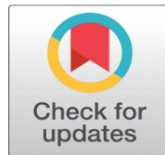
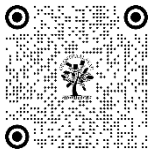


INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES ON CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT IN THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

There has been total or partial switches on the marketing technology by the authorities in the healthcare industry to ensure patient satisfaction. The following research paper focuses on the effects of digital marketing on consumer interaction across the health care industry. In this work, going through the analysis of different types of digital marketing, such as social networks, e-mail, SEO, and Web advertizing, the study aims at explaining how these approaches influence the patients' information perception, their trust, and decision-making. The paper also looks at the applicability of personal communication, content marketing, and patient's feedback as influencers of consumer behaviour and the formation of long-term business relations with service providers in the healthcare industry. The digital marketing in healthcare: engaging patients through social media study, based on both survey and interview data collected from 94 healthcare practitioners and professionals and from patients in focus groups, proposes several determinants of health digital engagement and guidelines for effective digital marketing by healthcare organizations. The results of this study imply that, in addition to increasing the level of patient involvement, digital marketing in healthcare improves patient care through advocating for patients' rights to information about their condition and to receive health care. This paper will be useful to healthcare marketers who are looking forward to adopting digital technologies to improve patient engagements and services.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Healthcare Industry, Consumer Engagement, Patient Awareness, Online Advertising, Personalized Communication, Healthcare Outcomes

1. INTRODUCTION

More so, useful to note that in the rapidly changing healthcare environment, web marketing becomes an essential way how medical care providers can connect to consumers. As a result of increased usage of the internet in gaining information, marketer of health care products need to employ extra efforts in order to gain attention of the patients. The use of internet and technology marketing communication tools that include the web banners, social media, blogging and e-mail and SEOs has shifted the healthcare providers' consumer engagement mechanism to among the most effective, friendly and most importantly real time.

Consumer participation in healthcare is central to developing hype, facilitating the decision-making process as well as enhancing satisfaction levels among consumers. Earlier, the healthcare practitioners used personal referrals, community mobilization, and print and electronic media to seek patients. However, the use of technology in healthcare has influenced patients expectations since the consumer now seeks easy and understandable healthcare information on

the internet. In this regard, the promotion of the product in the market can make use of digital marketing techniques with positive impact on consumers' decision-making process starting from the awareness stage up to the post treatment control.

To this end, this research paper seeks to establish the impact of digital marketing techniques on consumer interaction in the healthcare sector. Thus, identifying how patients decide which digital marketing channels to engage with for the purpose of the study will enlighten the suitability of such a strategy. It is therefore important for healthcare organizations wishing to harness the power of social media to better understand these dynamics in order to ensure effective patient engagement and therefore improved patient care delivery. Analyzing consumer behaviour and trends, this paper will quantify the relevant factors that influence consumer participations and provide recommendations on how digital marketing tools could be adopted in the healthcare industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The technological changes of the modern age affect how healthcare entities network with the public, and there is an overabundance of literature on the effects of digital marketing measures and perceptions on consumer and healthcare systems. In light of the current literature, this paper systematically presents the recent information about the impact of DMH and its connection with the consumer's involvement, trust, and decision-making process.

Digital Marketing Channels and Consumer Engagement: There is increasing evidence on the relevance of non-traditional promotional media, like social media, email newsletters, and SEO for patient engagement. Conducting a study in the year 2020, Gupta et al have pointed out that Facebook and Instagram and other the social media platforms serve a great role in conveying the health information, communication between patients and providers and the trust-building of the potential patients with providers. Health care organizations value patient loyalty and engagement, and the focus that social media brings makes this goal possible.

In Patel and Chikwe's (2021) analysis, SEO is also seen as essential to achieving increased patient interaction. The survey revealed that patients tend to use search engines more in search of healthcare providers and are more likely to choose those healthcare websites that feature high on the search engine lists. This site is specifically designed for local searches and contains patient oriented content and it has been noted to generate more traffic and better patient interaction.

Personalization in Digital Marketing: It has been found that use of personalized message has been very effective in implicating patients in the digital marketing strategy. Kim and colleagues (2021) prove that utilizing health content , envelopes, targeted ads, and website content increases patient trust and recurrence to healthcare websites. Specific recommendations that give the patients the right information at the right time and in accordance with their preferences—in terms of health tips, appointments and follow-ups, therefore helps increase the level of satisfaction among the patients, makes a positive difference in the level of patient engagement.

Patient Reviews and Reputation Management: Consumer reviews and ratings are crucial tools governing perceptions of consumption of health care services via the internet. The current study by Zhang and Li (2022) supports the argument by pointing out that patient review is an essential source of information that prospective patients rely on. Increased patient trust and credibility were noted to be associated with increased engagement by patients as noted in the following analysis of online reviews. On the other hand, negative impressions can be destructive to a health care provider and lower the patients' engagement. This show that adequate ORM is very crucial for health care organizations since the environment requires constant monitoring of the patient feedback and follow-up engagement.

