



## Research Article

### DIRECT-TO-CONSUMER-ADVERTISING IN THE SOCIETY- A REVIEW

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#### ABSTRACT

Direct to consumer advertising (DTCA) is the process which is generally applied to the marketing of pharmaceutical products. The first direct-to-consumer-advertising for prescription drug appeared in Reader's Digest in 1981 in USA. Each individual has its own reaction towards direct-to-consumer-advertising or one can say that the overall reaction towards direct-to-consumer-advertising for prescription drugs is mixed. The study proved that direct-to-consumer-advertising can be acceptable by the society if it shows positive response for better knowledge and awareness. Due to continuous growth in the society, the attitude and awareness among the individuals made direct-to-consumer-advertising a significant source. Web and other mediums has changed the views of individuals and opened the doors and opportunities for the promotion and enhancing knowledge of consumers and customers.

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#### INTRODUCTION

During late 1970s and early 1980s, pharmaceutical companies were not as much stylish in the use of public relations to reach crowd of consumers or customers or even medical individuals through media. Direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) is a process which is normally functional to the advertising or promotion of pharmaceutical products. The Food and Drug administration (FDA) is entirely accountable for regulating DTCA in different countries. The last updated guidelines of FDA were in 2009. Till now only two nations permit DTCA i.e. New Zealand in 1981 and US in 1997. On 2 august 2005, pharmaceutical research and manufacturers of America released its guiding principles on DTCA about prescription drugs, with the hold to stop congressional action to end industry self-regulation. Talking about previous years, the pharmaceutical companies spent US\$ 1.8 billion on DTCA for prescription drugs in 1999 and at present it is more than this. The first DTCA for prescription drug appeared in Reader's Digest in 1981 in USA (Pines, 1999).

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After a long time abeyance, DTCA was permitted with the criteria that advertisement must be true and balance information about side-effects, contraindications and effectiveness of drugs and also ads should include the information about generic name, brand name, side-effects etc. The early 1980s saw regeneration of pharmaceutical DTCA. The pharmaceutical companies such as Boots pharmaceuticals and Merck Sharp and Dohme started to hold the consideration of FDA. Further, provided an attention-grabbing etiology of coming out of the direct-to-consumer-advertising (Pines, 1999).

On the whole feedback till today's date for prescription drugs is assorted. Supporters dispute that direct-to-consumer advertising provides consumers with information about treatment options, and might help to increase public alertness and treatment of serious diseases like diabetes, hypertension, depression, cardiovascular diseases etc. (Homer, 1999). Opponents however bothered that DTCA might improperly increase patient demand for specific and generally costly agents and this demand may have a negative impact on medical practice and especially on the patient-physician relationship (Bell et al., 1999). Some physicians have pointed out that addressing information by patients bring from various advertisements makes the patient's visit longer and less efficient.

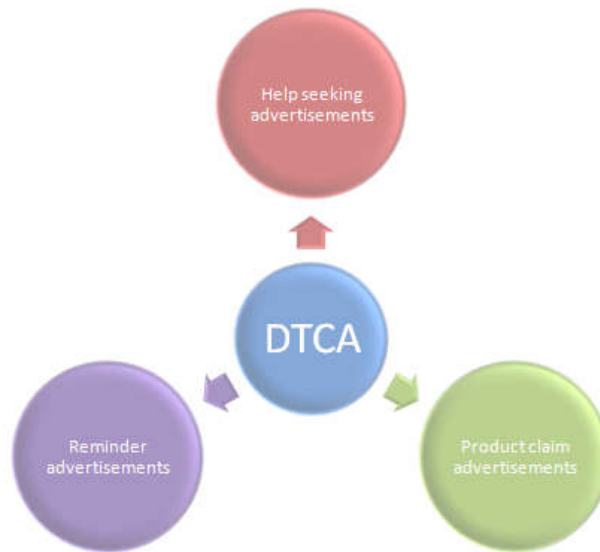
**There are mainly 3 types of DTCA**

- Help seeking advertisement- They provide information regarding the awareness of diseases, medical conditions and also encourages patients to talk to physicians about the available treatments.
- Reminder advertisements- They remind about name of product and may also provide information about strength, dosage form and price but probably may not mention the product indications or make claims about effectiveness.
- Product claim advertisements- These types of advertisements combines the brand name with claims about indications as well as effectiveness.

