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IMPACT OF SEVERAL FACTORS ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS OTC MEDICINES

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Abstract: The main aim of this paper is to analyse consumer perception and behaviour towards selection of OTC medicines. This research is based on secondary data collection. The study of consumer behaviour is very important field of study. In many countries regulatory agency selects a drug to ensure that OTC drugs contain ingredients that are safe and effective. Instead of final product OTC drugs are regulated according to active pharmaceutical ingredient (API). This study suggests that age, gender, income, education, price and brand trust are important determinants to buy OTC medicines. The study mainly focuses on demographic, behavioural, psychographic and geographic factors, how they affect consumer buying behaviour towards OTC.

Index Terms - Brand Trust, Consumer Behaviour, Over The Counter, Perception.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over-the-counter drugs are the drugs, which are sold to consumers directly without prescription from physicians unlike prescription drugs, which are sold to consumers by physicians consent with prescription. In many countries regulatory agency selects a drug to ensure that OTC drugs contain ingredients that are safe and effective. Instead of final product OTC drugs are regulated according to active pharmaceutical ingredient (API)¹. OTC drugs are available in general stores, supermarkets in many countries. In U.S as of 2011 about one-third of older adults reported use of OTC drugs. It has reached to 81% by 2018 as first line treatment for minor illnesses. The regulation of OTC drugs is overseen by Food and Drug Administration (FDA)². FDA put the requirement that every OTC drug should be labeled with set of facts which includes the following.

- Active ingredients
- Inactive ingredients
- Indications
- Purpose
- Safety warnings
- Directions for use

With OTC most courts have decided that labelling is enough and manufacturers need not find a way to advice consumers³. A licence is not required if sold by shop other than chemist shop in terms of rule 123, for sale of drugs listed in schedule K of D & C act Rules, 1945. Schedule K drugs include- drugs not intended for medicinal use, quinine and other anti-malarial drugs, magnesium sulfate, insecticides, disinfectants and aspirin tablets, paracetamol, analgesic balms, antacids, inhalers for treating cold and nasal congestion, ointments for external use, absorbent cotton, bangles, adhesive plaster, liquid paraffin.

Consumer behaviour is the study of how individual customers, groups or associations select, purchase, use and dispose ideas, products and services in order to fulfil their needs and wants. There is diversity among consumers as well as marketers. Behaviour is a mirror in which everyone shows his or her image. Consumer behaviour inspects how emotions, attitudes and preferences influence purchasing behaviour. Characteristics such as demographics, personality, lifestyle and behavioral variables such as usage rates, usage occasion, loyal and brand advocacy of individual customers affect people's wants and consumption. All aspects of consumer behaviour are concerned from pre-purchase activities through post-purchase consumption, evaluation and disposal activities.

It is considered about all people included either directly or indirectly, in acquiring choices and utilization activities including brand influencers and opinion leaders. Even for the experts in the field, research shows that consumer behavior is difficult to predict. However, new research strategies such as ethnography and consumer neuroscience are revealing new insight into how customers make decision. Customer relationship management (CRM) databases have turned into a benefit for the analysis of customer behavior. Databases additionally did market segmentation, particularly behavioral segmentation, for example, creating loyalty segments, which can be utilized to grow tightly targeted, customized marketing strategies on a one-to-one basis!

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Demographic factors play an important role in influencing consumer behaviour towards OTC products. Demographic variables include- family income, gender, age, occupation, education qualification⁷. These demographic factors are used to evaluate each individual eligible on the basis of their decision of buying OTC drugs. In research carried out by Taylor et al.2008 age was identified to be the main characteristic of demographic factor which influences consumer buying behaviour. In most of the studies it was found that general population primarily suffered from symptoms like headache, muscle pain, cold-flu, sore back, etc while diseases like constipation and diarrhoea are less prevalent. Hence, majority of OTC drugs consumed for such ailments are by geriatric population².

The study also observed that gender was one of the most important factors for demonstrating purchase behaviour of consumers. On basis of these studies it was found that female mainly suffered from symptoms like dry skin, headache, constipation, menstrual pain, insomnia and allergy in nose/eyes comparison to male (in which these symptoms are less prevalent)⁸.

