

## THE IMPACT OF THE LEADERSHIP PIVOTAL ROLE AND MARKETING STRATEGIES IN THE PROMOTION OF LOCAL INDEPENDENT PHARMACIES FROM BRAILA

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper aims at revealing the results of a study conducted on a sample of independent pharmacies from Braila, based on how to promote them among patients from Braila versus pharmacies. The paper also investigates the effectiveness of pharmaceutical management and marketing strategies applied by these independent pharmacies in order to provide incentives to patients. We aimed at identifying patients' information sources about these independent pharmacies, becoming brands among the pharmacies in Braila.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Brand, Pharmaceutical Leadership, Promotion Strategy.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the current context in which pharmaceutical chains dominate the pharmaceutical market, the independent pharmacies are increasingly struggling to withstand these financial hurdles. It is notorious that many pharmacies are running as family businesses, being small enterprises, which must face to the increasingly aggressive market, a fierce competition, which sometimes is non-competitive (Dumitriu, 2008; Zegreanu, 2013).

The goal of this paper is to analyze the ways in which the leaders of the three independent pharmacies have promoted their pharmacies in order to raise their awareness and become preferred by the patients. Our research has been designed by considering the practical strategies for becoming more effective leaders in specific organizational contexts (Northouse, 2014). We have analyzed how leadership manifests in the process of brand awareness in the case of independent pharmacies.

The paper is structured as follows: first, the theoretical foundation for the research model is properly addressed; the next section outlines the research methodology; then, the discussion on results is performed. Finally, the conclusions, implications and further avenues for research are explored.

### 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Pharmaceutical companies are engaging in high-pressure marketing techniques, based on the promotion of new medications aiming to deliver increased effectiveness. Incentives for patients are also considered in their loyalty programs (Lagace et al., 1991).

Starting from the assumption that pharmaceutical companies typically focus their marketing investments toward physicians and, in a smaller extent, directly to patients perceived as consumers

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(Manchanda & Honka, 2005), our research aims to explore the pharmaceutical companies' marketing efforts toward patients and close significant gaps in the body of knowledge focused on Romanian market.

Fierce competition from mass market pharmaceutical chains and shifting consumer purchasing patterns are forcing small independent retailers from pharma sector to alter the ways they have traditionally conducted marketing strategies (McGee & Peterson, 2000). Dispensing prescription medications is the primary operation in the workflow within an independent pharmacy practice. To provide additional pharmacy services in order to create an increased awareness, staffing and promotion techniques often would need to be envisaged (Doucette et al., 2006). Promoting consumer familiarity with medicines is one example of the very broad influence of the marketing on the pharmaceutical industry (Applbaum, 2006).

There are many opportunities for pharmacists to extend their currently limited counseling role in wider discussions of patient beliefs and concerns about their medicines. This paper is in line with a research conducted by (Latif et al., 2011), which highlights promotional activities that occur in the 'real world' setting of pharmacy practice and supports loyalty programs, based on patient-pharmacist personalized interactions for prescription of OTC medicines.

Independent pharmacies' leaders have the challenging societal responsibility to hire trustful employees, who must prove competences such as: labelling of the medicines, documentation and responding on patients' symptoms, health promotion, confidence and team-work with their colleagues (Mills et al., 2005). The leaders of pharmaceutical companies, mainly positioned at the upstream part of health care value chain, have to carefully manage not only the upstream information flow, which focuses on the relationships with regulative bodies, but also the downstream technical information flow, which helps creating demand through tailored marketing efforts, like advertising new products or loyalty schemes (Pedroso & Nakano, 2009).

As the work conditions in the pharmaceutical companies include the employee relationships and work environment, all these factors relate to employee job satisfaction, a precursor for delivering high quality services to patients. Leaders from independent pharmacies are struggling to increase employee job satisfaction and the employees will try to give their best, which will finally lead to increased awareness on the local market (Parvin & Kabir, 2011).

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research investigates and compares the efforts of the three Faltis, Iris, and Arnica pharmacies in the city of Braila to promote pharmacies among patients and the community in order to make these pharmacies more visible in the city of Braila. It also proposes to identify the pillars of loyalty programs specially designed for patients from these three listed pharmacies.

