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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## COMPARISON OF PHARMACEUTICAL AND HEALTHCARE BUSINESS PRACTICES BETWEEN INDIA AND VIETNAM IN HO CHI MINH CITY

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### Abstract

**Background:** The business cultures of Indian and Vietnamese companies operating in Ho Chi Minh City reflect distinct national characteristics while also sharing certain common values. As companies expand into international markets, understanding similarities and differences in business culture becomes a critical factor for success, particularly in culturally sensitive sectors such as pharmaceuticals and healthcare.

**Aim:** This study aims to compare the business culture of Indian and Vietnamese enterprises in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors in Ho Chi Minh City, with a focus on communication styles, relationship-building practices, and negotiation approaches.

**Methods:** The study adopts a qualitative and comparative approach, drawing on cross cultural business frameworks to analyze cultural practices in business interactions. Data are examined to identify patterns of communication, hierarchy, and relationship management among Indian and Vietnamese enterprises operating in Ho Chi Minh City.

**Results:** The findings indicate that while both cultures place strong emphasis on personal relationships and respect for hierarchical structures, notable differences exist in communication and negotiation styles. Vietnamese entrepreneurs tend to communicate in a gentle and indirect manner, whereas Indian entrepreneurs are generally more open and direct. Cultural and social values further influence how business relationships are established and maintained in each context.

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**Conclusion:** Indian and Vietnamese business cultures in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors demonstrate both convergence and divergence in their practices. Understanding these cultural dynamics is essential for effective cooperation and sustainable business development in Ho Chi Minh City's multicultural environment.

**Clinical/Practical Significance:** The study provides practical insights for pharmaceutical and healthcare companies seeking to operate or expand in Ho Chi Minh City, highlighting the importance of cultural awareness in business communication, partnership development, and market integration.

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**Introduction:-**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the global economy faced unprecedented shocks, and the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors were among the hardest hit. In both Vietnam and India, the pandemic not only deeply affected public health but also posed significant challenges to pharmaceutical, cosmetics, and functional food businesses in terms of supply chain disruptions, product consumption, and the maintenance of production and business operations. After the pandemic was brought under control, both countries faced pressure to recover economically, especially in reviving the activities of enterprises in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors. This industry plays an essential role not only in individual well-being but also in the overall social and economic development of both nations.

In Ho Chi Minh City—the largest economic and pharmaceutical-cosmetic hub of Vietnam—the growing presence of Indian businesses in the pharmaceutical and functional food sectors has raised many noteworthy issues. Indian enterprises tend to focus on providing high-quality products at affordable prices, while Vietnamese companies prioritize the development of domestic brands and the exploration of the local market. Both groups of businesses have had to shift their business strategies, adapt to the post-pandemic context, increase online marketing efforts, and participate more actively in trade fairs and promotional events to expand their customer base. However, differences in business culture, customer engagement methods, and consumer trust and perception toward pharmaceutical-cosmetic products from India and Vietnam remain areas requiring thorough research.

This study is particularly meaningful in the context of deepening economic integration and globalization, as Indian and Vietnamese businesses are increasingly strengthening cooperation and competing in the Vietnamese market—especially in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors in Ho Chi Minh City. Understanding the differences in business practices, customer engagement approaches, and consumer perceptions will enable companies to optimize their marketing strategies, enhance competitiveness, and better meet market demands. In addition, the author aims to clarify the characteristics of business culture and the pharmaceutical-cosmetic industry in Vietnam, offering diverse perspectives on the marketing methods employed by Indian enterprises in the herbal and cosmetic sector in Ho Chi Minh City. This will allow Vietnamese businesses to learn from these experiences and build suitable strategies for sustainable development in an increasingly competitive market.

The topic of pharmaceutical and healthcare business in India and Vietnam has received attention through numerous studies. In India, notable research includes Kanagala Anusha et al. (2015) on pharmaceutical marketing trends, Chaganti (2018) with a comprehensive work on pharmaceutical marketing, Nandy (2023) on strategic marketing management, and Vinita Srivastava & Jugal Kishore (2024) on pharmaceutical marketing management—all of which offer in-depth analysis of marketing strategies, customer relationship management, pricing, and distribution channels. In Vietnam, studies such as Dương Thị Liễu (2011) focus on business culture and influencing factors in the pharmaceutical-cosmetic industry amid integration and digital transformation. However, there is currently no research directly comparing business methods between Indian and Vietnamese companies in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sector in Ho Chi Minh City.

