

The changing trend

Covid-19 restrictions force higher adoption of telemedicine in the Indian healthcare space



SANJAY BORADE

Safe distance: many people are preferring telemedicine to in-clinic visits

A joint study by SMSRC-Purdue University's Krannert School of Management to understand the impact of Covid-19 on the practice of medical professionals has revealed that 81 per cent of the doctors in the metropolitan cities of North India have adopted telemedicine, as against 50 per cent in the metropolitan cities of South India, 35 per cent in East India and 50 per cent in West India. This first-of-its-kind study among Indian doctors has offered many interesting findings. For example, it reveals that South India ranks first with 62 per cent adoption of telemedicine, followed by West India, with 52 per cent, North India, with 50 per cent and East India, with 30 per cent. The above data from this study also reveal a significant shift from physical in-clinic visits to telemedicine due to various factors.

Kolkata-based SMSRC, one of India's leading healthcare research organisations, conducted this during June-July 2020, on a statistically significant and representative sample of 2,116 physicians, across key specialties in over 80 cities and towns of India. Since 2009, when it was set up, SMSRC's primary objective has been to take prescription research forward through Strategic Prescription Research (SPR) – essentially qualitative Rx Research analysis, based

on quantitative data applicable for marketing and corporate strategy formulations in the pharmaceutical industry.

Examining physicians who completely or partially transitioned to telemedicine from physical practice, the study highlights several other statistically significant findings that include among others a higher proportion of younger doctors (50 per cent) moved to telemedicine, as compared to their older counterparts (44 per cent). Similarly, more female doctors moved to telemedicine (58 per cent), than their male counterparts (44 per cent). Besides, more number of metro physicians moved to telemedicine (52 per cent) than their non-metro counterparts (44 per cent).

Higher shift Further, while female doctors, regardless of age and location, had a high propensity to move to telemedicine, not all men stayed with physical practice with equal propensity. Younger male doctors and metro male doctor cohorts exhibited a higher shift towards telemedicine than their respective counter cohorts.

"Greater proportion of female physicians moving towards telemedicine could be explained by greater risk aversion and pre-disposition to conservative decision-making, as opposed to their

male counterparts. Further, the nationwide lockdown, across an extended period of time and consequently absence of any domestic help, could have also relegated much of the domestic chores to females more so than to males, thereby restricting the former to adopting telemedicine in greater propensity," says Wreetabrata Kar, Assistant Professor, Krannert School of Management, Purdue University,

The trend of younger physicians adopting telemedicine in larger numbers than older physicians could have been triggered by older physicians exhibiting greater status quo bias – a cognitive bias, where people are resistant to change and want to continue in the current way of doing things. Therefore, the younger physicians are more adaptive to new approaches and methodologies and thus their adoption of telemedicine in greater proportion is reasonable. Likewise, metropolitan physicians moving to telemedicine more so than their non-metropolitan peers, could have stemmed from the former having greater familiarity and access to technology, and thus having more ease in adopting a new assessment mode.

The study also sheds light on the exact nature of telemedicine used in patient assessment by the physicians. Specifically, over 86 per cent indicated that they used their cellular audio calls for the purpose and about 62 per cent indicated they used WhatsApp/Facebook or similar social media apps. By comparison, only about 11 per cent indicated a move to practice management software (PMS).

"As mobile calls and popular general chat applications constitute the dominant share of telemedicine during Covid 19, the hype around a 'new normal' or early Covid 19 lock-down expectations of a tectonic shift towards telemedicine could be a bit pre-conceived," says Aneesh Mitra, General Manager, SMSRC. "This is especially so, when compared to other fast-growing spaces in the healthcare ecosystem, such as e-pharmacy, where the shift appears to be more permanent in nature."

