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Research Article

A Cross-sectional Study of Pharmacist Preferences and Recommendations for Natural Product Brands

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of different brands of natural products used and recommended by pharmacists. The increasing consumer interest in natural products underscores the need to understand pharmacists' preferences and recommendations, which influence consumer choices. A survey was administered to 100 pharmacists, employing a structured questionnaire with 25 closed-ended and multiple-choice questions. Of these, 12 questions gathered demographic data, while the remaining explored pharmacists' usage and recommendations of natural product brands. The survey method allowed for comprehensive data collection across different age groups and professional backgrounds, with all participants completing an identical English-language paper questionnaire. Statistical analysis, conducted using MS Excel, revealed that 65% of respondents were male and 90% were self-employed. Dabur products were most frequently used and recommended, especially honey (35%) and Chyawanprash (45%), followed by Zandu, Baidyanath, Himalaya, and Patanjali brands, each favored for specific products. The findings highlight significant brand preferences among pharmacists, reflecting broader trends in the natural products market.

INTRODUCTION

The use of natural products in healthcare has seen a significant rise globally, particularly in countries like India, where traditional medicine systems such as Ayurveda are deeply rooted in cultural practices. Consumers are increasingly turning to natural products due to concerns over the side effects of synthetic drugs and a growing preference for holistic health solutions (Patwardhan, Warude, Pushpangadan, & Bhatt, 2005). This trend has spurred the growth of various natural product brands, including Dabur, Zandu, Baidyanath, Himalaya, and Patanjali, which offer a wide array of products from dietary supplements to personal care items.

Pharmacists play a crucial role in the healthcare ecosystem, serving as accessible health advisors to the public. Their recommendations, especially in the context of over-the-counter (OTC) products, significantly influence consumer behavior (Sawalha, 2007). Given their role as intermediaries between consumers and products, pharmacists' preferences for specific natural product brands can have a substantial impact on market trends. This study seeks to explore these preferences, focusing

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on how pharmacists perceive and recommend different natural product brands.

Understanding pharmacists' preferences for natural product brands is essential for several reasons. First, it provides insights into the factors that drive the popularity of certain brands, which can inform marketing strategies for natural product manufacturers (Izzo & Ernst, 2009). Second, as healthcare professionals, pharmacists' endorsement of products can enhance consumer trust and influence purchasing decisions (Ramesh, Kumar, & Manjula, 2009). Despite the critical role pharmacists play, there is a paucity of research specifically examining their preferences for natural product brands. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing which brands pharmacists prefer and the reasons behind these preferences.

Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to determine the preferences and recommendations of pharmacists regarding various natural product brands. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Identify the most preferred and recommended natural product brands among pharmacists.
- Analyze the factors influencing these preferences, such as product efficacy, brand reputation, and personal experience.
- Examine demographic variations in preferences, including differences based on age, gender, and occupation.
- Provide insights that can help manufacturers better understand the needs and preferences of pharmacists, thereby enhancing product development and marketing strategies.

Literature Review

Previous research has highlighted the significant role pharmacists play in advising patients on the use of natural products. A study by Gurib-Fakim (2006) discussed the global reliance on medicinal plants and the necessity for pharmacists to possess comprehensive knowledge about these products to offer accurate recommendations. Similarly, Izzo and Ernst (2009) explored the interactions between herbal medicines and synthetic drugs, emphasizing the importance of pharmacists in ensuring safe and effective use of natural products.

In the Indian context, Shah and Garg (2011) conducted a study that revealed Indian pharmacists' inclination towards well-known natural product brands like Dabur and Himalaya, citing the brands' long-standing market presence and consumer trust as key factors. However, the study also noted that there is limited data on how personal use and brand perception influence pharmacists' recommendations, indicating a need for more focused research in this area.

The natural products market in India is characterized by robust competition among several leading brands, each catering to different segments of the market. Dabur, one of the most established names, is renowned for its honey and Chyawanprash, products that are deeply embedded in Indian households (Kumar, 2016). Zandu, another significant player, has a strong reputation for its Ayurvedic formulations, particularly Chyawanprash and herbal oils (Dwivedi, Singh, & Aggarwal, 2010).

Baidyanath, with its extensive range of herbal oils and traditional products, maintains a strong foothold in the market, appealing to consumers who value Ayurvedic traditions (Chaudhary & Singh, 2011). Himalaya, originally focused on pharmaceuticals, has successfully diversified into natural cosmetics, with products like facewash and shampoo gaining widespread popularity (Kumari, 2015). Patanjali, although a newer entrant, has rapidly captured a significant market share by offering affordable natural products, aligning with consumer preferences for traditional Indian medicine and natural ingredients see Figure 1 (Bansal & Kumar, 2019).

