

Chapter 2

The Role of Social Media in Healthcare Marketing

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ABSTRACT

The chapter discusses the features of using social media in the healthcare industry. It is emphasized that the role of social media in the era of digital technologies is especially increasing in the market of medical services, which leads to greater involvement of consumers in the field of healthcare. Digital technologies are gradually being introduced in the field of healthcare in Georgia, and an increasing number of medical organizations are using social media marketing to communicate with patients. Nevertheless, the use of social media by healthcare organizations is insufficient. One of the reasons for this is the lack of research in this field. With this in mind, this chapter presents a study that considers the impact of social media marketing activities on healthcare consumer behavior. Social media marketing activities, consumer engagement, consumer trust, and behavioral intention are selected as the main variables of the research. A conceptual model of the research has been developed, and relevant hypotheses have been formulated.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media is an integral part of modern society and is gradually becoming a significant marketing tool that provides companies with ample opportunities to interact with their consumers (Abid *et al.*, 2023). Social media has become a perfect platform for companies to popularize and sell their product, find new information, and useful products, and communicate with their friends (Jacobson *et al.*, 2020).

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Social media has become a valuable tool for healthcare knowledge management (Khan *et al.*, 2021). New technologies and ways of treatment as well as the growth of expectations in society that they are going to have access to high-quality healthcare create the need for new efficient strategies that will lower the cost of treatment (Kulkov *et al.*, 2021; Çağlıyor *et al.*, 2022). Social media in the public health agenda is another player in the marketing world that inspires and influences potential customers with the usage of social media platforms (Kostigina *et al.*, 2020; Carlsson-Szlezak *et al.*, 2020). Healthcare professionals use social media to build professional relationships with their colleagues and to share information (Rolls *et al.*, 2016). In the era of digital communication, healthcare providers recognize that social media with its diverse programs is the best tool for public health communications (Rolls *et al.*, 2016). Social media is the most effective way of sharing new information in the healthcare sphere as it can reach the widest and most diverse audience (Swan *et al.*, 2019).

Healthcare providers use social media to promote their organizations, also to establish strong relationships with existing and potential customers, and raise awareness of their own brand (Mondal *et al.*, 2022). As for patients, they receive information about their health condition through social media (Kamarudin *et al.*, 2022; Freire *et al.*, 2023).

Nowadays, healthcare organizations face many challenges. First of all, consumers move from a passive state to an active participant in the process of providing medical services (Crie & Chebat, 2013; Osei-Frimpong, 2017; Hung *et al.*, 2023). They are increasingly using digital applications and various technologies that help them to be directly involved in protecting their well-being. Accordingly, healthcare organizations try not to stay behind and improve the methods of providing medical services, in which marketing approaches play a special role. Scholars emphasize the fact that one of the tools for success in the field of healthcare is marketing skills (Anderson *et al.*, 2018; Chaves *et al.*, 2021). That is why healthcare providers increasingly use patient-oriented approaches (Crie & Chebat, 2013; Pilon *et al.*, 2023).

Practice shows that social media is an essential part of the marketing and communication strategies of many medical organizations. The use of social media gives health systems a lot of opportunities. It helps healthcare organizations and physicians build relationships with patients, Openly share their opinions and get feedback from them, strengthen customer confidence, and enhance the attractiveness of their brands. Through online communication, patients, hospitals, and physicians form the foundation of positive relationships. Also, audience-targeting advertising through social media platforms helps healthcare organizations work individually with patients. Users are actively utilizing the Internet and social networks to seek health information (Zhou *et al.*, 2018). It is also notable that 60% of social media users, compared to other groups, trust doctors' posts more (Chen *et al.*, 2018). We should also note the fact that today's doctors, due to their busy work schedules, have less time to post relevant posts on social media. That is why marketers help doctors regularly post messages with original and quality content on their social networks. As we can see, social media, when used wisely, can be a supportive tool for the development of the health care system as well as for the care of patients by raising their awareness and promoting health programs. Social media can make a significant contribution to improving the quality of medical services; however, we must also consider the risks associated with the protection of personal data and the accuracy of information (Alshakhs & Alanzi, 2018; Liu *et al.*, 2021).

Social media changes the nature and speed of communication between healthcare organizations and physicians. Today, a significant number of doctors and patients use social media to raise knowledge about healthcare and disease. In turn, the use of social media is quite effective for healthcare promotion and behavior change (Korda & Itani, 2013). Hospitals and physicians actively involved in social media can identify and solve patients' problems in a timely manner, leading to increased customer satisfaction

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