IJARSCT
International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology
International Open-Access, Double-Blind, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Multidisciplinary Online Journal
ISSN: 2581-9429
Volume 6, Issue 6, November 2026
Impact Factor: 8.2

The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Transforming Pharmaceutical Marketing and Communication: A Case Study of the Indian Pharma Industry

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Abstract : *The pharmaceutical marketing arena in India is highly cluttered, regulated and ever evolving; forcing industry players to explore innovative approaches to communication, and pharma marketers to explore new communication channels. Digital channels and in particular artificial intelligence (AI) are being experimented with to stay connected with healthcare practitioners (HCPs) through personalised and timely digital communication. This paper explores the potential of AI enabled pharmaceutical communication in India, focussing on a conceptual, qualitative and case based design based on the literature, government orders, advertisements, reports and other secondary data. AI capabilities including machine learning, natural language processing and generative AI have been mapped to the pharma communication landscape in India for potential pharma communication applications, and a research gap in India specific scientific, compliant and contextual AI applications to pharma marketing identified. An AI-Enabled Pharmaceutical Communication Framework has been proposed for AI applications at the pre-conference, conference and post-conference stages, with India specific considerations. An example of applying AI to augment pharma conference communication has been illustrated, and differences with traditional marketing as well as challenges of data privacy, algorithmic bias, hallucination and ethical boundaries under the UCPMP 2024 have been discussed. The paper concludes with recommendations for managers and a research agenda for future studies.*

Keywords: The role of artificial intelligence in transforming pharmaceutical marketing and communication: A case study of the Indian pharma industry

I. INTRODUCTION

But pharmaceutical marketing is unlike that of other products: the people who decide what to buy and the people who use the product are often not the same, the products are scientifically sophisticated and communication is highly constrained by regulatory and ethical factors. Pharmaceutical companies have to educate HCPs about the safety, benefits and proper use of medicines, and cannot overtly market medicines in the same way as consumer brands. The challenge of persuasion versus responsibility makes the quality of communication core to the industry's social licence.

In the past 10 years, digital technologies have also reshaped HCP engagement. Doctors now turn to journals, webinars, professional messaging platforms, telehealth portals and search engines - in addition to, or instead of, face-to-face appointments. COVID-19 further accelerated this transition by limiting in-person detailing and shifting conferences online. At the same time, advances in machine learning, natural language processing (NLP) and generative AI have made it viable to process and generate content at scale, and even predict customer needs (Davenport et al., 2020; Huang and Rust, 2021).

India is a particularly interesting context for observing this change. The country has an enormous, fragmented and fiercely competitive home market, an extensive generic manufacturing industry, an enormous field force, and a fast digitising doctor population. However, most academic literature on AI in pharma marketing focuses on drug discovery

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and clinical development (Paul et al., 2021), with relatively little about commercial communication in emerging markets. Our contribution to that imbalance, in this paper, is to explore how the Indian pharma marketing and communication industry might be transformed with AI, and how that transformation can be achieved profitably and compliantly.

II. INDIAN PHARMACEUTICAL MARKETING: INDUSTRY CONTEXT

The Indian pharmaceutical industry is often considered to be one of the largest globally, based on volume of production, and among the largest in terms of global sourcing of generic medications and vaccines (India Brand Equity Foundation [IBEF], 2024). As many as several thousand manufacturers compete within the country's market, creating strong brand-level competition, especially in chronic therapies like diabetes, cardiovascular, respiratory and anti-infectives. Many products are chemically similar, which means that differentiation must focus on trust in the brand, quality perception, service offering and strength of the relationship with the prescriber.

India's three market structures imply three important constraints on marketing. First, the prescription-led model puts the physician in the centre of demand-generation and the typical large number of medical representatives is responsible for most of the commercial communication. Second, the market can be characterised by geographical spread: the information needs of the typical specialist in a metropolitan area, the tier-2 and tier-3 town general practitioners and the rural practitioner can be very different, and their access to and mastery of digital channels varies substantially. Third, regulation is getting stricter. The Uniform Code for Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP) 2024, issued by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, sets minimum standards for promotional claims, gifts, hospitality, sponsorships of events and behaviour by representatives, and it makes company management responsible for enforcement (Department of Pharmaceuticals, 2024).

The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 imposes obligations on any organisation that gathers or processes digital data on HCPs or patients (Government of India, 2023).

Combined, these factors give India a double edge, as a perfect showcase of AI-enabled communication thanks to its sheer scale, fragmentation and growing digital user base - but also a harsh test of whether these tools can work within very tight ethical and legal boundaries.

