Understanding the Role of Digital Marketing in Shaping Purchase Intention for Pharmaceutical Products in Emerging Markets

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Abstract

Purpose: *An exploration of the role of digital marketing in consumer purchase intentions within emerging markets for pharmaceutical products is presented in this study.*

Methodology: *The study consists of positivist philosophy and follows inductive reasoning in descriptive approach to assessing this relationship. There was a quantitative survey of a sample of 50 people in a specified emerging market with a 12-item questionnaire.*

Findings: *The data, analysed with the help of IBM SPSS, indicated very weak and statistically insignificant correlation between digital marketing and purchase intention (r -0.055, p > 0.05). This implies that there is no straightforward correlation between these variables and therefore that other variables might have a greater impact in determining the purchase of pharmaceutical products.*

Value: *The importance of the study is an emphasis on the missing link in existing literature regarding emerging markets and insights that can change the traditional notions of digital marketing effectiveness in this market domain.*

Keywords- "Digital Marketing", "Pharmaceutical", "Purchase Intention", "Emerging Markets".

1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

The world in which the pharmaceutical industry is playing has severely changed, especially in the emerging markets. Over the years, the marketing of the sector has been characterised by the use of traditional sales personnel and print publications, but currently, digital technology is redesigning the sector. The pharmaceutical companies are realising the importance of effective digital marketing. This is critical, particularly when one takes into consideration the fact that the market is currently worth 1.48 trillion U.S. dollars as of 2022 (Amura, 2023). The following paper aims to comprehend the processes by which digital marketing affects the purchase intention of consumers regarding pharmaceutical products in these dynamic markets. It tends to dig deeper into particular digital avenues used, the content and messaging involved, and the mediation of the connection between digital exposure and purchase decision psychology and behaviour.

Aim and objectives

The main aim of this study is to explore the contribution of digital marketing to the consumer purchase intention of pharmaceutical products within emerging markets.

Objectives:

● To analyse and categorise current pharmaceutical companies' digital marketing strategies in emerging markets

● To determine the direct impact of digital marketing channels on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions

● To explore the specific challenges and opportunities related to regulatory compliance, data privacy, and digital literacy that are unique to emerging markets

● To recommend strategies for shaping purchase intention for pharmaceutical products

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Evolving Pharmaceutical Marketing Landscape

The pharmaceutical marketing environment is under a major shift, due to the fast-emerging markets that are embracing the use of digital media. In the past, marketing was a Business-to-Business (B2B) model whereby the industry focused largely on targeting healthcare professionals (HCPs) by using the

conventional channels such as face-to-face calls on sales representatives, medical conferences, and print journals (Ferreira et al., 2022). The patient was to be more or less passive, and physicians were the source of information and the main product choice. But Istepanian (2022) mentioned that the growth of the internet and mobile healthcare has enabled a new generation of health consumers. Patients and their caregivers today are taking a more active role in making decisions about their health, and they use online health resources to search for conditions, treatments, and medications. This trend has led to a transition to the Business-to-Consumer (B2C) model concerning Over the Counter (OTC) drugs and wellness products.

Factors Influencing Consumer Purchase Intention for the Pharmaceutical Sector

Various cognitive and behavioural factors play into the decision-making process for purchasing pharmaceutical products, particularly in the Over the Counter (OTC) sector. In accordance with Daowd et al. (2021), information quality and accessibility can be regarded as one of the factors that can influence consumer purchase intention. Consumers want to know simple and solid information about the effectiveness, safety, and side effects of a product. Apart from this Supardin, Rokhmawati & Kuncorowati (2023) highlighted brand image and trust as another critical factor. The reputation of a pharmaceutical brand is a strong influence on the purchase intention of a consumer and is achieved with a long period of time that is based on repetition of messages and the quality of experience over the course of time. Moreover, price and accessibility are particularly significant in price-sensitive emerging markets. Online pharmacies and e-commerce offer more pricing and shopping convenience to the consumers which can directly affect the product preference of the customers.

Theoretical Underpinning

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) presents a good theoretical background to the study as it discusses the importance of consumer beliefs plus social effects on the intent to buy (Sok et al., 2021). TRA describes that a human action, such as buying a pharmaceutical item, is driven mostly by two variables, the attitude towards a behavior and subjective norms. Within the scope of this research, the consumer attitude is defined by the assessment of the digital marketing stimuli. The subjective norms, on the other hand, are things that are influenced by what the consumer feels others want them to do (Rossmann, 2021). This can be seen in terms of the digital habitat, which comprises the power of online reviews, social media influencer testament and opinions on health forums. Thus, the research aid use of TRA to rationalize an understanding of the research since a precise model is presented to study the way digital marketing efforts.