**The author proposes two research questions to guide the entire survey and analytical process:**

1. How do consumers in Ho Chi Minh City perceive pharmaceutical and cosmetic products from India and Vietnam?
2. How do pharmaceutical business and marketing approaches differ between India and Vietnam in Ho Chi Minh City?

Based on both direct and indirect sources on Indian and Vietnamese business cultures, the author identifies a significant research gap in the comparison of pharmaceutical business practices between the two countries in Ho Chi Minh City. By tackling this gap, the study aims to enrich the existing theoretical framework and offer practical guidance for future practice.

**Theoretical Framework:**

The study adopts an international business culture and international marketing approach, combined with comparative analysis, to examine the similarities and differences in pharmaceutical and healthcare business practices between Indian and Vietnamese enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City. According to Richard Gesteland (2012, pp. 80–120), international business culture consists of a set of values, norms, and behaviors that shape communication, relationship building, and negotiation in the global business environment. This theoretical framework is applied to analyze differences in communication styles and business cooperation practices between Indian and Vietnamese enterprises. Hofstede (2001, p. 79) proposes a six-dimensional cultural model to systematically compare cultural

differences across nations. This model serves as the primary theoretical foundation for analyzing the influence of national culture on business behavior and consumer perceptions of pharmaceutical and cosmeceutical products in Ho Chi Minh City. According to Cateora, Gilly, and Graham (2020, pp. 100–150), international marketing requires firms to adapt product strategies, pricing, distribution, and communication to the cultural characteristics of each market. This perspective is employed to compare the business and marketing approaches of Indian and Vietnamese pharmaceutical enterprises operating in Ho Chi Minh City.

### **Research Methodology:-**

The study employs a qualitative research approach based on Creswell (2009, pp. 61–65), in which in-depth interviews are presented as a key research tool for generating empirical findings. Creswell emphasizes that in-depth interviews enable researchers to collect rich and detailed data on participants' experiences, perspectives, and beliefs, which is particularly valuable when examining complex domains such as business culture and marketing practices.

Following Creswell's qualitative approach, in-depth interviews are utilized as the central method for gathering in-depth data on participants' viewpoints, attitudes, and beliefs. This method is especially appropriate for investigating issues related to business culture and consumer behavior. In this study, in-depth interviews are conducted with Vietnamese consumers in Ho Chi Minh City to explore their perceptions and evaluations of domestic pharmaceutical and cosmeceutical products as well as products of Indian origin. The interviews focus on key aspects such as product quality, pricing, brand reputation, and country of origin. The use of in-depth interviews allows the study to identify differences in consumer perceptions and behaviors, while also highlighting the role of cultural factors, social trust, and personal experience in shaping pharmaceutical product choices in Ho Chi Minh City.

### **Research Results and Discussion:-**

#### **Perceptions of Consumers in Ho Chi Minh City Regarding Indian and Vietnamese Cosmeceuticals:**

After the COVID-19 pandemic, Vietnamese consumers, especially in Ho Chi Minh City, have shown a significant shift in their health care needs. People have become increasingly concerned with choosing products that have clear origins, are safe, and free of harmful chemicals, while avoiding counterfeit and imitation goods that flood the market. In this context, cosmeceuticals and dietary supplements from India are highly regarded by many consumers in Ho Chi Minh City for their quality, credibility, and safety. In contrast, although Vietnamese domestic products are diverse, they are often questioned regarding quality and safety. This study focuses on analyzing consumer perceptions in Ho Chi Minh City regarding Indian and Vietnamese cosmeceutical products, using the six-dimensional model of business culture. By applying this approach, the research aims to clarify the cultural factors that influence consumer behavior and product selection decisions in the modern health care landscape.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of health and product quality, leading consumers in Ho Chi Minh City to become more cautious when choosing goods—particularly those directly related to health, such as cosmeceuticals and functional foods. Post-pandemic, consumers no longer prioritize price alone but increasingly focus on factors such as clear origin, assured quality, safety, and chemical-free composition. Additionally, authenticity and protection against counterfeit products have become key criteria in purchasing decisions. In this context, Indian functional foods and cosmeceuticals have emerged as a reliable choice due to their global reputation, lower incidence of counterfeiting, and a “cleaner” image compared to domestic products. Although Vietnamese cosmeceuticals have development potential, consumers remain wary due to safety concerns, inconsistent quality, and a lack of transparency. Consumer skepticism is rising, especially in light of frequent media reports highlighting counterfeit and substandard products in Vietnam. Notably, in May and June 2025, authorities discovered and publicized numerous fake functional foods, cosmetics, and supplements, heightening community concern and prompting greater caution among consumers.

