

# The Importance of Medical/Sales Representative in the Pharmaceutical Industry: A Meta-Synthesis

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## Abstract

*Medical Representatives (MRs) are defined as the remote-marketers of pharmaceutical companies. Their job revolves around persuading the physician, providing adequate information to the physicians about the new drug launched by the company the MR is working for. Along with it, MR(s) are also responsible for sharing the knowledge about the happenings & information for the latest researches in the pharmaceutical sector to the physicians & the pharmacists. Though MRs are the last element of a pharmaceutical sales team preceding by national/zonal/regional, and area sales manager, but apparently MR(s) are the ones who represent pharmaceutical companies at the forefront. Thereby, the following paper identifies the importance of medical representatives in the Pharmaceutical Industry, and the intended research objective is proven by reviewing literature studies. A number of literature review have been done from the studies conducted from 2016-2020 globally in the same domain. Online versions of nine past studies have considered being a part of the literature of this research. Studies conducted in Lebanon, Pakistan, Ethiopia, and other parts of the world have given concrete evidence about the importance of medical representatives in the pharmaceutical industry. However, evidence has been obtained about the challenges & business taking place as part of the pharmaceutical sector's marketing strategy exhibited mainly by medical representatives. Thus, the following research has also presented practical recommendations to deal with this subject.*

**Keywords:** Medical representative, remote-marketers, physicians, pharmaceutical industry, marketing strategy

## 1. Introduction

Back in the day, when there were no critical diseases discovered. It was easily assumed to treat Flu and fever with the ever-green Aspirin or Paracetamol etc. As humans evolved, their lifestyles also evolved and certainly in a threatening manner. This leads to the natal of uncountable, contagious & life-taking diseases such as the Bird Flu, Measles, Chickenpox, Hepatitis, Aids, Polio, Covid'19 & so on. These diseases/infections demand medicines that are specifically made to cure the respective disease. Only Aspirin or Paracetamol cannot cure these diseases.

The dangerous situation demanded the research and development of the medicines which combat with deadly diseases. As the time necessitated, the researchers discovered needed medicines the pressure falls upon how to let the doctors know that the newly discovered medicine named "XYZ" can cure the terrible diseases "ABC". Here is when the knowledge of Marketing enters into the pharmaceutical industry. If a seller wants to sell his product, despite the nature of the product (Food/apparel/phone, etc.), it needs to be marketed well enough to influence the customer. Similar to this, medicines need to be marketed as well. However, the pharmaceutical industry differs in the dimension that Print or Electronic media does not contribute much to its sales. Thereby, Medical/Sales representatives are introduced in the Pharmaceutical industry to promote/advertise/guide/market the medicines to the physicians/doctors.

### 1.1 Medical/Sales Representative

Sharma, Ranjana, & Mithilesh (2020) described Medical representatives as a key element in the cooperation of pharmaceutical firms & health workers (Physicians/doctors). The researchers termed MRs as the standing advertisers of medicines in front of the physicians that inform about the functions of the medicines and inform

doctor about the new formulation in the respective medicine has that the old one does not have. MRs usually deal/work in medicines of all sorts ranging from antibiotics to treatment targeted such as Gynae related diseases, Cardiology issues, neurology, gastroenterology & the list does not stop.

The confirmation mentioned above about the corporate personalities of MRs is not once but many times confronted by researchers around the world. Similar to this, Bhatt (2018) describes Medical representatives as the influential powerhouse that enhance and typically initiate the sales of medicines & along as a result of the imperative pattern in doctor's prescription. The researchers entitled the given information when conducted their research in the pharmaceutical industry of India. These confrontation or confirmations are not purely based on the growing pharmaceutical industry's current situation around the world. But researchers are continually studying the significant influence of sales/medical representatives in the pharmaceutical industry.

Likewise, Smith et al. (2000) indicated in their study that Medical Representatives act as the impale dome in the industry of pharmacy/drugs/medicines. As they exclusively play at the front field and represent pharmaceutical companies to the doctors & eventually to the customers.

