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Pharmaceutical laboratories' communication during the Covid-19 Crisis: Actors, tools, and action logics

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Abstract:

Since Marche 2020, many socio-economic actors, such as pharmaceutical companies, have had to rethink their communication strategies due to the constraints imposed by the Coronavirus pandemic. This study examines the communications changes and the resources mobilized by pharmaceutical companies operating in Algeria during this period of health crisis. Its aim is to examine the changes in communication approaches undertaken by the laboratories in the digital and information and communication technologies era. This empirical and qualitative study is based on interviews with a set of actors involved in pharmaceutical companies' communication campaigns, namely: medical delgates, doctors and pharmacists. The activities of these pharmaceutical companies on the web and on social media networks were also observed.

Keywords*: Covid-19; Digital; Communication campaigns; Medical delgates; Pharmaceutical companies.*

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Introduction

We are all aware of the essential role that communication plays in human relations and its importance in the life of socio-economic organizations. Its usefulness within organizations is undeniable, as it is indispensable for the promotion of products and services. This is particularly true in the human pharmaceutical industry, where its impact is even more evident.

Indeed, the nature of this economic activity differs from others due to the very strict rules governing the advertising and promotion of its products, whose target audience is not an ordinary consumer. Unlike certain industries, the pharmaceutical sector is above all a fundamental component of the healthcare system. It contributes to scientific progress and to improving quality of life by developing medicines that serve human health.

Nevertheless, the products and activities of this industry are subject to laws, regulations, and policies governing the development, manufacturing, authorization, quality control, and marketing of medicines in many countries. In this respect, Algerian health law, particularly Chapter VI, is very explicit. Articles 237 and 240 clearly define what constitutes pharmaceutical product advertising practices, as well as their limits and the rules that must be respected.

In this regard, medicines cannot be marketed like other products, mainly because of their specific nature and purpose (Ollivier & Hurteloup, 2008, 242), but also because they are subject to market standards that differ from those applicable to mass consumer goods.

To circumvent these legal constraints in the Algerian context, pharmaceutical companies employ intermediaries responsible for carrying out promotional missions targeting healthcare stakeholders and professionals, namely physicians and pharmacists. These intermediaries, known as medical or pharmaceutical representatives (or sales representatives), act as spokespersons for the laboratories among their partners in the healthcare sector, introducing them to their products and services.

According to a World Health Organization (WHO) definition, medical representatives spend most of their time meeting face-to-face with practicing healthcare professionals (Gray, Hoffman & Mansfield, 2013, 63).

Their role is to inform healthcare professionals about new studies, the benefits and risks of treatments, and to provide information about marketed medicines. In this way, they promote manufactured products primarily through interpersonal communication. This form of marketing represents the largest expenditure for pharmaceutical companies: in 2004 alone, in the United States, the budget allocated to it was estimated at more than 10 billion dollars (Gray, Hoffman & Mansfield, 2013, 63).

However, since the health crisis related to the coronavirus and the long months of lockdown, these communication practices have been completely disrupted in the name of the precautionary principle and social distancing imposed by the global pandemic.

It is within this perspective that our empirical and qualitative study is situated. It aims to examine the communication transformations adopted by pharmaceutical companies operating in Algeria during this period of health crisis (lockdown). Accordingly, we seek to answer the following question: how did pharmaceutical laboratories adapt their traditional communication strategies to the new context of the health crisis?

This line of inquiry leads us to assume that pharmaceutical companies opted for new temporary communication plans in order to continue promoting their products. Traditional communication campaigns were therefore likely adapted to the specific circumstances by leveraging the potential offered by digital spaces and information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Consequently, through its cross-sectional approach, this research seeks to provide an overview of the evolution of communication practices and medical detailing in the digital era. This work is based on interviews conducted with a group of medical representatives (5), physicians (5), and one pharmacist, as well as on an observation of pharmaceutical companies' activities on the Internet and digital social networks (DSNs).