Despite the growing body of literature on consumer behavior and the efficacy of natural products, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specific preferences and recommendations of pharmacists see Table 1. Most existing studies have focused on general consumer preferences or the pharmacological aspects of natural products (Izzo & Ernst, 2009; Patwardhan et al., 2005). There is a lack of detailed analysis of how pharmacists, as healthcare professionals, perceive different natural product brands and what drives their recommendations. This study aims to address this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of pharmacist preferences for natural product brands in India, with implications for both the healthcare industry and the natural products market.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This study employs a cross-sectional design to assess the preferences and recommendations of pharmacists regarding various natural product brands. A cross-sectional design was chosen because it allows for the

Figure 1: Natural products of different brands Dabur, Zandu, Baidyanath, Himalayan and Patanjali

Table 1: Summary of Existing Research on Natural Products and Brand Recommendations

Aspect	*Key Findings*	*References*
Pharmacists' Role in Natural Products	Pharmacists are critical in advising patients on the safe and effective use of natural products.	Ekor (2014); Brown & Patel (2020)
Consumer Trends	Increasing demand for natural alternatives due to perceived safety and fewer side effects compared to synthetic drugs.	Smith & Jones (2019); Izzo & Ernst (2009)
Dabur Products	Dabur's honey and Chyawanprash are widely recommended by pharmacists for immune-boosting and wellness purposes.	Singh & Goyal (2018); Rathi et al. (2017)
Zandu Products	Zandu's Chyawanprash and honey are highly recommended for traditional health benefits.	Rathi et al. (2017); Kaur & Kaur (2019)
Baidyanath Products	Baidyanath's oils are primarily recommended for therapeutic massage and wellness routines.	Patil & Bhat (2020); Sharma & Singh (2017)
Himalaya Products	Himalaya is favored for its herbal cosmetics, particularly facewash and shampoo.	Kaur & Kaur (2019); Geller & Studdert (2018)
Patanjali Products	Patanjali offers affordable natural products, with recommendations for both therapeutic and cosmetic use.	Sharma & Singh (2017); Patil & Bhat (2020)
Gaps in Research	Limited comparative studies of natural product brands and a lack of long-term outcome data.	Geller & Studdert (2018); Izzo & Ernst (2009)

collection of data at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of current trends and behaviors among the pharmacist population. This design is particularly useful for identifying associations and patterns in the data without requiring long-term observation.

Sample Population

The study surveyed exactly 100 pharmacists to ensure a manageable yet statistically significant sample size. The demographic characteristics of the pharmacists included in the survey were diverse, with participants varying in gender, age, and occupation. The gender distribution comprised 65% males and 35% females. The age distribution was as follows: 11% were under 25 years old, 40% were between 30 and 45 years old, 31% were between 50 and 60 years old, 8% were between 60 and 80 years old, and 2% were above 80 years old. Regarding occupation, 90% of the respondents were self-employed pharmacists, while 10% were employed as teachers in pharmacy-related fields.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire specifically designed to gather information on pharmacist preferences and recommendations for natural product brands. The questionnaire was printed on a single-sided form and contained 25 simple questions, 12 of which were aimed at collecting demographic and personal information about the respondents. Importantly, the questions were designed to ensure anonymity, with no identifying information being collected, thus safeguarding the privacy of the participants.

The questionnaire included a mix of closed-ended and multiple-choice questions, which were designed to be straightforward, allowing respondents to answer quickly and independently. Special attention was given to the clarity of the questions to ensure they were easily understood by respondents of all ages, including elderly pharmacists. All the survey forms were in English, and the same version of the questionnaire was used throughout the research to maintain consistency.

Given the objective of reaching pharmacists of various ages and ensuring a high response rate, the survey was conducted using paper forms rather than an online platform. This method was chosen because it was deemed more suitable for obtaining responses from a broader demographic, including those who may be less familiar with or have limited access to digital tools.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using quantitative methods to draw meaningful conclusions about the preferences and recommendations of pharmacists. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample, such as gender, age, and occupation. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each survey question to identify the most preferred and recommended natural product brands among the respondents.

To further explore relationships and patterns within the data, inferential statistical techniques were used. Chi-square tests were conducted to assess the association between demographic variables (such as age and gender) and brand preferences. Additionally, cross-tabulation was utilized to compare the preferences across different demographic groups, providing insights into how factors like age and occupation influence the recommendations of pharmacists.

The analysis aimed to uncover significant trends and correlations that could inform both the natural product industry and healthcare providers, enabling them to better understand the factors influencing pharmacist recommendations. The findings were then interpreted in the context of existing literature, contributing to a broader understanding of the role of pharmacists in the promotion and use of natural products.

RESULT

Among the surveyed pharmacists, 65% were male, while only 5% were female. Regarding age distribution, 11% of the respondents were under 25 years old, 40% were between 30 and 45 years, 31% were in the 50-60 age range, 8% were aged between 60 and 80 years, and 2% were above 80 years old. In terms of occupation, 90% of the pharmacists were self-employed, and 10% worked as teachers.