## 1.2 Marketing & Medical Representatives

Medical representative is an integral part in the sales and marketing department of a pharmaceutical company. Medical representative always works on pre-described plan of the day. He/she keeps with him/her last visit details of particular area's customers and customers conversion plan of the day.

Bhatt (2018), also through the medium of the intended research, indicated medical representatives' possible role in influencing the doctors to prescribe the medicines. The researcher narrated that although the marketing activity between the MRs & doctors does not happen in any other forum. However, it can be influenced by the doctor's behavior as doctors also play the role of a consumer while MRs acts as the advertiser.

Murshid, Mohsen, and Zurina (2017) conducted their study on the role of MRs & other promotional tools to increased sales in the Pharmaceutical Industry. The researchers proved their research objective through past literature of around 40 studies that confirmed their respective research's objective of MRs playing a vital role in increasing sales of Pharmaceutical industries.

## 2. Research Objective

The following research is intended to conduct a study which will sanction the fact of:

- Medical Representatives are necessary for the sales of the Pharmaceutical industry.

## 3. Research Methodology

A qualitative research methodology is used for the very context of the respective research topic. Research Objective will be confirmed or rejected based on past literature & available findings. Literature across the online sources from the tenure of 2012 till data will be considered for this research.

## 4. Literature Review

To fulfill the following research's objective, past research in the same domain from all around the world is considered.

Ajay (2018) assessed the doctor's perception of the MRs in his study. In his study, the researcher created a subtle and direct relationship between MRs & doctors' behaviors to prescribe the medicines. Marketing & Communications were the key elements linking the doctor's perception towards the MRs & intention to prescribe the medicines. Through the medium of the research, Personal selling & its importance were highlighted in the paper, and MRs was defined as an exclusive handler of Personal selling. The researcher initiated the study with a pre-defined assumption that indicates MRs to be the only bridge between the pharmaceutical industry & Doctor(s). However, the research's main objective was divided into sub-objectives of improving the performance of MRs as per the demands of Health practitioner.

The population size of 55 doctors was chosen as respondents, and semi-structured questionnaires were circulated amongst them for data collection. Thorough data analysis narrated the outcomes of 1) MRs should be frequent in doctors' visits, and (2) MRs should possess excellent command over communication skills.

Faisal, Aini, Muhammad, Ramayah, and Riaz (2020) conducted a similar study in Pakistan. Research's main objective was to identify the underpinning influences that joins the health practitioner's prescription behavior for his/her interaction with the front face of the pharmaceutical company, i.e., the Sales Representative. As per the objective pertains around Prescription 'Behavior' of Health practitioner, the researchers implied the study under the theory of planned behavior (TPB).

Two hundred forty-eight doctors were chosen from the five districts of Attock, Pakistan, amongst which questionnaires were used to collect the intended data. Data mining was finished utilizing PLS path modeling. The outcomes were concluded as the prescription behavior of Doctors is affected by the type of conversation that happens in between the MRs & them; and product (drug knowledge), Market knowledge, & the overall way of persuasion/communication were found to be the triggering aspects that shape the practitioners' prescription.

Likewise, an identical study was conducted by Fickweiler, Freek, Ward Fickweiler, and Ewout Urbach (2017) that identified the physicians' attitudes & prescriptions affected by the interaction with sales representatives. The study was initiated with the conformity of Sales representatives being the essential asset of Pharmaceutical industries who are wholly responsible for the communication between them & health practitioners. Cohort studies, cross-sectional studies & survey designs were adopted as the data collection medium for the research's very purpose.

The findings were straight as predictions that pharmaceutical Sales representatives (PSR) interactions with health practitioners affect their prescription behavior & attitudes as the variables of "benefits" create hurdles between both parties. Recommendations of the paper were focused on the sufficient training of PSR(s) to make PSR(s) a pro in communicating with health practitioners.