1. Pharmaceutical companies' communication campaigns in normal times

Before going any further in this analysis, it is appropriate to first examine certain concepts specific to pharmaceutical companies' activities in

relation to communication. It should be emphasized that these practices existed well before the Covid-19 pandemic.

To cope with the constraints imposed by legislation regarding advertising in the pharmaceutical sector, pharmaceutical companies resort to other channels, which of course remain legal. These communication campaigns are essentially based on operational marketing (Lendrevie Jacques, 2000). This approach relies on what is known as the sales force, composed of medical and pharmaceutical representatives responsible for providing information and promoting medicines. Their mission, as defined by Leem[2], is to present products to members of the medical profession. They are also tasked with developing persuasive arguments and responding to questions concerning the efficacy, tolerability, and potential side effects of the promoted products.

It is important, however, to emphasize that medical or pharmaceutical detailing is subject to ethical rules and good practice standards. Some countries regulate this activity through the implementation of a medical visit charter[3].

Medical detailing thus enables the implementation of promotional and communication campaigns targeting specific audiences (physicians and pharmacists) who have the authority to prescribe medicines and therefore generate prescriptions. This function, carried out by medical representatives (supervised by regional managers), whose profiles are generally rooted in scientific fields (medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, veterinary and biological sciences), represents one of the main areas of communication investment and expenditure for pharmaceutical companies.

It should be noted that, unlike medical representatives, pharmaceutical representatives work more closely with pharmacies and pharmacists. Their mission consists of ensuring product availability on the market. This activity also aims to encourage in-pharmacy sales of products without necessarily going through wholesale distributors.

Other key actors also intervene in this promotional process. Among them is the Product Manager, also referred to as the Key Account Manager

[2] https://www.leem.org/definition-du-metier-de-visiteur-medical
[3] https://www.leem.org/sites/default/files/import/presse/communiques/122_61.pdf

(KAM), who develops overall communication strategies and action plans according to product ranges. The KAM also participates in data analysis, competitive environment assessment, and the study of specific contexts, such as the health crisis and lockdown, in order to respond and develop new communication strategies that address emerging needs.

In addition to these actors, pharmaceutical companies may engage or mobilize other contributors when necessary. These include opinion leaders, health specialists who speak at conferences (whether in person or online) to address epidemiological aspects, required treatments, global recommendations, and more. These experts are likely to influence the decisions of prescribers and pharmaceutical distributors (De Baynast, Lendrevie & Lévy, 2017, 54). Resorting to such influencers provides significant support and grants greater credibility to the promoted products. All these actors, traditionally associated with conventional pharmaceutical practices, were compelled to invest more heavily in the digital sphere, particularly during the lockdown period.

In terms of activity, each representative conducts an average of around ten visits per day. Target selection is determined according to the product range and customer portfolio segmentation, following carefully considered targeting and hyper-targeting strategies previously established through surveys. For their part, physicians and pharmacists receive up to around ten representatives per week (between six and ten for physicians, and between four and six for pharmacists).

Generally, a visit lasts between ten and twenty minutes, the time needed to exchange and present information to healthcare professionals. As one pharmacist notes: “For my part, I receive an average of five medical representatives per week. I allocate about fifteen minutes to each of them to learn about the medicine presented, whether old or new, as they are expected to provide us with updated information. Sometimes, when we are overwhelmed by patients, we simply do not have the time to listen to them[4].”

Nevertheless, practitioners unanimously acknowledge the importance of medical detailing due to its informative nature: “It adds value, as representatives inform the medical profession about product availability and

[4] Interview with pharmacist A. Ait Benali, conducted on May 15, 2025.

pricing[5]." This delegation work also helps to "update scientific knowledge about new molecules for better use[6]." Thus, medical representatives contribute to the circulation of information related to medicines and participate in enhancing the safety of professional practices[7].

