

Technological Effects on Advertising in the Publishing and Pharmaceutical Industries

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Within the last 20 years, technology has influenced many aspects of both the publishing and the pharmaceutical industries. Yes, these industries may be incredibly different from each other, but the fact of the matter is that both are consumer industries that aim to sell product for profit. As such, both must employ certain marketing strategies to grasp the attention of their target consumer audiences, which can be achieved most diligently through using modern technologies that appeal to the consumer base. This paper will examine three marketing aspects that have been rapidly shaped by advancements in technology, and which both the publishing and the pharmaceutical industries use to attract consumers from the ever-increasing digital age. Such topics will compare and contrast how technology has created and influenced 1) the use of ‘samples’ as a means to attract a buyer, 2) social media usage as an entity in our digital technology use, and 3) peer-to-peer or ‘consumer’ marketing, through consumer-created content on websites such as YouTube. In this way, one may better understand how technology has dramatically shaped the evolutionary marketing practices of both industries.

To begin, technological innovation has been paramount in maintaining success in business industries. On the pharmaceutical end, developments in nanotechnology over the past 30 years have led to an explosion in the discovery and synthesis of pharmaceutical drugs, along with the Big Pharma’s need to apply current digital trends to its marketing and distribution practices (Cardinal, 2001, p. 19). On the publishing end, digital innovation and the emergence of the World Wide Web has allowed for books to be digitized and transmitted instantly from one consumer to the next. As such, both industries have made use of ‘sampling’ as a valuable marketing tool, by allowing consumers to ‘taste’ a product before considering whether or not one should purchase it.

The book publishing industry has made excessive use of sampling through taking advantage of the Internet’s intangibility. Booksellers, such as Amazon and Google Books, allow consumers to read a set amount of text before they are made to buy the book if they are to read any further — a marketing practice that can only be made effective through information technology, rather than a physical book. Similarly, the upsurge in new prescription drugs, as brought about by rapidly developing laboratory technology, has fostered increased competition amongst pharmaceutical companies vying for physicians’ attention. While drug samples are physically distributed to medical practitioners, doctors most often make cost-effective use of e-Sampling and promotional websites in order to research and order these free samples for their patients (Ding et. al, 2014, p. 514). Drug sampling, in this case, (though it easily applies to both industries) has been described as “the most effective way to introduce a new product or to create new excitement for an existing one” (Ding, 2014, p. 510). Samples are undoubtedly effective in promoting products and increasing sales.

Though, while both industries employ sampling techniques to entice consumers,

there is a significant difference in the ease of sampling access between books and drugs; one that's contingent upon tangibility. While consumers can digitally sample books 'on the go' through a publisher's direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising technique, competitive pharmaceutical companies do not have such a luxury. Drug samples are limited not only because they are a physical substance rather than virtual information, but also because they cannot be legally distributed from the manufacturer to the consumer (p. 510). Doctors and other medical practitioners act as the "gatekeepers" to pharmaceutical drugs, thus driving up the cost of distribution, and limiting consumer (patient) choice (p. 510). To sample an online book — a product comprised of information — can be instant, flexible, significantly cheaper, and in most cases free, whereas to administer a free drug sample to a patient requires time, transportation and distribution costs. It's also worth noting differences in consumer satisfaction; consumers are compelled to buy a text in order to satisfy their desire for the final product; free prescription drugs are often accessed by patients who are satisfied after drug-use, and whom take advantage of quick access to reduce their medical expenses (p. 510).

The publishing and pharmaceutical industries also make use of advertising through social media — interactive platforms brought about by the Internet. Publishers use Facebook, Twitter, FTP services, and video-sharing websites like YouTube to promote their books to mass audiences. In April, 2013, Michael Shatzkin, outlines, [on his blog *The Idea Logical Company*](#), one of the main forces shaping the publishing industry: the process of "atomization," in which any person on the web has the necessary tools for publishing content that can be accessed by anyone at any time. Publishers have taken advantage of this open-based publishing arena in order to target audiences with their advertisements, and have now even branched out [into using smartphone apps to promote their products](#). Advertising companies are also using the web to teach authors and companies how to make the most of their online promotions by using certain strategies on social media — as evidenced by [StandoutBooks](#), a company dedicated to "[serv\[ing\] authors and companies worldwide](#)" so they can "[make the most of the change \nand opportunity enveloping the publishing industry.](#)"

In Canada, pharmaceutical companies have been trying to navigate their prescription drug markets through the social media landscape, though not as successfully. You see, in contrast to the United States, [Canada has banned all pharmaceutical direct-to-consumer \(DTC\) advertising through traditional media](#). This poses a problem for Canadian pharmaceutical companies in that they cannot advertise their products on the radio or television; they can, however, circumvent Canadian laws by advertising on social media. This posed considerable controversy in 2013 when, [as *The Vancouver Sun* reported](#), Canadians were "inundated" with ads on all social media platforms, while policy experts from the B.C. Medical Association (BCMA) voiced their concerns that the federal government should place stronger focus on vetting sneaky pharmaceutical companies who were supposedly breaking the law. In using the same social media advertising strategies as publishers, 'Big Pharma' has challenged the validity of Canadian laws, and have influenced policy officials to enact stricter law enforcement strategies.

Though, just last August, [The Toronto Star reported that Canadian company Pfizer](#) had released a new pharmaceutical website aimed at extending reach to social media users including physicians, and thus again threatening Canada's weak security laws. In the U.S., however, pharmaceutical companies have traversed all areas of social media and have made great progress in influencing consumers to purge their doctors for certain brand-name drugs.

Finally, peer-to-peer marketing has played a role in attracting a consumer base for publishers and pharmaceuticals, though these marketing strategies have been far

more prominent and successful with publishers. YouTube offers an ideal video-sharing setting for authors to promote their books, and consumers to promote the books they have read. [DW posted this past summer](#) that the practice of making videos (vlogs) about books, coined “BookTubing,” is a relatively novel form of marketing that publishers have leapt on in recognition of its advertising success; one video has the potential to reach thousands, even millions of potential buyers. High profile consumers from the pharmaceutical industry have also made attempts to promote prescription drugs through peer-sharing or social media platforms. One such instance includes celebrity Kim Kardashian, who, [as The Guardian reported](#), teamed up with drug maker Duchesnay USA this past August to promote a morning sickness drug called Diclegis, on Instagram. Government officials then contacted the drug maker to demand that Kardashian remove the Instagram post, claiming it to be “false or misleading” in that it “fails to communicate any risk information associated with its use and it omits material facts.” Once again, the pharmaceutical industry has faced legal controversy over its DTC marketing tactics, while evidently violating U.S. transparency laws.

Conclusively, technological developments in both the publishing and pharmaceutical industries have created and influenced new-age marketing techniques in each respective industry. It’s interesting to examine how two vastly different products, one tangible and the other intangible, have managed to employ, to some degree, the same marketing strategies, though with varying success. While publishers have been given the ‘easy road’ in promoting their information-products through an open, available Web, Big Pharma has risen to the challenge of employing the same sampling, social media, and peer-to-peer advertising tactics, but has been bombarded with criticism and legal controversy, due to restrictions in DTC advertising. It’s compelling to note how an industry that provides drug products that can significantly impact one’s life strives to reach out to consumers in the same ‘nonchalant’ open-web style as used by book publishers — who have nothing to fear from producing harmless content. This may lead one to speculate as to whether pharmaceuticals should re-think their advertising practices so that they do not potentially endanger the lives of their consumers. Nonetheless, technology, through expanded innovation and increased competition, has played just as profound a role in shaping the pharmaceutical industry as it has with book publishers.

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