

Marketing of Illicit Drugs on Facebook: Access and Control

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Abstract

The study primarily revolves around the general patterns of content on illicit drugs available on Facebook such as frequency of posts/ads, nature of the products, appeals used in the ads, claims made and legal status of the product. It further examined how FB audiences engage in accessing the product; take interest give approval, commenting for acceptance or rejection of the product etc. Researchers followed quantitative content analysis for the study. Top ten Facebook pages were examined for each category of advertised product. The study concluded that most of advertisements or posts for all types of products were unpaid. Majority of the advertised drugs were related to the Skin problems and Weight (Loss/Gain). Cosmetic aesthetics were highly targeted by the advertisers. Skin products had the highest percentage of Comments. Overall health items gave preventative claims, whereas Weight (Loss/Gain) items had a promotional claim along with Body Fitness. Self-actualization appeal was highly used in the advertisements. Besides all that, majority of the products were not approved by the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan.

Keywords: Illicit drugs on social media, Facebook and drugs, Quackery on social media, Illegal drug sale on Facebook, DRAP regulations for social media

Introduction

The The Web might be the technical breakthrough that has been used the most during the last two decades. According to figures from the U.S. Census Bureau for 2006, there are over 2 billion adolescent Internet users (Ryan, 2018). The Internet-related business and commerce expansion has brought about enormous advantages. The Internet has greatly dropped expenditures and expanded access to more things for further people across the globe by lubricating the wheels of business. Certainly, online operations are fundamental to the worldwide of trade. However, with the proliferation of cyber retailers and eager customers, a more sinister aspect of internet commerce has developed. Most people in both western and non-nations use the World wide web on a daily basis, which implies that there are more and more chances for people to engage in hidden behavioral patterns available on the internet that could be viewed as immoral or improper. The online sale of prescription drugs is one area that causes the most concern. This market has been invaded by dishonest and evildoers who are happy to offer contaminated, phony, and subpar pharmaceuticals to anybody having a payment card and the desire to pay. These sales frequently serve as both a base for further illegal activities and an illegitimate way of profit (Macky, Liang, York, & Kubic, 2015).

Due to the possibility of legal repercussions and social stigma if discovered, the use of illegal substances is a significant motivator for individuals to keep their use a secret in this situation. Worldwide, drug offences carry severe penalties as well as significant stigma. An increasing number of these Internet-based services are presently offered, and the increased accessibility of the Net makes it a particularly perfect medium for enhancing the accessibility of assistance for problem drinkers, smokers, and illegal drug users in all areas (Copeland & Martin, 2004).

Offering such services on the internet may have little influence on public health if drug consumers as a class are reduced prone to have exposure to the Internet, despite the high incidence of Web accessibility in the whole population and the opportunity for digital treatment at a relatively cheap cost. Who is engaged, what is being exchanged, how the distribution of the drugs to physical places is organized, and the financial activities related to the purchase and supply of the narcotics are all things which need to be kept under wraps? Analysts believe that the market that has been propelled by the Internet pharmacy company in 2004 had sales of \$15 to \$20 billion (Oliver, 2000).

Perspective of the Illicit Drugs

Typically, online pharmacies did not require a prescription from a patient's doctor. To create matters worse, just 50% of the websites selling medications online that needs a prescription request that it be faxed, creating enormous chances for fraud and getting around valid and significant doctor monitoring. All who purchase these medications assume the chance that they will not receive whatever they order or, worse still, that they will receive contaminated medications that will not successfully cure their disease(s) and may even cause them injury or death. Physician control of care is abandoned (Lian & Mackey, 2009).

Policymakers need to be aware of the harm that unrestricted Internet medication sales pose to public health in order for them to take the required action to solve the issue and enable patients to benefit from online shopping. The size of

Internet medicine sales is expanding, and there are several risks associated with them, especially for patient populations that are more susceptible. Patients continue to buy from suspicious online vendors despite warnings from authorities, enforcement agencies, and public safety groups, either because to a lack of knowledge or because it is difficult to obtain medications locally. Unfortunately, dishonest merchants and dubious suppliers occupy the realm of online drug sales, making it possible to buy almost any substance with impunity (Fung, Woo, & Asch, 2004).