Literature Gap

One of the major gaps in the current literature is the absence of valuable empirical studies that target emerging markets on the basis of their specific mechanics. Although many studies have considered how digital marketing has affected the pharmaceutical industry in the developed world, few studies can explain how it has impacted the developing countries due to their consumer behaviour differences, different regulatory environments, and socioeconomic situations.

3. METHODS

A **positivism research philosophy** has been used. It assumes that there exists an objective reality that could be measured and comprehended using scientific reasoning and empirical observation (Maretha, 2023). The research is **descriptive** since it involves a desirable method of research to identify and quantify the effects of digital marketing on consumer purchase intention of pharmaceutical products in a systematic manner. The **inductive** reasoning process has been adopted since observations made through the data can be employed to develop a more generalised concept and make a relationship between digital marketing and consumer behaviour in an emerging market.

The **quantitative research design** has been used as a survey in order to gather numerical data about a specific sample. The questionnaire comprises **12 items**, which are meant to gauge the variables that concern digital marketing exposure, consumer awareness and intentions to purchase. To accomplish the research, a sampling of **50 individuals** has been selected in a chosen emerging market by employing a non-probability sampling method. The **IBM SPSS** has been used to code and analyse the data obtained through the surveys.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Correlations

		Digital_Marketing	Purchase_Intention
Digital_Marketing	Pearson Correlation	1	-.055
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.703
	N	50	50
Purchase_Intention	Pearson Correlation	-.055	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.703	
	N	50	50

Figure 1: Correlation

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient in the table between the variables Digital Marketing and Purchase Intention is -0.055. This shows that there is a very weak adverse relationship between the two variables. In this instance, the decrease in digital marketing activities does not have a significant connection with a shift in consumer purchase intention. The negative sign implies that the effect is low, with an inverse correlation. A value close to zero suggests that as one variable increases, there is little to no predictable change in the other (Šverko et al., 2022). The p-value or the Sig. (2-tailed) The value is 0.703. To reach statistical significance of the correlation, the p-value should normally be below 0.05. The level of correlation is not statistically significant as 0.05 is vastly less than 0.703.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.055[a]	.003	-.018	.71898

a. Predictors: (Constant), Digital_Marketing

Figure 2: Regression Analysis

The R value is 0.055. This is the value of the correlation coefficient between the predictor and the dependent variable. A number that is this near to zero shows a very weak relationship. This implies that digital marketing is not an adequate predictor that can be used to describe purchase intention using the model.
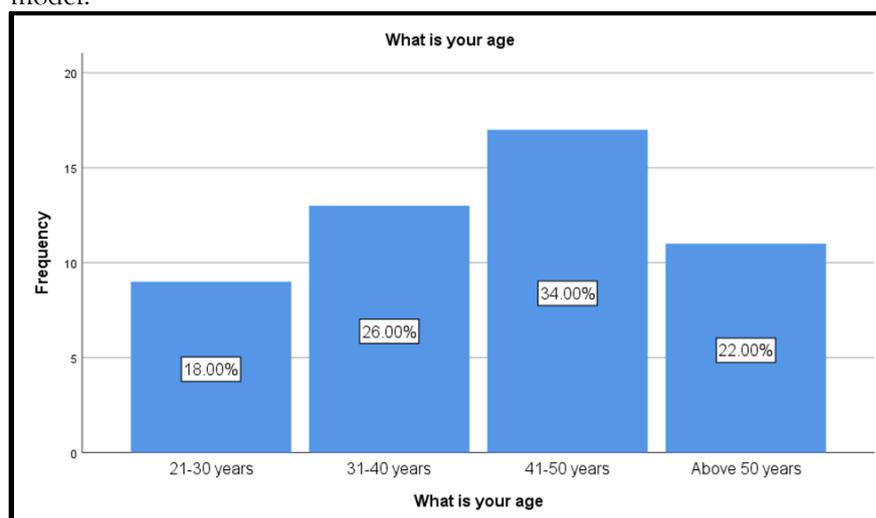

