



Issue 4/2019

THE STRATEGY OF PROMOTING AND SELLING MEDICINES ON THE ROMANIAN MARKET

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Abstract

For the purpose of writing this paper, we have been to choose this subject as it is a core part of the pharmaceutical companies' business strategy for promoting medicines. Regarding the importance of the research theme and the business environment, it is crucial that anyone connected to this business should realize the importance of organization, details, good deployment and impact of each event. In this respect, marketing can be seen as a true system of economic activities related to the programming of products and services that have the role of satisfying the requirements of current and potential consumers considerably, but is also linked to prices, promotion and distribution products or services.

Taking into consideration the importance that marketing has within the pharmaceutical field and the huge budgets that medical and pharmaceutical companies spend for the events organized in this domain, I consider that a company which is able to have a new approach and a new vision for the



Issue 4/2019

organization of events and sharing medical education to doctors and medical information to patients will have a big success.

Keywords: *medicine; marketing; pharmaceutical industry; medicine promotion strategy.*

JEL Classification: M30

Introduction

The pharmaceutical industry is a strategic component of the Romanian economy, having an essential contribution through the taxes paid to the state budget. In addition to this economic influence, the role of the pharmaceutical industry is growing in complexity through its major contribution of the health level of the population. People's health definitely influences governmental strategies through the social implications that it brings to a long-term period. That is why it is extremely important to understand how this industry works, what are the forces that drive it and what are the variables that can be influenced to make operating mechanisms more efficient. This article aims to make a breakthrough in the Romanian pharmaceutical industry and to focus the reader's attention on the important elements that define this industry and the areas of action that can be improved in general, and in particular, an analysis will be made on how a producer medicine promotes and sells medicines on the Romanian market. The Romanian pharmaceutical market is strongly influenced both by external factors and by internal factors. The analysis of these factors by marketing specialists leads to the development of appropriate strategies to meet the demands and competition in the market. A method commonly used in assessing external factors that influence the market is the Pestel Analysis which analysis the economic, political, social, cultural, institutional, technological and demographic variables.

Romania has an internal and stable political climate that is reflected by stimulating factors in the pharmaceutical market. Multinational companies are encouraged to invest and come to Romania with state-of-the-art products. However, the economic inefficiency of governments over the last 20 years has led to the creation of a pressure by the Romanian state on the economic environment materialized by taxes to cover the lack of strategy and governmental efficiency. The pharmaceutical industry is fairly protected by changing economic conditions, because the demand for



Issue 4/2019

medicines remains constant. Romania's economic growth is reflected in the pharmaceutical industry through the presence of many multinational companies that have significantly diversified their product portfolios to better meet demand. Changes in social trends may have an impact on the demand for products. Consumers motivation and need identification in case of medicines are based on many personal, cultural and social factors such as: health perception, individual's education and social norms, the general social framework related to public health, the norms of the group to which the individual belongs (family) [Gârdan & Geangu, 2009]. The generic medicine has a great impact on the pharmaceutical industry due to its accessibility, causing fierce competition between generic companies, which is reflected in the final product price.

At the same time, the patents' expiring for original medicines and the emergence of much cheaper generics stimulate innovative companies' actions to invest heavily in research and development to find new medicines. A society that develops from all points of view creates the premises for its members to hope for and to have a higher level of life that translates into a more effective medication, and in this case through a higher consumption of medicines.

The pharmaceutical market in Romania is highly regulated and harmonized with the EU legislation. In Romania, the existence of strict legislation on fixed-term patent protection prevents many pharmaceutical companies from launching a new product on the market. The National Medicines Association (ANM) is the Romanian institution responsible for implementing and monitoring the application of legislation in the field of medicines. For a manufacturer to receive a Market Implementation Authorization (APP), it must comply with internationally agreed regulations. In order to receive APP, a generic medicine has to prove through bioequivalence studies by independent company that it is similar to concentrations and efficacy with the original medicine. The competition in the pharmaceutical industry is held in ethical limits by the Competition Council, which is a state body that is responsible for monitoring and correcting techniques of good practice in all industries.

The system of values, customs, and traditions of the population encourages the pharmaceutical industry. The population of Romania perceives the medical profession as one of great importance and influence, treating with seriousness and respects the representatives of this profession. As a result, physicians have a great influence on the population and are a growth factor for the pharmaceutical industry.

