

Digital Marketing Challenges in the Healthcare Sector in Mysuru District. An Empirical Study

Nishath Anjum G

Research Scholar

Department of PG studies and Research in Management,
KSAW University, Vijayapura

Mallikarjuna N L

Professor

Department of PG studies and Research in Management,
KSAW University, Vijayapura

Abstract

Digital marketing has become an important part of healthcare communication in India. Patients depend on online platforms for information related to hospitals, doctors, treatment options, costs, and service quality. People search for the reviews about the treatment they need on the internet to find the best option of doctors and hospital infrastructure. Though its growing relevance, the digital marketing in healthcare faces several challenges due to ethical concerns, regulatory restrictions, infrastructural limitations, digital knowledge gaps, and trust-related issues.

This study gave the opportunity to measure the digital marketing challenges faced by healthcare sector in Mysuru district using data collected from patients, doctors, hospital staff, and hospital management. The findings as per the data collected regarding digital presence of the hospitals available and services offered by them show that while digital platforms influence hospital choice among younger and urban patients, most hospitals struggle with inadequate digital infrastructure, lack of trained personnel, and difficulty in measuring marketing effectiveness. The study highlights the need for structured, ethical, and patient-centric digital marketing strategies to improve patient satisfaction, loyalty, and competitive positioning.

It is the need for any private hospital to be competent and showcase their efficiency online in country like ours where health care sector is not a monopoly.

Introduction

The healthcare sector in India has experienced rapid transformation due to economic freedom, technological advancement, rising private sector participation, and increased patient awareness. Hospitals are no longer viewed merely as welfare-oriented organizations but as competitive service providers that must deliver quality care while ensuring patient satisfaction. In this evolving environment, marketing has emerged as a strategic function in healthcare management.

Digital marketing has influenced the way hospitals communicate with patients. Websites, social media platforms, online reviews, mobile applications, and telemedicine portals have become important

sources of healthcare information. Patients increasingly use digital platforms to compare hospitals, assess doctor expertise, check treatment costs, and understand insurance coverage. But healthcare digital marketing differs from conventional marketing due to the sensitive nature of medical information, ethical responsibilities, and regulatory constraints.

Scope of the Study

The study covers Mysuru district, a representative of a diverse healthcare ecosystem comprising government hospitals, private multi-specialty hospitals, charitable institutions, and specialty centers catering to urban, semi-urban, and rural populations. It examines the adoption and challenges of digital marketing tools such as hospital websites, social media platforms, online reviews, and digital appointment systems.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant as it provides district-level empirical evidence on digital marketing challenges in the healthcare sector, an area with limited existing research. It offers practical insights for hospital administrators to design ethical and patient-centric digital marketing strategies. The findings support policymakers in framing clear digital healthcare guidelines and contribute academically by linking digital marketing practices with patient satisfaction, trust, and competitive positioning of healthcare institutions.

Although internet penetration and smartphone usage are increasing in the region, many healthcare institutions in Mysuru face difficulties in adopting digital marketing effectively. This study focuses on identifying the major digital marketing challenges faced by healthcare sector in Mysuru district and examining their impact on patient engagement and hospital competitiveness.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the influence of digital platforms on patient hospital selection behavior.
2. To identify major digital marketing challenges faced by healthcare institutions in Mysuru district.
3. To analyze the impact of digital marketing challenges on patient satisfaction and loyalty.
4. To suggest strategies for improving digital marketing effectiveness in the healthcare sector.

Review of Literature

Healthcare marketing is fundamentally different from traditional marketing because healthcare services are intangible, high-risk, and trust-dependent.

Gronroos, Christian (1988) emphasized that service quality and corporate image play a critical role in shaping patient perceptions.

Priya Deshpande (2005) reported in the article Service Quality Perspectives and Satisfaction in Health Care Systems – A Study of Selected Hospitals in Hyderabad. The LPG environment has exposed many enterprises, particularly those in the service sector, to competitive challenges; service quality, cost, and the competitive environment will help them modernise.

Kotler and Keller (2010) noted that healthcare marketing must balance promotional activities with ethical responsibility and transparency.

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K Khiong (2022) has analysed the impact and challenges of digital marketing in health care industries during digital era and covid 19 pandemic.

Studies have shown the growing role of digital platforms in healthcare decision-making. Research indicates that hospital websites, online reviews, and social media platforms significantly influence hospital selection, particularly among younger and educated patients.

Research Methodology

This study is based on analytical research design using a mixed-method approach. Primary data were collected from four hospital stakeholder groups: patients, doctors, hospital staff, and hospital management across selected hospitals in Mysuru district.

A total of 520 respondents participated in the study, including

- 400 patients
- 50 doctors
- 50 hospital staff members
- 20 hospital management representatives.

A part of each questionnaire used was helpful to collect data on usage of digital information, perceptions of hospital digital presence, service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty.

Secondary data were collected from hospital reports, government publications, and academic journals.

Results and Discussion

The findings indicate that digital platforms are increasingly used by patients for hospital selection, especially among younger and urban respondents. Hospital websites and online reviews play an important role in deciding patient perceptions and initial trust. But it cannot be denied that elderly patients and rural populations depend more on personal referrals (word of mouth) and direct hospital visits due to limited digital knowledge and accessibility.

Several digital marketing challenges were identified during the study. Low digital knowledge among patients reduces the effectiveness of online communication. Many hospitals lack updated websites, online appointment systems, and social media engagement strategies. Inadequate technological infrastructure and shortage of trained digital marketing professionals further limit usage.

Trust and credibility remain central to healthcare decision-making. Patients place greater emphasis on doctor reputation, previous experience, and word of mouth referrals than on digital advertisements. Regulatory uncertainty regarding permissible digital advertising practices also discourages hospitals from actively promoting services online. The hospitals face difficulty in measuring the performance and return on investment of digital marketing activities.

Findings

The study shows that digital platforms influence hospital choice, especially among younger patients of age group from 18 to 40. Digital marketing usage by hospitals is lesser due to infrastructure limitations, skill shortages, ethical concerns, and low digital knowledge.

Trust, previous service experience and referral visit to hospitals are given importance than promotional digital content in healthcare decision-making. Hospitals that adopt structured and patient centric digital strategies attract specific patient type and they are hospital specific or doctor specific services.

Suggestions

Healthcare sector should adopt framed digital marketing strategies aligned with patient needs and segmentation. Investment in digital infrastructure and staff training should be prioritized. Digital content should focus on patient education, transparency, and trust-building rather than aggressive promotion. Use of local languages and simplified digital interfaces can improve patient walk-ins. Hospitals should implement analytics tools to evaluate digital marketing performance.

Conclusion

The study concludes that digital marketing in the healthcare sector of Mysuru district faces multiple challenges related to digital knowledge, infrastructure, and trust concerns. While digital platforms offer significant opportunities for improving patient engagement and competitive positioning, their effectiveness depends on ethical practices, service quality integration, and patient-centric strategies. A well-structured digital marketing framework can enhance patient satisfaction, loyalty, and long-term sustainability of healthcare institutions in Mysuru district.

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