Figure 3: Age

Most of the respondents who participated in the survey (34%) were between the ages of 41 to 50 years. The lowest number of participants (18%) was between the ages of 21 to 30 years.
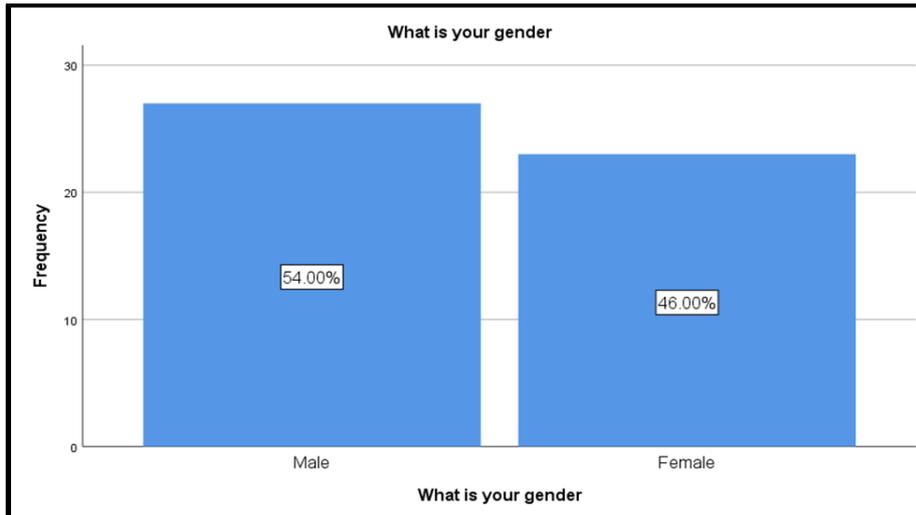
Figure 4: Gender

As seen from the above graph, 54% of the participants were male, and 46% of the participants in the survey were female.
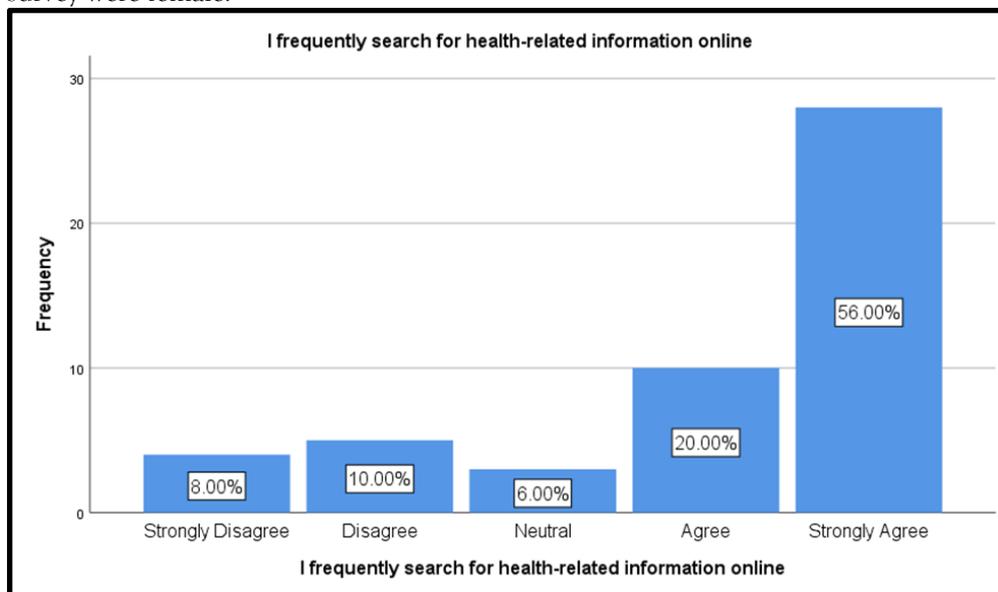

