

Assessing Direct Marketing and Personal Selling Tools Used by Medical Representatives

Direct marketing and personal selling tools are the tools most used by medical representatives in their daily work. The aim of the study is therefore to assess the direct marketing and personal selling tools used by medical representatives and to provide recommendations for their effective use. The research includes results from a questionnaire survey of healthcare professionals and semi-structured interviews with medical representatives. Based on the findings, the article provides insights into what changes might be useful in the use of direct marketing and personal selling tools.

Keywords: direct marketing, personal selling, marketing tools, medical representative, healthcare professional.

Tiesioginio marketingo ir asmeninio pardavimo priemonės dažniausiai naudoja medicinos atstovai kasdieniame darbe. Todėl tyrimo tikslas – įvertinti medicinos atstovų naudojamas tiesioginio marketingo ir asmeninio pardavimo priemonės ir pateikti rekomendacijas, kaip jas efektyviai naudoti. Atlikus tyrimą supažindinama su sveikatos priežiūros specialistų anketinės apklausos ir pusiau struktūruoto interviu su medicinos atstovais rezultatais. Jais remiantis, straipsnyje pateikiama įžvalga, kokie pokyčiai galėtų būti prasmingi naudojant tiesioginės rinkodaros ir asmeninio pardavimo priemones.

Raktiniai žodžiai: tiesioginis marketingas, asmeninis pardavimas, marketingo priemonės, medicinos atstovas, sveikatos priežiūros specialistas.

Introduction

Expenditure on pharmaceuticals is rising rapidly around the world. Data provided by the State Medicines Control Agency of Lithuania (Valstybinė vaistų kontrolės tarnyba, 2023) reveals that in 2021, there was a substantial increase of 23.9% in the sales of nominal pharmaceutical packages in Lithuania compared to 2020, and a further increase of 11% increase in 2022 compared to 2021. As

the quality of the Lithuanian healthcare system and access to healthcare improves, and as the population ages, prescription rates are also increasing. In Lithuania, the prerogative of recommending or prescribing medications and medical aids to patients primarily rests with healthcare professionals, notably physicians, and, in some instances, nurses. However, it is important not to overlook the major role played by pharmaceutical companies. The increasing availability of pharmaceutical

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products, pharmaceutical marketing campaigns and the use of various marketing communication tools also influence the course of prescription growth.

The behaviour of medical representatives and the use of marketing communication tools within the pharmaceutical sector are subject to regulation as outlined in the Code of Ethics for Pharmaceutical Marketing (Vaistų rinkodaros etikos kodeksas, 2022). Direct marketing and personal selling have been used for decades. Personal selling and direct marketing, when employed in conjunction, demonstrate a dynamic interplay, characterized by complementary, substitutive, and synergistic dimensions. This symbiotic amalgamation can yield amplified sales performance (Hansen, 2009). Personal selling facilitates a reciprocal and interactive dialog between the medical representative and healthcare professionals, fostering the establishment of a human connection and trust. Such a connection sets the stage for a mutually advantageous exchange. Notably, the value derived from a medical representative's personal visit substantially surpasses that of direct marketing tools. Consequently, nurturing relationships with healthcare professionals continues to occupy a pivotal role in the financial prosperity of pharmaceutical enterprises (Dingus, 2017). Empirical investigations affirm a correlation between the use of diverse marketing communication tools during the personal visit and prescription rates (Gray, Hoffman, Mansfield, 2009). However, a medical representative's visit transcends the confines of personal selling as an isolated marketing element. An effective visit necessitates the incorporation of direct marketing tools, such as the

provision of brochures, product samples, clinical trial data, graphical representations, clinical cases, and similar resources (Dar, 2020). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the conventional marketing approach, which has been prevalent for many years, is no longer tenable. This approach is yielding to alternative strategies that endorse direct communication with customers. Such strategies include using various tools, as postal communication, email, phone calls, text (SMS) messages, and face-to-face interactions (Abraham, Joseph, 2019). This is supported by G. Azoev, E. Sumarokova and G. Butkovskaya (2019) who state that the situation in pharmaceutical advertising has started to change drastically over the last 10 years. Digital channels have opened up new communication opportunities for contact with target audiences to achieve educational and business goals (Azoev et al., 2019). It is evident that additional, contemporary marketing communication tools have emerged, including but not limited to blogs, social networks, mobile applications, etc.

Given the variable effectiveness of marketing communication tools, as noted by P. McGettigan et al. (2001), and the extensive range of tools used within the pharmaceutical industry, the question arises for managers of pharmaceutical organisations as to what specific tools and methods are required to establish and maintain relationships with healthcare professionals, while at the same time promoting product sales. **The research object** is therefore the direct marketing and personal selling tools used by medical representatives.

The aim of the research is to evaluate the direct marketing and personal

selling tools used by medical representatives and to provide recommendations for their effective use.

In order to reach the aim, **the research methods** used were literature review and comparison, interview as a qualitative method, questionnaire survey as a quantitative method for empirical research, data analysis.