To accomplish this mission, the sales force benefits, from the time of recruitment, from periodic training aimed at mastering communication techniques, pharmaceutical marketing, sales, negotiation, and planning in the field of medical detailing. These training sessions are often organized abroad, both for professional development purposes and as part of a motivational strategy through incentive trips[8].

2. The communication strategy of pharmaceutical companies

Pharmaceutical companies' communication is part of an overall promotional strategy. This communication framework aims to influence the prescribing behavior of healthcare professionals (Meslem Abir Boukerch & Yahia, 2020, 97–120). This strategy is implemented by medical representatives through medical and pharmaceutical visits.

In their communication approach, laboratory representatives prioritize the technique of exchange, face-to-face interaction. During these meetings, they present the distinctive characteristics of the product, which they translate into therapeutic and economic advantages (price, reimbursement). In this field, they apply a principle that has become a genuine motto: "sell benefits, not features." They develop tailored arguments based on a "patient profile," prepared in advance by the Product Manager and grounded in scientific evidence and global recommendations issued by certain health authorities favorable to their products. They also take into account the opinions of healthcare partners and collaborators (physicians, specialists), as well as the laboratory's consultants.

At the same time, they rely on active listening techniques to gather feedback and record doctors' objections, observations, and complaints

[5] Interview with A. F., general practitioner at EPSP of Aokas, conducted on June 10, 2025.
[6] Interview with Dr M. H, medical specialist, conducted on June 10, 2025.
[7] Interview with Dr. D. I., cardiologist, conducted on May 20, 2025.
[8] Interview with M. Kadi, medical delegate at Mag Pharm, conducted on April 28, 2025.

regarding the product. The representative thus adopts a form of information monitoring that enables them to respond according to context, observe their environment, and analyze competitors' actions.

While the dissemination of medical information by representatives helps update physicians' knowledge and build trust, this activity clearly falls within the scope of promotional communication, whose objective is to circulate and position pharmaceutical industry products using specific promotional materials.

Under normal circumstances, the respondents interviewed state that they receive a range of brochures, leaflets, posters, and promotional gadgets bearing the name of a laboratory and/or a product brand, as well as books, scientific journals, and even product samples (tests). This practice, referred to in industry jargon as "marking the visit," consists of leaving behind a tangible reminder of the brand, which will recall the product to the prospect each time they look at the branded item.

During their visits, representatives also use dosage cards, advertising sheets, product visuals, and a sales aid (Detailing Aid). These technical tools are accompanied by rhetoric and discursive strategies adapted to the interlocutor's profile and the communication context. In order to achieve the desired objectives, "several techniques are used, such as the inverted pyramid, counterpoint, the 'records and jokes' method, the use of humor, or adapting tone according to the profile of the physician or pharmacist and the situation[9]."

This sales force perfectly embodies the profession's flagship slogan: "the power of persuasion, the strength of the salesperson," summarizing the representative's impact on prospects. According to a frequently cited formula, "7% of the message is conveyed through words, 38% through tone of voice, and 55% through gestures" (Intermed, 2007, 66).

Internally, representatives are required to report and communicate to their superiors, particularly regional managers, on their weekly activities and the actions carried out during visits. Using reporting tools, they highlight problems encountered in the field, healthcare professionals' reactions, organized medical events, as well as anomalies, stock shortages, and any useful information related to products or competitive activities.

[9] Interview with M. Kadi, *Op. cit.*

This system makes it possible to readjust and redirect strategy and communication plans according to needs and in response to competitors' strategies. As one of our respondents notes: "Competition is particularly fierce, especially during the Covid period, when almost everyone was adopting the same practices. We constantly had to innovate and readapt our communication action plan to stay one step ahead of competitors[10]."

In addition to individual visits, representatives also organize focus groups and roundtable meetings within healthcare institutions. Using presentation tools (data projectors), they present the characteristics of a given product to a small group of physicians.

They sometimes sponsor postgraduate training programs, seminars, conferences, and symposiums organized at national or international levels. These events target a network of physicians and pharmacists considered potentially strategic partners for their products, in accordance with the Pareto principle, whereby 20% of the customer portfolio generates 80% of the laboratory's revenue[11].