Figure 5: Online search

Through the survey, 56% of the participants strongly agreed that they frequently search online for health-related information. However, 6% participants remain neutral.
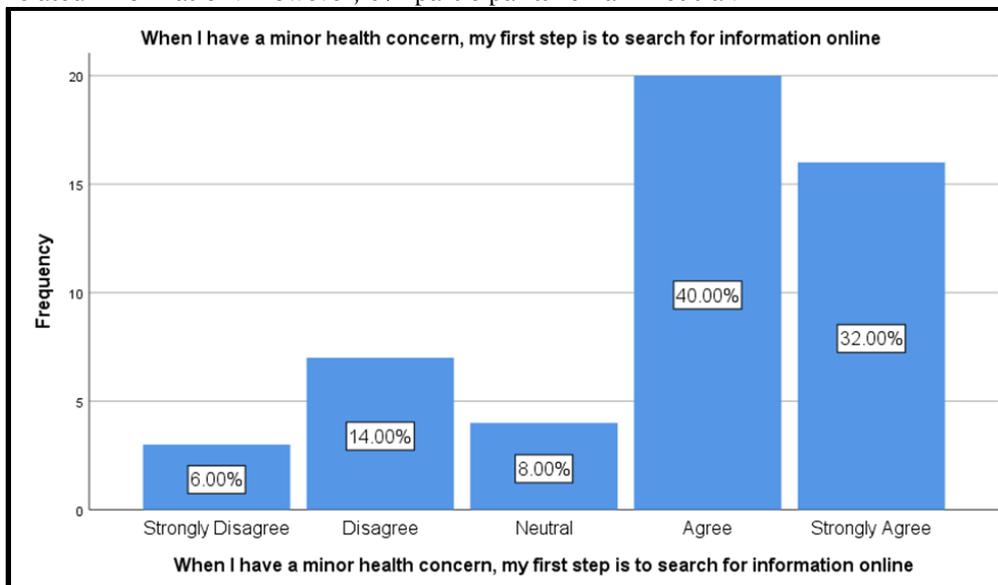

Figure 6: First step

While 14% of the participants disagreed that they do not search for online information whenever there are minor health concerns, 40% of the participants agreed that they search online for information.
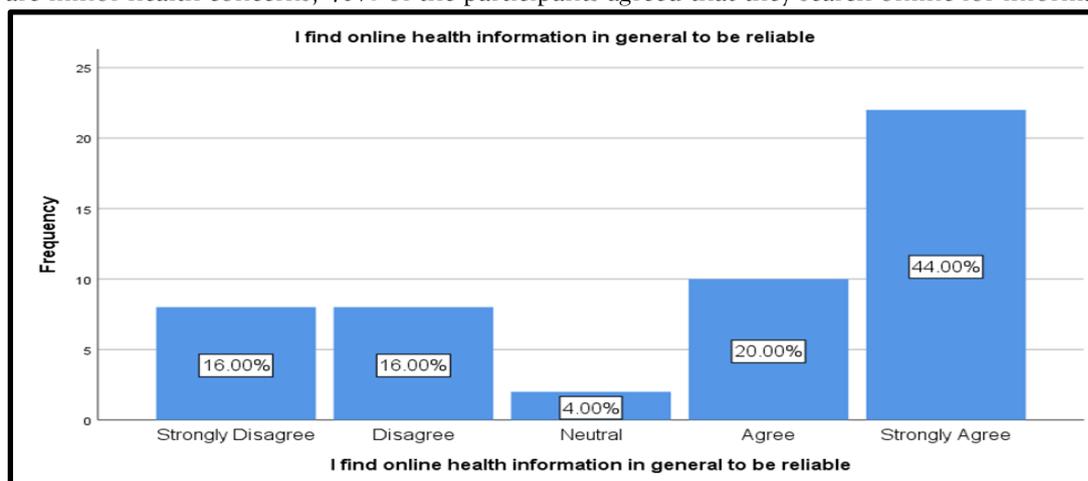
Figure 7: Reliability of information