From the past, as mentioned above, research, a quite dissimilar study, was conducted by Jung, Yeon-Sung, Geum-Pyo Hong, and Ho-Taek Yi (2017), which highlighted the pharmaceutical companies' issues, especially which are SME(s) in nature, concerning their sales margin. For the discourse of the following research, researchers named "Doctor(s)/health practitioner(s)" as "Customers" and termed the whole issue-dilemma that persists for SME(s) pharmaceutical companies as "Customer-oriented selling". The study was inaugurated with governmental authorities giving less-to-attention in the industry of drugs & hence, this provokes the problem within it.

Controls of sales representatives were considered as the sub-objectives of the research & outcomes were aiding that fully. Two hundred and forty-four Sales Representatives were chosen using stratified sampling & thus were functioned for data collection means. The authors concluded that the authors as activity control, control, self-control & capacity control were found out to be the source control dimensions that on exhibition by sales representatives in front of "customers", a.k.a "Health practitioners" can cause detachment in sales of drugs. In

the pharmaceutical industry, "customer-oriented selling" is only successful & efficient when Sales representatives hold the specifications of Control dimensions (activity control, self-control & capacity control) from within. Thereby Pharmaceutical industries must train their valuable asset & portable marketers (Sales representatives) to have a grip over control dimensions when communicating with Health practitioners in order to enhance the sales graph.

Abdallah (2017) identified a new dimension in the Jordan Pharmaceutical market that needs much research & attention in the domain of Pharmaceutical marketing; pharmacists & medical representative's relationship. Through his intended study, the main researchers' objective was to examine the determinants that keep the corporate continuity between pharmacists & medical representatives. The following study's discourse & the main dependent variable, i.e., Relationship continuity, has diverged onto four independent variables of interdependence, emotional intensity, shared values & relationship dissolution costs. Before conducting the sequential steps of carrying out the intended results, the researchers highlighted the mediating role of trust between the relationship mentioned above of both the parties. Amman's capital was chosen as the geographic territory of the research & 500 pharmacies were targeted for data collection.

Likewise, 500 pharmacists were chosen to fill a self-administered questionnaire. The findings were found to be descriptive & diverged in nature as the first half of the outcomes were fully supportive of the need for MRs in pharmaceuticals as they are the ones who inform pharmacists about the know-how, function, merits, and demerits of any new drug launched by a pharm company. The other half of the results fully fulfilled the mentioned research objective and implemented multiple regression techniques onto the obtained data. Emotional intensity acting is the strong variable that continues the relationship between pharmacist(s) & Medical representative(s). Whereas interdependence shared values & relationship diminishing costs were least impactful onto the dependent variable of relationship continual. To conclude the following research's findings & intentions, the author mentioned a partiality glitch of the mediating variable of trust.

This research nonetheless cleared the doubts that existed in between the corporate relation of pharmacists & Medical representatives.

Along with the conformity about the necessity of Medical Representatives in the Pharmaceutical industry, past literature also provides analytical & effective findings that aid in the vital relationship of physicians, Medical Representatives & pharmaceutical companies.

Supportive evidence of the above-written statement is found to be linked to a qualitative study conducted in Lebanon. Elie. et al. (2017) carried out a study intended to characterize the interaction between physicians, pharmaceutical companies & medical representatives. The study was one of its kind in terms of it was carried out in the demographic of a middle-income country of Lebanon. The researchers carried out their study to assess these interactions on the dispensing practices & drug prescription.

The three respondent groups of Physicians, Medical representatives & Pharmaceutical companies were chosen for the data collection process as per the snowballing sampling technique, accompanied by a grounded theory approach. Thematic & semi-structured transcripts were conducted to gather the data from the respondent groups, respectively. Thirteen physicians, six Medical representatives & thirteen pharmacists were chosen to participate in the study.

Results narrated that interactions between the three respondent groups are monetary & non-monetary, such as promotional, educational, prescription & dispensing practices. Authors summarized their study as the interaction between the three groups can carry out impactful benefits on the drug prescription & dispensing practices; however, the effects may be substantial, and the concerned authorities must make policies that benefit

the three groups (Physicians, Pharmaceutical companies & Medical Representatives) in respective ways of interest.