Srivastava RK et al.2017 conducted a study in which he observed that younger people tend to buy OTC drugs more than elder ones. Also, the set of products is different for younger group of people. Products like baby care and children nutritional target younger people whereas the set of products for geriatric is completely different. The study divided the population on the basis of gender. Gender plays key role in influencing consumer buying decision. Gender wise male and female undergo different kinds of morbidities throughout their life cycle and moreover different people in different manner influence them⁶. Hence the perception towards buying OTC products will be different according to gender. The research also concluded that females are more aware about skin care products, herbal and ayurvedic products than male. Likewise, male is more aware about analgesic drugs, cold-cough drugs, vitamins and minerals compared to female. The result also showed that income is also an important factor as it can impact on lifestyle and personality of an individual and hence can change their attitude towards his/her decision. Income and education can change the perspective of an individual. People with low income buy generic drugs in more number⁹.

Income is also one of the critical factors which impacts consumer behaviour towards buying OTC drugs. Different income level people have different buying behaviour towards OTC drugs. "Direct-to-consumer-advertising" study on consumer buying behaviour concluded that DTCA have high influence on low-moderate income population however, it has neutral effect on high income population. DTCA influenced people with lower and higher medication. It was spotted that even though people earn handsome amount of money they are found to be choosy for medication^{12, 10}. Another observation was people earning more than 1000 PLN per person spend more than 10 PLN on OTC drugs monthly and price of drugs influences them. Price is the main factor for them to buy OTC drugs¹¹.

Education is also an important demographic factor which engages consumers in changing the perception related to buying of OTC drugs. Publicznego KZ et al. (2012) conducted study on 400 people, divided them into 4 groups based on their educational qualifications. Each group had 100 people.

- **Medical students:** Medicine (19 people), pharmacy (24 people), public health (38 people).
- **Non-medical students:** Humanities (Human Resource Management, Law etc-54 people), Science (Environmental protection, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Geography- 46 people)
- **Medical staff:** Nurses from operation unit (33 people), Nurses from ward (50 people) and other position (17 people)
- **Non-medical staff:** shop assistant, waitress, miners, etc.

Through this study it was observed that people from non-medical staff tend to buy more OTC drugs than medical staff. Since, people from medical staff has higher knowledge about the composition of drugs and they understand the leaflet of drugs so they think they do not overuse OTC drugs¹¹.

A survey was conducted by R K Srivastava and SadhanaWagh to analyse the data obtained to know perception of consumers towards over the counter products. It was conducted in Mumbai and Nashik. Consumers attitude towards OTC products was identified and it was found that based on age and gender there is much difference in the perception of OTC. The influencing factors that affect OTC's purchasing conduct are doctor's advice, pharmacist's advice, brand name, healthy usage, past experience, prior knowledge. (RK Srivastava and Sadhana ,2017)

RK Srivastava and Sadhana evaluated consumer purchasing behaviour factors on qualitative and quantitative characteristics. The 5 factors which play key role are- corporate image, influencers, quality, understanding and promotion were found to be responsible from purchasing of pharmaceutical products from OTC. Medical considerations, aesthetics and identity of manufacturers also affect the purchasing of OTC pharmaceutical products. The arrangement of factors among different places however varies (R K Srivastava and Sadhana, 2017)

Centre for Consumer Studies Indian Institute of Public Administration Indraprastha Estate, New Delhi a research was carried out and NSSO data was taken into consideration and rural consumers preferences were determined. It was found that- 42% respondents- they preferred to spend the most on goods, 18% respondents- preferred to spend on health care goods. A similar inquiry was conducted that showed 73.2 % of the respondents decide their purchase on product's cost, 14.9 % relied on brand, 39.2% made their decisions on product quality and 20.1% followed shopkeeper's advice. The respondents who relied on celebrity endorsement were just 4.9 %. The results depicted that consumers mainly focus on prime factors like price and quality before purchasing a product. (Prof. Suresh Misra et al., 2016)

A survey was conducted by Kohli et al., across India to determine the factors influencing consumer preference in making buying decisions for branded product over OTC product and vice-versa. Product advertisement and marketing, condition of patient and safety & efficacy of the product was considered as the key factor in decision making.¹⁸ A study by Lordofos and Mulvana et al., concluded that consumers getting positive results over a particular OTC product usage are more likely to continue the product to cure the illness over the customers who don't end up getting good result. Hence, the loyalty of the consumer for the product depends on the consumer reliance in the product also making them recommend the products to their peer groups and other known person. Trust and past experience were considered as the factors that determine brand loyalty and reordering of the product or item.¹⁹

In Nigeria, the OTC product packing and purchase behaviour associated with it amongst customers was studied by Alagala and Bagbietal. The consumers judged and made decision over choosing a product by their own information, familiarity, and packing of the product. It was also identified that advertisement and recommendation or word of mouth etc made the product familiar to them also making presumption of product as of high quality and efficacy. Lucrative packaging of the product created differentiation within the other competitor products available in the market enhancing the brand loyalty of the product amongst consumers²⁵.