Direct marketing and personal selling tools

Marketing communication elements encompass advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, and direct marketing. These elements can be employed individually or together to cultivate customer relationships (Punchibandara, 2018). T. M. Dar (2020) characterizes the marketing communication mix as the amalgamation of advertising, personal selling, direct marketing, sales promotion, and public relations. It is worth noting that each element of marketing communication exhibits unique attributes and may have variations across industries, depending on its characteristics, objectives, and customer profile (Dar, 2020). In the pharmaceutical field, marketing communication elements play a pivotal role in effecting drug prescribing behaviour (Ahmed, 2014). Thus 84% of the marketing endeavours in the pharmaceutical sector are directed towards healthcare professionals, as they serve as the primary decision-makers from the manufacturer's perspective (Hailu, Workneh, Kahissay, 2021). According to a qualitative investigation conducted by A. D. Hailu et al. (2021), the use of marketing communication

elements has a decisive impact on physicians' behaviour in recommending pharmaceutical products.

When it comes to the daily work of medical representatives, there are two main elements of marketing communication used: direct marketing and personal selling.

Direct marketing is characterized as the direct communication with customers through various direct marketing tools, which engage consumers and prompt them to respond directly (Perčić, Perić, 2021; Karaxha, Tolaj, Abaz, 2016). This approach underscores the establishment of a direct relationship, bypassing intermediaries (Elrod, Fortenberry, 2018; Wilkinson, McAlister, Widmier, 2007). Additionally, direct marketing enables a more focused approach to creating highly relevant offers by conducting research and addressing specific consumer needs (Nugroho, Witarti, 2021), thereby conferring a substantial competitive advantage. Well-targeted direct marketing tools result in a higher return on investment and do not annoy those who are not interested in the offer (Rzepakowski, Jaroszewicz, 2012). Furthermore, direct marketing ensures message personalization and confidentiality, all achieved at a reduced cost compared to personal selling (Hansen, 2009).

Personal selling is defined as direct interaction between the seller and the buyer, with the primary objectives of achieving predetermined goals, such as facilitating sales and nurturing enduring customer relationships (Putra, Astuti, Fadhli, 2021). This interaction encompasses activities such as attentive listening to customer concerns, assessing their specific needs, and resolving any issues they may encounter (Putra et al.,

2021). Notably, the effective execution of personal selling has been associated with an increase in pharmaceutical prescriptions (Bhatt, 2018). In the context of the pharmaceutical industry, personal selling assumes paramount significance as it serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it functions as a tool for reminding physicians about existing pharmaceutical products, introducing them to new offerings (Govindaraj, Satish Kumar, Anantha Subramanya Iyer, 2022). Moreover, it provides a platform to convey essential information regarding the benefits of these products for the patient and potential side effects (Punchibandara, 2018). Research conducted by K. Bala and K. Sharma (2019) reinforces the notion that regular visits by medical representatives are the best means of raising awareness of a pharmaceutical product. In alignment with this, A. K. Hansen (2009) contends that personal selling, referred to as “visiting physicians” within the pharmaceutical context, stands as the most effective method of promoting pharmaceutical products, followed closely by direct marketing approaches, such as samples and direct mail. T. H. Siddiqui and R. K. Yadav’s (2019) survey results affirm that personal selling does play an important role in identifying and prescribing medicines for patients.

From the perspective of physicians, a survey conducted in 2016 revealed that 43% of physicians regarded medical representatives as one of the most valuable sources of information (Gadhiya et al., 2021). These results are reinforced by another survey, where physicians consistently identified visits by medical representatives as the most effective mean of acquiring information about medicines

(Bala, Sharma, 2019). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the use of personal selling as a method is associated with significant expenses (Hansen, 2009), coupled with constraints in terms of reaching a limited number of physicians and incurring high costs related to medical representative time.

Traditional marketing tools are still extensively employed by medical representatives. K. Bala and K. Sharma (2019) argue that *telemarketing* is only meaningful to physicians when the call informs them about the dosage, side effects, and efficacy of the drug. Meanwhile, *text (SMS) messages* are commonly employed to disseminate information about goods or services, provide links to website updates, and serve as reminders for appointments or presentations (Abraham, Joseph, 2019). *Printed promotional materials, such as brochures, catalogues, and leaflets*, serve as effective tools for conveying validated information about specific medicines. These promotional tools not only facilitate communication but also function as reminders for products that can be conveniently left for the physician after the visit (Dar, 2020). Notably, *direct mail*, as sending *catalogues*, are still prevalent. The *provision of free samples* of medicines often serves as an incentive for physicians to recommend products to their patients (Jacob, 2018). K. Bala and K. Sharma (2019) draw conclusions from their study, suggesting that the distribution of complimentary medication samples, alongside the communication skills of medical representatives, has a positive impact on the prescribing medicine by physicians. Research results of use of *scientific medical journals*, as direct marketing tool, yields conflicting findings.