There are 44% of respondents who strongly agree that online health information is generally reliable. However, 16% of the participants strongly disagreed with this fact.
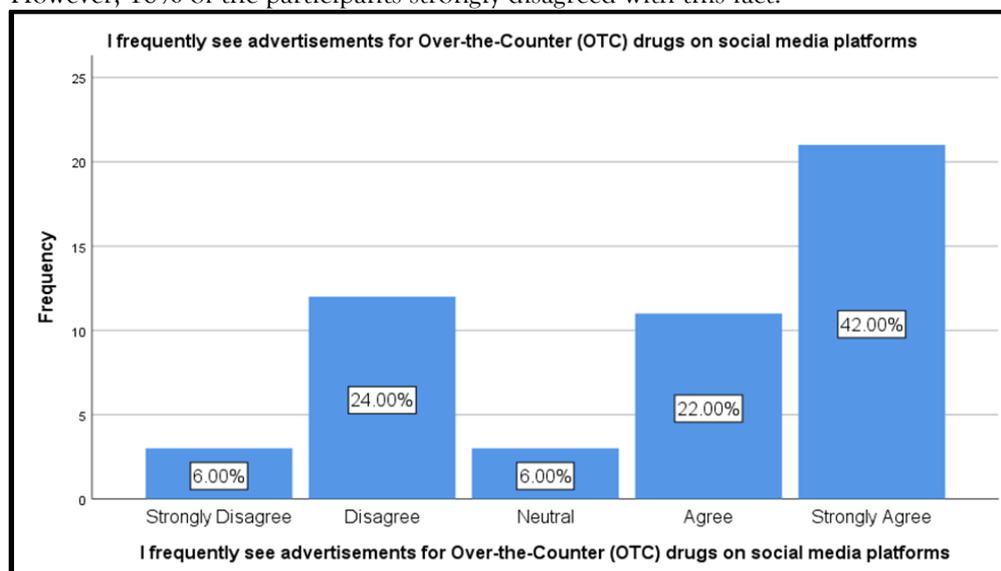

Figure 8: OTC drugs

As per the survey responses, 42% of the respondents strongly agreed that they see OTC drug advertisements on social media platforms. On the contrary, 24% of respondents disagree with this.
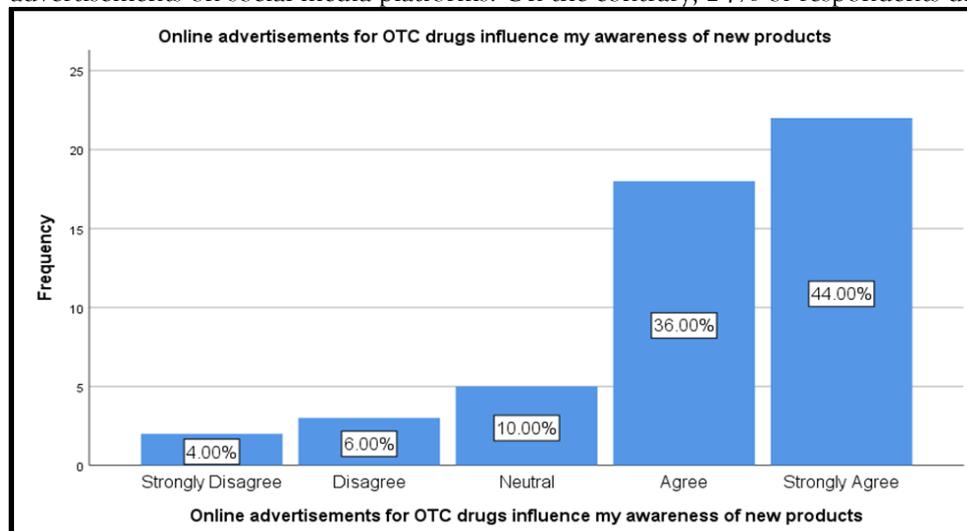

Figure 9: Influence of advertisement

44% of the respondents of the survey were influenced by the OTC drugs advertisements regarding awareness of the new products. Whereas, 6% disagreed as they were not influenced by the advertisements while gaining knowledge about new products.
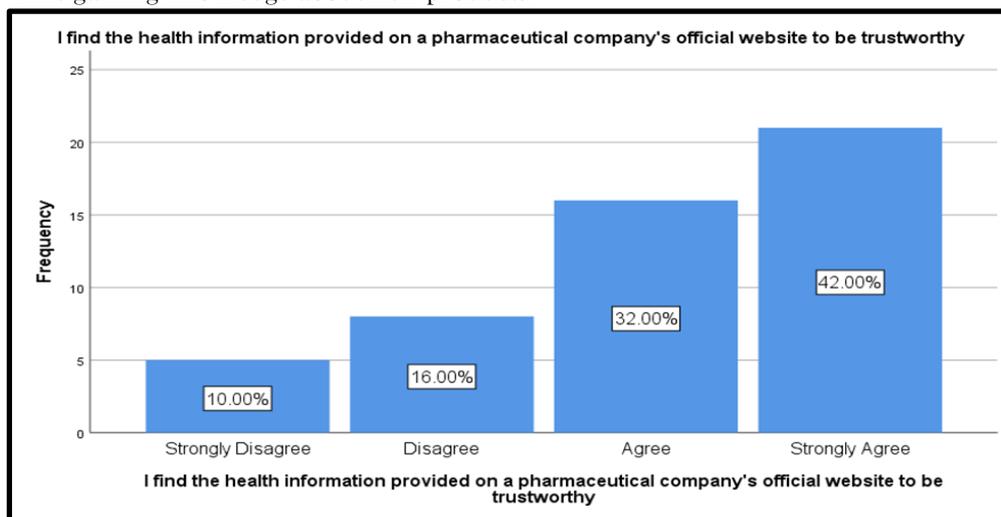