To understand the buying decision making of the consumer amongst OTC and non OTC products a study in 2016 was conducted by Pujari and Sachan, et. al., leading to a sharp interpretation that in the minds of the people the quality of the product was directly proportion to the price of the product making high priced products of superior quality and vice-versa²¹. Manohar and Manohar in 2015 performed a study on 400+ subjects including the pharmacists about OTC medications. Cost of the product defined the market of the product as per the income of consumer. It was obvious that low income people would prefer cheaper product over costly ones. The advertisements and aesthetic packing were found to be of no importance for this category in buying decision making²⁶.

A study was also done to understand the buying behaviour of old age people in India by Reisenwitz et al. It was found that the geriatric people/patients followed no specific pattern and the past experience was not of much relevance in their case. They preferred to choose the one which is recommended by the pharmacist or was of high aesthetic packing which would catch attention at first sight. Also, this age group was involved in minimum purchase of OTC product compared to other age groups. Hence, the brand loyalty, advertisements, past experience and so on other factors was not of utmost importance to elderly customers²⁴. The major reason observed amongst customer in choosing OTC products over prescription was the time, type of disease, cost of treatment and medicine cost etc²⁰.

Hence, looking above one can conclude that several factors comes into play in deciding OTC drug buying behaviour among consumers. Hence, understanding these factors can help pharmacist and OTC drug manufacturers design their marketing scheme and pattern as per the income, demographics etc. of the consumer. The measurement of thought process of a consumer, feelings, reactions etc. is known as psychography of the consumer³¹. These psychographic factors help to identify how a person reacts to the product, its advertisement, brand public relation efforts etc. Knowing the psychography of the consumer the targeting, marketing, branding and advertisement of the product can be customized and hence better sales could be achieved also giving the customer the desired features in the product. Its main focus in on AIO's- Activity, interest and opinion towards a particular product.

Reynold and Darden define the AIO components as follows (Blackwell and Miniard, et al., 2002).

- **Activity:** - It is an action such as observing a medium, shopping in a store or telling a neighbour about a new service.
- **Interest:** - It is the degree of excitement is some object, event or topic that accomplishes both special and continuous attention to it.
- **Opinion:** - An opinion is the open answer that a person gives in response to stimulus situations in which some questions are raised.

A large no. of consumer opinion is carried in AIO inventories stating to degree of agreement/disagreement³⁰. Psychographic studies include following:-

- 1) **Attitudes-** Evaluating statements about other people, places, ideas and product.
- 2) **Values-** Beliefs about what is acceptable and desirable.
- 3) **Activities and interests-** Time devotion by consumer on besides his professional occupation.
- 4) **Demographics-** Age, gender, education, income, occupation etc.
- 5) **Media patterns-** Media preference by the consumer.
- 6) **Usage rates-** Measurement of consumption within a specified product category.

According to Duncan and Edward theory 1974 of self-medication hypothesis (SMH), the individual's choice of particular drug is not accidental or coincidental but is a result of individual psychological condition as the drug of choice relieves the symptoms of the user. Individual will choose such drug which will help them to manage their specific type of psychiatric distress and which will help them to gain emotional stability.

As per Khantzian, more psychiatric distress is experienced by drug dependent individual than non-dependent ones and the development of drug addiction involves incorporation of drug effects and need to strengthen these effects into supportive structure building activity of the ego itself. Hence addict's drug of choice is not random. Khantzian specified the 2 important aspects of SMH which stated that drugs having psychopharmacological properties are preferred by individuals to relieve from psychological suffering.

Marketers use psychographics to define segments. but a better practice is to avoid definition of segments through AIO's but a more preferred practice is to avoid definition of segments through AIO in favour of using AIO's to better understand segments that have been defined with more traditional variables.

The use of psychographic studies has been for the following purposes (Edris and Meidan, et al., 1989).