Effects of these Illicit Drugs on social media

Certain medications have had their (non-medical) usage outlawed globally because it is thought that their effects are too hazardous or destructive. The Central Nervous System is affected by these substances, which may either stimulate it (as in the case of (crack) cocaine, amphetamines, or ecstasy) or inhibit it (as in the case of opiates, heroin, or sedative-hypnotics like benzodiazepines or barbiturates), or they might have hallucinatory affects (such as marijuana or hashish, LSD, and phencyclidine) (Houck & Siegel, 2015). Who is engaged, what is being exchanged, how the distribution of the drugs to physical places is organized, and the financial activities related to the purchase and supply of the narcotics are all things that require to be kept under wraps. Search engines are encouraged to increase the number of online advertisers by the profits from adverts. Although PharmacyChecker.com is used by Internet search engines to ostensibly "check" the validity of online drug retailers, very little real screening of the potential advertising occurs. "Verified" pharmacies do not adhere to the purported verification "requirements" and offer bogus medications. The adverts for un-trusted pharmacies benefit respectively the medication and the search engine.

Theoretical Framework

The study involved descriptive method as was based on research questions. No association between variables was predicted hence the grounded theory approach was adopted. Theory of Persuasion and Propaganda Models and Techniques were found relevant to the major concepts of this study. The researchers intend to conduct hypothetical studies on the basis of theoretical propositions in their further research.

Research Design and Method

According to Kumar (2011) it is crucial for researchers to understand the strategies that will be used to approach certain problems utilizing different approaches. This study is quantitative in nature and for quantitative review, the content analysis method was used. Content of Facebook pages operating in Pakistan selling so-called herbal, non-registered drugs/ not approved from DRAP and Facebook advertisements of such medicines were analyzed.

Population and Sampling

The FB pages and advertisements relating to the illicit drugs/nonregistered medicines/ so called herbal treatments etc. were taken as the population of the content analysis. Top 10 Facebook pages were selected by relevant keywords on the basis of the number of their followers/likes as the sample frame. The pages were found out through different keywords through the Meta data. Top five Posts of the selected pages were analyzed and the coding sheet was compiled for further analysis.

Research Questions

RQ1 What are the general patterns of content on illicit drugs available on Facebook such as frequency of posts/ads, nature of the products, appeals used in the ads, claims made and legal status of the product?

RQ2 How do the FB audiences engage in accessing the product; taking interest in any product, giving approval, giving positive comments and rejection of the product by condemning it?

Data Analysis

SPSS (V.23) was used to analyze the data. Cross tabulation technique was used. Following are the statistics:

Table 1.
*Nature of the product * Paid Advertisement Cross tabulation*

Nature of the product	Paid Advertisement		
	Unpaid Ad	Paid Ad	Total
Skin	74	1	75
	98.7%	1.3%	100.0%
Hair	41	1	42
	97.6%	2.4%	100.0%
Height	30	1	31
	96.8%	3.2%	100.0%
Multivitamin	127	6	133
	95.5%	4.5%	100.0%
Weight (Loss/ Gain)	50	1	51
	98.0%	2.0%	100.0%
Beauty	34	1	35
	97.1%	2.9%	100.0%
Overall Health	83	11	94
	88.3%	11.7%	100.0%
Total	439	22	461
	95.2%	4.8%	100.0%

According to the table 1, a total of 461 comments from the top most pages with the most subscribers and likes in various classes were exposed in Facebook pages for skin, accounting for 98.7 percent of unpaid ads and 4 per cent of paid ads. Hair pages made 97.6% of all unpaid ads and 2.4 % of all paid ads. There are 96.8% unpaid and 3.2 percent paid adverts in the category of Height. Unpaid advertisements for Multivitamin account for 95.5 percent of the total, while paid advertisements account for 2.0 percent. 98.0 percent of the ads on the Weight (Loss/Gain) pages are unpaid, while 2.0 percent were paid. 97.1 % of Beauty page ads are unpaid, whilst 2.9 proportion are paid. Unpaid promotions provided 88.3 percent of total health advertisements, whereas paid advertisements contributed for 11.7 percent.