Vietnamese consumers are increasingly prioritizing safety and clear origins in the products they use. During surveys conducted at pharmaceutical and health care expos in Ho Chi Minh City—particularly in districts 7 and 12—I interviewed consumers at various booths. Among them, the booth of Hamdard Laboratories (India) attracted notable attention. Hamdard is a well-established nonprofit organization in India specializing in pharmaceuticals and supplements rooted in the traditional Unani system of medicine. This company regularly participates in international events and owns production plants and distribution networks in key Indian cities such as Ghaziabad, Manesar, Okhla, Bengaluru, Patna, Kanpur, Meerut, Ahmedabad, Ambala, Bhiwandi, Indore, Jaipur, Kolkata, and Hyderabad.

**Excerpt from Interview No. 2:**

After attending the exhibition, many Vietnamese consumers purchased and tried a skincare product extracted from almond oil produced by Hamdard (India). They reported positive experiences, particularly valuing the product's natural herbal ingredients. Some users mentioned they had already heard of the brand through friends and held a favorable impression of it. This familiarity led them to switch to Hamdard products because of their natural origin, reasonable prices suited to Vietnamese incomes, and international credibility. Moreover, purchasing directly from Indian representatives at the expo gave them peace of mind, helping them avoid the risk of buying counterfeit products—a prevalent concern in the domestic market.

With modern technology, consumers can easily access and research international products using translation tools and digital platforms. Learning about Hamdard—a globally expanding brand—has never been more convenient. Currently, Hamdard exports to more than 25 countries, including the U.S., Canada, Nepal, Australia, Mauritius, Kenya, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Japan, Singapore, New Zealand, Russia, Serbia, and Zambia. In addition to exports, the company actively participates in major international exhibitions, such as Gulfood 2025 in Dubai, where Hamdard introduced new products like bottled coconut water, honey, spices, and cooking oils—boosting global brand awareness. (India Pharma Franchise, 17/6/2025)

**Hamdard products are now officially available in Ho Chi Minh City, including:**

- Traditional Unani medicines: Herbal remedies for common ailments, syrups, health supplements.
- Functional foods: Products to boost health, immunity, and digestion.
- Beauty care products: Hamdard Arq Gulab rose water, essential oils, and natural cosmetics.
- Natural foods: Honey, bottled coconut water, traditional spices, and other healthy foods.
- Personal hygiene products: Herbal soaps, shampoos, and toothpaste.

One particularly sought-after item by Vietnamese consumers is the Arq Gulab rose water, which is sold at low prices during promotional events and sometimes even given away for free. These products are primarily distributed via international online platforms like Amazon and Noon, as well as Indian food specialty stores in Vietnam.

Sri Sri Tattva is another well-known Indian company specializing in health care, dietary supplements, and cosmetics rooted in Ayurveda. It is committed to delivering high-quality, safe, and environmentally friendly products that enhance consumer well-being. Sri Sri Tattva's products, approved by India's Ministry of AYUSH, are gaining increasing trust among Vietnamese consumers—especially popular items like the Sudanta toothpaste, Kanchanara tablets (for cyst treatment), and other wellness products.