These training sessions are often led by recognized professors and specialists—namely, medical opinion leaders in their therapeutic area. The laboratory's brands and products are systematically highlighted, particularly through exhibition stands or explicit references during scientific presentations.

In sum, the representative (medical, commercial, or pharmaceutical) constitutes an essential element of pharmaceutical companies' communication processes. They serve as the laboratory's ambassador, acting both as a receiver and sender of internal communication (upward and downward) and of external communication, often horizontal, with healthcare professionals. Some laboratories even consider the representative as a "medium"[12] in their own right, given the intensity of promotional activity and the sustained persuasive effort carried out to win, maintain, and protect market share within a specific segment.

[10] Interview with S. Kechid, medical representative at Sanofi, conducted on May 19, 2025.
[11] *Idem*.
[12] *Idem*.

3. Pharmaceutical companies' communication during Covid-19

One of the most striking global trends following the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic was the rise of remote work and the increased investment in digital communication. By way of illustration, in Switzerland, the research and development budget in the pharmaceutical industry increased by 1.3 billion in 2019, according to the latest report published by the Federal Statistical Office. Over the following two years, annual expenditures rose by 10%, including ICT-related service expenses, which accounted for 14% of this increase (Meyer-Vacherand, 2022). These figures reflect a deliberate commitment by the industry to invest more heavily in what is perceived as a promising sector, in order to optimize its services and adapt to new contexts, particularly during times of crisis.

In Algeria, from mid-February 2020 onwards, most laboratories recalled their representatives and suspended face-to-face meetings. High-risk working conditions prompted pharmaceutical companies to rethink their communication methods and strategies. During this crisis period, their action plans were readjusted to a health context requiring greater social distancing and a significant reduction in travel and physical interactions. As an alternative, pharmaceutical companies primarily focused on the use of ICTs and digital platforms to maintain, as much as possible, a minimum level of activity.

According to our respondents, this reorganization resulted in the implementation of internal virtual meetings, online conferences, and remote sessions organized as part of postgraduate training programs, mainly targeting physicians and pharmacists.

Moreover, laboratories intensified the dissemination of promotional content on digital social networks and websites, while increasingly relying on videoconferencing platforms and applications (Zoom, Remote, Medeo, etc.), as well as reporting and management tools (CRM, PowerPoint, Excel).

These practices made it possible to maintain contact with healthcare professionals, strengthen relationships within professional networks, and conduct information monitoring in order to track competitors' activities.

Thus, the crisis context led pharmaceutical companies to adopt new action plans. Their activities gradually shifted from the physical sphere to the digital space, with an increased reliance on digital tools to optimize the

effectiveness of medical visits. It was within this framework that a digitalized version of the medical visit emerged—already known to laboratories but previously underutilized.

Certainly, the use of these new tools profoundly transformed the format of medical visits without altering their purpose, messages, or fundamental principles of communication. In other words, while the medium and modes of dissemination evolved, the substance of communication remained relatively stable, while at the same time opening up new perspectives and possibilities for dissemination, echoing the idea developed by Romand (2009, 56).

4. The technical and digital alternative

It should be emphasized that pharmaceutical companies around the world did not wait for the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic to introduce ICTs into their communication processes. In Algeria, for example, major pharmaceutical companies have, for more than a decade, provided their representatives with technological tools such as tablets, iPads, and free Internet subscriptions in order to facilitate their work, particularly during medical visits. For instance, Sanofi Aventis allocates an annual budget of 60,000 dinars (approximately 300 euros) for the purchase of a professional mobile phone[13].

This gradual digitalization has contributed to intensifying pressure within the sector, where brand and product recall has become omnipresent in disseminated communications. Communication no longer targets only a specialized audience (prospects), but also makes it possible to reach the general public (patients) through the Internet and digital social networks, while generating substantial savings in terms of costs, time, and communication efforts.