Table 2.
*Nature of the product * Self Advertisement Cross tabulation*

Nature of the product	Self Advertisement		
	Other's Product	Self Product	Total
Skin	47	28	75
	62.7%	37.3%	100.0%
Hair	27	15	42
	64.3%	35.7%	100.0%
Height	15	16	31
	48.4%	51.6%	100.0%
Multivitamin	73	60	133
	54.9%	45.1%	100.0%
Weight (Loss/ Gain)	41	10	51
	80.4%	19.6%	100.0%
Beauty	22	13	35
	62.9%	37.1%	100.0%
Overall Health	46	48	94
	48.9%	51.1%	100.0%
Total	271	190	461
	58.8%	41.2%	100.0%

Table.2 data analysis reveals that a total of 461 adverts were examined for various categories. 62.7 percent of the advertisements in the skin genre are for Other Products, while 37.3 percent are for Self-Products. Hair category accounts for 64.3 percent for Other Product and Self-Products description is for 35.7 percent. Height shows 48.4

percent for Other Products and Self Products account for 51.6 percent. To Multivitamin, the Other Products adverts are of 54.9 percent and 45.1 percent for the Self Products. Type of Weight (Loss/Gain) contributes 80.4 percent in Other Product adverts and 19.6 percent in Self Products. Beauty pages have 62.9 percent other product advertisements and 37.1 for Self Products. The kind of pages for Overall Health has 48.9 percent as Other Product while for Self Product it is 51.1 percent.

Table 3.
*Nature of the product * Post Cross tabulation*

Nature of the product	Posts		
	Posted by Group Admin	Posted by Group Members	Total
	Skin	29 38.7%	46 61.3%
Hair	16 38.1%	26 61.9%	42 100.0%
Height	17 54.8%	14 45.2%	31 100.0%
Multivitamin	66 49.6%	67 50.4%	133 100.0%
Weight (Loss/ Gain)	11 21.6%	40 78.4%	51 100.0%
Beauty	14 40.0%	21 60.0%	35 100.0%
Overall Health	60 63.8%	34 36.2%	94 100.0%
Total	213 46.2%	248 53.8%	461 100.0%

A total of 461 commercials were assessed for various categories, according to the data in Table 3. Group Admin publishes 38.7% of group posts in the skin category, while Group Members post 61.3 percent. Group Admin postings account for 38.1 percent of all postings with in Hair domain, while Group Members posts contribute for 35.7 percent. Group Admins have 48.4 percent of the postings for the type Height, while Group Members have 51.6 percent. Group Admin responses for Multivitamin are 49.6%, while Group Member contributions are 50.4 percent. 21.6 percent of Group Admin entries and 78.4 percent of Group Member posts are for the Weight (Loss/Gain) kind. Group Admin postings accounted for 40.0 percent of total posts on Beauty pages, while Group Member entries make 60.0 percent. According to the statistics in Tab.4.3, Group Admin is responsible 63.8 percent of the submissions on Overall Health pages are by Group Admin, while Group Members are responsible for 36.2 percent entries.

Table 4.
*Nature of the product * People shown interest Cross tabulation*

		People shown interest			Total
		Least Interested	Moderately Interested	Highly Interested	
Nature of the product	Skin	11 14.7%	12 16.0%	52 69.3%	75 100.0%
	Hair	16 38.1%	7 16.7%	19 45.2%	42 100.0%
	Height	7 22.6%	7 22.6%	17 54.8%	31 100.0%
	Multivitamin	23 17.3%	24 18.0%	86 64.7%	133 100.0%
	Weight (Loss/ Gain)	10 19.6%	10 19.6%	31 60.8%	51 100.0%
	Beauty	15 42.9%	6 17.1%	14 40.0%	35 100.0%
	Overall Health	20 21.3%	23 24.5%	51 54.3%	94 100.0%
	Total	102 22.1%	89 19.3%	270 58.6%	461 100.0%