Some studies assert that this tool is perceived as a trustworthy and informative source of information, while others contend that email-based information is more frequently preferred over academic journals. This perception may be influenced by various factors, including the limited time available to healthcare professionals for information retrieval, analysis, and interpretation, the restricted access to free academic resources, and language barriers (Auruškevičienė, Butkevičienė, Šalčiuvienė, 2015). The significance of scientific and practical conferences organized by pharmaceutical companies as well is ambiguous. For instance, certain studies suggest that physicians exhibit limited interest in attending such conferences, there exists a lack of enthusiasm for conferences as a communication channel. Conversely, another study underscores the positive attributes of this tool, including its high perceived value, credibility, and level of details (Auruškevičienė et al., 2015). Personal selling can be executed through diverse means, including *face-to-face interactions*, *telephone conversations*, *remote video meetings*, and other methods (Putra et al., 2021).

New technologies are reshaping the tools employed in various industries. In the pharmaceutical sector, the pervasive influence of information technology has spurred its integration (Gadhiya et al., 2021). A comprehensive exploration of digital marketing tools used by pharmaceutical companies in recent years underscores the transformative shifts occurring in the industry (Kulkarni, 2019). S. Wittayakom (2022) asserts that digital marketing remains an evolving domain within the pharmaceutical

sector. Notably, *websites* have become indispensable for physicians seeking specific medical information, providing a reliable source that positively influences product selection (Auruškevičienė et al., 2015). While the use of websites in pharmaceuticals is relatively recent, the majority of pharmaceutical companies already maintain websites offering health and medicine-related information as well as promoting company events. *Social media*, identified as an emerging marketing trend in pharmaceuticals (Ahmed, 2014), though social networks can be used effectively to interact directly with physicians, regularly share information about products or services, and invite them to events (Abraham, Joseph, 2019). *Email*, encompassing *newsletters* and *promotional content*, is increasingly perceived as beneficial by physicians (Abraham, Joseph, 2019). Notably, the transmission of medical information via email stands out as particularly impactful among one-way communication channels (Auruškevičienė et al., 2015). V. Gadhiya et al. (2021) highlight various methods of electronic information transfer, including *remote video visits*, *online content reviews with direct consultations* by medical representatives, *teleconferences* and *webinars*, *interactive consulting*, and *personalized letters*. They contend that new technologies are poised to play a pivotal role in reshaping the pharmaceutical industry, potentially phasing out traditional tools. This prompts to research what marketing tools are still used by medical representatives, what is their impact on healthcare professionals, what shift, if any, could be meaningful and would result in higher efficiency and physicians' satisfaction.

Research methodology

The research used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative approach was used to interview medical representatives, while the quantitative approach was used to interview health professionals from different specialties, including doctors and nurses. The research was carried out in Lithuania.

The interview method was chosen for the qualitative research. Interviews were undertaken with 9 medical representatives representing three different pharmaceutical companies. Interviewees were required to possess more than 5 years of experience and to have experience with diverse pharmaceutical products, encompassing both prescription and non-prescription medicines, medical aids, medical equipment, and hospital medicines. The average work experience of the interviewees was 13.8 years (ranging from 5 to 19 years). Two out of nine interviewees specialized in prescription medicines, five in non-prescription medicines, six in prescription medical aids, two in medical equipment, and one in hospital medicines. The interviews probed into the most commonly employed marketing tools and their impact on healthcare professionals, the integration of information technology

and digital marketing, future prospects. Interviewees were frequently limited to naming only two tools seeking to keep focused on the main tools. The interviews were conducted remotely in 2022.

Quantitative survey using a questionnaire targeted to healthcare professions, working in Lithuania, including physicians and nurses of diverse specialties. The questionnaire covered questions about the prevalent direct marketing and personal selling tools used by medical representatives, asking to assess these tools, evaluate the impact of these tools on their decision-making, as well, demographic questions. Some questions required respondents to provide ratings on a Likert scale.

After distributing the questionnaires, 207 completed responses were received, but not all respondents encountered medical representatives in their work. Thus, for further analysis, 167 responses were left, analysing only those, who encounter with medical representatives. The demographic characteristics of all respondents who participated in the research are presented in Table 1. The size of the study population is 35,988, comprising 13,205 physicians and 22,783 nurses, midwives, etc. (Higienos institutas, 2022). The sampling error is 7.6%, with a confidence level of 95%.

Table 1. Characteristics of survey respondents, percentage

Gender		Age		Position		Work experience	
Female	71.9%	<30 yrs	31.1%	Resident physician	22.6%	<10 yrs	42.3%
Male	28.1%	30–40 yrs	18.6%	Physician	33.9%	10–20 yrs	20.8%
		40–50 yrs	22.8%	Nurse	39.3%	20–30 yrs	21.4%
		50–60 yrs	19.2%	Other medical training	4.2%	≥30 yrs	15.5%
		>60 yrs	8.4%				

The questionnaire survey was conducted in 2022. The questionnaires were distributed in both electronic and paper format, with all responses then combined for analysis.