To achieve these goals, the following research methods have been employed:

- a case study to identify pharmaceutical marketing strategies used by independent pharmacies Faltis, Iris and Arnica from the city of Braila;
- comparative statistical analyses to discover and identify the best promotion strategies among these three independent pharmacies.

As a research tool, two questionnaires have been administrated to patients in order to assess their level of satisfaction and loyalty toward the independent pharmacies Faltis, Iris and Arnica in Braila. The data analyses were performed in Excel and SPSS.

The questionnaire *Methods of promotion and loyalty of patients to independent pharmacies* (Appendix 1) was carried out on 20-30 November and 4-17 December 2017 on a number of 453 persons in Braila county, based on 17 closed questions of identification, closed selection questions as well as open-ended questions, presented both in electronic and paper format, to the respondents via the online platforms (Google Forms) but also directly to the respondents, on the field.

The *Decision Making* questionnaire (Appendices 2 and 3) was conducted between November 20-30 and December 4, 2017, respectively, on a number of 33 pharmacists working in Faltis, Arnica and

Iris pharmacies, which are among the top priorities of the patients in Braila. The questionnaire contains 18 questions and was submitted on paper format, handed to the respondents personally. The responses of the respondents were multiple, ordered, spontaneous and uninfluenced by the investigator.

As evaluation indicators, we considered:

- ways to promote independent pharmacies indicated in the Braila community;
- the extent to which patients buy pharmaceuticals and medicines from these pharmacies;
- patient information sources about these independent pharmacies included in the survey sample;
- how to develop loyalty offers for patients.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

We start the presentation of results with the demographics of the respondents, as the structure of the sample plays a pivotal role in understanding their behavior.

**Table 1. Distribution of patients by gender**

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Female	288	63.6%
Male	165	36.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* authors

It was found that the target pharmacies' respondents were grouped as follows: 63.6% females and only 36.4% males (Table 1).

**Table 2. Distribution of patients by residence**

<i>Residence</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Urban	378	83.4%
Rural	75	16.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* authors

From the residence point of view, urban patients turn to 83.4% of pharmaceutical services, compared with 16.6% of those in the rural environment who use pharmaceutical services (Table 2).

**Table 3. Distribution of patients by age groups**

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
18 - 25 years	42	9.1%
26 - 45 years	91	20.1%
46 - 60 years	132	29.1%
over 60 years	188	41.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* authors

The study found that the predominant age of patients attending these pharmacies was over 60 years in 41.5%, 29.1% between 46-60 years, 20.1% between 26-45 years and only 9.1% is the category between 18 and 25 years (Table 3). The high percentage represented by patients over 60 years of age is most likely due to the multiple illness they experience with age. Pharmacists should therefore

consider this very important issue in the further development of pharmaceutical marketing strategies.

**Table 4. Distribution of patients by income per family**

<i>Income</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
under 500 lei	15	3.3%
501-1000 lei	186	41.1%
1001- 2000 lei	159	35.1%
over 2000 lei	93	20.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: authors*

The analysis of the questionnaire shows that the incomes of patients per family member are between 501-1000 lei in 41.1% of the cases, 35.1% have revenues between 1001-2000 lei and 20.5% the incomes they exceed 2000 lei and only 3.3% have incomes per family member under 500 lei (Table 4). But these respondents were interested in participating in our study of independent pharmacies, so they are interested in maintaining their own health and their family.

**Table 5. Distribution of patients by their level of studies**

<i>Study level</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Without studies	5	1.1%
Secondary	29	6.4%
High school	148	32.7%
Bachelor	126	27.8%
Master, PhD and postdoc	145	32%
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: authors*

We observe the independent pharmacies in Braila are visited almost by the same level of the persons with high school education in 32.7% and by the persons with higher education in 32% post-secondary studies of 27.8%, the rest of the percentages belonged to persons with secondary education (6.4%) and without studies only 1.1% (Table 5). This can be explained by the fact that the marketing strategies implemented by the people of these pharmacies were more adapted to the modern methods of promotion, especially through the Internet, newspapers and specialized magazines, these methods being more accessible to those with high level of studies.

