

A Study On Information In Drug Advertisements: An Example From Türkiye

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Abstract: Physician prescribe medications partly on the basis of the information made available to them by the pharmaceutical companies' advertisements placed in medical journals. Because of this reason, the advertisements must require some qualifications. In December 1990, Ministry of Health put a new regulation into force to control the promotion of medicines. In our study, "Journal of Turkish Clinics" has been taken as a sample and the regulation is compared.

For 1990, while 58 % of the advertisements were given by foreign companies, this ratio increased to 89% in 1991. The availability of information on indication did not differ too much. It was 100% in 1991, while it had been 98% in 1990.

The very significantly different result found between 1990 and 1991, was the information on price. While it was 0.9% in 1990, it increased to 46 % in 1991.

Keywords: Pharmacy, Promotion, Drug Advertisements

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Introduction

It has been estimated that, the average viable market life of a drug is approximately five years. Thus many of the drugs available to practitioner were unknown to them during their medical training. As a result, health practitioners are undated with information regarding drug therapy. These messages originate from such professional sources as detailmen, journal advertisements and samples.

Physicians report that, drug advertisements are an important source of information and they rated drug advertisements in medical journals, as either

İlaç Reklamlarının İçerdiği Bilgi Üzerine Bir Araştırma: Türkiye'den Bir Örnek

Özet: Hekimler reçete yazarken tıbbi dergilerde yer alan ilaç reklamlarındaki bilgilerden de bir ölçüde etkilendirler. Bu nedenle hekimlere sunulan ilaç reklamlarında aranan özellikler vardır. 1990 Aralık ayında Sağlık Bakanlığı tarafından İlaç Reklamları Yönetmeliği çıkarılmıştır. Bu çalışmada "Türkiye Klinikleri" dergisinde yer alan ilaç reklamları baz alınarak, yönetmelikten önce ve sonra ilaç reklamlarında yer alan bilgiler karşılaştırılmıştır.

1990 yılında reklam veren firmaların % 58'ini yabancı şirketler oluştururken, 1991'de bu oran % 89 olarak bulunmuştur. Endikasyon bilgisinin bulunabilirliği değişiklik göstermemiştir. 1990 yılında bu oran % 98 iken, 1991'de % 100 olmuştur.

1990 ve 1991 yılları arasında en çok fark olan bilgi ise fiattır. 1990'da % 0.9 oranında fiyat bilgisi verilirken, 1991'de bu oran % 46'dır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Eczacılık, Promosyon, İlaç Reklamları

somewhat or very important to them as sources of information¹. Although the exact extent of this influence has not been directly measured, the potential for influence is great.

The possibility has been raised that the drug advertising affects not only prescribing, but also diagnosis². Unfortunately, the specific role of journal advertising cannot be isolated.

The recent history of legislative control of drug advertising commences with the thalidomide disaster of 1962 in United States and subsequent legislation was initiated by the Food and Drug Administration (F.D.A.) in the period between 1962 and 1968².

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In U.S.A., F.D.A. follows up the advertisements one by one, so as to find out whether the drug advertisements are misleading, false or inappropriate. Journals publish the misleading advertisements an companies' name by the request of F.D.A.³.

In Türkiye, the regulation concerning the promotion of human pharmaceuticals and medical preparations was put into force in late 1990 by the Ministry of Health General Directorate of Pharmaceuticals⁴.

According to this regulation, a drug advertisement must give the information of commercial and generic name, dosage form, indications, side effect, interactions, contraindications, warnings, references, legal category and price of the drug (Table 1). These concepts are also suggested by World Health Organization (WHO)⁵.

Table 1: Regulation Concerning the Promotion of Human Pharmaceutical and Medical Preparations

Article 15: Printed promotional materials, which have claims on medical products should contain the following information:

- * the commercial name of the drug, the name(s) of the active ingredient(s) using either international nonproprietary name(s) (INN) or the approved generic name of the drug
- * content of active ingredient(s) per dosage form
- * approved, minimum one therapeutic form,
- * dosage form or regimen,
- * major side effects,
- * major interactions,
- * contraindications, warnings,
- * name expression "please apply for detailed information",
- * legal category (narcotics or other controlled drugs)
- * The price of the drug and given date

We aimed to analyse the information in drug advertisements, and we also tried to find out the effects of the new regulation.

Materials and Methods

This is a before after study⁶. The first part belongs to 1990, that is, before the regulation and the second part belongs to 1991, that is, after the regulation.