"A similar status quo bias is seen across all types of physicians, when we are looking more specifically at the adoption of PMS-based telemedicine practice," Mitra further adds. "Despite

the various benefits of PMS-based telemedicine platforms for physicians, coupled with the social distancing measures related to Covid 19, the lower than expected adoption of such platforms suggests that there is a need for developing easy and time-saving applications for physicians, keeping in mind the higher patient-doctor ratio in India. In parallel, initiatives such as National Digital Health Mission (NDHM) would also prove to be a stimulus in driving higher adoption towards specific telemedicine-based applications.” ♦

ARBIND GUPTA

arbind.gupta@businessindiagroup.com

TRACTORS


M&M leads the pack

In the automotive sector, the sale of tractors is not only leading the recovery process (since June 2020), but is also giving good growth momentum to the industry. Farm income levels have improved due to better yield and prices. The positive trend for tractors is expected to continue through the festive season.

India is the world's largest manufacturer of tractors. It is also the world's largest tractor market. Mahindra Group (with Swaraj Tractors) has the largest share of the Indian tractor market, with other leading tractor makers, such as TAFE, Sonalika, Escorts and John Deere also offering their products. These top five players together hold the biggest market share. The leader in the tractor segment, Mahindra & Mahindra's (M&M), farm equipment sector sold 42,361 units in September 2020, as against 36,046 units during September 2019. "Our sale of 42,361 tractors in September 2020 shows a growth of 18 per cent over the previous year," says Hemant Sikka, president, farm equipment sector, M&M. "Retail demand continued to be buoyant backed by a good monsoon, higher *khari*f acreage and continued government support, including higher MSPs for key crops."

As per the first advance estimate of production, the *khari*f output is set for another record performance. This year's production is estimated to be 5

TOP FIVE TRACTORS MANUFACTURERS			
Manufacturer	SALES		
	Sep-19	Sep-20	Growth (%)
M&M Group	36,046	42,361	17.52
TAFE	14,473	19,973	38
Sonalika	10,571	16,000	51.36
Escorts	10,521	11,453	8.86
John Deere	6,010	9,805	63.14



Mahindra is miles ahead in tractors sales

per cent higher than last year's and 17 per cent higher than the normal. High output may lead to a drop in prices. According to Mahindra officials, starting with single digit growth in May 2020 followed by double digit growth in all subsequent months, tractors witnessed healthy demand during the *khari*f harvesting season (supported by good monsoon and higher cash flows with timely procurement of *rabi* crop). However, issues due to localised lockdowns, manpower and working capital-related constraints, crippled the supply side situation and hampered the availability of tractors. The company expects normalcy to return in October. It is also ramping up production.

Positive impact In its September 2020 report, India Tractor Market: Global Industry Analysis and Forecast till 2030, P&S Intelligence, claims that the Indian tractor market is expected to witness considerable growth in the coming years, buoyed by the increasing farm mechanisation rate, along with the rising construction activities driven by urbanisation. In addition, the surging investment by leading tractor manufacturers in the country is expected to positively impact the market during the forecast period (2020–2030).

Among the competitors, the south-based tractor maker Tractors And Farm Equipment Ltd (TAFE) sold 19,973 units in September 2020, while Sonalika Tractors registered its highest monthly domestic sales of 16,000 units. "I am

proud to share that, in September 2020, we have created a historical milestone, by recording the highest ever tractor sales in a month," says Raman Mittal, executive director, Sonalika Group. "It is heartening to see the positive sentiments of farmers, which have helped us to continue the growth momentum and achieve new record highs month after month. Our recently launched four new tractors have been well-accepted by the farmers, as their performance has surpassed previous benchmarks in addressing their crop-specific needs."

Escorts sold 11,453 units in September 2020. The company expects to sustain the market share with its aggressive marketing efforts, dual-brand strategy – Farmtrac and Powertrac series – and further expansion of the dealer network. John Deere sold 9,805 units in September 2020. As per the Federation of Automobile Dealers Association (FADA), all-India registration figures show that 68,564 tractors have been registered in September 2020, as against 38,008 in the same month in 2019, a whopping jump of 80.39 per cent.

With the increasing sales figures every month, tractor manufacturers are bullish and strongly believe that the trend will continue as the demand for tractors is picking up across India. They are also fully geared up at the plants to increase the production capacity and meet dealer requirements. ♦

SM BOOTHEN

feedback@businessindiagroup.com