Progress and technological change put pressure on health systems. New generation medicines created with advanced technology that treats rare and serious



Issue 4/2019

diseases have influenced and will influence in the future the dynamics of the Romanian pharmaceutical market. In Romania, there is an increasing trend of aging population. The number of births is less than the number of deaths. In the last 30 years, Romania's population has fallen naturally or due to migration by almost 20%. An aging population leads to an increase in the number of chronic diseases associated with age. This trend of aging and illness of the population directly affects and influences the pharmaceutical industry and the marketing strategies of companies in this field.

General framework of pharmaceutical industry

A conclusive picture of the pharmaceutical industry can also be seen in the analysis and influence of the 5 Forte Porter. [Epure, 2007]

Threats of new entrants into this industry are low. In the pharmaceutical industry, there are high barriers to entry because of the high costs associated with research and development of new medicines. Patent protection can be an important barrier to generic medicine companies.

Worldwide, the large amounts of money available in the pharmaceutical industry have led to a steady stream of new companies created. However, these smaller companies do not pose a serious threat to large pharmaceutical companies. In fact, one of the key exit strategies of a start-up investor in the pharmaceutical industry is selling to a large pharmaceutical company when new products are in the initial development phase. The only areas for which pharmaceutical companies are of particular interest (to develop new products) are niche such as hepatitis, immunological diseases, and cancer and biological medicines in the future. The global trend also applies to the pharmaceutical market in Romania and will remain continuing a steady trend for the coming years. Competitive rivalry in the pharmaceutical industry is extremely high. The high degree of competition is due to: strong market presence of multinational medicine companies and the opportunity arising from the expiry of the original medicines patent and the presence of a large number of generic medicines companies. The number of pharmaceutical companies is quite high in Romania (382 records in Cegedim). However, the top 15 rankings account for 63% of the total market (the percentage is fairly stable in years). All companies fight for the same number of doctors, pharmacists and potential patients and, at the same time, for the same resources (insurance money).

The trend for the next 5 years is that competition and rivalry will grow even more, mainly through:



Issue 4/2019

- Making mergers and acquisitions;
- Applying technology to increase efficiency.

The negotiating power of buyers in the pharmaceutical industry varies according to their type. Of all stakeholders in the pharmaceutical industry, the customers have the slightest negotiating power because medicines are necessity products and in most cases they need help from the Romanian state to get them. As a customer, we will refer to:

- Pharmacists;
- Doctors;
- Patients;
- Health Insurance House (CAS).

Pharmacists – Growing Negotiating Power

Due to the legislation that allows selling without a prescription, the strength of the pharmacist is very high. Often, the purpose of the medical act is less influenced by the doctor and more influenced by the pharmacist who releases the brand with the best commercial advantage for him. Of all pharmacies, pharmacy national chains have the highest power, accounting for 30% of the total number of pharmacies, but more than 50% of total sales. Pharmacies are fighting for patients with their own marketing activities. The pharmaceutical chains, the more patients they have, the more bargaining power they have, and it will be more costly for manufacturers to sell their products in these pharmacies. The trend is that the strength of national drugstores will increase even further in the years to come. They buy individual chains or local pharmacies, conquering the market. The Romanian market is very attractive in this area, so one of the biggest players in the EU as pharmacies (Dr. Max) has already entered Romania and will develop next year by purchasing the second chain Pharmacies in Romania (SSB). As for individual pharmacies – their power is getting smaller and the prognosis is that they will disappear over the next 10 years. In 10 years, there will be more or less four types of very strong pharmacies: national chains, local chains, virtual chains and purchasing groups.

Doctors – MEDIUM Negotiating Power, Decreasing in Power

Doctors can only prescribe the molecule on recipe. However, the strength of doctors in choosing the brand to be bought by the patient has dropped dramatically in recent years. There are strictly regulated differences in what each physician can



Issue 4/2019

prescribe: general practitioners and specialists. There are protocols and different types of compensation lists. The future trend will be that the power of physicians will increase when they prescribe original products (which, as mentioned above, will primarily be niche or biologic medicines), but still moderate and low tendencies for generic prescription medicines.