**Examples include:**

- Immune boosters: NAOQ19, Shakti Drops, Tulsi Drops, Triphala Tablets, Chyawanprash
- Digestive and liver support: TriphalaChurna, Haritaki, Chitrakadi Gutik
- Women's health: Shatavari Tablets, Evening Primrose Oil
- Joint and bone health: Flexijod Joint Care, Sandhimitra Vati
- Personal care: Sudanta toothpaste, Gulab Jal rose water, hair oils, massage oils.

Additionally, Sri Sri Tattva offers healthy foods such as ghee, herbal juices, organic spices, and products for meditation and spiritual practices. Sri Sri Tattva products are now available in over 30 countries, including Vietnam. Consumers can conveniently purchase them via international e-commerce platforms like Amazon, Big Basket, or through Ayurveda specialty distributors. With a reputation built over time, Sri Sri Tattva continues to expand its market and has become a trusted global brand. At the Vietnam Medi-Pharm Expo 2024 held in District 7, Ho Chi Minh City in August 2024, numerous Indian-imported products, particularly from Hamdard, were displayed and received strong consumer interest. These included popular functional foods like liver supplements, digestive aids, women's health products, and joint support remedies.

A standout marketing strategy used by Indian companies was to have Indian doctors offer free pulse diagnosis to Vietnamese consumers and provide health consultations without pressuring purchases. Despite language barriers, communication was facilitated through interpreters or simple phrases, often with student translators. This friendly, sincere consultation style impressed many Vietnamese consumers and led them to voluntarily purchase products, without the need for exaggerated advertisements or flashy promotions. In contrast, booths run by Vietnamese businesses often gave the impression of high-pressure sales tactics. Staff were overly enthusiastic, constantly

praising products, offering lucky-draw promotions, and even requiring customers to download company apps on their phones to track products, leaving consumers feeling restricted and uneasy. Although Vietnamese products have been on the market for years, this marketing approach proved counterproductive, deterring potential buyers.

**Excerpt from Interview No. 5:**

One consumer shared that they prefer real-life product experiences over exaggerated marketing. They expressed concern about aggressive promotional strategies where products were hyped without proven quality. According to them, some Vietnamese businesses lure customers with discounts or freebies, only to demand that they download apps to learn more about products. This tactic created a sense of coercion, making customers feel they could not leave without buying something. As a result, people sometimes made purchases just to escape the pressure, which left a negative impression.

**Analyzing this phenomenon through Hofstede's cultural dimensions model offers insights into why Ho Chi Minh City consumers perceive Indian and Vietnamese cosmeceuticals differently:**

- High power distance in Vietnam leads consumers to place greater trust in established, internationally recognized brands than in local ones. They are more likely to follow advice from doctors or experts than make independent decisions.
- High uncertainty avoidance, especially post-pandemic, drives demand for products with certifications, quality control, and origins in countries with strict regulatory systems—like India.
- Collectivism means consumers are heavily influenced by group opinions, social trends, and recommendations from friends or family. If Indian products gain positive community recognition, consumer trust follows.
- Feminine cultural traits, which emphasize quality of life, drive consumers to prioritize safety and sustainability over cheap or fast-acting solutions. This explains the growing preference for Indian cosmeceuticals, known for their safety.
- Post-pandemic, Vietnamese consumers are more long-term oriented, willing to invest in preventive health care and sustainable solutions rather than temporary fixes.
- Restraint culture leads to cautious, thoughtful spending—especially on non-essential items. However, in the health sector, people are willing to pay more for safe, long-lasting products.

The current cosmeceutical market in Ho Chi Minh City clearly reflects the competition between local and imported products. Indian products are favored for their long-standing reputation, lower risk of counterfeiting, and more affordable prices than those from Europe or the U.S. This trust is also linked to rigorous quality standards and a “clean” product image. In contrast, Vietnamese cosmeceuticals face challenges due to consumer distrust, counterfeit issues, and a lack of transparency. While consumers express a desire to support domestic goods, they remain wary of potential risks in a volatile market with unclear information. As a result, consumers in Ho Chi Minh City tend to view Indian imports as a safe and reliable choice for health care—while still hoping that Vietnamese businesses will improve product quality and transparency to better meet market expectations.

