doctors is defined as per the norms of the company, with the provided promotional materials & inputs, MR's & managers visits these doctors, promotes the identified brands, utilizes the strategically planned inputs & try to get prescriptions from the doctors. More the number of doctors prescribing the promoted brands more will be the sales & better will be the performance of the sales people & it can be correlated with die effectiveness of the strategy formulated by the company.

2. Statement of the Problem

The pharmaceutical industries in India have flourished in the recent past. The Research in Pharma industries has reached greater heights in providing medicines to all chronic diseases and the demand for medicines is also growing high. Pharma corporates have introduced variety of medicines for different ailments day by day with different brand name. The success of the company is only by the easy reach of customers, where the medical sales representative are doing good job. Many companies in order to increase their sales adopt different marketing techniques and survive in the market with help of the pharmaceutical representatives. So, it becomes necessary to understand business skills, to study the market conditions, create contacts and network and adopt strategy to make their task very effective. It is understood that medical representatives play a vital role in building the business and hence medical representatives introduces the product to the market, influence and convince the customer and closes the sales. Medical sales representatives are the backbone for selling of pharma products. Medical representatives act as ambassador of the pharma companies and help them to win the confidence of customers. This made the researcher to find how and what skills are adopted to Capture the market, the marketing strategies adopted to retain the customers and their level of satisfaction on their jobs and hence a study on marketing practices of pharmaceutical sales representatives were identified as a problem of the study.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To study the marketing practices of pharmaceutical sales representatives
- To ascertain the essential business skills and qualities of pharmaceutical sales representatives
- To identify the different problems faced by pharmaceutical sales representatives on marketing of pharmaceutical products.

- To examine the level of satisfaction towards different marketing aspects of pharmaceutical sales representatives
- To analyse the influence of marketing attributes on level of satisfaction of pharmaceutical sales representatives

4. Need and Scope of the Study

Many studies have been done in past regarding physicians perception towards personal selling practices of pharma representatives, Gifts from pharma industry affect trust among physicians, CRM practices of pharmaceutical industry, Perception and Attitude of pharma reps regarding prescribing habits of physicians etc., Studies on pharmaceutical representatives skills, training they have undergone, their business qualities, marketing practices handled by them, satisfaction of job, and problems faced during marketing of drugs are very few as per the search of review of literature. So by taking this research gap, the present study is focused on the marketing practices of pharmaceutical sales representatives and it aims to provide information regarding the required skills, knowledge and strategies that are to be adopted in the field of marketing their products. It also aims to provide the job satisfaction and its related practices to give clear picture regarding different problems that are evolving among pharmaceutical sales representatives. The present study focuses only about pharmaceutical sales representatives point of view, for further research opinion towards retailers, stockiest, distributors, perception of physicians regarding sales promotional activities done by medical reps relating to particular disease or according to different segments of physician, how the pharma industry is targeting their marketing tactics can also be taken.

5. Significance of the study

The study is expected to understand the sales promotion and marketing strategies of the pharmaceutical sales person. It will help the pharma companies to understand the salesman perspectives in different phenomena. It will give the real picture of the expectation of the salesmen and the problem faced by them in their jobs. The study will give an insight to all the pharma companies to analyse their marketing strategies and reframe them for their success. The study will enable the pharma companies to understand the business skills of the pharma representatives and organize the necessary training aspects. It also helps to analyse the pharma companies regarding the customer relationship aspect of the pharma sales representatives. This will really make the companies to identify the lacuna in their market practices. Moreover the growth of pharma industries will depend on the performance of sales representatives. This study will throw light to academicians and researchers to understand how the sales representatives influence the marketing of pharmaceutical products.