III. TRADITIONAL PHARMACEUTICAL MARKETING

Conventional pharmaceutical marketing relies on a few traditional communication channels. At the core of the promotional mix is personal selling (detail) by medical reps. They call on doctors, provide product information using visual aids and leave samples and literature in doctors' consulting rooms where this is allowed. These are complemented by print promotional material, journal advertising, CME programmes, symposia and supported conference attendance, and speaker programmes with KOLs.

This model has clearly defined advantages. Eye-to-eye contact develops trust, enables immediate discussion and establishes long term relationships. It also has some disadvantages which are becoming more apparent. Research on interactions between physicians and industry, for instance, already demonstrates that face-to-face representation is limited in duration and may be sales-driven or promotional (Wazana, 2000, Fugh-Berman and Ahari, 2007). The reach is restricted by the size of the field-force and the geographical field, the targeting is often based on historic sales data and the representative's judgement rather than rigorous evidence, the content is largely standardised so a general practitioner will get the same message as a cardiologist, and return on investment is hard to determine since a field call, a conference interaction and a subsequent prescription are almost impossible to track. Moreover, expectations of compliance are growing, making hospitality-based contact increasingly ineffective, and companies are being driven to provide value-adding information.

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IV. AI APPLICATIONS IN PHARMACEUTICAL MARKETING

AI involves computer systems that mimic human activities like analysing data, processing language, and making predictions (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2019). A classification of marketing applications involves mechanical AI, for mundane tasks, thinking AI, for analysis and forecasts, and feeling AI, for customer interaction (Huang & Rust, 2021). These can all be found in drug marketing. An overview of the central uses of AI can be found below.

- Customer segmentation and targeting. Machine-learning models take into account HCPs' prescribing behaviour, speciality, practice setting, digital behaviour and past engagement, using these to target high-potential HCPs and bucket them into actionable segments, evolving from static call lists to prioritised buckets.
- Next-best-action and omnichannel orchestration. Recommend-ation engines point out what message – through what channel (a representative visit, e-mail, messaging app, webinar or portal) – and when it will have the highest impact on a given HCP.
- Generation of content. Large language models are capable of producing initial drafts of disease-awareness materials, scientific summaries and slide decks, as well as multi-lingual communications that are further edited and approved by medical, legal and regulatory counterparts.
- Help from chatbots and virtual assistants Chatbots and virtual assistants address basic questions from providers about product features, dosing, administration, and others, while helping to triage more complex or adverse event-related questions to licensed medical personnel. The automated service is capable of recording these conversations.
- Social and sentiment monitoring. Natural language processing tools can be used to examine society's conversations, comments in surveys and conference responses to identify areas of new uncertainty, misinformation and their unmet information requirements (Ventola, 2014).
- Decisions modelling and support. Models for example estimate prescriber attrition or switching, and predict the anticipated impact of promotional activity, to assist planning of resources.
- Field-force enablement. AI copilots arm reps with account updates, offering talking points, transcribe and summarise meetings and automate reports so reps can spend more quality time engaging in scientific discussions.
- Translation and localisation. Machine translation and speech recognition makes scientific communication accessible in many of the regional languages of India.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research in our area of interest is presented along four streams. An initial body of research on AI in marketing addresses topics that include the impact of AI on marketing strategy, customer experience and customer relationships (Davenport et al., 2020). They define AI by its level of intelligence and whether it is embodied in a robot or is purely as software. They further (2020) provide an AI strategy framework with various capabilities mapped to the segmentation, targeting and positioning process.

The second stream is about AI in healthcare and pharmaceuticals. Davenport and Kalakota (2019) look at the potential of AI for clinical practice and administration; Paul et al. (2021) consider AI in drug discovery and development.

The 3rd stream considers traditional drug promotion and ethical implications. Wazana (2000) and Fugh-Berman and Ahari (2007) report how industry contacts may shape prescribing ideology, providing an extra reason for unbiased, evidence based persuasion. Ventola (2011, 2014) considers DTC advertising and social media use by healthcare professionals, outlining the potential and dangers of digital media.

The fourth flow relates to technology adoption and risk. The Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003) show how perceived usefulness and ease of use and social influence adoption, and are relevant to reps and HCPs who need to accept the AI tools. Additionally, concerns about algorithmic bias (Obermeyer et al., 2019) and nonfactual outputs from generative models, often described as hallucination (Ji et al., 2023), are key where inaccurate information could impact patient safety.

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VI. RESEARCH GAP

Despite renewed enthusiasm, four opportunities are missed. Firstly, virtually all examples of AI use in the pharma industry come from discovery and clinical development, and none from sales and marketing. Secondly, existing marketing-AI frameworks tend to be generic and, unsurprisingly, do not incorporate the requirements that make marketing in the pharma industry distinctive-the compliance paradigm. Thirdly, there has been little analysis relevant to India, accounting for the national regulatory instruments (UCPMP 2024, the DPDP Act 2023), language diversity and the heterogeneous digital maturity of its HCP community. Fourthly, concrete, event-level direction on how AI can assist medical conference communication, a traditional but still potent form of scientific interaction, is lacking. This paper addresses these four omissions, combining a context-specific India lens with compliance-aware guidance on marketing-AI and an illustrative event-based case.

