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Mumbai:Ã?Â Marketing practices of the pharmaceutical industry have been unlike any other sector, due to the sensitive and highly regulated nature of the end product. So, as the rest of the industrial community was tapping into the fast growing resources on the internet, the pharma industry, especially in India, has been cautious and is softly making its way into the world of social media. (Read: The Facebook challenge for pharma)

Sanofi, a world leader in vaccines, has proved to be an early entrant by utilizing the social media landscape in India for its brand of flu vaccine. At the recently organize DIA IT Life Sciences Summit 2012 in Mumbai, Ms Aparna Thomas, senior director, Communications & Public Affairs, Sanofi, spoke about how they were using Facebook for their flu vaccine campaign. "For our 'Mothers against Flu' campaign, we decided to target 'DigiMoms' or mothers who regularly access social networking sites. This would help us identify and build a target community for Sanofi's flu vaccine. We launched the campaign on Facebook and adopted a 360 degree approach to direct traffic towards the page. Through this page, we organized a number of polls, quizzes, discussions centered around the topic of common flu and flu vaccines," she said.

The 'Mothers Against Flu ' campaign was originally launched inAugust 2011, but it was re-launched in August 2012, generating more than 12,000 likes to date, with more than 3,000 in the first month itself. Ms Aparna Thomas adds that offline activities, which included a celebrity endorsement by film actor Raveena Tandon, and online advertisements helped in increasing their visibility to a large extent.

Spikes in page views corresponded to the days when offline activities were conducted. "What we observed was that contests, questions and similar activities allowed us to interact with our target audience. The ultimate intent of this campaign is to learn

as much as possible, about how to leverage the power of social media in India," she said, adding that they have recently launched a Twitter handle too the same campaign.

Social media was just one of the innovative topics for discussion at the DIA IT Life Science Summit 2012. Among the other issues discussed were if pharma industry was exploiting IT enough or how it can bridge the distance between drug discovery and development, compliance with regulations and quality standards, technology, mobility and analytics-driven sales and marketing and much more.

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