That said, ICTs have enabled pharmaceutical companies' sales forces to maintain almost constant contact with their socio-economic environment, while also fostering customer loyalty and retention within the company's digital extensions through subscription options, tags, hyperlinks, website redirects, and private discussion groups on social networks. This digital

[13] Interview with S. Kechid, *Op. cit*

potential has also contributed to a gradual reduction in budgets allocated to traditional promotional materials (flyers, posters, printed materials), which have progressively been replaced by digital content and formats (texts, videos, slides, interactive content).

With the Covid-19 crisis, the pharmaceutical industry was compelled to accelerate this transition and rethink its prospecting methods and sales force practices. The immediate priority was to maintain contact with healthcare professionals and preserve the resulting promotional activity (Laazzabi, 2022, 40).

During the initial phase corresponding to the first month of lockdown (February–March 2020), medical and pharmaceutical representatives were instructed to contact their prospects and client networks by telephone[14]. The aim was twofold: first, to inquire about physicians' situations in an empathetic approach, as they were on the front line of the pandemic[15]; and second, to collect information, data, and electronic contact details (email addresses, digital contact information, etc.) in order to strengthen relationships and continue communication remotely.

Subsequently, remote work was adopted as an alternative, with varying rhythms and modalities depending on the laboratory, although similar in form and purpose. Some representatives worked up to eight hours per day and conducted up to three individual virtual meetings[16] per week with physicians via applications such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Viva Engage, or remote detailing platforms[17].

Remote work took various forms: sending emails (mailing), organizing webinars, virtual conferences and meetings, conducting online medical visits, participating in e-congresses and digital booths (e-stands), as well as publishing content on public and private digital social networks.

[14] Since the Russo-Ukrainian war, Sanofi Ukraine has provided a telephone hotline for patients who have left the country, in order to maintain contact and continue clinical trials and studies on test subjects.

[15] In Algeria, more than 40 medical doctors have died due to Covid-19.

[16] Interview with S. Kechid, *Op. cit*

[17] Interviews with medical representatives from the laboratories Hikma, Sanofi Aventis–Algeria, and Magpharma.

According to one of our respondents[18], Sanofi Aventis is among the leaders in Algeria in terms of digital integration since the Covid-19 pandemic. The company notably developed an application called Medéo, enabling its network and collaborators to access, free of charge, reports, studies, scientific recommendations, and medical videos from a dedicated database. Representatives received specific training on the use of these digital tools. Furthermore, an application intended for partner physicians, still in an experimental phase, was introduced to facilitate remote consultations with their patients.

Emailing, already part of routine practices before the pandemic, became a central channel for both internal and external communication during the health crisis. It facilitated the transmission of information and reports to management, the sending of messages and Internet links, and the sharing of documents useful to physicians. It was also through this channel that representatives invited physicians and pharmacists to participate in individual discussions, virtual conferences, and group meetings.

Whether in the form of medical visits, conferences, or other digital activities, once informed and invited, prospects could participate remotely or freely access links, watch medical videos, listen to podcasts, or download documents made available online by the laboratory. They could also access digital promotional materials, particularly the electronic Detailing Aid (E-ADV), which presents the features, benefits, and indications of products as developed in the medical representative's sales argument.

In its electronic version, this visual tool is more interactive and dynamic. It reinforces the impact of the message by engaging visual memory, thereby complementing the representative's oral discourse with compelling illustrations that facilitate understanding.

Thus, the medical visit can take place entirely remotely, by telephone and/or via the Internet, depending on the prospect's preference. In such cases, the representative provides access codes enabling the physician to log onto the discussion platform (meeting) and simultaneously view the shared E-ADV on screen. This configuration promotes interaction, questions, and feedback under conditions similar to those of an in-person visit.

[18] Interview with S. Kechid, *Op. cit*

During the lockdown period, each representative was required to organize, on average, up to three remote medical visits per week, in addition to other activities deployed across various digital networks.