In the context of globalization, understanding and adapting to the cultural characteristics of each country has become a key factor for businesses to achieve sustainable development in the international market. Enterprises not only need to master management skills and business strategies but must also deeply understand the values, norms, and behaviors accepted by society in the global business environment. India's approach to international business culture is considered a set of recognized principles and behaviors that help businesses avoid unnecessary cultural misunderstandings and conflicts during global trade and cooperation. Such insights play a vital role in developing business and marketing strategies tailored to each specific market, thereby creating competitive advantages and maintaining sustainable growth. (Richard Gesteland, 2012, pp. 80–120)

Analyzing cultural differences between countries is a crucial factor that helps businesses design appropriate business strategies for specific markets. A survey conducted in Ho Chi Minh City shows that Indian enterprises—particularly in the fields of pharmaceuticals, functional foods, skincare, haircare, toothpaste, and herbal-based products—often apply a business approach that emphasizes respect for customer choice. There is no evidence of a power-centric or coercive culture in the sales process; instead, they adopt a friendly service style that enables consumers to have hands-on experiences and make decisions freely. Indian businesses always prioritize reputation and product quality as core elements in building and developing their brands. They understand expanding into international markets—including Vietnam—is not merely a commercial activity, but also a matter of maintaining the national image and

reputation in the eyes of global consumers. Therefore, their business strategies often aim for sustainable development, placing community health at the center and prioritizing long-term marketing policies over short-term profits.

To enhance competitiveness in foreign markets, they focus on developing high-quality products at reasonable prices, suitable for the average income of the local population. Additionally, they pay particular attention to cultural factors, consumer behavior, and specific needs in each region—for example, Ho Chi Minh City, which displays a high degree of diversity and complexity in shopping behaviors. This approach accurately reflects Hofstede's (2001, p. 79) analysis of the relationship between cultural dimensions and business strategy in a global environment.

**Excerpt from Interview No. 7:**

A participant at the exhibition shared that she was impressed by the marketing approach of Indian businesses: a Traditional Medicine doctor directly from the pharmaceutical and cosmetic company came to Vietnam to conduct health check-ups, perform acupressure, and provide product consultations, accompanied by a translator or using translation software when necessary. What stood out was that they did not pressure customers to make purchases; buying was entirely voluntary after thorough consultation. This gentle and respectful approach made customers feel comfortable and more willing to explore the products. In contrast, many Vietnamese booths often applied sales pressure by talking excessively, offering aggressive promotions or free gifts, which made visitors feel awkward if they chose not to buy. This stark difference highlights two distinct marketing styles: the respectful, experience-based approach from India versus the more forceful, pressure-driven sales tactics commonly found in Vietnam.

To successfully develop products in Vietnam—particularly in Ho Chi Minh City, a dynamic economic hub—businesses need to understand local consumer culture and shopping habits. Grasping actual consumer needs, the types of products in demand, and how customers engage with goods will provide valuable direction for marketing and distribution strategies. Market entry approaches cannot be separated from the specific cultural context; they require flexibility in building customer relationships. For Indian businesses, this becomes even more crucial if they aim to establish a reputable and consumer-friendly brand image in Vietnam. High-quality products, well-aligned strategies, and a respectful attitude toward local culture are key elements for achieving sustainable growth in this market.

In addition to studying consumer behavior, an international marketing perspective highlights the essential role of crafting strategies tailored to each market. According to Cateora, Gilly, and Graham (2020, pp. 100–150), international marketing is not merely about promoting products, but rather a comprehensive process that includes researching the target market, adapting products to local cultural and social characteristics, building efficient distribution systems, and implementing appropriate communication strategies to earn customer trust. This approach is particularly critical in the cosmetics and healthcare sectors—industries where consumers often have strict criteria regarding product quality, ingredients, origin, and safety.

**Excerpt from Interview No. 9:**

According to the insights shared by Interviewee No. 9, the Vietnamese market still tends to focus heavily on immediate sales rather than prioritizing product sustainability and long-term customer experience. Consumers observe that many Vietnamese companies place short-term gains above efforts to build trust and brand credibility, unlike Indian pharmaceutical firms. The interviewee emphasized that for domestic products to gain the trust of Vietnamese consumers, local businesses must develop realistic marketing strategies, understand the specific needs of different customer segments, and—most importantly—ensure that product quality matches what is advertised. If the actual quality falls short of promotional claims, even the most attractive discounts or aggressive media campaigns will struggle to secure long-term market presence. Transparency and a strong commitment to quality are key factors in regaining consumer trust and support for Vietnamese-made products.