Patients – REDUCED Power of Negotiation

Now, in Romania, most patients rely on prescriptions from doctors or pharmacists when it comes to RX medicines in particular (it is also true for OTC products, but not for RX). Knowing that in the next 10 years, Y-generation components will be the main buyers, we can predict that their concentrated attention and increased education will increase decision-making, taking into account not only the price (as in most cases now), but also the quality. So the trend is that patients' influence will increase over the next 10 years. They will take more care of the options they have in treatments and the quality of products and services.

Health Insurance House (CAS) – Huge negotiating power, and will maintain its dominant position

Limitation of prices for compensated medicines is very strict: generic companies may have a maximum of 65% of the original price and the lowest price in the EU countries where they are sold. The trend of the coming years will be: reduced funding and inefficient use of public resources, plus increasing the number of chronic diseases. For this reason, the government will continue to focus in the coming years on introducing cost-saving measures such as the lowest EU price and claw-backs.

The Negotiating Power of Suppliers in the Pharmaceutical Industry is Medium

Medicine distributors buy goods and pharmaceutical products from producers (foreign or domestic) and sell them to pharmacies in Romania. They have their own logistics and sales force. So besides taking orders and bringing medicines to pharmacies, they also have marketing activities. Based on these, they can influence the sales of products in pharmacies and have enough negotiating power. More than 10 years ago, distributors had the logistics of the whole process, and it was the moment when they began to create and develop their sales forces and have their own commercial approach (linked to producers). More recently, distributors began to develop in two different directions:

– Promotion teams focusing on a producer / brands;



Issue 4/2019

– Extending their activities by creating virtual pharmacy chains (VPCs) consisting of grouping more individual pharmacies under the same concept and design in strict correlation with the commercial approach (VPCs acquire medicines exclusively or mainly from the VPC vendor).

Due to the decrease in prices and the claw-back taxes, the commercial conditions offered by the producer to the distributor decreased dramatically. Cumulative conditions, bargaining power and retailers' profitability tend to fall. Having anticipated this in advance, they have developed and created new areas that will help them maintain the same level of negotiation and profitability. In order to better control the distribution chain, many distributors merged with national or international medicine chains or created their own chain of pharmacies (for example, Fildas Distributor – Catena Pharmacy). The trend for the coming years will be that distributors will maintain their power by focusing on:

- own promotional teams (high skills, team hire);
- new technologies developed to reach pharmacies will provide strong penetration in pharmacies;
- increasing the VPC's activities and power;
- fusion between pharmacies' distributors and chains or the creation of distributor pharmacies.

The Threat of Substitutes in the Pharmaceutical Industry

The threat of substitutes in the pharmaceutical industry is medium. As substitutes for medicines, we can talk about new trends in the use of “natural solutions” for treating diseases. Helped by increased Internet access and information, over the past 10 years, the substitute medicine with “natural ingredients” has been greatly promoted, with more and more followers. The information “sold” by replacement products (generally, dietary supplements) is not regulated by any law (all medicines, including OTC medicines, are strictly regulated in terms of communication with the professional public or the general public). Due to this situation, misleading problems can occur and the increase in excess consumption of supplements is favoured. The trend is that if the legislation does not change, the consumption of supplements will increase at the expense of medicines and the major diseases risk being untreated. A similar situation is also found in vaccines cases where an important part of the population refuses to vaccinate because of media poisoning. Another trend or “hope” is that, if the education of the new generations is higher, it will increase the



Issue 4/2019

addressability for the healthcare professionals, and the tendency to substitute medicines will decrease.

Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning of Products on the Market

Segmentation, targeting and positioning of products on the market are other tools used by marketing specialists to achieve competitive advantage in pharmaceutical industry. The Romanian pharmaceutical market, by its size and complexity, puts real problems on marketing specialists in defining appropriate sales and marketing strategies. By segmenting the pharmaceutical market, it is desired to divide it into definable, accessible, profitable growth parts or potential growth segments, which can be monitored for a good implementation of marketing strategies. Through this method, marketing specialists can identify market segments that are compatible with their promotion and sales strategies. At the same time, marketing teams can monitor the implementation and the consequences of their strategies within a defined period of time.