5. Mapping the use of digital social networks by pharmaceutical companies

Despite the restrictions and strict regulations governing the pharmaceutical industry's communication activities toward the general public, this has not prevented laboratories from investing in the digital sphere. On digital social networks (DSNs), laboratories adopt what may be described as a "soft" communication style, lighter and more engaging in tone. The use of testimonials and storytelling is particularly noteworthy: the aim is to tell stories that highlight the company's commitment to individual well-being, society, and the public interest. These publications, conveying positive energy, are often illustrated with images of smiling individuals.

Our observation of digital spaces reveals that major companies in this sector, such as AstraZeneca, Pfizer, and Sanofi, are among the most active on DSNs, maintaining official and verified pages and channels on platforms such as Facebook and YouTube.

Within their content strategies, certain laboratories, such as AstraZeneca, associate their Facebook posts with themes that concern citizens, such as environmental protection or the improvement of living conditions, in order to project the image of a responsible, civic-minded company engaged in socially oriented initiatives. It has also been observed that these laboratories disseminate and share, through their official pages, links to conferences and thematic meetings they organize, as is the case with Pfizer.

Laboratories involved in the production of Covid-19 vaccines have regularly emphasized, in their publications, the importance of vaccination campaigns as well as the schedules for administering different doses. In their pursuit of visibility, they frequently tag the names of opinion leaders and recognized influencers who participate in these conferences.

Beyond DSNs, some laboratories also invest in specialized websites dedicated to providing information on specific pathologies, where they highlight their products and brands. For example, the laboratory Lilly has a

website dedicated to diabetes[19], while Pfizer Canada supports the website of the Arthritis Society[20].

Moreover, the use of webcasts represents another strategy developed by laboratories within their digital spaces (websites and DSNs). This enables professionals or Internet users who were unable to attend congresses, conferences, or training sessions to view recordings via streaming.

These digital platforms for publicizing medical information thus serve as showcases and contribute to a form of continuous media presence, reinforcing awareness of laboratories' products and brands.

Pharmaceutical companies' engagement with scientific societies (in the health sector) through the funding and sponsorship of scientific activities (conferences, symposiums, postgraduate training, etc.) also constitutes a strategic lever. It serves as a means of support and lobbying aimed at strengthening product positioning in the market and increasing visibility in the face of competition.

The websites of certain scientific societies therefore function as advertising interfaces for laboratory brands. This is the case, for example, with the website of the Algerian Society of Diabetology[21], which displays several partner laboratory brands. Other organizations integrate laboratory logos into the credits of educational videos or offer virtual tours of the stands operated by these pharmaceutical companies on the sidelines of (hybrid) congresses, as illustrated by the Algerian Society of Arterial Hypertension (SAHA).

In their digital communication strategies, laboratories notably tag the names of collaborators and well-known specialists, regarded as opinion leaders and influencers within the field. Their authority amplifies the reach of messages and enhances brand visibility, particularly through the use of hashtags, hyperlinks, and redirects to institutional websites or to the personal accounts of these experts. This strategy helps maintain Internet users within the company's digital ecosystem.

[19] www.mondiabete.net
[20] www.arthrite.ca
[21] www.sadiab-dz.com

However, interactivity on these digital platforms appears selective and controlled. Published comments are often filtered and limited to those deemed "relevant" or favorable to the brand. The note stating that "some comments may have been filtered" frequently appears at the bottom of posts, indicating moderation by page administrators.

Finally, the dissemination of specialized medical data on DSNs to a non-specialist audience remains problematic. Such information may be misinterpreted and potentially misleading. For this reason, some laboratories prefer to refrain from publishing overly technical medical content on these public platforms[22].

6. Between social communication and creating a need

During the Covid-19 pandemic, some laboratories, such as Pfizer, invested in corporate social communication by launching awareness campaigns through both traditional media (posters and billboards) and digital media (awareness videos, posts on digital social networks, etc.). However, "these posters are associated with the brand and the name of the laboratory[23]."