6. Research methodology

The examination is insightful and subjective in nature and the procedure embraced for the investigation is exhibited beneath. The present study was descriptive in nature. It focuses on overall marketing practices handled for promoting drugs, essential business qualities, level of satisfaction and various problems faced by pharmaceutical sales representatives at Coimbatore district. In order to attain the objectives of the study, both primary and secondary data were collected and used. The primary data were collected from 384 pharmaceutical sales representatives through well-structured questionnaire and secondary data were collected from various websites of government of Tamil Nadu, books, reports, magazines and journals. Simple random sampling techniques have been used for the selection of respondents for the study. To

provide a proper method of testing the data, various tools such as Percentage analysis, Descriptive statistics, Factor analysis, ANOVA, Overall means score, t-test, Kendall's coefficient of concordance, Chi-square, Multiple Regression has been applied.

7. Limitations of the study

The study suffers from the following limitations:

Limited secondary data is available in context with marketing practices of Pharmaceutical sales representatives across the country.

8. Review of literature

Priya Kalyanasundram (2017)[1] Medical representatives are the backbone in the pharmaceutical industries as they rapidly increase the sale with help of marketing practices. In order to promote the drugs they want to personally meet the customer and sell the product by travelling to every hospital , wait for a long time and make interaction with doctors to make them to prescribe their company products. In this circumstance they face lot of problems, become more stress in order to sell the drugs only then he will be able to achieve her sales target fixed by pharmaceutical company. Hence from this information a study regarding effect of stress faced by medical representatives in Coimbatore city. The objective of the study aims to analyze the impact of stress, to identify occupational stress level among employees and to suggest measures to overcome from stress. The findings of the study show that there is a significant difference between the year of experience and impact of stress factor. A significant difference is found among the respondents which includes role overload, role of conflict, under participation, poor peer relations, intrinsic improvement, strenuous working condition and unprofitability. The result shows that the overall stress factor is low in male gender when compared to female. Regarding the impact of type of firm with stress factors result finds that there is significant difference between stress and Indian company medical representatives. The study concluded that pharmaceutical company should develop suitable strategies to reduce stress among medical reps so that by avoiding stress it leads the organization to a success level.

S.A Krivosheev et.al. (2018) [2] conducted a study on satisfaction level of doctors towards visit of medical representative. The main objective of the study focused to identify degree of "Importance" and "satisfaction" level of doctor with specification related to medical representative work followed to market the drugs. It is observed from the study that with importance and satisfaction level of doctor with the medical rep visit have been evaluated and concluded that doctors are not fully satisfied with the visit of medical rep to meet their expectation level.

Tariq Mehmood Dar (2020)[3] focused to study various promotional tool used by medical representatives practicing in Pakistan with objectives to analyze the most important promotional tool used for making physicians to prescribe the drugs and to identify the one which is often used as a promotional method for making doctors to make prescription of the drugs. It analyzed that out of the respondents taken for the study 53% of the medical representatives gave the negative response towards accepting sample of drugs by physicians, 52% of the medical reps gave the suggestion that only by visiting regularly to doctors they are able to have strong relationship in promoting the drugs, 70% of the reps believed that only by senior reps are helpful in making the product to market with doctors. 64% of the reps do not relate the recommendation of product with bring up to date of product in the literature, 62% of the medical reps gave their answer that most of the doctors accept textbook as gift this make a strong relationship in promoting product prescription with doctors. 100% of the medical reps gave favorable response towards providing

sponsorship to the doctors for attending international conference which in turn help them in product prescription. Almost all of the medical reps gave the same response that offering sponsor for personal tour make strong relationship in product prescription, 68% of the medical reps are favors between free drug camps and product prescription, 83% of the medical reps gave opinion that personal gifts are one of the essential promotional tool used for generating the medicine, 54% of the medical reps not consider personality for promoting drugs. It concludes that offering sponsorship for attending international conference, personal tour and personal gifts are the important promotional tool used by medical representatives with the influence of pharmaceutical company in marketing the drugs to the final customers.