According to the statistics in table 4, a total of 461 comments were evaluated for various categories. In the category of skin, 14.7 percent of individuals are Least Interested, 16.0 percent are Moderately Interested, and 69.3 percent are Highly Interested. Within the Hair genre, 38.1 % are Highly Interested, 22.6 % are Moderately Interested, and 45.2 % are Low Interested. High Comments represent for 22.6 percent of the Height theme, while Moderately Interested accounts for 22.67 percent and Low Interested accounts for 54.8 percent. 17.3 percent of High Comments, 18.0 percent of Moderate Comments, and 64.7 percent of Low Comments came from the Multivitamin group. Weight (Loss/Gain) remarks represent 19.6% of High Comments, 19.6% of moderate comments, and 60.8 percent of low comments. High comments pay for 42.9 percent of overall comments on Beauty pages, while Moderate comments make for 17.1 percent and Low comments stand for 40.0 percent. There are 21.3 percent High Comments, 24.5 percent Moderate Comments, and 54.3 percent Low Comments on the overall health pages.

Table 5.
*Nature of the product * People who tested the product Cross tabulation*

	People who tested the product			Total	
	High Testimony	Moderate Testimony	Low Testimony		
Nature of the product	Skin	4 5.3%	9 12.0%	62 82.7%	75 100.0%
	Hair	10 23.8%	8 19.0%	24 57.1%	42 100.0%
	Height	4 12.9%	8 25.8%	19 61.3%	31 100.0%
	Multivitamin	11 8.3%	15 11.3%	107 80.5%	133 100.0%
	Weight (Loss/ Gain)	3 5.9%	10 19.6%	38 74.5%	51 100.0%
	Beauty	9 25.7%	9 25.7%	17 48.6%	35 100.0%
	Overall Health	12 12.8%	18 19.1%	64 68.1%	94 100.0%
	Total	53 11.5%	77 16.7%	331 71.8%	461 100.0%

According to the statistics in Table 5, a total of 461 comments were evaluated for different categories. In terms of skin type, 5.3 percent have High Testimony, 12.0 percent have Moderate Testimony, and 82.7 percent have Low Testimony. Within the Hair category, 23.8 percent of users have High Testimonials, 19.0 percent have Moderate Testimonials, and 57.1 percent have Low Testimonials. High Testimonials account for around 12.9 percent of all testimonials, followed by Moderate Testimonials at 25.8% and Low Testimonials at 61.3 percent. High Testimonials accounted for 8.3%, Moderate Testimonials for 11.3 percent, and Low Testimonials for 80.5 percent.

There are two types of testimonies: moderate and high. 5.9% of High Testimonials, 19.6% of Moderate Testimonials, and 74.5 percent of Low Testimonials are of the Weight (Loss/Gain) kind. There are 25.7 percent High Testimonials, 25.7 percent Moderate Testimonials, and 48.6 percent Low Testimonials on beauty sites. There are 12.8 percent High Testimonials, 19.1 percent Moderate Testimonials, and 68.1 percent Low Testimonials on the Overall Health pages.

Table 6

*Nature of the product * Promotions used for the product Cross tabulation*

	Promotions used for the product					Total	
	Discounted price	Lucky Draw	small offers	No Promotion	Free Delivery		
Nature of the product	Skin	29 38.7%	1 1.3%	1 1.3%	38 50.7%	6 8.0%	75 100.0%
	Hair	16 38.1%	0 0.0%	1 2.4%	25 59.5%	0 0.0%	42 100.0%
	Height	7 22.6%	0 0.0%	1 3.2%	18 58.1%	5 16.1%	31 100.0%
	Multivitamin	35 26.3%	0 0.0%	9 6.8%	79 59.4%	10 7.5%	133 100.0%
	Weight (Loss/ Gain)	4 7.8%	1 2.0%	7 13.7%	29 56.9%	10 19.6%	51 100.0%
	Beauty	2 5.7%	0 0.0%	4 11.4%	24 68.6%	5 14.3%	35 100.0%
	Overall Health	17 18.1%	0 0.0%	8 8.5%	66 70.2%	3 3.2%	94 100.0%
	Total	110 23.9%	2 0.4%	31 6.7%	279 60.5%	39 8.5%	461 100.0%

According to the statistics in Table 6, a total of 461 goods were evaluated for various categories. The promotions employed by the various pages and items were evaluated here. For skin type items, 38.7% provide discounted prices, 1.3 % offer a lucky draw, 1.3 percent offer little offers, 50.7 % do not offer any promotions, and 8.0 percent offer free delivery. For Hair, 38.1 % use Discounted Prices, 0.0 % use Lucky Draw, 2.4 % use Small Offers, 59.5 % use No Promotions, and 8.0 % use Free Delivery as the Product Promotion.