VII. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

7.1 Research Objectives

However, a total of four opportunities are absent, despite revived interest in marketing-AI.

1. All indications of its pharma usage are restricted to discovery and clinical development with none from sales and marketing;
2. The marketing-AI touch-points frameworks are generic and, predictably, are silent on the demand for compliance-centricity that makes marketing in the pharma industry unique;
3. Little query has been devoted to implications for India, taking into account the nation's specialised regulatory instruments (UCPMP 2024, the DPDP Act 2023), multilingualism and the segmentation of its HCP population on the digital front; and
4. Adequate minimum event-level prescription on its deployment for academic conference communication, a staid but up to date communication channel.

7.2 Research Questions

- RQ1. What is the state of pharmaceutical marketing and communication practice in India and what are its shortcomings?
- RQ2. What types of AI are most pertinent to HCP engagement and scientific communications?
- RQ3. What are the ways in which AI can be incorporated within a communication framework that complies with Indian legal and ethical standards?
- RQ4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of replacing or augmenting existing methods with AI-assisted approaches?

VIII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a conceptual and qualitative research strategy, with an illustrative case. Given that the adoption of AI technology in pharmaceutical communication in India is still unfolding, systematic primary data does not yet exist for quantitative research, thus a conceptual approach is more apt. The methodology includes four parts.

- Secondary data analysis. The following data sources were utilised: Peer reviewed journal articles, publication reports (for example IBEF), books, government publications and regulations. Data sources were selected by ensuring their relevance to the areas of AI in marketing, healthcare communication and regulation of the pharmaceutical. Data was synthesised thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- Framework development. Themes from the review were combined with the regulatory context to arrive at a hierarchical framework for communication enabled by AI.
- Case study examples. Building on the principles of case-based research (Yin, 2018), a fictional, representative situation of an AI-assisted conference communications tool is used to demonstrate how the framework works in practice. This case is a hypothetical scenario based on reported functionality, it is not an assessment of any one company, and does not present measured outcomes.

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- Compared. Conventional and AI-powered techniques are weighed up with respect to specified domains, leading to advantages, disadvantages and the consequences.

The main drawback is that we do not have any first hand empirical data so the propositions cannot be statistically generalised to the extent that relevant sample data is not available. Section 15 shows how such data could be obtained through interviews, surveys and field experiments.

IX. PROPOSED AI-ENABLED PHARMACEUTICAL COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK

The proposed framework organises AI use into five connected layers, with governance running through all of them so that compliance is designed in rather than checked at the end.

Layer	Core activities	Example AI tools
1. Data foundation	Consolidate HCP profiles, engagement history, event data and feedback with consent; ensure data quality and security	Customer data platforms, data-cleansing and consent-management systems
2. Insight and segmentation	Segment HCPs, predict needs and engagement likelihood, detect topics of interest	Clustering, propensity models, NLP topic modelling
3. Content and personalisation	Draft, adapt and translate scientific content for each segment and language, under medical review	Generative AI, translation engines, content-recommendation systems
4. Engagement and delivery	Orchestrate channels, support representatives and answer routine queries	Next-best-action engines, chatbots, field-force copilots
5. Measurement and learning	Track engagement quality, feedback and outcomes; refine models	Dashboards, sentiment analysis, attribution models
Governance (cross-cutting)	Medical-legal-regulatory (MLR) approval, human oversight, audit trails, UCPMP and DPDP compliance, bias monitoring	Approval workflows, logging, access controls, model-monitoring tools

Three design principles underpin the framework. First, human-in-the-loop control: AI drafts and recommends, while qualified medical and regulatory professionals approve all promotional and scientific content. Second, evidence orientation: generated content must be grounded in approved sources such as the product label and published studies, which reduces the risk of hallucination. Third, value-led engagement: communication should help HCPs treat patients better, not merely increase message volume, in line with the information-centred spirit of the UCPMP.

X. TRADITIONAL VS AI-ASSISTED PHARMACEUTICAL MARKETING

Dimension	Traditional marketing	AI-assisted marketing
Targeting	Historical sales and field judgement	Predictive, data-driven prioritisation
Message	Standardised across audiences	Personalised by specialty, interest and language
Reach	Limited by field-force size and geography	Scalable across regions through digital channels
Availability	Working hours; scheduled visits	Round-the-clock for routine information

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Dimension	Traditional marketing	AI-assisted marketing
Content production	Slow, manual, agency-dependent	Faster drafting with mandatory expert review
Measurement	Indirect, lagging indicators	Near-real-time engagement analytics
Relationship	Strong personal rapport	Risk of impersonality unless blended with human contact
Cost profile	High variable cost per call	Higher upfront investment, lower marginal cost
Compliance control	Dependent on individual conduct	Can be systematised, but needs new oversight of models

The comparison suggests that the two approaches are complementary. The most effective model is likely to be a hybrid in which AI handles data analysis, content preparation and routine queries, and representatives and medical advisors concentrate on high-value scientific conversations.