9. Research Gap

To fill gap in earlier studies the present studies is undertaken to provide an in-depth knowledge regarding Essential business skills and qualities, Sale planning, Effectiveness of training program, whether medical conference provide good platform for marketing, Aspects of job, Motivational factors of the company to Pharmaceutical sales Representatives, Performance Appraisal of Pharmaceutical sales Representatives, Employee welfare schemes, Satisfaction towards marketing attributes of Pharmaceutical sales Representatives and Different problems faced by the Pharmaceutical sales Representatives is lagging. Therefore, the study focused under the topic "Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices and Sales Representatives' Satisfaction: An Empirical Study

Table No – 58

Descriptive Statistics - Level of Satisfaction on Different Marketing aspects among Pharmaceutical Sales Representatives

Factors	N	Mean	S. D
Product Handling	384	4.505	0.689
Sales strategies	384	4.469	0.666
Analyzing competitors Market	384	4.409	0.702
Relationship building	384	4.367	0.757
Customer relation	384	4.388	0.763
Grievance handling	384	4.268	0.832
Self-Grooming	384	4.271	0.861
Code of Conduct	384	4.224	0.868

In this section descriptive statistics is used to find out the average mean for satisfaction on different marketing aspects among pharmaceutical sales representatives

From the above table it is understood that mean value is high for Product Handling (4.505) followed by sales strategies (4.469), competitors market (4.409), customer relation (4.388), relationship building (4.367), self-grooming (4.271), grievance handling (4.268) and the least mean value is found for code of conduct (4.224).

It is concluded that most of the pharmaceutical sales representatives are highly satisfied with product handling.

Table No - 59

Overall Mean Score, ANOVA & T-test – Satisfaction score on different Marketing aspect among Pharmaceutical Sales Representatives & personal factors of the pharmaceutical sales representatives

Ho: There is no difference between Satisfaction score on different Marketing aspect of Pharmaceutical sales representatives & Personal Factors of the pharmaceutical sales representatives

Variables	Groups	No.	Mean	SD	t / F-value	P-Value	Sig.
Gender	Male	380	34.9105	5.12456	.125	.724	NS
	Female	4	34.0000	5.35413			
Age	20 - 40 years	327	34.8349	5.13412	.240	.786	NS
	40-60 years	56	35.2500	5.11060			
	Above 60 years	1	37.0000	.			
Educational Qualification	Degree/Diploma	127	34.9606	4.83769	1.555	.213	NS
	Post-Graduation	133	34.3308	5.35232			
	Professionals	124	35.4516	5.12503			
Marital Status	Married	298	35.1141	5.17053	2.311	.129	NS
	Unmarried	86	34.1628	4.90105			
Annual Income	Up to Rs 2,50,000	23	32.6957	5.10289	2.907	.022	S
	Rs 2,50,000 - 5,00,000	132	34.3788	5.30379			
	Rs 5,00,000 - 7,50,000	196	35.1837	4.94762			
	Rs 7,50,000 - 10,00,000	32	36.7500	4.79247			
	Above 10,00,000	1	40.0000	.			
Year of work Experience	Up to 5 years	42	34.0714	4.59264	1.872	.134	NS
	5 - 10 years	121	34.6612	5.36432			
	10 -15 years	183	34.8962	5.09418			
	Above 15 years	38	36.6053	4.80731			

It is clear from the above table that there exists a significant difference between Satisfaction score on different marketing aspect of pharmaceutical sales representatives and personal factors of the pharmaceutical sales representatives as P-value for one variable are found to be less than the significant value (0.05). Hence, the hypothesis is rejected and the hypothesis is accepted for gender, age, educational qualification, marital status and year of work experience

Therefore, it is concluded that there exists a significant difference between annual income and Satisfaction score on different Marketing aspect of the pharmaceutical sales representatives.