Results of interviews with medical representatives

To find out which marketing tools are used by medical representatives, the ones most commonly mentioned included face-to-face visits, pharmaceutical brochures, catalogs, scientific literature, direct calls, clinical cases, events, conferences, and roundtable discussions. Face-to-face visits emerged as the most favoured tool, with respondents highlighting the advantages of this method: *it allows for clarifying relevant issues and finding solutions using the presented products; it proves to be the most effective method, targeting a specific audience and reaching the client effectively.* The second most popular marketing tool is the use of brochures/catalogs for pharmaceutical products and scientific literature. Respondents justified this choice by stating that *it provides precise, curated information; dissemination of product information is the fastest way to achieve product awareness and sales.* The popularity of these two marketing tools among medical representatives suggests that a preference for direct visits is still prevalent, and traditional, time-tested direct marketing methods are still in use.

The most impactful marketing tool, according to the majority of respondents, is the face-to-face visit. According to medical representatives, a face-to-face visit *offers the ability to comprehend and*

address problems; serves as a reminder about the product and the company; provides answers to questions; allows to share up-to-date information from the manufacturer; enables the observation of the interviewee's needs, timely responses, and the management of the situation by offering relevant details at that moment. In the evaluation of respondents' answers, there is unanimous agreement that face-to-face visits effectively address the immediate needs of healthcare professionals. Given the availability of physicians, a quick response from a medical representative to questions or concerns during an in-person interaction is deemed the most influential tool in shaping the physician's preferences. Face-to-face visits are also identified as the most effective mean of encouraging healthcare professionals to prescribe or recommend the pharmaceutical products to patients. Interviewees noted that this marketing tool is used every day or consistently. Medical representatives increase the frequency of visits to enhance the prescription / dispensing of the represented pharmaceutical product. The more physicians are prescribing the product, the more attention they receive from the medical representative. The use of scientific literature emerges as the most effective way to enhance communication during both in-person and remote visits. Interviewees emphasized that *using scientific literature is the most engaging and trust-building tool, providing evidence of the product's effectiveness.* Physicians place the highest trust in scientific literature, finding it intriguing. These statements affirm that the use of scientific literature fosters trust in the medical representative and the represented company, ultimately

boosting sales. However, when communicating remotely, medical representatives predominantly opt for emails due to their perceived advantages: *it fosters a more personal connection; is convenient for sending a larger volume of information and event invitations*. While opinions may vary in some cases, the majority of respondents still consider emails a convenient means of information communication. The majority of medical representatives identified text (SMS) messages as the least effective marketing tool. Medical representatives explained their choice by stating that *it is not interesting, they do not read it, and they don't have time; physicians find it intrusive and distracting; in the opinion of many physicians, this method of information delivery annoys them, negatively impacting their decisions to prescribe a pharmaceutical product*. From the perspective of medical representatives, it can be observed that they have tried this direct marketing method before and noticed the negative reaction it provokes from physicians, which usually results in the opposite, i.e., an unfavourable outcome for prescribing the pharmaceutical product. For this reason, this marketing tool is most commonly used only to invite physicians to events.

All respondents mentioned using information technology to a greater or lesser extent in their work. They based their choice on the following reasons: *when it is possible, I use a tablet, especially when reviewing clinical cases, scientific research, visual materials; I use a computer, but not frequently; I also often use flash memory to record relevant scientific information for physicians*. Respondents emphasized the assistance of information technology in presenting visual materials. Information

technology provides the opportunity to present the latest information clearly and vividly and to update it more frequently without significant financial expenses. The most frequently mentioned IT device was a tablet computer. Responses were based on opinions such as: *it increases the impact on physicians; it demonstrates the effectiveness of the product, initiates discussion; it saves time and enhances sales impact*. The choices of all medical representatives were based on the demonstration of visual materials, which increases the effectiveness of sales and establishes contact with physicians.

Interviewees view the use of information technology as acceptable for healthcare professionals. Responses were anchored in statements like *physicians appreciate it; it has a positive response; information could simultaneously reach multiple clients, leading to cost savings for the company; this approach enhances persuasiveness by showcasing images and clinical cases, capturing attention, and facilitating discussion, debate, and sales*. However, some respondents indicated that this is not universally accepted by healthcare professionals, providing examples like *personal experience shows that this is not appealing to most, direct, personal contact remains the most attractive and effective tool*. Medical representatives were asked to comment on whether they observe changes in the pharmaceutical market influenced by digital marketing. Positive responses acknowledged the rising popularity of digital marketing, emphasizing its focused nature. However, they highlighted *the necessity for discussions involving at least two participants to yield feedback and benefits*. Interviewees also pointed

out instances where *companies optimize websites, ensuring easy access for consumers through search channels, advertising, and social network dissemination; businesses that grasp the internet's importance and invest effort in this area are available 24/7; the majority of interviewees have adapted to teleconferencing, while attendance at traditional contact conferences is declining*. Contrarily, a few interviewees claimed not to notice changes shaped by digital marketing, stating that *healthcare professionals generally exhibit low interest, especially during remote lectures where their focus on content diminishes*. Two distinct positions emerge from these responses: some believe digital marketing accelerates information dissemination and broadens engagement, while others contend that it lacks significant impact on medical professionals.