Figure 10: Trustworthy information

According to the survey, 42% of the respondents find the information on the official website of the pharmaceutical company to be trustworthy. On the other hand, 10% of the respondents strongly disagreed that the information is trustworthy.
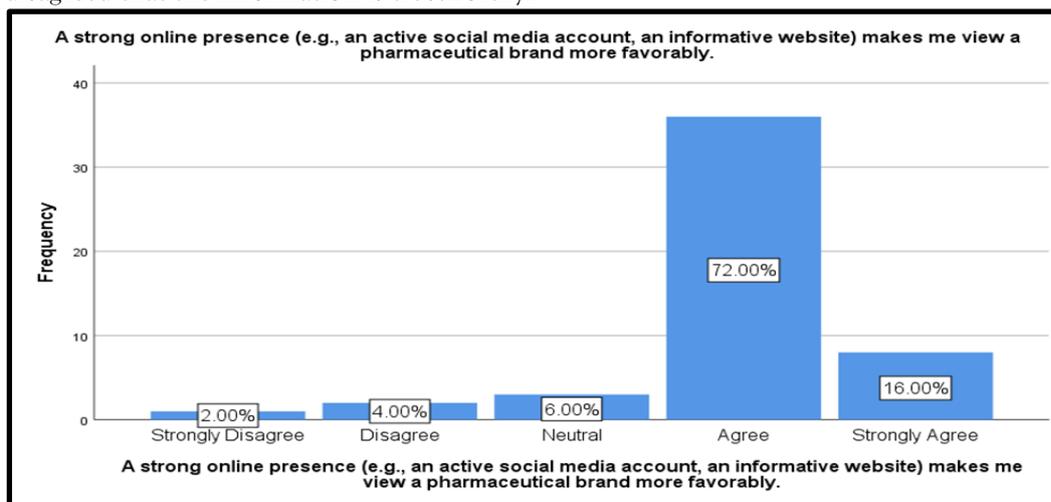

Figure 11: Strong online presence

72% of the survey respondents agreed that a strong online presence, such as an active social media account and informative website, makes a pharmaceutical brand more favourable to the customers. Nonetheless, 6% respondents are neutral regarding this, and 2% strongly disagreed.

Figure 12: Future purchase

44% of the participants strongly agreed that they will prefer buying from the pharmaceutical brands of their choice in future. While 6% remained neutral, 10% participants disagreed with this.
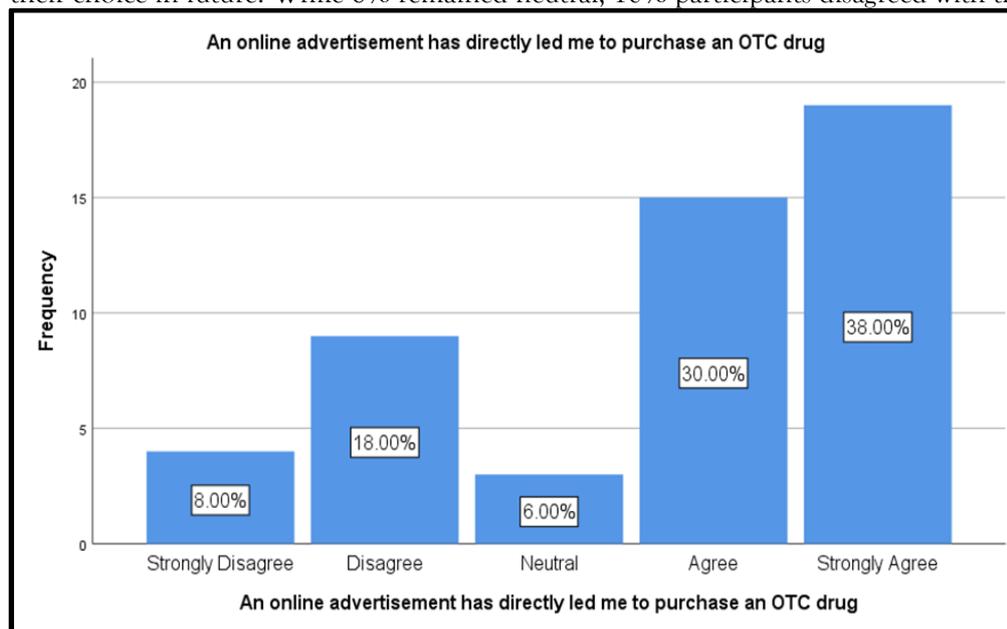