**Highlight of Indian Business Practices in Cosmetics & Healthcare in Ho Chi Minh City:**

Indian companies emphasize sustainable, customer-focused practices and long-term value over short-term profit. They prioritize product quality—natural, health-safe, traditional herbal formulas—over flashy advertising campaigns. Their marketing relies on gentle interaction, sharing knowledge, health consultations, and letting customers make informed choices. For example, Indian doctors diagnose and advise on herbal products in a relaxing setting, letting customers freely decide whether to purchase. Distribution networks -including authorized physical outlets and online stores - minimize sales pressure. Products like herbal toothpaste, shampoo, herbal teas, and herbal

extract capsules are favored by Vietnamese consumers for their consistent quality, reasonable price, and declared natural origins. The slow, trust-building philosophy is key to their success.

In contrast, the cosmetics and health products industry in Vietnam faces challenges: rapid growth in local brands, but inconsistent quality and misleading advertising have eroded consumer trust. Marketing campaigns in social media, KOL endorsements, and spa “push-sales” techniques frequently rely on pressure tactics. Many consumers report feeling “trapped” or forced into purchases, resulting in discomfort, mistrust, and avoidance of domestic brands. Over-hyped messages and app-based marketing often fail to match actual product results, creating a significant gap between businesses and consumers and hindering sustainable growth.

A comparison of the two approaches shows that Indian firms focus on authentic product quality, sincere marketing, and consumer-centered practices. Vietnamese companies, however, often invest heavily in form (campaigns, quick sales) at the expense of creating lasting trust. Indian companies leverage deep cultural roots and traditional medicine values that emphasize holistic health—while Vietnamese businesses are still navigating brand promotion trends. India's approach demonstrates how building trust through high-quality products and professional customer service is crucial—especially in health-related sectors. Meanwhile, Vietnam needs to improve production processes, raise real product quality, and adopt honest, transparent marketing strategies to regain consumer trust and support in the long term.

Indian business methods in cosmetics and healthcare in Ho Chi Minh City offer a refreshing model that emphasizes sustainability, natural ingredients, and long-term trust. This approach has won over Vietnamese consumers who have grown increasingly skeptical of domestic products driven by short-term gains. India's example highlights the crucial importance of genuine quality and customer respect in building a sustainable business—particularly in health-related industries. Vietnamese companies must reevaluate their marketing, invest earnestly in R&D and product quality, and commit to truthful communication to win back consumer confidence and forge lasting partnerships.

### **Conclusion:-**

This study analyzed consumer perceptions in Ho Chi Minh City regarding pharmaceutical and cosmetic products from India and Vietnam, while also comparing business strategies employed by companies from both countries in this sector. The findings indicate that each country has distinct advantages: Indian enterprises are recognized for consistent product quality and flexible marketing strategies, whereas Vietnamese companies gain consumer trust through their understanding of the local market and clearly identified product origins. However, issues such as misleading advertisements and counterfeit domestic products have recently tarnished the image of local brands.

The analysis of business methods reveals that Indian companies focus on expanding distribution channels and employing direct marketing, while Vietnamese enterprises rely mainly on digital platforms but still lack long-term strategic planning and an adequate distribution scale. Based on these realities, the study proposes several recommendations to enhance the competitiveness of Vietnamese pharmaceutical and cosmetic businesses. These include greater investment in research and development (R&D), improvement of distribution and logistics systems, expansion of international cooperation—particularly with Indian partners to learn from their marketing and quality management experience—and active participation in industry networking activities.

It is important to note that this study primarily focused on consumer perceptions and business strategies, without delving into a detailed or quantitative analysis of product quality by specific product categories. This is a limitation that should be addressed in future research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the competitive capabilities of pharmaceutical and cosmetic companies from Vietnam and India in the domestic market.

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