In assessing future perspectives, the majority of interviewees expressed the belief that the nature of their work might change, necessitating increased use of information technology in their daily routines. Some of the statements include: *I believe that more attractive forms than those currently available will emerge; there will be more frequent use of information technology; perhaps there will be less reliance on direct visits, but the dissemination of digital information alone will not guarantee sales; this field will transition more towards remote and optimized communication; a good marketing specialist can achieve much more by strategically distributing information and events to specialists than an entire army of directly traveling representatives*. Based on the responses of the vast majority, it can be stated that medical representatives are recognizing changes shaped

by information technology and digital marketing, gradually becoming integral part to their daily work. Interviewees anticipate that the nature of their work may evolve in the future, with the roles of medical representatives increasingly aligning with responding to the needs of modern society and implementing changing functions in the role of a medical representative.

Results of survey of healthcare professionals

To determine how medical representatives most frequently reach healthcare professionals, various marketing tools were presented for evaluation, assessing the frequency of information obtained through each marketing tool. As shown in Table 2, information is most commonly provided through thematic events (average score 3.97), face-to-face visits (3.57), printed brochures (3.34), and email (3.26). Healthcare professionals also consider these methods to be the most convenient and informative. The research results indicate that thematic events are considered highly convenient (4.26) and informative (4.32). Face-to-face visits remain in second place, being informative (4.14) but less convenient (3.88). Email is considered a more convenient method (3.71) than printed advertising brochures (3.34), and although it may seem that both tools can provide the same information, the informativeness of email (3.46) is rated higher than that of printed advertising brochures (3.39). This may be related to the ability to easily find information when needed, given the abundance of information

Table 2. Assessment of marketing tools used by medical representatives, average score

	Frequency of obtaining information ¹	Convenience of the tool ²	Informative- ness of the tool ³	Encouraging interest in the product ⁴	If I were a medical representative, I would use ... ⁵
Thematic events	3.97	4.26	4.32	4.46	4.51
Face-to-face visit	3.57	3.88	4.14	4.15	4.20
Social networks	2.78	2.89	2.95	3.06	3.21
Printed brochures	3.34	3.34	3.39	3.43	3.62
Text (SMS) messages	2.36	2.84	2.65	2.50	2.57
E-mail	3.26	3.71	3.46	3.27	3.73
Phone call	2.49	2.50	2.56	2.32	2.49
Direct mail	1.85	2.02	1.97	1.82	2.10

¹ – 1 – never, 5 – very often² – 1 – very inconvenient, 5 – very convenient³ – 1 – completely uninformative, 5 – very informative⁴ – 1 – completely discouraging, 5 – very encouraging⁵ – 1 – would never use, 5 – definitely would use

available, which is easier with email. Social networks, text (SMS) messages, telephone calls, and direct mail are perceived as less convenient and informative.

In order to find out to what extent the choice of marketing tool is important in stimulating a physician's interest in a pharmaceutical product, it was found that 57.5% of healthcare professionals said that the marketing tool used has an impact on the interest in a pharmaceutical product; 30.5% said that it does not have an impact.

The most impactful for generating interest in products are thematic events (4.46), face-to-face visits (4.15), printed brochures (3.43), and email (3.27). Additionally, social networks stimulate interest in products (3.06), even though in previous questions, this tool was rated with lower scores. When respondents were asked about the tools, they would use themselves if they were medical representatives, their responses were identical to the current usage. Respondents would

use thematic events (4.51), face-to-face visits (4.20), email (3.73), printed brochures (3.62), and social networks (3.21). In summary, it can be concluded that thematic events and face-to-face visits are dominant tools in all criteria. Simultaneously, a need for digitization is evident; email is considered more convenient and informative than printed brochures, and respondents would use it more frequently if they were medical representatives. There is also a clear demand for increased use of social networks; respondents would use them more frequently if they were medical representatives.

The research aimed to understand how physicians perceive the information received from medical representatives. When asked how often they doubt the accuracy of the information they receive, most respondents, 61.2%, said they rarely doubt the information they receive. This response affirms a strong communication bond and trust between healthcare professionals and medical representatives.

The study also sought to explore how physicians view the marketing tools used by pharmaceutical companies and their representatives in general. Observing the distribution of respondents based on the percentage of answers, it is evident that the majority, 62.5%, chose a more positive response, while 25.6% expressed consistently positive views. To sum up, total of 88.1% of respondents, i.e. the vast majority of healthcare professionals are in favour of the marketing tools used by medical representatives.

Respondents were asked to assess the importance of regular reminders of product information for prescribing a pharmaceutical. The majority of respondents, 51.8%, chose that it is important, while 36.1% indicated that it is very important to them. Overall, 87.9% of respondents agree with this perspective, emphasizing that the reminding and updating of pharmaceutical product information is genuinely important for healthcare professionals.

Different marketing tools and their impact on more frequent prescription or recommendation of a pharmaceutical product were analysed. It was found that three response options dominated: direct visits from medical representatives – 27.1%, thematic events – 26.5%, and samples of the pharmaceutical product – 18.7%. The results suggest that for healthcare professionals, the importance lies not only in direct visits from medical representatives or participation in thematic events but also in the review, testing, and monitoring of pharmaceutical products. Additionally, more frequent prescription and recommendation of pharmaceutical products could be encouraged by printed brochures (10.2%).

