Chapter 26
Rhetoric of Private Healthcare Offers Presented to SMEs over the Internet

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ABSTRACT

The chapter aims at determining through a rhetorical analysis the extent in which private medical services are offered to small and medium enterprises over the Internet. The multidisciplinary approach to e-health systems is stressed. Authors present a short description of contemporary changes in health care – client relation as well as the Internet influence on human activity, particularly focused on virtualization of SME and new challenges for medical practice and the medical services market. Rhetorical approach as research methodology is described at length. Subsequently, online offers of four international private medical companies are undergo analysis: two operating in Taiwan and two operating in Poland. Cases from countries of different culture, dissimilar health care systems, a different role of small and medium enterprises and a different level of technology and information systems have been chosen for comparison. The research shows how Internet offers reflect classical rhetorical structures and cultural diversity on the rhetorical level. Internet as e-health medium, from the rhetorical perspective, seems to be still used in very traditional, mainly profit-oriented way.

PROBLEM

The analysis of e-health systems requires a multidisciplinary approach in which various factors, including technological as well as psychosocial, should be discussed. A particular area of interest and the subject matter of this article stems from the following assumptions:

The Contemporary Challenges for Medical Practice

To be brief, the Internet significantly influences social relations and the sense of identity of not only individuals, but also the society in various aspects of their functioning. These changes concern also the health and illness issues forming new challenges for medical practice and the medical services market. According to Shilling (2002), for example, people are drawn to online medical information by, above all, the desire to free themselves from a sense of helplessness (strictly associated with illness, as indicated half a century ago by Talcott Parsons in his classical studies of this matter). The Internet is altering the approach to making use of these services, enabling at the same time to carry out a comparative analysis of both, offers of solving health problems and taking advantage of several specialists' opinions, and verifying diagnosis and recommended treatments. Those and other factors are the reasons for which the patient seized to be just a "helpless layperson"-has taken the role of a "well-informed client". The Internet has become a vital medium for the so called new medical pluralism, according to formulation suggested by Cant and Shrama (Shilling, 2002) pluralism, which also includes alternative medicine practices in e-space advancing to the rightful competitor of conventional medical services. Dworkin (2000) adds the significance of online "mutual aid communities" concerning health issues. According to this author, they constitute a response to the atmosphere of rush characteristic of the present

patient-doctor relation. Last but not least, thanks to "the healthy lifestyle" movement, doctors, also online, act as experts on physical issues, but also as individual, in some way spiritual guides.

The Internet and the Health Care Institutions: Clients Relations

The Internet radically changes the relations of the health care institutions with their clients "The patient" - a client with a "click" has access to health care, including consultations in organizations related with health care all over the world. More and more often the client - a patient may monitor his or her health state thanks to the Internet as well as to perform more and more such analyses as EKG or blood pressure tests. The only limit of using the worldwide service in the field of health protection is the familiarity with the language. But soon this barrier will also be lifted (Kisielnicki, 2002). Traditional visit to several clinics or hospitals in order to select the best is very time-consuming and burdensome from the client's point of view. The next advantage of an Internet based visit is the wide range of medical services related to the searched service and automation of the offer analysis stemming from computer analysis of the previous inquiries e.g. medical consultations. Such a communication means have limitation, but for many clients it is very attractive.

Such a model of rendering services in medical care brakes all the paradigm of the traditional forms. It is still not a typical situation, but one needs to take into consideration the stronger competition of such an activity means.

In the selection of an organization rendering health services are the Internet-based social shopping services, where the reviews of products are posted by people, who are not anonymous and with whom one may compare by means of programmes called "Tags", which define the age, place of living and, above all things, preferences,

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