Table No - 60

Multiple Regression Analysis – Satisfaction on different Marketing aspects of Pharmaceutical Sales Representatives

Variables	Regression Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Beta	t	p-value	Sig.
(Constant)	26.788	4.729		5.665	.000	
Gender	.096	2.523	.002	.038	.970	NS
Age	-.615	.766	-.217	-.803	.423	NS
Educational qualification	-.400	.353	-.063	-1.134	.258	NS
Marital status	-.012	.667	.000	-.017	.986	NS
Annual Income	1.234	.539	.177	2.290	.023	S
Years of work experience	.910	1.670	.145	.545	.586	NS
Mode of appointment of pharmaceutical sales representatives	.159	.339	.023	.470	.639	NS
Essential business skills and qualities of pharmaceutical sales representatives	.088	.036	.140	2.424	.016	S
Marketing practices among pharmaceutical sales representatives	.123	.046	.135	2.692	.007	S
Different problems faced among pharmaceutical sales representatives	-.080	.024	-.160	-3.263	.001	S
CRM practices among pharmaceutical sales representatives`	.089	.039	.113	2.271	.024	S
Job Aspects among pharmaceutical sales representatives	.062	.049	.073	1.262	.208	NS

(S-Significant; NS-Not Significant)

Table No- 61 R Square value

R	R Square	F	P-value	Sig.
0.372	0.138	4.953	0.000	S

(S-Significant; NS-Not Significant)

The Table No 59 & Table No 60 given above shows the results of regression analysis, giving the details of Multiple R, R2 and regression coefficients of variables in the regression equation. According to Hair et al. (2008), the test is significant if the value is less than 0.05. The Beta co-efficient is used to determine which independent variables have the most influence on the dependent variable.

Multiple R given in the table above was the multiple correlation coefficient of the dependent variable with independent variables included in the analysis. The R-value indicates that moderate level of correlation (0.372) exists between the dependent variable (satisfaction on different marketing aspects of pharmaceutical sales representatives) and the set of independent variables. Next given was R square which, when expressed in percentage, explains that, 13.8% of the variation in the satisfaction on different marketing aspect of pharmaceutical sales representatives is due to the 12 predictor variables in the equation. Next given was F value (4.953). This value is F-statistic, calculated for R, used to find whether

R-value is significant or not. The associated significance level (P<0.01) reveals that R is fairly significant at 1% level.

From the regression table, among the 12 predictor variables, annual income, essential business skills and qualities, marketing practices, problems and CRM practices have significant effect on satisfaction on different marketing aspects of pharmaceutical sales representatives.

The Beta coefficients, which are standardized regression coefficients of the respective predictor variables, are free from units of measurements and hence they were comparable. The Beta coefficients showed that, annual income has more effect on satisfaction on different marketing aspect of pharmaceutical sales representatives compared to other variables.

It is concluded that annual income is considered as one of the predictor variable, which influence the satisfaction on different marketing aspect of pharmaceutical sales representatives.

10.Findings of the Study

Objectives – 4 - To examine the level of satisfaction towards different marketing aspects of pharmaceutical sales representatives

Simple Percentage Analysis

- Majority (61.7%) of the respondents are very highly satisfied with product availability.
- Majority (56.2%) of the respondents are very highly satisfied with sales strategies.
- Majority (53.4%) of the respondents are very highly satisfied with competitor's market.
- Majority (53.6%) of the respondents are very highly satisfied with relationship building.
- Majority (55.5%) of the respondents are very highly satisfied with customer relations.
- Most (48.7%) of the respondents are very highly satisfied with grievance handling.
- Majority (51.0%) of the respondents are very highly satisfied with self-grooming.
- Most (48.2%) of the respondents are very highly satisfied with code of conduct.

Descriptive Statistics

It is concluded that most of the pharmaceutical sales representatives are highly satisfied with product handling.

ANOVA

Therefore, it is concluded that there exists a significant difference between annual income and Satisfaction score on different Marketing aspect of the pharmaceutical sales representatives.

Multiple regression

It is concluded that annual income is considered as one of the predictor variable, which influence the satisfaction on different marketing aspect of pharmaceutical sales representatives.

