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Utilizing Social Media in Healthcare Marketing

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Abstract

Background: A substantial ascending trend in social media users has been observed over the last decades. This encouraged hospitals to adopt social media as a key method of marketing. When choosing which platforms to employ for marketing purposes, hospitals need to understand the favorites of their target group. The aims of this study are to explore the preferences of prospective customers in healthcare services, determine which social media platform is the most regularly accessed to search for medical information and what users think about the effectiveness of conveying medical information through social media influencers. **Methods:** A cross-sectional study design was implemented utilizing a special questionnaire prepared by the researchers and transformed into Google form. **Results:** 434 respondents, of which 276 (63.3%) were females, most of them 423 (89.7%) were aged between 18 and 54 years. A significant portion of 284 (65.4%) were bachelor's degree holders. While the majority 265 (61.1%) were full-time employees, 222 (51.0%) had an income of less than 700 USD. The majority of the respondents preferred educational content type. Facebook was the most regularly used platform, and conveying medical information through social media influencers was found to be an effective method. **Conclusion:** Healthcare marketing utilizing social media has become an important place for attracting patients. In order to achieve the best outcomes, hospitals need to understand the favorites of their target group. In this study, educational content was found to be the most preferred content type among the respondents. Additionally, Facebook was the most regularly used platform, and many of the participants thought that conveying medical information through social media influencers was effective.

Keywords Marketing strategies, social media marketing, health care marketing

INTRODUCTION

A substantial ascending trend in social media users has been observed over the last decades. As the number of users was 2.3 billion in 2017, it became 5.04 billion in January 2024 around the world accounting for 62.3% of the world population. This number is projected to increase to 5.85 in 2027 [1]. Although younger adults constitute the most frequent users of social media, a notable increase in older adult users is observed [2]. These numbers encouraged hospitals to adopt social media as a key method of marketing and communication with potential healthcare seekers.

Several definitions are available for social media, according to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the

creation and exchange of user-generated content" [3], Bradley (2010) defined social media as "a set of technologies and channels targeted at forming and enabling a potentially massive community of participants to productively collaborate"[4], despite the deferent definitions, they all share the same meaning, social media is websites that provide the opportunity for the users to create online communities and enable for sharing information.

In the current era where communication is largely based on social media, healthcare marketing utilizing social media has become an important place for attracting patients, enhancing trust, and sharing essential health knowledge [5, 6]. These widely disseminated platforms provide cost-effective marketing solutions [7]. The role of social media in healthcare services marketing has increased significantly in recent years [8]. According to Smith, 95% of the top hospitals around the



world have placed greater effort on social media as a main component in their branding strategy, and the hospital size positively correlated with the number of platforms used by the hospital [9].

Hospitals use social media for many reasons including building brand awareness among customers, fostering engagement, influencing attitudes, communicating with the customers, and receiving feedback [10]. When choosing which platforms to employ for marketing purposes, hospitals need to understand the favorites of their target group [11]. Each social media platform fulfills different demographics and interests, permitting hospitals to adapt their outreach efforts accordingly [9, 11]. An essential aspect of creating effective content is sharing information that enhances patients' health and meets their needs where are allowed to comment, ask questions, and get private feedback [12].

The present study was conducted in Amman, Jordan. Social media has been extensively utilized in healthcare settings in Jordan, particularly in enhancing health awareness and promoting medical tourism. Studies have illustrated that social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram are vastly utilized by Jordanian people to seek medical information [13]. Additionally, research underscores the effect of social media on changing behaviors during health crises, emphasizing the need to use these platforms efficiently [14]. Moreover, social media platforms have been found to positively impact tourists' behavior towards therapeutic tourism destinations in Jordan, highlighting the important role of digital marketing in healthcare settings [15].

The aims of this study are to; 1) explore the preferences of prospective customers in healthcare services regarding the content types used in social media marketing, by determining which content type such as educational posts, patient testimonials and recommendations, promotional events, or health tips is the most favored by the target audience, 2) to examine the relationship between content type and customers' engagement.3) to determine which social media platform is the most regularly accessed to search for medical information, 4) what users think about the effectiveness of conveying medical information through social media influencers.

Methods

Sample and Sampling

In this cross-sectional study, a convenience sampling method was utilized to collect the data. This approach enabled us to recruit as many as possible of the participants and increased the generalizability of the results. The sample size for the present study was calculated based on a somewhat similar previous study [16]. Using an alpha level of 0.05 and a power of 0.80, based on this calculation the required sample size was 400 respondents.