XI. POTENTIAL BENEFITS

- More relevant. HCPs get content that meets their needs and focus so they receive less messages and are more receptive to the ones they get.
- Increased efficiency. Automation of reporting, drafting and routine inquiries allows representatives and medical teams to devote more time to the complex work.
- Greater access and equity. By far most centres and practitioners in small towns go without regularly being visited. And digital and multi-language tools can make quality scientific information go a lot further.
- Decisions you can act on. Analytics connect the dots between communication and engagement results and help you allocate your budget to what really works.
- Greater compliance. Approved-content libraries, audit logs and automated validation could help limit off-label or unapproved claims.
- Quick insights. By processing questions and feedback, we can identify information gaps more quickly than a post-event manual debrief.

XII. CHALLENGES AND RISKS

1. Data privacy and consent Processing of HCP and patient data would be governed by the DPDP Act 2023. The bases for processing are: consent, data minimisation and strong security (Government of India, 2023).
2. Accuracy and hallucination. Generative models have been observed to generate convincing but spurious output (Ji et al., 2023). This is critical in pharma, where mistakes around dosage, indications or safety are not an option, thus grounding and expert review are non-negotiable.
3. Algorithmic bias. Models that learn from incomplete or biased data can potentially overlook specific areas or subsets of physicians (Obermeyer et al., 2019).
4. Unclear regulations. Because standards like UCP 2024 were not designed for AI, there are still unanswered questions around, for instance, the validity of claims made by AI and chatbot conversations.
5. Concerns about ethics. Hyper-personalisation can be used for manipulation when it target specific weaknesses. Transparency of when an HCP interacts with AI.
6. Organisational readiness. Skills shortages, resistance by field staff, inaccurate data and legacy systems all can be barriers to adoption (Venkatesh et al, 2003).

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7. Cost and reliance. Building up technology and vendor base can be costly, and your SMBs may not be able to afford it.
8. A decine in the personal touch. Too much 'automation' may erode the personal touch which sustains relationships.

XIV. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Begin with clearly defined use cases, starting with low risk high return use cases like segmentation, content adaptation and event analytics and progress to patient facing or autonomous tools.
2. Establish decision-making framework. Develop cross-functional committee from marketing, medical affairs, legal, compliance and IT to authorize which AI use cases, content and vendors are permitted.
3. Make humans responsible. Depend on human validators to check all generated promotional and scientific content and establish channels for reporting adverse events.
4. Prioritize data quality and consent Clean, consented, well-secured HCP data should underpin every model.
5. Train and move field force. Re-skill reps as scientific partners of clinicians using AI insights as well as designing of the tools to reduce push back.
6. Monitor and audit your models. Regularly test models for accuracy, bias and drift and retain audit logs to demonstrate compliance to regulators.
7. Capture what counts. Monitor quality of scientific interactions and HCP satisfaction in addition to sales to prevent leading with volume.

XV. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Numerous follow ups are possible. Future research can explore implementation at a smaller scale by conducting interviews and survey based research with HCPs, marketing managers and medical representatives to validate the framework and measure acceptance rates with the help of technology adoption frameworks. Future experiments and longitudinal studies comparing the effects of AI assisted communication on engagement, knowledge and appropriate prescriptions while controlling for additional factors will help map the effectiveness of AI aided communication. Multi-case studies of Indian companies of various sizes, other emerging markets and ethnographies can highlight the role of scale in uptake. Further research can examine how AI tools are interpreted by regulatory bodies and auditing mechanisms for generative models for AI, text generation for AI in medical communication, language specific performance of generative tools for AI across Indian languages and ML based chatbot effectiveness, ethics and public impact.

XVI. CONCLUSION

AI can help India's pharmaceutical marketing evolve from its traditional field force-led, volume-orientated approach to a data-driven, multichannel, information-centric one. AI's real potential will lie in enhancing targetability, personalisation of scientific content, wider outreach and more effective measurement of communication as this report's suggested five-tiered framework and case study for the conference demonstrate. The associated risks are also high especially around data privacy, accuracy, bias and ethical marketing. If evidence from around the world is any indication, the right answer will lie in a hybrid model where AI supports natural human medical and field force expertise in the right governance framework. Companies with the right mix of tech skills, compliance and scientific credibility will be the winners. Empirical validation for this conceptual study in the Indian context will be an important next step.

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