Figure 13: Online advertisement

Maximum 38% of the respondents strongly agreed that online advertising has a direct impact on the purchase decision. However, 18% participants also disagreed that online advertisement did not influence their purchase decision for OTC drugs.
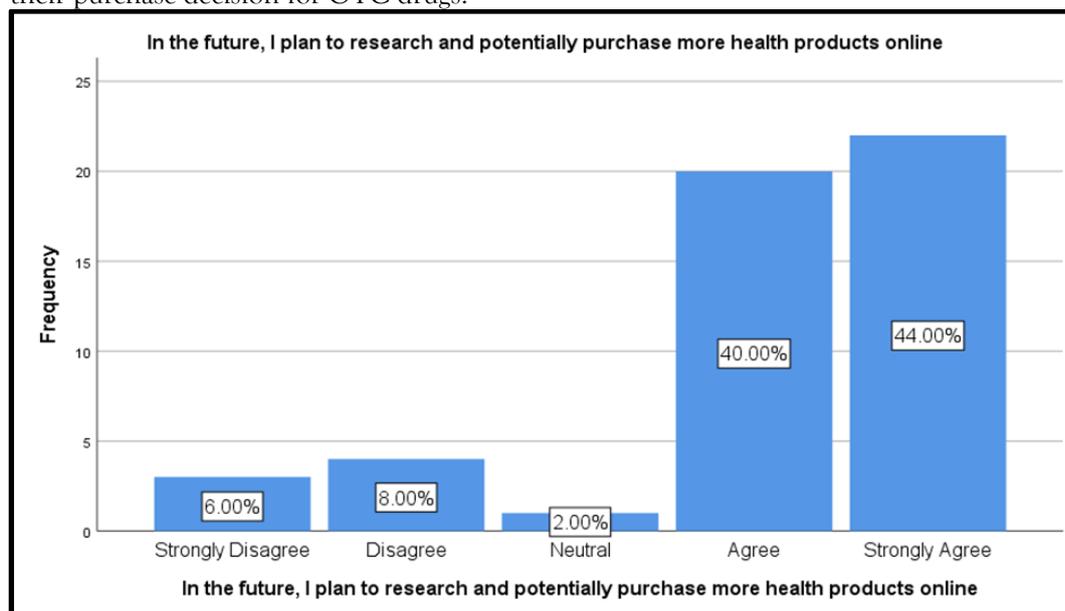

Figure 14: Future plan

As per the results of the survey, 44% participants strongly agreed and 40% participants agreed that in the future, they will do more research while purchasing health products online.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

CONCLUSION

Based on this study, it can be said that the first hypothesis, that there is a direct, simple relationship between digital marketing and consumer intention to buy a pharmaceutical product in emerging markets, is refuted. The empirical study based on a random sample of N=50 respondents demonstrated that the correlation between the two variables was within the limits, making it statistically insignificant. This leads to an inference that, though digital marketing is an omnipresent phenomenon, it has not been as directional in terms of influence on the buying of pharmaceutical products as other consumer items. The health-related purchase decision may be much more complicated and determined by a variety of other, stronger causes. The findings further suggest that it is necessary to obtain a closer realisation of how the

ethical issues and the harsh regulatory systems concerning the pharmaceutical industry can inhibit the success of direct-to-consumer digital promotion activities.

Suggestion

It can be suggested that rather than concentrating on direct sales, companies need to utilise digital channels to generate brand awareness and build trust. It can be done by means of educational content marketing, such as delivery of credible inducement to health along with product benefit exposure without promoting direct sales. Streamline it to be convenient and accessible, whether through making sure there is clear information on the presence of local pharmacies, ease of price comparisons, and easy-to-use e-commerce stores where legally possible.

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