

Investigating factors affecting drug purchasing behavior in light of digital practices used by Malaysian pharma companies to market and dispense their OTC products

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- Introduction/Background:** The practice of implementing digital marketing and e-commerce tactics can be increasingly observed, as it is especially adopted by pharma companies to promote their various OTC drug categories.⁽¹⁾ Therefore, the study's main objective was to identify the major factors that can impact OTC purchasing decisions among Malaysia's population amid the trend towards more digital inclusion in marketing and sales habits within the industry.
- Methodology:** In this cross-sectional study, both online and in-person methods were used to collect data from 408 respondents using a self-administered questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used. The data set was analyzed using SPSS 24.0.
- Results:** Most respondents were female and between the ages of 18-28. The study revealed that marketing strategies implemented via the internet for OTC drugs can significantly influence consumer purchase choices (M= 4.14; SD= 0.812) (**figure 1**). Noticeably, more than half (67.9%) confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic had at least some influence on their decision to purchase OTC products online (**figure 2**). The results of the regression analysis show that recommendations of others in online buying, online ads in online buying, online reviews, educational content, competitive online price, and quality of website/app were found to be significant predictors ($p < 0.01$) of consumer purchasing decisions for OTC drugs (**Table 1**).
- Discussion and conclusion:** To the best of our knowledge, the current research presents a unique perspective that has never been discussed in any Malaysian study in this context. It helped to understand further insights from the OTC consumers'/patients' perspectives. This is required to plan more successful marketing or health promotion initiatives in Malaysia's self-medication market, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tables

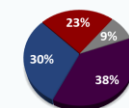
Table 1 - Multiple regression analysis (Coefficients)

Model	Coefficients		Sig.
	β	Std. Error	
Recommendations (offline buying)	0.053	0.035	0.126
Recommendations (online buying)	0.056	0.023	0.014
Brand name (offline buying)	0.049	0.032	0.134
Brand name (online buying)	0.026	0.023	0.282
Online ads (offline buying)	0.021	0.039	0.596
Online ads (online buying)	0.084	0.024	0.001
Other consumer reviews	0.118	0.031	0.000
Educational content	0.185	0.048	0.000
Convenience	0.064	0.041	0.116
Competitive online price	0.108	0.033	0.001
Quality of website/app	0.202	0.034	0.000

Figures



Figure 1 - Study participants agreement level about how digital marketing can influence their decision to purchase OTC drugs



Legend: ■ Yes, definitely ■ Somewhat ■ Not at all ■ Not sure

Figure 2 - COVID-19 pandemic impact on participants' online purchasing decision of OTC drugs

References

- Roblek, V. (2015), "Impact of Internet and Social Media on Organizational Change of OTC Medicines Marketing Management", International Journal of Electronic Marketing and Retailing, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 239-258.