The promotional approach used by the Height category is 22.6 % Discounted Price, 0.0 percent Lucky Draw, 3.2 percent Small Offers, 58.1 percent No Promotional Offers, and 16.1 % Free Delivery. Multivitamin type items were employed in the promotions, with 26.3 percent offering discounted prices, 0.0 percent presenting a lucky draw, 6.8 percent giving small offers, 59.4 percent giving no promotions, and 7.5 percent providing free delivery. Weight(Loss/Gain): 7.8 percent supply discounted prices, 2.0 percent use a lucky draw, 13.7 percent offer little offers, 56.9% offer no promotions, and 19.6 percent offer free delivery as a product promotion.

The promotional techniques used in the Beauty sector include 5.7 percent Discounted Price, 0.0 % Lucky Draw, 11.4% Small Offers, 68.6 percent No Promotional Offers, and 14.3 % Free Delivery. In the Overall Health category, promotional strategies encompass 18.1 % Discounted Price, 0.0 % Lucky Draw, 8.5 percent Small Offers, 70.2 percent No Promotional Offers, and 3.2 percent Free Delivery.

Results

The study is about the usage, sale and purchase of the uncontrolled drugs on the Facebook. The top most pages with high number of subscribers and likes are chosen for study.

Paid Advertisement

According to the findings, most of advertisements or posts for all types of products are unpaid. These are advertisements that were created without the use of any funds. Skin related products are majorly unpaid while the products related to Weight (Loss/Gain) are the next largest part of the unpaid advertisements.

Self-Advertisement

Self-promotion is a form of advertising in which one advertises its own products on the Facebook page. Weight (Loss/Gain) got the highest number for the Self Advertisements while the products related to the Hair stand as the second major under the current headings.

Post

In this study the Weight (Loss/Gain) type products has the highest number of postings by group members whereas the Overall Health genre received the next top most number of posts by Group Admin'. According to the study, the quantity of posts made by Group Admin and Group members are equivalent.

No of Comments

The sum of comments on the items and their sites is also evaluated. The kind of product named "Skin" had the Highest Comments in this study whilst the Multivitamin are the next in this high number of comments. High Comments are more common than Moderate and Low Comments, according to this study.

People shown interest

Skin type items have the highest number of interested users and the Multivitamin is at the next level of these highly interested persons. According to the study, high Interested people are more for any product than Moderately Interested and Low Interested people.

People who tested the product

The product Skin has the Lowest Testimony for the product which is followed by the Multivitamin. This study shows that Low Testimony is the most common, rather than Moderate Testimony and High Testimony.

People who are condemning the product

People who have tried the product but found it to be harmful or worthless fall into the last group of opinions. These are people who are denouncing the crowd. The field Skin has the least condemning comments and the Multivitamin is at the next level in these least Condemning. According to the findings, Low Condemning is more common than Moderate Condemning and High Condemning for various items.

Target Audience

The most significant aspect of any product advertising is the audience that must be addressed. It should be apparent who this product is intended for. Skin artifacts for women contributed highest in the target audience advertisements, while products for the Overall Health stand next of the whole, for the target audience as General. According to the research, the majority of skin care products are aimed at women, however overall health goods are for everyone and may be used by anybody.

Promotions used for the product

Every advertiser employed certain promotional strategies in order to promote their goods. The Hair type with No Promotion wins the maximum number of goods. Beauty Products come in second with No Promotion. According to the research, the majority of the items had no promotions.