**Table 6. Level of permanent consumption of drugs in the families of the respondents**

<i>Answer</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No	145	32%
Yes	308	68%
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: authors*

The results show that 68% of the interviewed persons (and their family members, too) consume regularly drugs, and only 32% of the interviewed respondents or their families do not require a permanent consumption of drugs (Table 6). These findings explain the development of pharmaceutical sector in all major cities of Romania.

**Table 7. Preferences in choosing a pharmacy**

<i>Answer</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No	396	87.4%
Yes	57	12.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* authors

The majority of respondents (87.4%) carefully choose pharmacies from where they buy their medicines and only 12.6% doesn't manifest loyalty toward a specific pharmacy (Table 7). This result outlines the leaders' role in performing effective CRM (Customer Relationship Management) strategies in view to turn their clients into loyal ones.

**Table 8. Awareness of pharmacies from Braila**

<i>Pharmacy</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Faltis	424	94%
Arnica	414	91%
Iris	394	87%
Dorobanți	253	56%
Bogdarina	73	16%
Remedia	83	18%
Other pharmacies from Braila	31	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>

*Source:* authors

The most popular pharmacies among the patients according to their awareness, are: "Faltis" pharmacy - 94%, followed by "Arnica" pharmacy 91%, "Iris" pharmacy 87% and "Dorobanti" pharmacy - 56%; the remainder of pharmacies having insignificant percentages, so they are not known among patients (Table 8). These results lead us to the conclusion that the strategies for promoting these pharmacies were well-chosen and well-implemented. In addition, the Faltis pharmacy is the only pharmacy that has a single pharmaceutical point, as opposed to Arnica pharmacies (which has 3 pharmaceutical points) and Iris pharmacy (which has 10 pharmaceutical points 9 in the city of Braila and one unit in the countryside).

If we analyze the way these pharmacies are promoted among patients, we find that they are promoted through television in the form of interviews and reports (interview with Digi TV and Kanal D, AGERPRES report), but also through the Internet (own site, social networking account), but also through newspapers and magazines (Cotidianul, Infomagazin, the magazine with which the pharmacy has a permanent bimonthly collaboration).

**Table 9. Most frequently visited pharmacies from Braila**

<i>Pharmacy</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Faltis	229	51%
Arnica	90	20%
Iris	82	18%
Dorobanți	31	7%
Other pharmacies from Braila	21	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* authors

We note that from pharmacies known to patients, Faltis is the most preferred (51%) (Table 9), which suggests that patients know this pharmacy very well and that it has been promoted on several channels but then, after becoming known, the leader managed to keep his patients loyal to his pharmacy, although this pharmacy does not provide loyalty cards.

**Table 10. Sources of information on the existence of independent pharmacies from Braila**

<i>Information source</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Family doctor / specialist	367	81%
A former patient (friends, neighbor, relative, etc.)	352	78%
TV, radio	232	51%
Newspapers, magazines	216	48%
Internet	229	51%
Flyers, guides, printed brochures	98	22%
Other sources	19	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>

*Source:* authors

Most of the respondents know these pharmacies from family doctor / specialist - 81%, from former patients (friend, colleague, relatives, knowledge, etc.) - 78%, from commercials broadcasting on TV and radio - 51%, from newspapers and magazines - 48%, via the Internet - 51%; low percentages were recorded in the category of leaflets and magazines - 22% and in the others sources – 4% (Table 10). For the family doctor / specialist, the highest percentage was recorded, because family doctors and special doctors in particular are still prescribing topical medications, so they inform patients about pharmacies in Braila with special offers, discounts etc.

**Table 11. The preference of independent pharmacies in detriment of chain pharmacies**

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
the acquisition of main prescriptions	128	28%
ethical behavior	108	24%
employees' competences	122	27%
lower prices	82	18%
other reasons	13	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* authors

Independent pharmacies are preferred in the detriment of chain pharmacies in particular for the acquisition of main prescriptions (28%), but also for the employees' competences (27%), the information provided by the employees of the pharmacy about the medical products – ethical behavior (24%), and lower prices (18%) (Table 11).

By analyzing these findings, we can state that independent pharmacies remain on the market because they have managed to identify "niche" segments in this highly competitive environment.

