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Gen Z Is Forcing Pharma to Shift Beyond Traditional Healthcare Models: Sheetal Sapale

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Trust and authenticity play a crucial role in influencing Gen Z healthcare decisions

The Indian Pharmaceutical Market (IPM) is entering a transformative phase where traditional healthcare engagement models may no longer be sufficient to connect with the country's youngest and most digitally empowered consumer base — Gen Z. Unlike earlier generations that largely depended on doctors, family guidance, and conventional healthcare channels for treatment decisions, Gen Z consumers are informed, prevention-focused, technology-driven, and heavily influenced by digital ecosystems, social media communities, wellness influencers, peer recommendations, and instant access to information.

For the pharmaceutical industry, this marks a significant shift in how healthcare products, therapies, and wellness solutions will need to be positioned and delivered in the coming years. Reaching Gen Z will require pharma companies to move beyond conventional prescription-led engagement and adopt personalized, digital-first, convenience-oriented healthcare models that align with the lifestyle and expectations of this generation.

In a presentation on "Decoding Gen Z," Sheetal Sapale, Vice President – Commercial at Pharmarack Technologies, stated that Gen Z is already reshaping healthcare consumption patterns in India and will continue to remain one of the strongest long-term growth drivers for the Indian pharma industry over the next decade.

Sheetal Sapale highlighted that Gen Z, currently in the 15–30 age group, accounts for nearly 26 per cent of India's population and represents the country's future workforce, healthcare consumers, and decision-makers. By 2036, this generation will move into the 25–40 age group while still contributing close to one-fourth of India's population, making them a critical long-term growth driver for the pharma industry.

She explained that Gen Z differs fundamentally from previous generations in its approach toward health and wellness. Earlier generations largely interacted with healthcare systems after the onset of illness and depended heavily on physician recommendations. In contrast, Gen Z consumers actively research symptoms, therapies, nutrition plans, fitness trends, and treatment options online before seeking professional medical advice. Healthcare demand increasingly begins before doctor consultation.

According to Sheetal Sapale, Gen Z views health not merely as disease management, but as a broader combination of wellness, fitness, appearance, mental health, productivity, preventive care, and lifestyle optimization. This generation is highly conscious about self-image, physical performance, stress management, sleep quality, diet, and long-term wellness outcomes.

The presentation noted that Gen Z consumers also expect healthcare experiences to mirror the convenience and personalization they receive from digital commerce and entertainment platforms. Fast delivery, app-based engagement, seamless digital interfaces, reward systems, personalized recommendations, easy information access, and real-time tracking are becoming critical expectations. As a result, channels such as e-pharmacies, telemedicine platforms, quick commerce, wellness apps, influencer-led healthcare discovery, wearable health ecosystems, and direct-to-consumer wellness brands are rapidly gaining relevance among younger consumers.

Sheetal Sapale observed that Gen Z is also far more open to discussing topics that were once considered sensitive, including mental health, reproductive wellness, sexual health, fitness supplements, obesity management, and preventive diagnostics. This openness is creating new growth opportunities across therapy areas such as dermatology, nutritional products, women's health, gastro care, respiratory therapies, ophthalmology, oral care, vaccines, and wellness-focused healthcare products.

She further emphasised that trust and authenticity play a crucial role in influencing Gen Z healthcare decisions. Unlike earlier generations that relied largely on authority-driven medical advice, Gen Z consumers validate information through online reviews, peer communities, ratings, influencers, and social proof before making purchase decisions. Brand loyalty is therefore increasingly dependent on transparency, relevance, engagement, and user experience.

The presentation also highlighted that Gen Z's strong adoption of health-tracking technologies is encouraging a more proactive approach toward healthcare management. Fitness trackers, calorie counters, sleep monitoring tools, preventive diagnostic platforms, and wellness apps are becoming integrated into everyday healthcare behaviour, driving continuous engagement rather than episodic treatment.

Sheetal Sapale further observed pharmaceutical companies that continue to rely only on traditional prescription-based growth models risk missing a major opportunity emerging within the younger consumer segment. "Instead, the industry will increasingly need to build omnichannel engagement models that combine preventive healthcare, digital education, personalised wellness ecosystems, convenience-led distribution, and consumer-centric experiences," she concluded.