A meta-synthesis was carried to examine the medical inducement & interaction between physicians & medical representatives. Salmasi et.al (2016), conducted the study and it was initiated with the keen concept of the enormous benefits which medical representatives can provide to the physicians. However, the research was exclusively focused on the nature of the interaction between medical representatives & physicians, as it is the foundation of many new issues, challenges & benefits to the respective parties. Eventually, the study was conducted to analyze:

- The reason behind the meetings/interactions between Physicians & medical representatives.
- The impact of these meetings/interactions (benefits, drawbacks, etc.)
- The impact of these meetings/interactions on the patients' health.
- And, eventually, if these meetings/interactions affect public health in any sort.

The findings of the study were purely based on the literature review of the respective domain. However, the study differentiated itself in that it does not only stick to the findings of the past research; it also presented updated sources of knowledge by following a meta-synthesis method.

Fifteen articles from around the globe researchers were matched with the inclusive criteria of the very research. Nonetheless, six distinctive themes were identified in the peer-reviewed articles of 1)The perceived ethical acceptability of the interactions between MRs & physicians, (2) Guidelines, (3) The attitudes held by physicians towards visits by MRs, (4) the frequency of MRs visits, (5) Physicians perceptions of such visits by the MRs, and (6) Reasons of acceptance or rejection of MRs.

The objectives of the research were struggling in between two specific outcomes of:

- Physicians found out MRs to be an effective & vital source of information regarding new drugs.
- Physicians did not show evidence of their prescription & medical inducement behavior to be influenced by the interaction between them & MRs.

The study was useful in uncountable ways as it clears out the basic considerations arising in between the interaction of health practitioners & medical representatives.

Analogous research was carried out by Avinash (2016) that was typically a companion to the above-entitled study. However, this study is primarily focused on the challenges that occur from the interaction of physicians & medical representatives & present its respective solutions as well. The study identified certain challenges that occur from pharmaceutical sales representative(s) (PSR) end and is provoked by the physician(s) carelessness/unconsciousness too. However, the pharmaceutical is an industry & as, like any other industry, it does practice some marketing and sales tactics to survive in the respective competitive and sensitive industry. Through an exploratory research methodology, the study concluded the challenges as PSR(s) are always on the hunt for tactics & ways to induce the physician enough to enhance the prescription medicines that are offered by him to the practitioner. Nonetheless, gifts are an intensive technique that PSR(s) use to imply the practitioner enough & make him/her a loyal customer to the pharma company. A very smart technique used by PSR(s) in the discourse of enhancing prescription medicines by the physician is easing the hectic routine of the physician by providing him with a folder/booklet of the drugs that he is trying to sell to the physician. This somehow saves the physician's time & energy and makes him impress with the PSR(s) communication & persuasion skill unconsciously.

As per additional mentioning in the research, social psychology traces are found to be practiced by PSR(s) when they visit practitioners. However, this theory might differ in implementation from physician to physician. The research was concluded with some solutions to the challenges above that narrate to bring more transparency in the pharmaceutical industry through PSR(s). Another solution to these slow-poising challenges is to train PSR(s) enough to make them realize the difference between adding value in their job means is; and why their respective job is different from any other industry's selling activities.

Terefe et.al (2016) examined the exceptional influence of Medical Representatives in prescribing medicines. The researchers conducted a study that lies on one of the basic foundations in the study field of the pharmaceutical industry and is wholly based upon the medicinal promotion by MRs and its effect on the physician to prescribe drugs & validate their choice of medicines amongst others.

Results were found to be like 40% of physicians provided evidence where their prescription procedures are influenced by the influences of MRs accompanied by extra benefits & gifts. However, the other 60% of physicians narrated the opposite of the former finding totally & blamed the MR(s)'s ineffective communication to be the reason for such finding.