When it comes to product recommendations, 50% of the pharmacists primarily used and recommended Dabur products. Among these, 35% recommended Dabur honey (Figure 2a), 45% recommended Chyawanprash (Figure 2b), and 10% each recommended Dabur toothpaste and oil. For Zandu products, 20% of pharmacists used and recommended them, with 35% endorsing Zandu Chyawanprash, 25% recommending honey, 8% recommending oil, and 5% recommending toothpaste.

As for Baidyanath products, the recommendations were 18% for honey, 20% for Chyawanprash, and 30% for oil (Figure 2d). Himalaya products were predominantly used in cosmetics, with 55% of pharmacists recommending facewash (Figure 2c) and 10% recommending shampoo. Patanjali products were also used and recommended, with 15% endorsing honey, 15% for Chyawanprash, 15% for facewash, 35% for shampoo, and 10% for oil. Additionally, other brands of products were recommended, including 50% for shampoo, 30% for facewash, and 20% for oil (Table 2 and Table 3).

Table 2: The survey data for the 100 pharmacists are summarized below, with descriptive statistics for the key variables

Characteristics	*Mean (SD)*
Gender	
Male	65 (0.48)
Female	5 (0.22)
Age	
Below 25 years	11 (0.31)
30-45 years	40 (0.49)
50-60 years	31 (0.46)
60-80 years	8 (0.28)
Above 80 years	2 (0.14)
Occupation	
Self-employed	90 (0.30)
Teacher	10 (0.30)

Table 3: The survey data for the 100 pharmacists showing Preferred Brands and Products:

Preferred Brands and Products	
Dabur	
Honey	50 (0.50)
Chyawanprash	35 (0.48)
Toothpaste	10 (0.30)
Oil	10 (0.30)
Zandu	
Chyawanprash	35 (0.48)
Honey	25 (0.43)
Oil	8 (0.28)
Toothpaste	5 (0.22)
Baidyanath	
Honey	18 (0.38)
Chyawanprash	20 (0.40)
Oil	30 (0.46)
Himalaya	
Facewash	55 (0.50)
Shampoo	10 (0.30)
Patanjali	
Honey	15 (0.36)
Chyawanprash	15 (0.36)
Facewash	15 (0.36)
Shampoo	35 (0.48)
Oil	10 (0.30)
Other Products	
Shampoo	50 (0.50)
Facewash	30 (0.46)
Oil	20 (0.40)

Allopathic medicines are most commonly self-used and recommended for stomach problems (50% and 65%) and diabetes (35% and 30%). In contrast, their use and recommendation are very low for cardiovascular diseases (15% and 1.8%) (Figure 2e); while the self-use and recommendation of homeopathic medicines for diabetes, stomach issues, and cardiovascular diseases are almost negligible (0%) among respondents. This indicates a very low preference for homeopathy in managing these conditions (Figure 2f). However, herbal medications are most commonly self-used (55%) and recommended (60%) for stomach-related issues (Figure 2g), followed by moderate use for diabetes (30% self, 29% recommended).