The Financial Resources of the Marketing Teams in the Pharmaceutical Industry

The financial resources of the marketing teams in the pharmaceutical industry are limited. That is why there is an acute need to segment the market and channel resources into areas of potential and interest for pharmaceutical manufacturers and distributors. Segmentation of the representative market for the pharmaceutical industry is achieved by disaggregating the market in geographic segments. The Romanian pharmaceutical market is segmented in the first phase at the level of the counties and at the level of the micro segmentation it reaches the level of the city or parts of the city, in case we speak of big cities. Since all pharmaceutical companies report and receive market information from the same authorized data providers, then their marketing strategies can be better adapted to market conditions and competition. The most well-known segmented data providers in Romania are Cegecim and IMS.

Variables for Market Segmentation

In the pharmaceutical industry, segmentation of the market takes into account several variables. Firstly, account is taken of geographical and demographic variables on the market. Another important variable that is taken into account in industry is related to the operational characteristics of the pharmaceutical industry. Not all companies in the pharmaceutical industry have proper budgets to cover selling and promoting the entire Romanian pharmaceutical market. This is why there is a need



Issue 4/2019

for geographically differentiated segmentation to create targeted marketing strategies on areas of interest or areas where companies have sales and promotion teams. Another variable that may influence market segmentation is situational and may be internal or external to the pharmaceutical industry, and may be related to the seasonality of certain pharmaceutical products or to the economic cycle. Other variables that may occur in segmentation may be related to the personal characteristics of customers or the special relationships that exist between clients and pharmaceutical industry players. For players from the pharmaceutical industry, targeting the market is a natural approach to trying to get commercial profit. Targeting the market must be done taking account of some logical steps starting from the general and reaching individual. As a first step in pricing the market, we must make a prediction on the size and direction of the market in the coming period. Then, the profiles of the segments where we will act should be identified and determined, followed by a prediction of their future dimensions. Once these predictions are done, in the next step the marketing strategy for each segment is defined and the potential for profit is predicted.

The Positioning of Products in the Pharmaceutical Industry

The positioning of products in the pharmaceutical industry is extremely restrictive and strictly regulated by the National Medicines Agency (ANM). This positioning of the medicines should be approved by the ANM and must follow the unique Marketing Placement Authorization (APP) guidelines. As a free translation, this means that the placement of a medicine on the market is strictly based on pathologies approved in the package leaflet. It is forbidden to promote off-label medicines on pathologies other than those approved. It is possible that some medicines in Romania have been approved for sale and release of less pathology than in other European countries. These approvals are exclusively granted by the ANM. Taking into account these positional restrictions, pharmaceutical companies are forced to innovate in marketing strategies to position their products appropriately and to achieve their value-added currencies in Romania. The perceptions of patients is mainly influenced by the explicit communication made by doctors and medical personnel, also other patients consumption experiences [Geangu et al., 2010]. The positioning of the products of the manufacturing companies on the Romanian market takes into account several variables. One of the positioning approaches takes into account the major attributes of the products compared to the competition.



Issue 4/2019

On the same therapeutic area and on the same medicine molecule, manufacturers position their products on the basis of some additional qualities and added value to their competitors. Other medicine placement takes into account the life cycle of a medicine. Many of the medicines on the Romanian market are outdated both as efficacy compared to other medicines as well as the incidence of adverse reactions or as compliance and adherence of patients to treatment. Many medicines on the market are from the old generation and are at the end of their life cycle. The goal of the manufacturers is to position their medicines in positions capable to replace those older medicines with lower efficacy or with a greater number of daily administrations with new medicines. Studies have shown that patients generally forget or refuse to take certain doses of medication in the day as the number of administrations is higher or the taste of administered medicine is worse to assimilate. Manufacturers are trying to increase the compliance and adherence of patient in Romania by bringing and positioning new generation medicines in a single daily administration or easy administration to replace older generic medicines.

By continuous positioning, medicine manufacturers adapt their marketing strategies and, depending on the stage of life cycle, products for sale and promotion. Some pharmaceutical manufacturers also position their medications according to the perceptions of clients (doctors and pharmacists) and patients about quality and safety. Much of the pharmaceutical companies are purchasing raw materials from countries like China or India where standards of efficiency, quality and safety do not match European standards. Thus, some European manufacturers place their medicines at the level of doctors, pharmacists and patients' perception as effective and safe and made to high European standards as opposed to competition.