Majorly, researchers worldwide provide statistical, qualitative & quantitative evidence of medical representatives as the influential force behind the growing pharmaceutical industry around the world. The pharma revenues worldwide totaled 1.25 trillion U.S. dollars in 2019 (<https://www.statista.com/topics/1764/global-pharmaceutical-industry/>) & this alone describes the growth of pharmaceutical industry around the world. Wrong or irrelevant medicines can cause a patient to lose his/her life; hence the industry is quite sensitive too in its kind. Thereby, an industry that deserves enough research & attention in numerous matters also demands an impeccable population of medical representatives to promote their products intelligently. The reviewed literature is an example & stable evidence of the prior conclusion.

## 5. Conclusion

This research dealt with the objective of the Importance of Medical Representative(s) in the Pharmaceutical Industry. The intended objective was fulfilled as pre-determined, where researchers from different parts of the world were majorly in support of the determined objective. Countries worldwide are taking necessary steps & giving enough consideration to the pharmaceutical industry domain & its vital asset of medical representative. However, certain lacking(s), doubts & concerns are highlighted in the past literature that derives the need for such policies by pharmaceutical industries & governmental authorities to carve out the mishaps in the pharmaceutical industry through medical representative(s).

## 6. Summary

The pharmaceutical industry is proving to be a much growing & competitive industry in itself, especially in the time of COVID'19. The whole world is waiting for the pharmaceutical industry to develop a drug that can cure COVID'19. Anyhow, the Pharma industry is running by an amalgamation of portable marketers as known as medical representatives, who transfer information from the pharma industry about new or existing medicines to Doctor(s) (Kiran & Kavita, 2020).

Medical Representatives play a crucial role in conveying new clinical research of medicines to the physicians. They also offer medicines' free samples to physicians for their patients to analyze the medicine efficacy and safety. MRs usually offer certain gifts/clinical table reminders of the medicines like paper weight, pen holder and even tissue boxes. Furthermore, MRs also invite doctors to participate in company sponsored academic conferences (local/international), seminars and workshops. In front of the physicians, medical representatives' communication, attire, medicine knowledge, attitude and behavior all matters. All in all, near to physician,

medical representative is the company's face. A physician rate the pharmaceutical company as per company's medical representative performance in the physician chamber. Thereby, this paper demonstrates its research objective of the Importance of medical representative(s) in the Pharmaceutical industry by a qualitative research methodology. Past literature of researchers worldwide has been used to prove the following research's objective, and nine studies as entitled in the paper are fully proving it.

Although the importance of medical representatives in the Pharmaceutical Industry cannot be neglected or taken for granted; however, the literature on the topic mentioned above still demands in-depth studies. The literature discussed in the early chapter of the paper proves that studies worldwide were majorly dependent on prior studies to it, and hence, the analytical component lacks evidence.

Nonetheless, some peer-reviewed papers were also giving concrete evidence about their findings through statistical analytics & quantitative methodology, which firms their study to a greater extent.

## 7. Recommendations

Pharmaceutical companies apply marketing strategies smartly and efficiently. Push & pull strategies are an impressive marketing technique used in the promotional phases of drugs by Medical Representatives (Ibrahim.et.al, 2015); after the thorough reviewing of past literature and keeping in consideration the excellent practices of marketing in the pharma industry, the recommendations through the medium of this research is focused into two proportions: 1) to pharmaceutical Industries and, 2) to Medical Representatives.

### 7.1 Pharmaceutical Industries

- Give adequate attention & importance to the training & development of medical representatives.
- Present a clean & clear view of the difference between the value of drugs information & using "gifts/obligation" strategy to medical representatives.
- Make use of "Social Psychology Theory" through medical representatives limited to an extent & not overpower it; by playing with the sensitivity of physicians' matter & busy schedule.

### 7.2 Medical Representatives

- MR(s) holds a massive amount of influential power over the prescription decision and dispensing practices of physicians (proved by literature review); thereby, they should value their profession's sensitivity & neglect the counter-benefits of their job.
- Enhance the frequency of visits to physicians and be concise & clear with the information dissemination in every visit.
- Over the counter (OTC) prescription means are increasing worldwide since MR(s) do get direct in communication with pharmacists; thereby, highlighting the importance of negligence caused by the OTC means of drug selling.

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