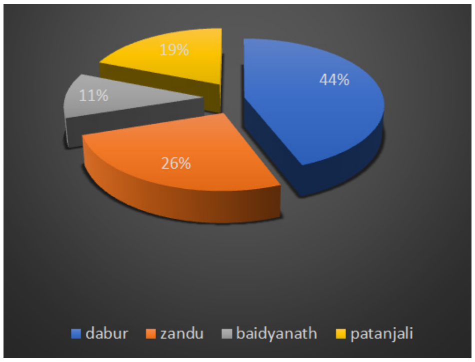

Figure 2(a): Self use & recommended of honey by pharmacist's

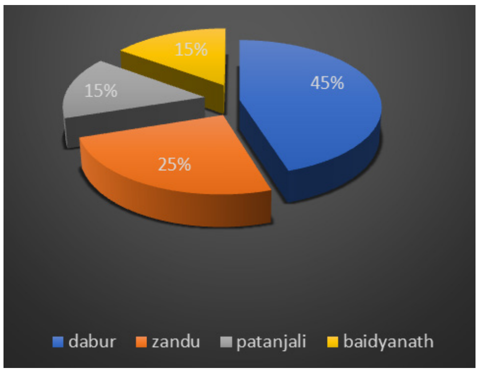

Figure 2(b): Self use & recommended of chayawanprash by Pharmacist

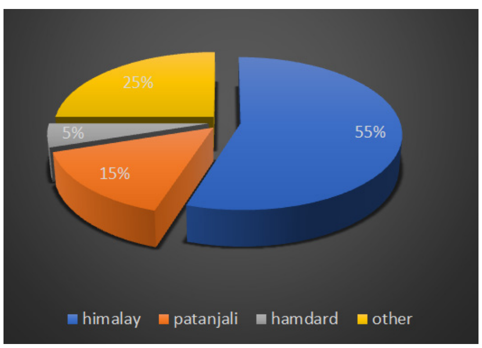

Figure 2(c): Self use and recommended of facewash by Pharmacistis

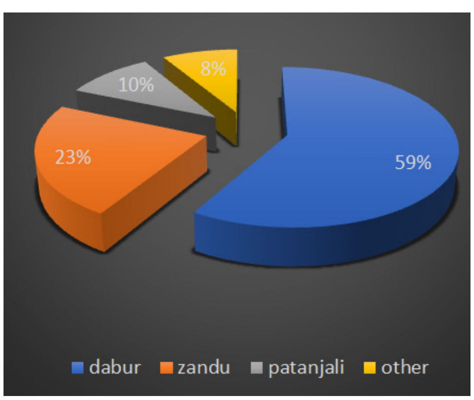

Figure 2(d): Self use & recommended of oil by pharmacist's

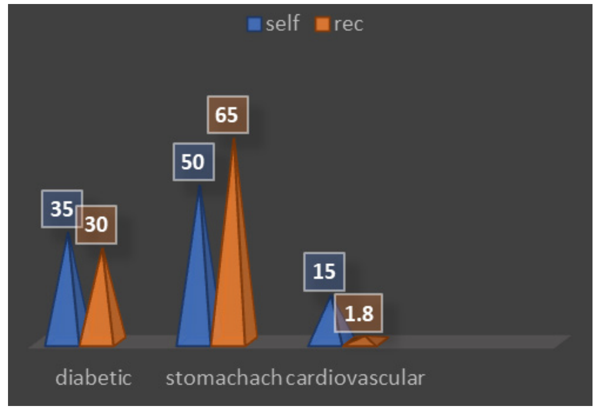

Figure 2(e): Self uses & recommendation of allopathy medication for disease

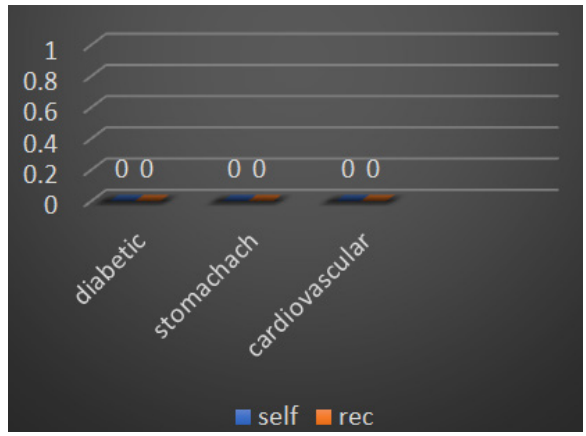

Figure 2(f): Self uses & recommendation of homeopathy medication for disease

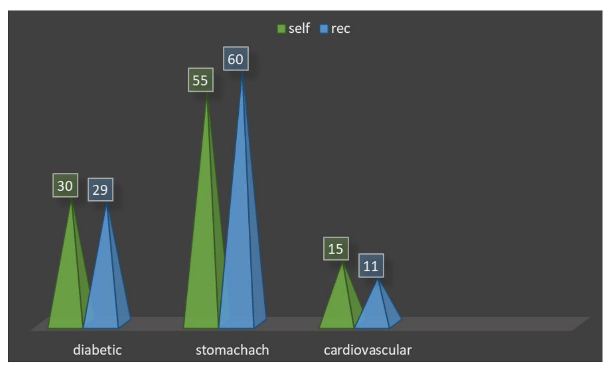

Figure 2(g): Self uses & recommendation of herbal medication for disease

Use and recommendation for cardiovascular conditions remain relatively low (15% self, 11% recommended).

CONCLUSION

The study highlights distinct patterns in pharmacists' demographics, product preferences, and therapeutic recommendations. The majority of respondents were male and self-employed, with a predominant age group between 30 to 60 years. Among healthcare products, Dabur emerged as the most commonly used and recommended brand, particularly for Chyawanprash and honey, followed by Zandu, Baidyanath, Himalaya, and Patanjali, each with varied product-specific preferences.

In terms of therapeutic approaches, allopathic medications were predominantly self-used and recommended for stomach ailments and diabetes, whereas their use for cardiovascular diseases was limited. Homeopathic medications showed negligible usage or recommendation, indicating a low level of trust among pharmacists. In contrast, herbal medications, especially for stomach issues, were widely used and recommended, suggesting a preference for natural and traditional remedies for certain conditions.

Overall, the findings underscore a significant inclination toward herbal and allopathic solutions, with clear brand-specific and disease-specific trends, while homeopathy holds limited influence in pharmacists' practice.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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