Study Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers. The questionnaire comprised 16 items, it was designed to gather data related to various aspects of social media users such as demographic characteristics, perception

regarding the usefulness of social media pages of medical institutions, favored content type, and the most regularly used platform. The questionnaire was sent to the participants in the form of link through different methods such as e-mail and social media account, participants who agreed to participate in this study provided the research team members with their preferred method to receive the questionnaire.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software (version 29.0.1.0). Frequency tables were used to describe the categorical variables of the sample, this enabled us to evaluate the relative percentage of the participants that fell into each category. Primarily demographic characteristics were described. Then, another frequency table was created to present the respondents' preferences, attitudes, and perceptions. Data were tabulated to provide a comprehensive insight into participants' behavior and interaction with social media.

Additionally, contingency tables were created across some variables to understand respondents' attitudes based on their preferences such as level of engagement and regularly used platform. The Chi-square test for independence was employed to examine whether there is a significant association between level of engagement and preferred content type, and between level of engagement and both age group and gender. The results were considered significant at a two-tailed alpha level of $P < 0.05$ and 95% confidence intervals.

Ethical Consideration

This study prioritized respondents' rights and privacy. All data were handled confidentially, and participation was entirely voluntary. No risks are associated with participation, and ethical approval was obtained before the study began.

Results

The sample comprised 434 respondents, of which 276 (63.3%) were females. The majority of the participants 423 (89.7%) were aged between 18 and 54 years. A large portion 284 (65.4%) were bachelor's degree holders. While the majority 265 (61.1%) were full-time employees, 222 (51.0%) had an income of less than 700 USD. (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants

Variable	Category	Frequenc y	Percentage
Age	Below 18	6	1.4
	18-24	104	24.0
	35-44	102	23.5
	45-54	92	21.2
	25-34	91	21.0
	55-64	34	7.8
	65 or more	5	1.2
Gender	Female	276	63.6

	Male	158	36.4
Education level	Below high school	7	1.6
	High school	28	6.5
	Diploma	57	13.1
	Bachelor's degrees	284	65.4
	Master	51	11.8
	PhD	7	1.6
Income	Below 700 USD	222	51.0
	701-1000 USD	103	23.7
	1001-1500 USD	55	12.6
	More than 1500 USD	54	12.7
Employment status	Full time	265	61.1
	Part time	16	3.7
	Retired	48	11.1
	Student	53	12.2
	Unemployed	52	12

The results revealed that participants had a high level of engagement with social media, 324 (74.7%) of participants reported their engagement level as daily. Additionally, it has been observed that 238 (54.7%) of the participants thought that social media is an effective method for communicating healthcare information, notably, 184 (42.4%) preferred to see new content daily. and 273 (62.9%) reported that they took actions such as booking an appointment as a result of seeing content on social media.

A substantial portion of the participants were satisfied with digital transformation in the healthcare field; while 313 (72.1%) reported that they were satisfied, 69 (15.9%) reported strong satisfaction. Considering the perceived effectiveness of the social media pages of medical institutions, 215 (49.5%) thought they are effective, whereas 113 (26%) found them very effective and those pages were important references for them.

Additionally, 356 (81.9%) agreed that digital services have improved the quality of care in the healthcare field. (Table 2). Facebook was the most regularly used platform among the participants with 327 (75.2%) users, followed by Instagram with 67 (15.4%) users, then YouTube with 26 (6.0%) users. (Table 3).

A substantial proportion of the participants 206 (47.5%) reported that educational post is the most attractive type of content on social media, and 152 (73.8%) of them classified themselves as highly interactive users.

The Chi-square test revealed that there is a significant relationship between preferred platforms and level of engagement ($X^2 = 18.00$, $df = 8$, $p = .021$). Moreover, a significant relationship was found between the level of engagement and the likelihood of taking action as a result of seeing content on social media ($X^2 = 13.414$, $df = 2$, $p = .000$). Furthermore, the majority of the participants 328 (75.6%) thought that conveying medical information through social media influencers is effective.

Table 2: Respondents' preferences and perceptions

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Level of engagement	Low	67	15.4%
	Medium	43	9.9%
	High	324	74.5%
Take decision*	Yes	273	62.9%
	No	161	37.1%
preferred frequency of seeing new post	Daily	184	42.4%
	Never	5	1.2%
	Once a week	23	5.3%
	Several times a day	115	26.5%
	Several times a week	107	24.7%
Satisfied with digital transformation	Strongly satisfied	69	15.9%
	Satisfied	313	72.1%
	Dissatisfied	47	10.8%
	Strongly dissatisfied	5	1.2%
Role of hospital pages	Very effective	113	26.0%
	Effective	215	49.5%
	Not differ	61	14.1%
	Not effective	45	10.4%
Role of	Effective	215	49.5%

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influencer	Very effective	119	27.4%
	Indifferent	78	18.0%
	Ineffective	22	5.1%
Satisfied with the impact of digital services on quality of caring	Yes	356	81.9
	No	78	18.1