All 1990, and 1991 issues of "Turkish Clinics" which is one of the leading medical journals is selected as the model.

Parameters taken account were: Therapeutical class, pharmaceutical form, the ratio(proportion) of the trade (commercial) name/generic name (height of the letters as milimeters) indications, side effects, warnings/precautions, references, name and the address of the manufacturer, pictorial elements(man, woman, child, product and containers) and graphics. Although the regulation does not force the information on bioavailability, ratio of brand name/generic name and pictorial elements, we consider these elements to be effective for appropriate advertising and included these parameters in the study.

We collected data in a coding form, and evaluated and compared the results of before and after the regulation as foreign and domestic companies' advertisements with "difference between two proportions" and "chi-square" statistical tests.

Results

Almost 20 % of the space in the journals were occupied by drug advertisements in both years. While it was 146/736 for 1990 and, 114/648 for 1991 in terms of pages ($p > 0.05$). All of the advertisements were full page advertisements and all were on pages of the journal and none was on loose inserts. And in both years, 84 % of the advertisements were only a single page.

For 1990, while the 58 % of the advertisements were belonging to foreign companies, it was 89 % for 1991 ($p < 0.05$). Before the regulation, 98 % of the advertisements had generic names. However in 1991, that is after the regulation, it was 94%. In most of the advertisements, the generic name appeared in smaller type than the brand name. The ratio of brand/generic name size (height) ranged from 1 to 16. The brand name/generic name size proportion for 1990 and 1991 are shown in Figure 1.

If we look at the ratio of the availability of information on indication, it did not differ too much. It was 100 % in 1991, while it had been 98 % in 1990.