11. Suggestions

Adopt Dynamic Marketing Strategies:

The market of pharmaceutical products is complex in nature. Unlike the other products, the pharma products are always adopted to the frequent changes due to the advancement in the research and development. The products will be value added with the new formula and as per the need. The companies always aim for producing the products which supports for the quick ailment of the diseases. This will bring confidence in the minds of the users and also use the products regularly. To create the confidence in the customers the underground work done by the pharma sales representatives should be very dynamic in nature. The customers should be updated with the new arrivals of medicines in the market. The Marketing

strategies adopted should be customer focussed and sharing of new developments and improvements should be done to the customers regularly. The Pharma sales representatives should plan and analyse the customer along with the 7P's of marketing mix to make the product reaching them successfully. Their platform of marketing and sales planning should be properly analysed with utmost care and caution as the competitor market will also pitch their product with new strategies.

New Sales Promotional Methods:

The study has portrayed on several sales promotional methods adopted by the pharmaceutical sales representatives to enhance sales of the product. Though it is beneficial to the customers, they expect more from the companies. Discount on bulk booking, reduction in MRP, Gifts & Presents, free samples and combo offers are the sales promotional tools given by the company. Customers have ranked discount on bulk booking as top appreciated sales promotional tools. Many customers expect doctor's references, cash discount for small purchases, gift coupons, organising health camps and so on. This will make new customers entry and retain the existing customers. New sales promotion methods will give a good lead to the business and also help in business development.

Analyse Competitors Market Strength:

The Pharma sales representatives should always be alert and updated about the new arrivals in the market. The Customers taste and preferences changes as per the requirements and latest trends in the market for any other product. But Pharma products are totally different as it should be prescribed by the medical practitioners. If there is any new change in the combinations of medicines it should be informed to them and that should be done by the Pharma representatives. The Competitors will always be vibrant in promoting their product with new ideas and promotional methods. Therefore, Pharma sales representatives should always analyse the competitor role in the market such as their marketing strategies, product and pricing strategies, their value added services, their Strength and weakness and explore the ideas and innovations available for them to reach the customers. Competitor Analysis is an important criterion for every Pharma Sales representative to plan their market and sales. So that there will not be any difficulty to face the customers in fulfilling the requirements.

12. Conclusion

Indian pharmaceutical industry is in a steady growth stage in the recent past. Over the next few decades the medical expenditure is expected to rise considerably. Indian government is also very keen in accelerating the research and development to produce Indian made medicines to help the poor by supporting them to get the medicines at fair and cheap price. Pharmaceutical sales representatives are the backbone of the pharma companies to take their products to the ultimate customers. Unlike the other sales representatives these Pharmaceutical sales representatives have the different set of customers on the basis of the medicines produced for the different diseases. They meet the customers through the medical practioner and their success depends only on the ailment of the patients. From the study it is understood that the pharma sales repsentatives have different marketing strategies to meet the customers. They have different skills sets and qualities to make the sales to the customers. It is also understood that there are more problems faced by them and it is unaddressed in many occasions. On the other hand, the disease is also at growing trend. We are introduced to new diseases which has paved way for new studies and research. Therefore, the job markets for the Pharma sales representatives are always in a growth stage. It is most essential for the aspirants for pharma sales representatives to understand the market and build up necessary skills to tap the market. This will also help in the opening of new avenues of marketing in the

field of pharmaceutical products. It is also to be noted that pharma representatives should sustain in their job to make more prospects that wholly depends only on the company attitude. There is always a cry that the pharma sales representatives are not able to match their remuneration to their work load. The Pharma companies should plan for healthy HR norms to fulfill their requirements and recognition. Out of all the study has given valuable suggestions to improve the marketing aspects of Pharma industries and life of pharma salesmen. If it is carried out in a systematic manner, undoubtedly pharma industry will have more prosperous future in Indian scenario

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