Health Claims

Every product's marketing includes some assertions that are made in the advertising. There are also health claims for every medicine. Overall Health type comes out on top, with highest number of respondents, claiming Precautionary. While Weight (Loss/gain) products are next in line, with highest health claim of Body Fitness. According to the analyses, overall health items have a preventative claim, whereas Weight (Loss/Gain) items have a promotional claim of Body Fitness.

Appeals used in the advertisement

There are several appeals used in advertising to market any product. Multivitamin is at the top of the list with Self Actualization Appeal. The category of Height articles comes in second with Self Actualization Appeal.

Access to the Product

There are numerous ways to get online access to the product. Beauty has the highest percentage of people who use Contact Though Inbox, while Weight (Loss/Gain) has next level of consumers who use Contact through the Online Order System. According to the results, the majority of items have contact with Whatsapp.

Delivery of the Product

One of the most pressing concerns is product delivery. Weight (Loss/Gain) products are highly accessible, without a prescription and the Beauty items are at second level in such type of accessibility. According to the report, the most of the items offered on Facebook are available without a prescription.

Discussion

The findings of the study said that most of the posts are unpaid that contradicts with the study by (Rao and Sankar, 2017) who address internet advertising that it is a paid approach of a digital medium and a reputable sponsor to advertise products and services is included. The intention of the assessment describe that the advertisement is directly connected with the concern of the target audience so it is in line with the investigation's main goals by (Usman, 2013) which is to increase the effectiveness of promotion in persuading the target audience.

The findings depict that high no of comments show more participants and the people who reject the product are also condemning the product is consistent with the research of (Brace, Edwards and Nancarrow, 2002) which explains how audience participation affects the efficacy of advertising. The study illustrates the usage of different appeals including fear appeal in the advertising that supports the assertions made in the article by (Hastings, Stead, and Webb, 2004) which discusses the prevalent usage of fear appeals in internet commerce is addressed in this article. Forced exposure, short-term assessment, and an excessive reliance on student samples are some of the shortcomings of experimental studies, which have formed the foundation for the majority of the work on fear appeals and which typically imply that high fear works.

The research express that there are multiple appeals as well as claims associated with the advertisements of the product that compliance with this article by (TStephen, 2015) reviews recently published research about consumers in digital and social media marketing settings. This article covers newly released studies on consumers in the context of social media and digital marketing. There are five themes that have been identified: (1) consumer digital culture, (2) reactions to internet ads, (3) impacts of online surroundings on consumer behavior (4) mobile environments, and (5) online word-of-mouth (WOM). These articles together give insight from a variety of perspectives on how consumers interact with, shape, and are shaped by the digital worlds that they are positioned in as part of their everyday lives.

The study's discovery about the easy access and delivery of the product via social media is consistent with (Chung and Austria, 2010). This study looks at the (1) motivations for using social media, (2) perceptions of online promotional statements, and (3) the efficacy of messaging promoting the benefits of online buying. This study's analysis prescribes that the appeals and claims used by the advertisement of the product are the key element for the persuasion of the user. Customers must anticipate obtaining the advantages that are promoted, the rewards of the commodity should be stressed in the promotional appeal, and the attraction should show whether the product is better than competing items (Philip T. Kotler, 2010)

According to the research, fear appeals are frequently utilized in health and other items. However, this study indicated that the majority of fear appeals come from cleaning products, cosmetics, and toiletries. A fear appeal, according to (Williams, 2012), suggests the risks of utilizing or not using a certain good, service, or idea, with the inference that if you don't "purchase," you'll experience negative outcomes. Fear appeals are frequently employed in advertisements for healthcare items, but they are also used for a wide range of other products, including those for personal safety, insurance, and financial security (Williams, 2012).

Conclusion

The study concluded that most of the advertisements or posts for all types of products were unpaid. Majority of the advertised drugs were related to the Skin problems and Weight (Loss/Gain). Cosmetic aesthetics were highly targeted by the advertisers. Both the page administrators and viewers were equally sharing their contents for promotion. Skin products had the highest percentage of Comments. Overall-health items gave preventative claims, whereas Weight (Loss/Gain) items had a promotional claim along with Body Fitness. Self-actualization appeal was highly used in the advertisements. More than 95% percent of the drugs are not approved from DRAP as validated through their official portal.

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