All Marketing Strategies Are Centred on Marketing Mix

Marketing specialists in the pharmaceutical industry are constantly searching for the perfect marketing mix to maximize their profits. All marketing strategies are centred on the 4 P: product, price, positioning, and promotion. The mix of these variables makes the difference between medicine companies. When talking about the product in the pharmaceutical industry, and in the case of medicine manufacturers, we are talking about both a tangible good that identifies itself with the medicine and an intangible good that refers to a service. The intangible service that medicine manufacturers make with the help of medical representatives is the medical education provided to healthcare professionals. Taking into account the dynamics of



Issue 4/2019

the medical industry, it is impossible for a physician to keep up with the new medical information related to pathologies and appropriate medication. International medical treatment guidelines are improving rapidly according to the new medical studies published. On the Romanian market are approved and marketed tens of thousands of medicines that are hard to remember and assimilated by medical specialists without the help of the medicine manufacturers. That is why we can say that medicine manufacturers are in addition to medicine suppliers and service providers with useful medical information for physicians and pharmacists for the benefit of patients.

The products that marketers promote on the Romanian market can be classified into two main categories: RX (medicines with medical prescription) and OTC (medicines without prescription). RX products may only be recommended by physicians due to the risks and consequences that may arise from the ingestion of these medicines. OTC (Over the Counter) products can be consumed and purchased without a prescription because of the low risks involved in overconsumption or inappropriate consumption.

The price of RX medicines is regulated on the Romanian market by the National Medicines Agency and published officially in the annual catalogue of CANAMED medicines. The ANM requires all APP holders' maximum medicine prices and at the same time obliges medicine manufacturers to register their medicines in Romania at the lowest price of 12 European standard countries. As producers of medicines, they have to take into account another additional variable, namely the pricing of medicines and the price of competition. Medicine prices have suffered and are permanently subject to changes and adjustments based on company strategies or price movements. In the case of compensated medicines, the Romanian state offers a subsidy to each insured by reducing the co-payment it has to pay for the purchase of pharma medicines. This copayment represents a specific percentage determined by the ANM on various pathologies (50%, 100%) and relates to the lowest-priced medicine in that class.

The only way to play with prices and increase profitability is with the OTC medicine pricing strategy. These medicines, which are released without medical prescription, do not have price-setting constraints, as is the case with Rx medicines. That is why it is extremely important for a medicine manufacturer to have a complete and comprehensive OTC medicine portfolio that will increase the company's profit margin. In the case of generic OTC medicines, manufacturers try not to enter into a price war that may erode profit margins. There is also the risk that by eroding prices,



Issue 4/2019

customers will no longer have confidence in the qualities of the medicine offered at a too low price. In the mind of the Romanian consumer a cheap medicine is associated in thinking in most cases with a bad medicine. There are few cases where patients require expensive medication from doctors, assuming that if expensive it is also very good.

Advertising in the Pharmaceutical Industry

Advertising in the pharmaceutical industry is strictly regulated by the National Medicines Agency. It is forbidden to use mass advertisements for prescription medicines (RX). Advertising is only allowed for medical specialists, physicians or pharmacists, and only in specific contexts, such as specialized pharmacies or in symposiums and congresses where access to the public is limited. Instead, in the case of OTC medicines with a non-prescription, advertising is allowed on any media channel. Medical promotion is a marketing tool widely used in the pharmaceutical industry. The multitude of medicines present on the Romanian market makes it virtually impossible for the medicine manufacturers to be seen by the medical industry specialists and to persuade them to prescribe or recommend without the help of medical team representatives to promote the medicines.

Medical Promotion – Basically a Sales Process

Medical promotion is basically a sales process. Medicines at pharmacies cannot be sold without a prescription from a doctor. The doctor would not know of a medicine on the market if he did not been promoted. The promotional team brings medical information to healthcare professionals in pharmacies and medical institutions, discovering their needs for patients on their clients, and selling those strict benefits that cover their needs. So promotion is a sale of benefits that cover the needs in order to get the recommendation. The placement of medicines in the Romanian pharmaceutical market is done through distributors. They buy large quantities of medicines from manufacturers, store them and distribute them in smaller quantities to pharmacies where they have business relationships. At the national level, the most important distributors are: Farmexpert, Farmexim, Mediplus, Fildas, Dona Logistics, Pharmafarm. Most pharmaceutical manufacturers sell their medicines in Romania via two-level distribution channels. One is the level of national distributors and the second is that of pharmacies that make the final sale to



Issue 4/2019

patient clients. The type of distribution chosen by the majority of producers for the Romanian market is the selective distribution which grants the right to distribute medicines to a limited number of collaborators.