**Table 12. The loyalty card – the main reason to choose an independent pharmacy**

<i>Answer</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	153	66.2%
No	300	33.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* authors

One of the marketing policies, in the view of independent pharmacy leaders, would be the use of loyalty cards, on the basis of which patients can purchase some products with certain discounts, but surprisingly, the majority of patients (66, 2%) (Table 12) choose these independent pharmacies not because of these loyalty cards, but on other criteria, mentioned above.

**Table 13. Patient satisfaction with regard to pharmacists, pharmacy services and the pharmacy as a whole**

<i>Patient satisfaction degree</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
very satisfied	337	74,39%
satisfied	115	25,39%
dissatisfied	1	0,22%
very dissatisfied	0	74,39%
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* authors

The analysis shows that the majority of the interviewed patients who have chosen a particular pharmacy are satisfied with the services offered, as a whole, 74.39% for the "very satisfied" and 25.39% "satisfied" (Table 13). So, customers whose expectations of this pharmacy have been satisfied, they return whenever they need it in their chosen pharmacy, so they become loyal patients. The percentage of dissatisfied clients is very low, so we consider that if their expectations were not fully satisfied, they are looking for another pharmacy.

**Table 14. Patients' intention to recommend in future the services of the pharmacy**

<i>Answer</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	429	94,70%
No	2	0,44%
I don't know	22	4,86%
<b>Total</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source:* authors

It is noted that the majority of interviewed patients (94.70%) are satisfied with the services offered, which is why they intend to recommend the pharmacy (Table 14). Recommendations and favorable reviews on social networks are very effective promotional vectors for the pharmaceutical companies.

**Table 15. The extent to which respondents trust the pharmaceutical staff of the pharmacies from the sample, using marks from 1 to 10**

Mark	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Number of patients	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	34	124	289

*Source:* authors

Trust is the main element in which the patient returns to the pharmacy whenever he needs it. This is reflected in the percentage of 63,80%, very high for the 10 mark and 27,4% for the 9 mark, which reflects the satisfaction of the patients (Table 15).

We have also tried to see the quality of staff (pharmacies and pharmacy assistants) hired by the leaders of the independent pharmacies presented in the study.

Having the opportunity, we applied the Decision-Making questionnaire to a number of 33 pharmacy assistants and pharmacists, including 22 pharmacy assistants and 11 pharmacies working in independent pharmacies in work, to see if hired staff can take some well-thought-out decisions, correlated with real situations, and whether they can implement their decisions, or just wait for the unit manager. Our conclusion was positive that the data obtained correlates with patient feedback.

**Table 16 – Application of Decision-making questionnaire on Faltis pharmacy**

<b>Pharmacy Faltis</b>	Number of persons with scores between 18-42	Number of persons with scores between 43-66	Number of persons with scores between 67-90	Total people surveyed
Pharmacists	-	2	1	3
Pharmacy Assistants	-	2	1	3
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>

*Source:* authors

**Table 17 – Application of Decision-making questionnaire on Arnica pharmacy**

<b>Pharmacy Arnica</b>	Number of persons with scores between 18-42	Number of persons with scores between 43-66	Number of persons with scores between 67-90	Total people surveyed
Pharmacists	1	3	-	4
Pharmacy Assistants	-	10	2	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	-	<b>13</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>16</b>

*Source:* authors

**Table 18 – Application of Decision-making questionnaire on Iris pharmacy**

<b>Pharmacy Iris</b>	Number of persons with scores between 18-42	Number of persons with scores between 43-66	Number of persons with scores between 67-90	Total people surveyed
Pharmacists	-	1	3	4
Pharmacy Assistants	-	6	1	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	-	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>

*Source:* authors

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Given the diversity of the respondents' opinions regarding the pivotal role of pharmacies' leaders in their institutional brand awareness, our findings suggest the emergence of a careful selection of

staff, so that they meet all requirements in terms of efficient workflow, starting with patient counseling, as well as preparing topical and official recipes by keeping their tradition and respect for the patients.

The statistical analyses performed on the three independent pharmacies from Braila make sense of their leaders' behavior in terms of promotion strategies' ongoing development, increasing performances and awareness at the level of local consumers.