* Take decision: take decision as a result of seeing content on social media

Table 3: Regularly used platforms

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Platforms	Facebook	327	75.2	75.2	75.2
	Instagram	67	15.4	15.4	90.6
	Snapchat	7	1.6	1.6	92.2
	Twitter	8	1.8	1.8	94.0
	YouTube	26	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	435	100.0	100.0	

Discussion

Digital marketing may be employed to improve brand awareness, raise client loyalty and establish an audience base [17, 18]. In this era when internet users exceed five billion worldwide, using digital content marketing is crucial for organizations to reach the largest possible number of clients [8]. Digital content marketing is a planned method aimed at generating and advertising valuable pertinent content to appeal and to engage a specific target group online [19, 20]. Healthcare institutions can raise the awareness and loyalty of the clients for their healthcare service by utilizing digital content marketing [21]. Social media marketing is the utilizing of social media platforms to communicate with target groups in order to build brand awareness, enhance sales and increase website visitors [22, 23]. This includes posting attractive content, interacting with the followers, evaluating the results and seeking feedback [24]. Successful digital marketing strategies necessitate a careful understanding of the behavioral patterns of the clients, their preferred content type, and what factors affect their actions [25]. The findings of the present study provided valuable information regarding the clients' preferences, attitudes and opinions toward using digital marketing using social media.

In the world of social media, there are several types of content. Content should provide the audience with valuable true information, valuable content can promote trust and enhance loyalty among the audience [26]. The findings of the present study demonstrated that educational content is the most interesting content type with nearly half of the participants preferring this type, the findings also showed that there was a significant relationship between the level of engagement and preferred content type, the majority of high engaged participants chosen educational content as the most attractive content type, indicates that audiences always seek contents that enrich their knowledge and promote health literacy [27]. Several studies highlighted the superiority of educational content over other content types in influencing users engagement [28, 29]. Educational content provides the audiences with useful knowledge that addresses their concerns, it is a preferred type for highly educated audiences whose choices are more guided by facts [30]. Due to its informative nature, educational content can offer valuable advice and information regarding human health that are attractive and engaging for different individuals with different demographic variations [31]. Utilizing educational posts in healthcare marketing can be helpful for patients in making important decisions regarding their health, therefore, accurate and reliable information in this regard is crucial to build trust between healthcare institutions and their potential clients [32].

The results of this study revealed that Facebook is the most regularly used platform among the surveyed respondents. This result was in line with the latest global statistics, according to Statista, Facebook is the most popular social network worldwide, with more than 3 billion active users in all age groups [1]. Additionally, this result was consistent with a cross-sectional study conducted by Alghizzawi et al., their study aimed to explore the effectiveness of using Facebook in promoting medical tourism in Jordan. The findings of their study suggested that utilizing Facebook in advertising to therapeutic tourism positively impacts tourists' behavior, leading to increased attention to therapeutic tourism destinations in Jordan [15]. For healthcare institutions, it is fundamental to rely on a widely spreading platform in their digital content marketing as this can largely impact content distribution and engagement and maximize prospective clients.

Moreover, the result of the present demonstrated that the majority of participants thought that conveying medical information through social media influencers is effective, indicating the role of social media influencers in shaping customers' opinions [33, 34]. Influencers, particularly those active in the field of health and fitness have established credibility and their recommendations are trusted among the followers. Recent studies have reported that influencer marketing is one of the most widely used tools in digital marketing. Additionally, studies documented that social media influencers have a significant impact on customers' engagement [35, 36]. It is noteworthy for healthcare institutions to employ social media influencers in their digital marketing strategy [37].

While conducting this study some limitations have been encountered, firstly the data collection method relied on self-reported questionnaire, by using this method there is a susceptibility to provide socially desirable answers and respondents may not accurately recall their attitudes and favorites. Secondly, the predefined response options might not fully capture the respondent experience. Thirdly, older adults may be underrepresented in this study, therefore findings should be interpreted with caution regarding this age group.

Implication

The findings of this study have several important implications for healthcare marketers and policymakers. Identifying the preferences, perceptions, and attitudes of potential customers can help healthcare marketers tailor their marketing strategy, tailored content can increase reach to a larger number and enhance engagement. Additionally, conveying medical content through true methods ensures widespread and promotes the trust between marketers and potential customers. Moreover, determining which platforms are more preferred by social media users can help allocate the marketing efforts more efficiently. Understanding where the target group is more active allows for effective resource allocation and impactful marketing strategy.

Conclusion

Healthcare marketing utilizing social media has become an important place for attracting patients. To achieve the best outcomes, hospitals need to understand the favorites of their target group. In this study, educational content was found to be the most preferred content type among the respondents. Additionally, Facebook was the most regularly used platform, and most of the participants thought that conveying medical information through social media influencers is effective.

Disclosure of interest

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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