While no one can question the empathy shown by representatives toward their collaborators or prospects during the health crisis, it is important to recall that even under normal circumstances, pharmaceutical companies incorporate the technique of need creation into their communication strategies. Indeed, identifying a need initiates engagement and opens dialogue in order to provide solutions.

This crisis period therefore represented an opportunity for them to strengthen relationships with their networks and transform the pandemic into an opportunity. Many pharmaceutical companies identified, or even created and remotely documented, new needs related to medical, material, and scientific aspects. Services such as workplace disinfection or the provision of protective equipment for medical staff (gowns, gloves, masks, hydroalcoholic gel, etc.) were offered to prospects in response to their need for safety and protection.

[22]Interview with M. Habi, medical representative at Hikma, conducted on May 19, 2025.
[23]Interview with Dr. L. Amrane, psychiatrist in Béjaia, conducted on May 5, 2025.

Representatives also supplied medicines that were out of stock (for example, Lovenox)[24], as well as respiratory devices to physicians who requested them. In addition to these material needs, there was also a purely medical and scientific need. In this regard, representatives played the role of disseminators and transmitters, particularly through digital tools and ICTs, of new data and global recommendations concerning the management and treatment of vulnerable patients at high risk of complications in the event of Covid-19 infection. Hence the continued remote contact and exchanges, as well as the organization of online conferences and training sessions for prospects.

However, it should also be emphasized that the excessive repetition of similar practices by representatives from different laboratories sometimes produced the opposite effect. In this respect, in 2020, 58% of French physicians considered remote interactions less satisfactory than face-to-face meetings[25]. Over time, prospects, the primary targets of the pharmaceutical sales force, experienced a sense of fatigue, or even an intrusion into their private lives, as remote promotional pressure extended beyond regular working hours[26].

Conclusion

The coronavirus crisis further highlighted for pharmaceutical companies the importance of digital tools and the usefulness of ICTs in their communication campaigns, as well as in the rapid transmission of information to prospects at lower cost and without physical contact. The use of ICTs in medical detailing has helped reduce expenses related to paper-based materials, brochures, and other printed supports, which have gradually been replaced by digital content (e-posters, e-ADV, etc.). This explains the enthusiasm of these companies for developing digital communication systems.

[24]According to our respondents, Sanofi Aventis–Algeria had supplied 18 million doses of Lovenox (an anticoagulant) to the Central Pharmacy responsible for supplying public healthcare facilities with medical products and consumables.
[25] Laazzabi Yacout, (2022), *Op.cit,* p. 41.
[26] Interview with Dr. H. B., general practitioner in Béjaia, conducted on May 5, 2025.

With the return to normal, some laboratories have sought to maintain the use of ICTs in their communication strategies, particularly for organizing postgraduate training sessions (e-EPU) and even for conducting virtual visits, as exemplified by the laboratory GSK.

The Covid-19 crisis has also fueled pharmaceutical companies' ambition to invest further in digital solutions. Sanofi Aventis Algeria, for example, plans to launch a telemedicine and remote medical consultation platform for its prospects. Moreover, thanks to ICTs, reporting systems have shifted from weekly reports to daily updates: representatives are now required to transmit their performance summaries instantly to their hierarchy using management software (CRM).

These tools undoubtedly accelerate two-way communication between management and the sales force, but they also serve as a means of monitoring and control, encouraging representatives to improve their performance.

Finally, it should be noted that prospects' acceptance of ICT use remains problematic. Many representatives agree that face-to-face meetings remain irreplaceable in medical marketing campaigns. This has led several laboratories to abandon remote practices that were adopted temporarily and out of necessity during the coronavirus pandemic. Furthermore, the excessive repetition of similar practices by different laboratories has sometimes produced counterproductive effects. Over time, prospects experienced a certain fatigue, with remote media pressure being perceived as an intrusion into their private lives.

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