Conclusions

In order to be successful in the Romanian pharmaceutical market, it is necessary to develop and implement complex marketing strategies that will ensure competitive advantage in an over-crowded field of competitors.

In order to continue with a sustained growth of this market, a well-informed consumer is needed and, in this respect, the service offered by the pharmacy offices is becoming a key and differentiating aspect compared to other channels. Medicine producers and doctors play a key role in the development of a sustainable system: health and wellness culture as the main added value that will be enhanced in the coming years. Current consumption trends will help us identify the future of the pharmaceutical market.

The prescription of generic medicines should be encouraged, as other countries have been doing, both to achieve a more appropriate use of the medicine and to stimulate competition in the market by eliminating the strong economic barrier represented by the commercial brand in medicines.

The prices' vector of a market and the quantities consumed is the result of the interaction between producers, funders, prescribers and consumers of medicines, all of them reacting with imperfect information to the actions of the others. While such a scenario of actions and reactions has a dynamic nature, the regulatory framework designed must take into account not only the clinical and pharmacological aspects of the medicine sector, but also the interaction mechanisms that occur within the supply and demand of these products. Thus, market structures are the result of the offer's ability to establish prices and criteria to differentiate its products, presenting cases of greater competition or greater concentration, affecting the intervention policy of the regulator. From another perspective, greater diversity in supply atomizes the ability of producers to establish rules of the game, facilitating the operation of cost-effective prescription patterns. Also, differentiated market structures within the pharmaceutical sector require specific intervention mechanisms, there being an extended palette of policies.

Product-based strategies will be focused on adding features that determine an additional benefit for the customer. These characteristics in the case of a the pharmaceutical product will focus on the packaging, the pharmaceutical form and the



Issue 4/2019

substance that compose it. For the packaging, one could include new attributes such as color, biodegradable materials and so on. For the pharmaceutical form, we could replace the tablet with the soft capsule, to reduce the risk of falsification, but also to improve its speed of action and bioavailability. For the substance, one could include excipients that are less harmful to health. It can be concluded that all the characteristics added to the Product must fundamentally be aimed at giving greater added values represented in benefits for the final consumer. An example of added value is free home delivery for the purchase of pharmaceutical products in some pharmacies.

On the other hand, promotion-based strategies have very well defined characteristics such as the following:

- **Personal Sale:** It is the direct and personal or telephone presentation of a product to the final consumer through a representative of the pharmaceutical organization.
- **Advertising:** It is a form of not personal communication that is usually done through mass media such as internet, newspapers, radio and television.
- **Sales Promotion:** It is a demand stimulating activity to complement personal sales and advertising information such as: 2x1 offers, organization of draws for amounts in purchases, acquire the second pharmaceutical product at half price and so on
- **Public Relations:** Public relations, as a form of communication to a target audience in order to obtain favorable attitudes and opinions about our product, can take many forms, such as sponsorship of medical events, lobbying and so on.

The distribution strategies are based on the following aspects: Offer certain pharmaceutical products exclusively, use intermediaries, offer pharmaceutical products through the internet or by telephone, delivering the pharmaceutical products at home and so on.

Directions for Future Research

Regarding the content of the present work, one would identify certain directions for future research:

- quantitative research based on field survey regarding consumers' perception of medicines regarding the degree of trust in producers and/or the chains of established pharmacies;
- research on the degree of efficiency of media channels used for the promotion of medicines;



Issue 4/2019

- qualitative research of focus group type regarding the decision-making process of buying medicines for young consumers;
- research on general population perception of possible consumption problems;
- research on perception of young people on possible consumption problems and associated risk situations;
- research on accessibility to the health system of all social groups;
- research regarding the impact of prevention policies on the use of some substances and other consumption problems.

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Issue 4/2019

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