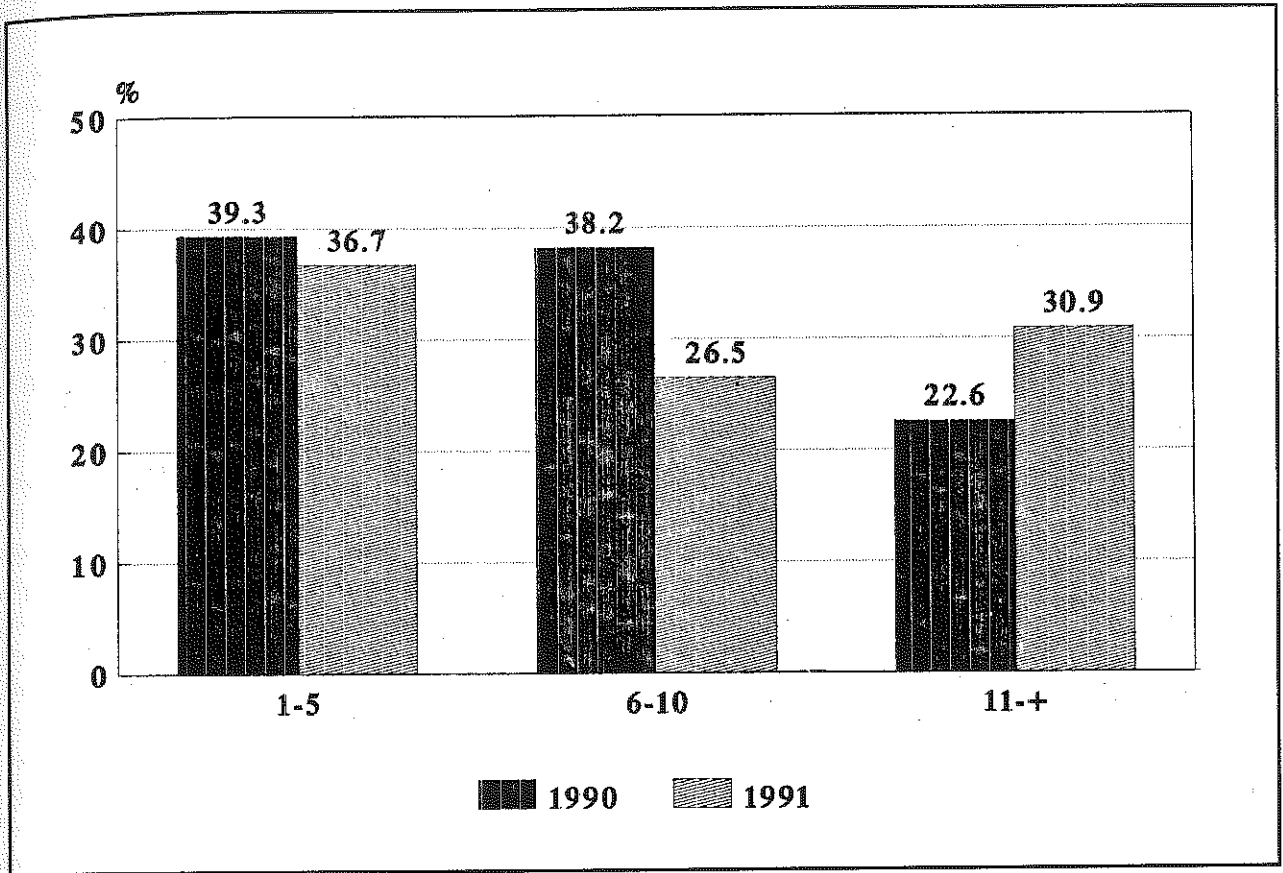


Figure 1: The ratio of brand name/generic name size (Height of the letters as proportion)

The ratio of availability of information on adverse effects, contraindication, warnings/precautions between years 1990 and 1991 differed ($p < 0.05$) (Figure 2).

In 1990, only 0.9 % of the advertisements included information on price. This ratio increased to 46 % in 1991 ($p < 0.05$).

For our study, space allocation for drug advertisements by therapeutic category (class) was found as follows according to years 1990 and 1991 (Table 2):

Pictorial elements were also analysed. Almost all the advertisements had pictures. The breakdown of the elements, that were present in the pictures indicated that the drug product or its containers was the most frequently mentioned element. The other elements are also found to be as follows (Table 3):

Table 2: Space Allocation for Drug Advertisement by Therapeutic Category in "Turkish Clinics" According to years 1990 and 1991.

Therapeutic Category	1990 (%)	1991 (%)
Antibiotics	23.0	22.4
Antifungal Agents	19.0	20.4
Hormones abd Gynecological Prep.	6.0	5.1
Analgesics	4.3	5.1
Antihyperlipidemic Drugs	4.3	5.1
NSAID's	3.5	6.1
Agents Used in Anemia	3.5	-
Antihypertensives	3.5	16.3
Miscellaneous	32.9	19.5