The marketing strategies implemented by the independent pharmacies from Braila included in the research sample enable structuring complex decision-making to match growing patients' needs, in the context of pharmaceutical chains' high competition pressures.

Building upon the approach of leadership and marketing techniques tailored to pharmaceutical industry, this research deepens the understanding of peculiarities of a local pharmaceutical market and strengthens the commitment of independent pharmacies' leaders to increase their local awareness and reputation.

Although this research addresses the key challenges that independent pharmacies from Romania are facing, the examined respondents' behavior doesn't guarantee the replicability of results on larger samples from different regions of Romania. To overcome this limit, further research will be performed on independent pharmacies from all the development regions in Romania.

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### Appendix 1 - Methods of promotion and loyalty of patients to independent pharmacies

- In your family there are people who require permanent medication consumption?
- Do you have preferences in choosing a pharmacy?
- Which of the independent pharmacies in Braila, listed below, do you know?
- Indicate which pharmacy from the ones listed in the previous item do you frequent most often?
- How did you find out about this pharmacy?
- What are the main criteria when choosing this pharmacy?
- Having a loyalty card is the main reason why you chose this pharmacy?
- How satisfied are you with the professional competence of pharmacy staff?
- Do you intend to recommend in future the services of the pharmacy?
- How do you assess on a scale from 1 to 10 the extent to which you trust the pharmaceutical staff and the pharmacy you are attending?
- Demographics (gender, residence, age, education and income level)

### Appendix 2 - Test on Leadership: Decision-Making questionnaire

Item	Never	Rarely	Someti mes	Often	Very often	
1	I assess the risks associated with each alternative before I make a decision	1	2	3	4	5
2	When making a decision, it is final - I know my approach is correct	5	4	3	2	1
3	I'm trying to discover the real problem before I start going through the process of making a decision.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I rely on my own experience when I'm looking for solutions to a problem.	5	4	3	2	1
5	Often, I rely on instincts when making decisions	5	4	3	2	1
6	Sometimes I am surprised by the consequences of my decisions.	5	4	3	2	1
7	I use a very clear structural process to make decisions	1	2	3	4	5
8	I believe that involving other stakeholders in making decisions makes the process much more complicated than it should	5	4	3	2	1
9	If I have doubts about my decision, I redo the process and review my reasoning mentally	1	2	3	4	5
10	I give myself the time to make the best decision.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I have many possible solutions when I am making a decision	1	2	3	4	5
12	Before I make my decision, I'm creating a plan to implement it.	1	2	3	4	5
13	In a decision-making group, I support the proposals of my friends and try to find ways to make them work	5	4	3	2	1
14	When I make my decision known, I rely on reasoning and justification	1	2	3	4	5
15	Some of the choices you choose are sometimes more difficult to implement than I expected	5	4	3	2	1
16	I prefer to make decisions on my own and then let others know what I have decided	5	4	3	2	1
17	I find out which are the most important decision makers and then use these factors to evaluate my choices	1	2	3	4	5
18	I emphasize the confidence I have in my decisions to gain support from others for what I want to do.	5	4	3	2	1

**Appendix 3 - Interpretation of the questionnaire – Leadership**

Score	Comments
18-42	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Decision making is not yet a strong point for you.</li> <li>✓ You are not objective enough, you rely too much on luck, instinct and synchronization.</li> <li>✓ Begin to improve your skills by focusing more on the decision-making process than on the decision itself.</li> <li>✓ Based on this pre-trial process, you will have more confidence in your decisions.</li> </ul>
43-66	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ This chapter is OK for you.</li> <li>✓ Understand the fundamentals of the problem well, but you need to improve your decision-making process and be more proactive.</li> <li>✓ Focus on finding more options and discovering more risks and consequences.</li> <li>✓ The better you analyze, the better your long-term decision will be.</li> <li>✓ Focus on the areas where you usually get out and develop a system that works in a multitude of situations.</li> </ul>
67-90	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ You have an excellent approach in this field!</li> <li>✓ You know how to go through the decision-making process and how to find many solutions.</li> <li>✓ Then you analyze the options and make the best decision, relying on the data you have. As you gain more experience, you use your information to assess your decisions and continue to be successful in making decisions.</li> </ul>