**Literature Review**

At present time, pharmaceutical companies are doing lots of efforts to promote prescription drugs or over-the-counter (OTC) drugs to consumers according to the regulations given by FDA. It is very important for the companies to advertise their drugs in proper manner so that it has no bad impact to the consumers in any way.

Pharmaceutical companies had spent billions for the promotion of various drugs. In the studies, the pharmaceutical companies spend nearly twice as much on marketing in US and other countries as they do on research and development (Ganon et al., 2008).



**Figure 1. Depicting types of direct-to-consumer-advertisement**

**Types of Dtc Drug Advertisements and Its Fda Regulated Requirements- (By Food Drug Administration)**

Type of advertisement	Requirements
Product Claim Advertisements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Brand name and generic name of drug. Example- Arbitraer is the brand name and Misvastatium is the generic name.</li> <li>•FDA approved use of drug. Example- Arbitraer is approved to treat seasonal allergy symptoms.</li> <li>•Ads must include that the drug is given by prescription only</li> <li>•Ads must provide the required true and balanced information about the risks and benefits of particular drug. Example- Arbitraer is used to treat seasonal allergy symptoms and may cause headaches, cold, cough or backaches during the use.</li> <li>•Ads must clear the approved age range for the users. Example- Arbitraer is for adults 18 and older and is not recommended to children.</li> <li>•Print ads must include the statement “you are encouraged to report negative side-effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit MedWatch or Call 1800-FDA-1088”</li> <li>•Ads must include brief summary of drugs like-                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓What is Arbitraer?</li> <li>✓Who is Arbitraer for?</li> <li>✓What are the major and common side-effects?</li> <li>✓How should I take Arbitraer?</li> <li>✓Where should I go for more information about Arbitraer?</li> </ul> </li> <li>•Ads must direct the readers to seek doctor’s advice about taking the drug</li> <li>•Ads may provide sources of further information such as toll free number or websites.</li> </ul>
Reminder advertisements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The ads do not describe the uses and dosage recommendations of the drug.</li> <li>•Ads must contain warnings about drug risks.</li> </ul>
Help-seeking advertisements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Ads must contain the use of specific drug.</li> <li>•Ads may recommend readers to seek the advice of health care providers.</li> <li>•Ads may or may not contain the name of drug.</li> <li>•Ads must identify the company sponsoring the advertisement with correct phone number or website to visit for more information.</li> </ul>

The study indicated that consumer's attribute towards direct-to-consumer advertising has now shifted to positive and they believe that it helps them to educate about the best medications, treatments, side-effects, contraindications etc. (Alperstein et al., 1993). DTCA has totally changed the way of thinking of consumers related to knowledge of drugs. This helped them to know the best treatment and medication for the disease they are suffering. In survey with consumers, many of the respondents indicated that they inquire about the medications and drugs from advertisements and request doctors for the same prescription (Bell et al., 1999).

Also in the survey proved that more than half of the patients inquired the physicians about the advertised medications and requested to prescribe that medication (Thomaselli et al., 2003). As the time passes patients are changing their old frame of mind of just following their doctors but now with the help of internet and social media they inquire about the drugs for their sake and contentment. Critics agreed that due to increase in patients request for advertisements of medications leads to the first choice towards branded, advertised prescriptions with more reasonably priced and also effectual treatments (Peyrot et al., 1998). With these advertisements consumers get to know the best and affordable treatment (Dyer, Geoff, 2002).

The study examined that younger adults are more enthusiastic to experience the greater raise in the knowledge of drugs after the exposure to the advertisements of drugs as compared to the older adults and the reason for this cause is that the new generation at the present time spends lots of time on internet and get knowledge of new medications, treatments and diseases because they think that social media and advertisements by the pharmaceutical companies are the preeminent and accurate source for them (Abernathy, Adama, 2006).