The roles of other tools, such as social networks – 5.4%, emails – 6.6%, phone calls – 2.4%, SMS messages – 1.8%, direct mail – 1.2%, are minimal. Evaluating other factors that could encourage physicians to prescribe/recommend a pharmaceutical product, training and presentations on the product theme are the most encouraging factor (average score 4.41). However, the competence, knowledge, and familiarity with the product of the medical representative are also crucial (4.34), along with objective and up-to-date information from the medical representative about the product (4.19), the quality and advantages of the specific pharmaceutical product over competitors (4.10), concise, clear, and brief verbal information about the product (3.98), very concise, clear and brief oral product information (3.86), active use of direct marketing tools by the medical representative (3.42), and even friendly relations with the medical representative (3.31). The personal qualities of the medical representative and how they are perceived by physicians can also influence the frequency of prescribing / recommending a pharmaceutical product, a view endorsed by 72.6% of respondents.

Pharmaceutical companies often incorporate the use of information technology in the presentation of pharmaceutical products. Research results indicate that healthcare professionals consider accessible information technology important, with the majority, 93.9%, supporting more active use of information technology when presenting pharmaceutical products. The most acceptable form of information technology usage is remote conferences and seminars (average score 4.26). Sending

personalized electronic emails is also considered acceptable (3.70). Although previously unconventional, the use of remote video visits is now becoming acceptable (3.22). The least acceptable form is communication over the phone while reviewing online content (websites, social media information, electronic press) (2.92). Interactive training using information technology equipment (4.09), various medical simulations (3.98), the use of tablets for visual information (3.39), mobile applications (3.23), and remote video calls (3.03) would be most likely to stimulate interest in pharmaceutical products. The positive evaluation of information technology usage by the majority underscores the approval of such technology and enables drawing conclusions regarding the necessity for its broader application.

Comparison of research results

Summarizing the research findings from healthcare professionals and medical

representatives, the areas where the opinions varied were identified. The main differences in opinion were observed in the application of three tools: thematic events, medical representatives' visits, and the use of information technology.

Thematic events (conferences, seminars, roundtable discussions, etc.)
Survey results from healthcare professionals revealed that the majority of professional information reaches them through thematic events. This method is considered the most effective in encouraging interest in a product. If they were medical representatives themselves, healthcare professionals, especially physicians, would primarily use this method. Additionally, this method was ranked second in importance for the promotion of pharmaceutical products. Although medical representatives do not frequently use thematic events, they acknowledge their effectiveness for healthcare professionals. Divergence of opinions regarding thematic events is presented in Figure 1.

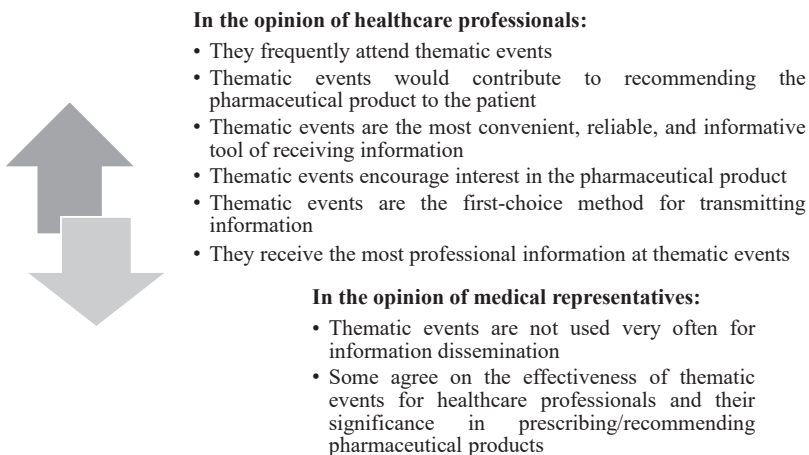


Fig. 1. Divergence of opinions regarding thematic events

When evaluating the divergence of opinions, it would be worthwhile to consider organising more frequent thematic events. This is particularly important given that, according to health professionals, most professional information is provided at these events. Additionally, considering the established favourability of healthcare professionals towards thematic events and their approval of the use of information technology, it is debatable to contemplate not only in-person but also remote events and their ratio of usage between in-person and remote events.

Medical representatives' visits. The research results reveal a distinction in the perspectives of healthcare professionals and medical representatives regarding the visits conducted by medical representatives. Medical representatives assert that direct contact visits are the most commonly used and most effective marketing tool, receiving the greatest attention. On the other hand, healthcare professionals argue that visits rank second in terms of the importance of the method of receiving information and encouraging interest in the product.

However, they could contribute most to prescribing/recommending pharmaceutical products more frequently. If they were medical representatives themselves, healthcare professionals state that they would use visits as a secondary marketing tool after thematic events. Divergence of opinions regarding visits is presented in Figure 2.

When evaluating the effectiveness of visits to promote or recommend pharmaceutical products, it is important to consider not only in-person visits, but also remote visits. This is especially important given that visits are a costly marketing tool for medical representatives and are valued less by healthcare professionals than thematic events. Currently, medical representatives are primarily focused on face-to-face visits, but a change in their format could be beneficial in terms of costs, acceptability, and effectiveness. Additionally, remote visits could be more frequently utilized for those healthcare professionals who, based on applied segmentation, are visited less frequently or when trying to adapt to each individual's scheduling preferences.