- a) From above mentioned psychographic segmenting a number of target consumers according to their lifestyle.
- b) Detailing a particular consumer segment on basis of psychographic dimension.
- c) Identifying the relative significance of number of psychographic dimensions that best explain the variation in a given aspect of consumer behaviour
- d) Making assumptions of consumer behaviours based on psychographic measures.

The characteristics it can be concluded that several psychographic factors like lifestyle of the consumers, activity, interests motivation perception triggers consumers to buy OTC products. Consumers evaluate different alternatives present and then the final choice is made based on psychographic factors.

The idea of this research includes that the various factors such as demographic, geographical, behavioural, psychographic and miscellaneous factors affecting buying behaviour of the consumers towards the OTC products. The demographic factors included age, income, gender, education status, occupation, etc. The geographical factors included responses from various consumers that how quality, influences, corporate image, etc affect this type of buying behaviour. The behavioural factors give us an insight of the preference, buying decision of the consumers and the repeat purchase behaviour in future. The psychographic factors included word of mouth, media and communication and social media which helped in word of mouth and faster communication which triggers consumers to buy OTC.

As discussed earlier, the demographic, psychographic, behavioural and geographic factors affecting consumers while buying an OTC product, the miscellaneous factors consist of a further mixed. Diverse and modern element that affect the consumer behaviour. The miscellaneous factors are categorized are:

- Patient counselling
- Promotion strategy
- Word of mouth
- E-WOM (electronic word of mouth)

A short and simple definition was given by Savage, et al., about patient counselling as the act of one to one communication where the patient shares necessary information, guidance, discusses the therapeutic uses, side effects and gets all the queries resolved by the counsellor.

They conducted a study consisting of 359 patients selected randomly and counselled by general practitioner. Out of the selected candidates 9 refused to participate and 30 failed to complete the assessment. Rest candidates were divided into two groups. One group was given counselling by a practitioner and another was not given counselling. The group which was counselled showed more satisfaction and better knowledge and adherence to their treatment regime compared to the one not provided³⁶. The counsellors comprise of doctors, physicians, pharmacists etc. The doctors and physicians advise their patients about the products they can use for treatment of a certain disease.

The pharmacists should advise the patients about the therapeutic use of the drugs, its side effects, the drug interactions and regimen. The consultation of patients by such counsellors affects their behaviour in buying over the counter drugs.

Various studies were performed to prove that location of pharmacy also plays a major role in OTC products buying behaviour by Liao, et al. The study also consisted of promotional and sales strategies to influence impulsive buying behaviour in consumers and it was found that the offers and promotion made impact on the OTC product buying behaviour of the customers³⁷.

Chevalier et al. Defined Word of mouth (WOM) as a traditional technique of reviewing a product, making comments and expressing significant views about it³⁸.

To check the impact of the electronic word of mouth a large-scale study was conducted amongst consumers by Litvin et al., and it was found that e- word of mouth (E-WOM) is a much more advanced method of communication amongst the consumer's community and hence influencing their buying behaviour. The reviews of the consumers on the product affected the buying behaviour of the new customers and the views of consumers were of the great significance to the marketing team of the product³⁹.

Henning et al., Believes that when a consumer passes a comment, it can be easily available to any other customer around the globe, which can affect, notably, the success factor of a drug or any other product for that matter⁴⁰. The effect of E-WOM in buying decisions of consumer plays a significant role as it is expressed at a large scale, at a global platform.

The Internet always introduces newer ways to notably improve the consumers to capture, analyse, interpret and express their views about a product which in turn affects the buying decision of customers, which is even true for the OTC Drugs, and Products.

CONCLUSION-

The idea of this research includes that the various factors such as demographic, geographical, behavioural, psychographic and miscellaneous factors affecting buying behaviour of the consumers towards the OTC products. The demographic factors included age, income, gender, education status, occupation, etc. The geographical factors included responses from various consumers that how quality, influences, corporate image, etc affect this type of buying behaviour. The behavioural factors give us an insight of the preference, buying decision of the consumers and the repeat purchase behaviour in future. The psychographic factors included motivation, perception, learning, belief and attitude as well as lifestyle, interests and activities which triggers consumers to buy OTC. The importance of patient counselling has also been mentioned in the article. Various other major factors such as location of pharmacy and impact of promotional events or offers in influencing the OTC product buying behaviour has also been focused on. Also, this is the era of internet and hence internet is one of the major mediums that plays role in the buying decision making of the consumer through various means such as customer reviews and E-WOM etc.

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