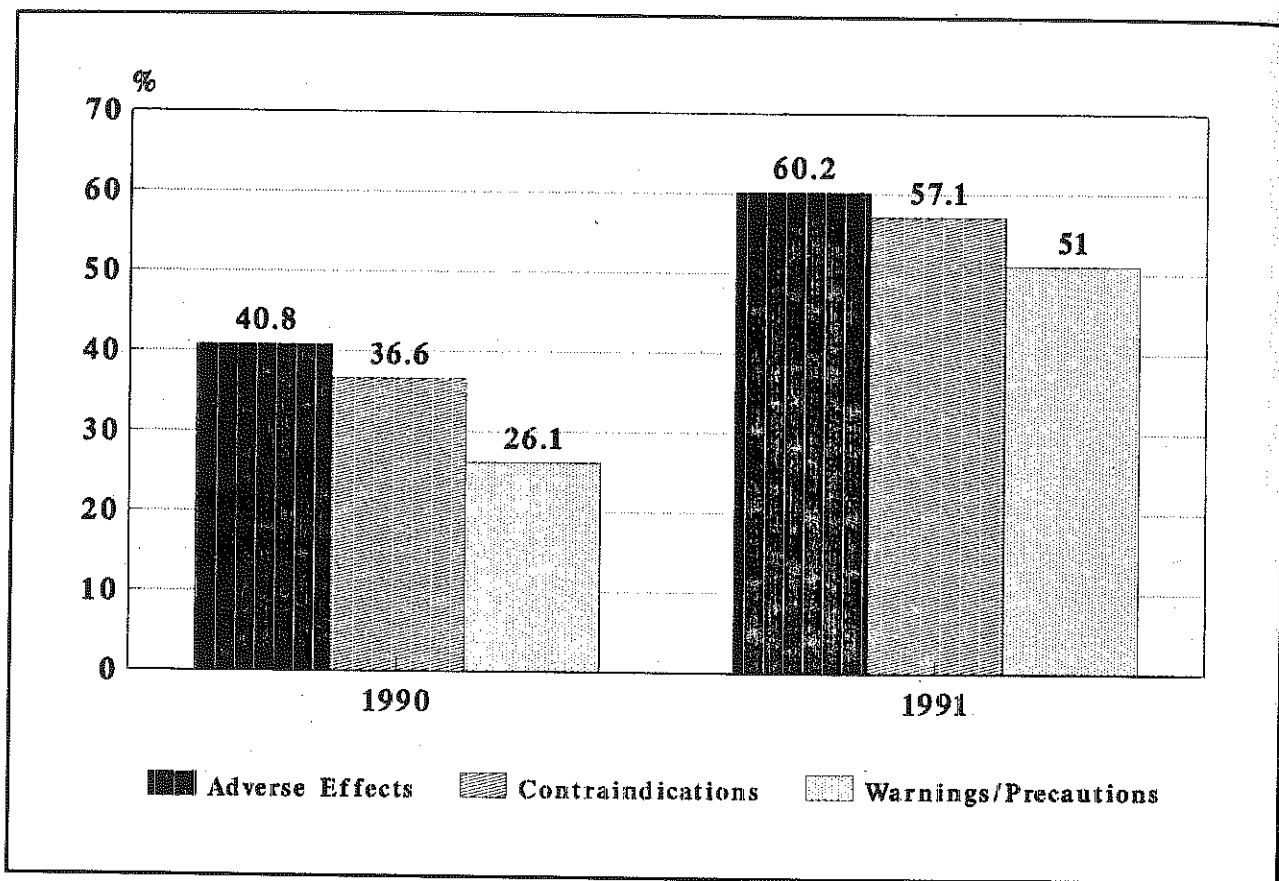


Figure 2: Availability of information on Adverse Effects, Contraindications, Warnings/Precautions

Table 3: Space Allocation for Drug Advertisements by Type of Pictures According to Years 1990 and 1991.

Type of picture	1990 (%)	1991 (%)
Drug Product or its containers	69.6	58.2
Relevant or Irrelevant drawings	58.3	39.8
Chart or Graphics with data	12.2	0.0

The most advertised pharmaceutical form for both years were tablets, with ratios of 29 % (1990) and 33 % (1991).

All the advertised drugs were under legal category.

Discussion and Conclusion

Advertising is both an important source of information and an important source of income. As long as it is a profit market industry, it will be in the interest of drug companies to continue to try to sell more drugs.

The role of advertising in educating the physician about individual prescription drugs, had not been sufficiently developed, but if advertising is used carefully and selectively, may be a high efficient mechanism.

According to our study, in 1990 and 1991 84% of the advertisements were only a single page. But in another study, 62 % of the advertisements were single page or less in length⁷. In our study, none of the advertisements were less than one page.

In our study, 20 % of the space in journal was occupied by drug advertisements. In another study, the ratio is 50 %. In the same study, almost all the advertisements were belonging to major multinationals⁸. In our study, 73% of the advertisements were belonging to foreign companies.

Most frequently promoted therapeutical classed of drugs in our study were antibiotics and antifungal agents. In another study, drugs for cardiovascular system took the first priority⁸.

In our study, while the availability of the information for price was only 0.9 for 1990, it increased to 46 % in 1991. In another study, none of the advertisements had information on price⁹.

Although the availability of the information on adverse reactions, contraindications and warning/precautions has significantly increased, we cannot say the regulation is working properly, since this regulation has no teeth. In Great Britain, it was also found that more strict regulation was needed¹⁰.

In a developed country, the pharmaceutical industry is part of a balanced power structure, including government, academia, professional and consumer organizations. In developing countries, these balancing influences do not exist. Two different strategies have been employed by the government to control the quality of the information health professionals receive from the pharmaceutical companies in the form of journal advertisements. The first involves legislative control with legally enforceable sanctions. The second involves agreement upon a voluntary code, supervised by pharmaceutical industry. The effectiveness of each of these policies can be evaluated by comparing countries, which have adopted legislative or voluntary codes of advertising control or by comparing practices on a before-after basis.

Editors of journals carrying advertisements, could play a special role by performing their own critical scrutiny and taking a more robust, independent line.

This study shows that, although there are significant differences in before and after the regulation, there is still something missing in some very important areas. We believe that, the provision of drug information should be in the responsibility of pharmacists and other health care professionals, who know the drugs and patients best.

Finally, although advertisements are fashionably taken as trivial, we believe they must be taken seriously. Readers, who pay no conscious attention to advertisements, are liable to be influenced in just the way the advertiser intended. On the other hand, those who examine advertisements critically, will learn what they really need and want.

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