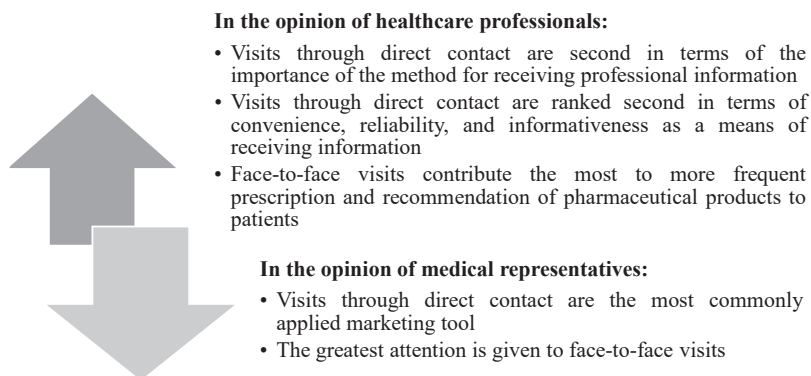


Fig. 2. Divergence of opinions regarding medical representatives' visits

Information technologies. When comparing the obtained research results, a discrepancy in opinions and the use of information technologies by medical representatives was observed. Healthcare professionals hold a highly favourable view of information technologies and would support their more frequent use by medical representatives. Remote conferences, seminars, email, and virtual visits are especially well-regarded. However, medical representatives do not have a unanimous opinion on information technologies. Although the majority of them attempt to use information technologies to some extent, primarily through the use of tablet computers for visual presentations, they do not share a common view. Medical representatives are divided into two groups, some asserting that information technologies are/are not acceptable for physicians, and others debating whether digital marketing is/is not relevant. Divergence

of opinions regarding information technologies is presented in Figure 3.

However, medical representatives agree that the range of tools used by medical representatives may change in the future and that information technology will be used more frequently. This conclusion aligns with the statement by V. Gadhiya et al. (2021) that new technologies will play a crucial role in the pharmaceutical industry, and it is likely that the traditional sales model will gradually phase out. Therefore, by considering the time-saving benefits for healthcare professionals and aiming to enhance efficiency and effectiveness, the increased use of information technologies could emerge as a future trend. The acceptability of information technologies among healthcare professionals encourages the exploration of more efficient solutions, new ways of IT usage in the daily work of medical representatives, including email, social marketing, and website usage.

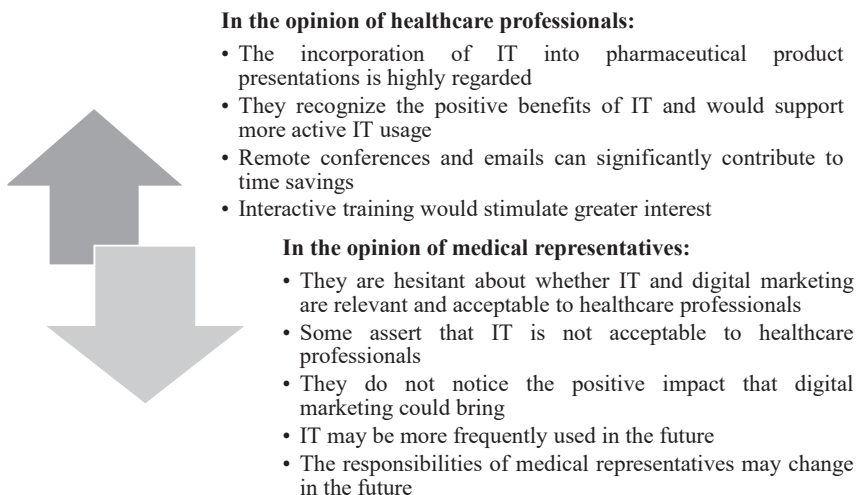


Fig. 3. Divergence of opinions regarding information technologies

Conclusions

In the pharmaceutical industry, a medical representative is the first and most important contact a pharmaceutical company has with healthcare professionals. The most commonly used marketing tools in the work of a medical representative are direct marketing and personal selling, which complement each other, and their combination can increase sales. Direct marketing allows for personalised messages and provides information at a lower cost than personal selling. It creates a direct relationship with customers and encourages quick responses and the development of long-term relationships. Personal selling is considered to be the most effective mean of increasing awareness of pharmaceutical products. Through personal selling in pharmaceutical industry, detailed information about the use of the pharmaceutical product, its benefits to the patient, or potential side effects are conveyed. Medical representatives use a variety of traditional and digital marketing tools, including direct mail, telemarketing, text messaging (SMS), catalogues and brochures, as well as sample distribution, scientific publications, events, visits, websites, social media and email. Pharmaceutical companies are becoming increasingly involved in digital marketing. Medical representatives are encouraged to use smart electronic devices such as laptops or tablets to maintain active remote contact, organising virtual visits, online conferences, training sessions, etc. Due to the increasing use of digital platforms by healthcare professionals, more investment is being made in tools that can reach healthcare professionals.