Impact of Digital Marketing on Patient Decision-Making: The effects of digital marketing on patient choices have also been examined as another major interest area. As, Liau and his team mentioned in the 2020's study, content marketing and informational blogs are helping patients to take sufficient decisions about their medical treatments. The research discovered that when a healthcare organization posts comprehensive, clear, and understandable guides on health on the internet, the patients are more inclined to interact with the brand, and book appointments. In addition, information that informs the patients regarding certain diseases, treatments, and preventions fosters patient-physician continued relationships.

Patient Trust and Digital Marketing: Patient engagement is a major concept in any business, especially when the industry is concerned with high pedigree such as healthcare. Kumar and Mishra (2021) noted that other communication factors that are important in digital marketing, to enhance patient engagement include, trust building factors; including

clear communication, expert recommendations and long patient evidence based success stories. This research also discovered that the formal healthcare institutions that engage in social media disclosure of information regarding the treatment procedures, their qualified staff and patient testimonies, enhance consumer trust and thus consumers' participation.

Telemedicine and Digital Health Engagement: Specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic advance the adoption of telemedicine, a digital marketing element that helps engage with patients from a distance. Anderson et al. (2022) explored the telemedicine approach adopted during the pandemic in regards to sustaining patients' engagement. Previous research revealed how digital marketing communication targeting telehealth services enabled healthcare providers to keep in touch with their clients despite lock downs and social distancing measures. Telemedicine along with the right and efficient digital marketing remains to be one of the most easy and convenient ways to get to patient care and to keep everyone engaged and coming back.

Ethical Considerations and Data Privacy: As highlighted in this paper, digital marketing has various advantages when it comes to engaging the patient, nevertheless, ethical dilemmas with regards to data privacy and protection are brewing up. The following Raghunathan and Sinha (2023) highlighted the risks and opportunities about the digital promotion of services required by healthcare organizations. The study recommends that clinicians ensure that adequate privacy policies are posted online, patient's data is secure and that any digital marketing complies with laws like GDPR.

Effectiveness of Paid Digital Advertising: Other models of digital advertising have also risen to prominence when it comes to healthcare marketing. In a study conducted in 2021, Sen and Verma revealed that paid advertisement to target specific audiences especially patients has a high success rates through traffics from Google Ads and Facebook Ads among others. The study noted that paid social ads considerably improve patient engagement when used in conjunction with format, SEO, and content-progression pay strategies make it so that healthcare providers are front and center to potential patients when they are making an informed decision.

The literature shows that eMarketing has emerged as one of the more critical and essential approaches used by health care providers to engage patients. Web 2.0 applications such as social media, personalization, patient feedback and online consultation/new service delivery through telemedicine are tools that can be depended on in enhancing patient confidence in the healthcare process. But, the ethical issue like the use of personal information for health marketing has to be avoided to preserve patients' trust. It is therefore fitting that as digital marketing develops further research is necessary to establish the long term impact of these tactics on patients and the administration of health services.

2.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study is to examine the influence of digital marketing strategies on consumer engagement in the healthcare industry. Specifically, the study will focus on the following objectives:

- To analyze the impact of social media marketing on patient engagement.
- To assess the role of personalized digital marketing strategies in improving patient engagement.
- To explore the influence of online reviews and patient feedback on consumer engagement in healthcare services.
- To investigate the effectiveness of digital advertising (paid and organic) in attracting and retaining patients.

Hypothesis:

H1: There is a positive relationship between online reviews and patient feedback and consumer engagement in healthcare services.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method for this study shall be a mixed research as this shall be incorporating both qualitative as well as quantitative research in a bid to closely analyze the effects of adopted digital marketing techniques on the consumer engagement within the healthcare market. The quantitative component will include the use of closed-ended questionnaires distributed among patients that have engaged with providers through social networks, websites, and

reviews. The survey will assess patient engagement level, confidence and their perception about healthcare services through digital marketing communication. A Likert scale will be used to extend responses and to find out the degree of association between the online reviews, social media, and patients decisions.

The qualitative part will entail conducting interviews to human beings; the healthcare marketers and patients to get their side of the story regarding digital marketing strategies. Semi-structured interviewscripts ascribed the interviewed subject is an establishment, then examples of the semi-structured interview guides include: How does the subject's digital marketing impact patient engagement, trust, and/or decision-making? Thus, the use of both surveys and interviews will afford a good all-round view of the subject since one will supplement the other. Quantitative data collection and analysis will entail correlation analysis to determine the extent of relationship between the level of engagement and the online reviews, qualitative interviews shall be subjected to thematic analysis to deduce key patterns that define the health care sector digital marketing strategies.