Also the study explained that the proponents of direct-to-consumer communication highlight the need for patient empowerment, as the patient has full right to receive accurate and consistent information (Fabius et al., 2004). DTCA contribute to lower the prices of prescription drugs due to the improved rivalry within the industries, which also helps to improve patient conformity to their therapy and educate them about the new existing new treatments for the causes they consider fatal (Desselle & Aparasu, 2002). Promotion of medicines lead to more sense of right and wrong about the existing drugs, both with the patients and doctors and this helps them for better detection, diagnosis and treatment (Dubois, 2003).

It is also pointed that DTCA also helped out to have good relationship in between doctors and patients (Auton, 2006). If raising patient's involvement in their treatment may be regarded as the contribution for the safety of consumer's choice and also to improve the patient autonomy. DTCA has demonstrated advantageous to the customers as well as consumers in many ways; such as it helps in information broadcasting and also help further to persuade the communication between patients and providers (Young et al., 2013). The possible unconstructive implication particularly related to the lack of limited understanding of drug interactions from patient's side but can be cleared by communication with health care professionals.

## Different Mediums for Dtc Promotion

At present time, there exist various mediums for the promotion of any type of product in the market. According to Neilson data (2013), the pharmaceutical companies had spent a lot on DTC promotion.

**Table 1. Different Mediums for DTC Promotion and Its Total Expenditure**

S.NO.	Medium	Expenditure
1	Web	\$59,800,000
2	Television	\$2,481,700,000
3	Print	\$1,235,000,000

Source- Nielson data (2013)

In case of direct-to-consumer promotion for prescription drugs or other category of drugs, some of the mediums are as follows-

### Web

According to the Internet Live Stats, the total internet users till July 2014 are 2,925,249,355 and at present India is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest internet user after U.S. and China. One can imagine that how web has totally changed the lives of today's population. In 2013, the pharmaceutical companies spent about \$59,800,000 for DTCA by internet, a survey by Neilson. The web has opened a new door for DTC promotions by attracting the consumers for gaining abundant information in a tempting, interactive and adapted way. The top pharmaceutical companies spent near about \$3.2 billion for DTCA in 2013, according to Neilson data.

It was examined that customers and consumers visits the web to get correct and up-to-date information on drugs and also health issues which may be private for them to discuss openly with others (Macias et al., 2004). Furthermore, the consumers on regular basis gets connected with doctors and pharmaceutical companies to get detailed information which helps to maintain and build healthy relationships with each other i.e. doctors, patients and pharmaceutical companies. FDA has also given the regulation in which the companies must have to share their toll free number or website address where they can give detailed information on drugs within their broadcast advertisement for particular drug. According to Information Technology Act which is regarded as the country's cyber law, the companies have to give relevant information to the users on social media (Roy Chowdhury, 2010). In November 2009, the US FDA had a two day public hearing on 'Promotion of FDA regulated Medical products using internet and social media tools (USFDA). This meeting was intended to help and guide FDA in making better policy decisions for the promotion of prescription drugs using internet and other social media tools.

### Television

Television is one of the medium through which drugs are advertised and promoted. It involves basically 2 tasks- firstly, to create advertisement that meets the broadcast standards and secondly, placing advertisements through targeted time that reaches the desired customer or consumer. The pharmaceutical companies till now had spent a lot for the TV advertisements. According to Neilson data, in 2013 about \$2,481,700,000 has been spent by the pharmaceutical companies.

It took many years more before the FDA issued rules and regulations for TV advertising. The FDA regulations then stated that a product can only be advertised on TV if brand name, generic name and other important points added. The FDA has crafted the rules that included 4 main components for the advertisement

- Toll free number for people to call
- A reference to see magazine and other sources
- A website
- Instructions to ask your doctor or pharmacist for complete information

### Print

This is also one of the forms of advertisement in which magazines, newspapers or other physically printed media included, to reach consumers or customers. These types of media has also specific regulations given by FDA to advertise for drugs as- giving information of brand name or generic name, risks related to drugs, therapeutic uses, contraindications, dose recommendation etc. In 2013, the pharmaceutical companies had spent about \$1,23,500,000 according to Neilson data. The major advantage for print media is that the individual can keep these ads anywhere and also can be saved for long time with no damage.