Medical representatives still most commonly choose a visit through direct contact as the most frequently used marketing tool. This decision is based on the belief that a visit has an impact on healthcare professionals and most effectively promotes the prescription or recommendation of pharmaceutical products to patients. According to medical representatives, personal selling is strengthened most by the use of scientific literature, which influences the physicians' trust in information and ensures a long-term relationship between the medical representative and the healthcare professional. In the opinion of the majority of medical representatives, information technologies are not always acceptable to healthcare professionals, and digital marketing is also perceived ambiguously: ones see digital marketing contributing to faster information dissemination, while others believe that digital marketing has little impact on healthcare professionals.

When healthcare professionals interact with pharmaceutical company's medical representatives, they most commonly encounter thematic events (conferences, seminars, etc.), visits from medical representatives, printed brochures, and electronic letters sent by pharmaceutical representatives. In the opinion of healthcare professionals, the marketing tools used by medical representatives are important and have a direct impact on the healthcare professional's decision to allocate or recommend a particular pharmaceutical product. Thematic events, as well as visits from medical representatives, are considered the most convenient, informative, reliable, and impactful marketing tools used by medical

representatives. Additionally, healthcare professionals highly appreciate the use of information technologies by medical representatives.

The results obtained confirm that the use of traditional marketing tools is still widespread, but there is a favourable environment for a shift to the use of marketing tools in other ways. Considering the results, it is recommended not only to discuss face-to-face but also remote events and their usage ratio. The same

applies when evaluating the need for visits; it is relevant to plan not only face-to-face but also remote visits. This could be beneficial in terms of cost, acceptability, and effectiveness. One possible future direction is to increase the use of information technology. This includes not only IT usage during visits and events but also in everyday work of medical representatives, where tools such as email, social marketing, and website could be used more in new, more effective ways.

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MEDICINOS ATSTOVŲ NAUDOJAMŲ TIESIOGINIO MARKETINGO IR ASMENINIO PARDAVIMO PRIEMONIŲ VERTINIMAS

S a n t r a u k a

Farmacijos pramonėje pardavimo praktika skiriasi nuo įprastinio pardavimo, nes galutinis vartotojas nėra asmuo, priimančias sprendimą įsigyti farmacijos produktą. Farmacijos produktą (vaistą, medicinos pagalbos priemonę, medicinos įrangą arba kt.) skiria medicinos sektoriaus darbuotojas ir jis priima sprendimus. Asmuo, kuris įsigyja farmacijos produktą, yra pacientas (Dar, 2020). Farmacijos įmonėse pardavimo funkcijas vykdo medicinos atstovai, kurie užsiima asmeniniu pardavimu sveikatos priežiūros specialistams, naudodami tiesioginio marketingo priemones (Punchibandara, 2018).

Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjama, kaip tikslingas marketingo priemonių pasirinkimas ir pritaikymas gali padėti medicinos atstovams didinti šių priemonių poveikumą medicinos sektoriaus darbuotojams. Tyrimo objektas – medicinos atstovų darbe naudojamos tiesioginio marketingo ir asmeninio pardavimo priemonės, o išsikeltas tikslas – įvertinti naudojamas priemones ir pateikti rekomendacijų, kaip šias priemones efektyviai naudoti.

Tyrimo metodai apima mokslinės literatūros analizę, kiekybinį tyrimą naudojant anketą, duomenų analizę ir kokybinį tyrimą pasitelkiant pusiau struktūruotą ekspertų interviu.

Gauti tyrimo rezultatai patvirtina, kad tradicinės rinkodaros priemonės vis dar plačiai

naudojamos, tačiau egzistuoja palankios sąlygos pereiti prie kitų jų panaudojimo būdų. Atsižvelgiant į gautus tyrimo rezultatus, aktualu organizuoti ne tik tiesioginius, bet ir nuotolinius renginius, diskutuoti apie jų naudojimo santykį. Tas pats pasakytina ir vertinant vizitų poreikį; aktualu planuoti ne tik tiesioginius, bet ir nuotolinius vizitus. Tai galėtų būti naudinga išlaidų, vizito pobūdžio priimtinumui ir vizito efektyvumo aspektais. Viena iš galimų tiesioginio marketingo ir asmeninio pardavimo ateities krypčių yra platesnis informacinių technologijų (IT) panaudojimas. Tai apima ne tik IT naudojimą vizitų ir renginių metu, bet ir kasdieniame medicinos atstovų darbe, kuria- me galėtų būti labiau naudojamos tokios priemonės kaip elektroninis paštas, socialinė rinkodara ir interneto svetainės, ieškoma naujų jų panaudojimo būdų. Tinkamai pasirinkę ir pritaikę marketingo priemones, medicinos atstovai gali padidinti šių priemonių poveikumą medicinos sektoriaus darbuotojams. Šio tyrimo duomenys bei pasiūlymai gali padėti farmacijos įmonėms planuoti ir įgyvendinti marketingo strategiją, pasirenkant bei derinant skirtingas, tačiau tikslingas marketingo priemones, siekiant gerinti savo veiklos rezultatus.