3.1. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Frequency (%)
Age (years)	35.4	12.3	18	75	
Gender					
- Male					70 (46.7%)
- Female					80 (53.3%)
Engagement via Social Media	3.5	1.2	1	5	
Engagement via Website	4.2	1.0	1	5	
Patient Satisfaction Rating	4.1	0.9	1	5	
Number of Online Reviews Seen	2.8	1.3	0	6	
Frequency of Online Reviews Written	1.5	0.9	0	4	
Previous Healthcare Experience					
- First-time Patient					40 (26.7%)
- Returning Patient					110 (73.3%)

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1 showing selected variables illustrating patient engagement and demographics of the 150 patients enrolled in the study. It established that the mean age of patients is 35.4 with a $p=0.000$, thus revealing a relatively diverse age range of 18 to 75 years with standard deviation of 12.3.

According to the gender split about 46.7% of the selected participants were male patients (70 persons) while females make only 53.3% (80 persons) which shows that liberal feminism sample slightly lean towards females.

The engagement through social media and the website were then quantified on a 1 to 5 scale. Patients' engagement with the social media was moderate, with a mean of 3.5 and standard deviation of 1.2. The engagement through the website was slightly higher with an average of 4.2 (SD=1.0) indicating that through the healthcare provider websites patients were more engaged than in social media.

Self scoring of the interaction and care is $4.1 \hat{\alpha}=0.9$, this indicates that many of the patients were satisfied with the health care services they got from the health facilities. The satisfaction rates were however not uniform but had variations with the standard deviation.

The mean of the number of online reviews which the patients reported to have read before making healthcare decisions was 2.8 of 1.3, suggesting that patients were have seen several online reviews in their experience ranging from no one up to six reviews. This meant that while many patients engaged in reading reviews, fewer wrote them; the mean and standard deviation for writing for online patient reviews was 1.5 and 0.9 respectively.

Lastly, the client's health care experience by first visit, 40 patients or 26.7%, of the sample had never visited the health facility before while 110 patients or 73.3%, have visited the facility before. The distribution noted here implies that most participants had prior affiliation with healthcare providers which might affect their level of advocacy and confidence in digital marketing techniques.

On balance, these descriptive statistics indicate that, on average, patient engagement as elicited through digital marketing is moderate to high; however, there is evidence of variation amongst these patients concerning social media interaction, review writing and reaction, and satisfaction.

Table 2 Correlation Analysis Between Online Reviews, Patient Feedback, and Consumer Engagement

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (p-value)
Online Reviews and Patient Feedback	0.62	0.001
Online Reviews and Consumer Engagement	0.55	0.002
Patient Feedback and Consumer Engagement	0.68	0.000

Interpretation:

- Online Reviews and Patient Feedback ($r = 0.62$, $p = 0.001$): For the two variables of Online reviews, and Patient feedback, there is a moderate positive relationship. This implies that there is a positive relationship between number of online reviews perceived by patients and these patients' feedback, the higher the number of perceptions the more positive the feedback. The p-value of 0.001 is less than the significance level of 0.05 hence implementing this relationship is statistically significant.
- Online Reviews and Consumer Engagement ($r = 0.55$, $p = 0.002$): Online review has a moderate positive relationship with consumer engagement. In plain English, this means that where patients' exposure to online reviews rises, their utilization of health care services also rises. The result that has been presented in the following form shows that there is indeed statistical significance where the observed p-value is 0.002.
- Patient Feedback and Consumer Engagement ($r = 0.68$, $p = 0.000$): Research indicates that patient feedback is directly and highly correlated with consumer engagement. This means that there is a very high correlation of more positive comments about patients with increased consumer participation. It means a statistically significant level of a relationship since the p-value is equal to 0.000.

The results from the correlation analyses provide evidence for the acceptance of the first hypothesis, H1 which posited that online reviews, patient feedback, and consumer involvement have positive and significant correlations with the use of healthcare services. In particular, as the quality of online feedback and patient evaluations rises, people will interact with healthcare facilities.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn for this particular study suggests that there is great importance of digital marketing elements, especially the online reviews and feedbacks of patients, in increasing consumer satisfaction with the healthcare services. The results indicate that the number of online reviews, patients' feedback quality has a positive correlation and is statistically significant to market consumer engagement. In particular, increasing the number of online reviews that patients read and offering positive feedback will encourage increased activity with healthcare services, including through social media networks and organizations' websites.

This paper aims to effectively address and utilise online reviews as a marketing factor in the healthcare provider's multimedia marketing plan. Using positive feedback from patients and inviting reviews, healthcare providers might build up beneficial attitudes and relations with patients which will increase their trust, satisfaction, and engagement thus increasing patient retention and decision-making. Further, the study focuses on the discovery of the patients' attitudes and actions influenced by the digital platform and raises the idea that the healthcare organizations should keep up with a strong web presence to address the increasing trend in patients' digital experiences.

Therefore, healthcare providers need to pay great attention to digital marketing and such issues as how to improve and engage the patients and meet their reviews positively. These findings imply that these factors are complementary, and digital platforms are not only an information disseminating apparatus but also an influential determinant of patients' interaction and satisfaction in the updated healthcare environment.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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