### Attitude and Awareness of Consumers

The first time in 1980's DTCA came into the source and from that time consumers get to know the phenomenon and actual objective of DTCA. After that FDA in 1983 placed certain regulations on all type of advertisements especially for prescription drugs. About 50 town hall meetings were conducted and surveys were done just to understand the attitude and awareness of consumers towards DTCA. The consumer's attitude and awareness, in which 69.1% of consumers thought that drug advertisements help them to educate and 28.4% of consumer's thought that these advertisements confuse them (Alperstein & Peyrot, 1993). A survey done indicated that till now majority of individuals were aware of different types of drugs to be advertised and also have positive belief which help them to educate and spread awareness among them. So, one can easily compare the attribute and awareness of DTCA among the consumers from 1990's to till date.

A recent study conducted by concluded that the consumers who have more trust on social media or mass media or other interpersonal channels for health information, medications and treatments have much more positive attribute towards DTCA (Lee et al., 2007). The attitude of consumers was neither favourable nor unfavourable because some of the consumers believe on information being advertised but some of them ask their physicians about the drugs (Herzenstein et al., 2004). As the use of DTCA has been increasing the awareness of consumers for the prescription drugs as well as OTC drugs has also been increasing. Generally, individuals likely to notice only those advertisements for the conditions from which they are suffering or their near ones are suffering. An example, in a study explained a visit by 11 year old boy with his mother. The boy said to doctor "I need Lamisil". The doctor got shocked and asked the child that from where he gets to know about the drug and child explained that he had seen an advertisement on

TV for the condition he had been suffering (Frey, 2003). This example illustrated the influence of DTCA among the individuals with no age limit.

### Transmission in Dtc Advertising

Any type of advertisement requires appropriate and profitable communication. It is very well said that if the audience failed to get to know the objective of presenter in correct manner then the communication is of no use. It has been observed that communication is a result of three way match among intentions, expectations and texts (Barbas, 1990). It is very important to represent oneself in proper manner so that the individual's expectations can be satisfied. In advertisement, the main thing is the use of signs and symbols which manifest in language and graphics, but the communication requires more than words and pictures. There are nine aspects for health informatics, irrespective of method of delivery, must be taken into consideration (Nicholas et al, 2003), and are as follows-

- Content (quality, reliability, accuracy, scope, depth)
- Design and aesthetics (layout, interactivity, presentation, graphics)
- Disclosure of authors and/or sponsors
- Correctness of information and frequency of updates
- Authority/reputability of sources
- Accessibility and availability
- Links and quality of links(website)
- Attribution and documentation(references and balanced evidence)
- Intended audience

It has always been recommended to give true and balanced information to the consumers with the help of direct-to-consumer-advertising. Some of the points which the pharmaceutical companies must have to include in the advertisements are as follows-

- Complete drug name
- Chemical name of drug
- Therapeutic uses of drug
- Dose recommended
- Side-effects
- Contraindications
- Interactions
- Precautions
- Manufacturer and supplier name

### Conclusion

The current evidences and studies indicate that the effect of DTCA on consumer's mind is both positive and negative. Due to continuous increase in understanding the effects, attribute and awareness of DTCA have included major aspects in further change in the ways of DTCA which will be more beneficial for the consumers. The pharmaceutical companies declare that DTCA help the consumers and making them more informed about diseases and prescription drug choices. DTCA is continuously maximizing the benefits and minimizing the risks which help to better utilize for the improvement of public health. The study focuses on awareness and attitude of consumers regarding prescription drugs.

The consistent positive pattern from respondents shows good impact on sales of the drugs. The younger adults are much more aware about the drugs and their uses. Also web has totally changed the thinking of the individuals because of busy and monotonous schedule they don't get enough time for face-to-face communication with their physicians and so here internet helped them a lot. The consumers take the guidance from social media and the advertisements from where they get useful information about the prescription drugs like medications, treatments, precautions, contraindications etc. Physicians are also changing their attitude towards DTCA with more positive views than in the past.

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