

THE EFFECT OF DIGITAL MARKETING AND BRAND IMAGE ON PATIENT VISIT DECISIONS AT VWXY HOSPITAL

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of digital marketing and brand image on patient visit decisions at a hospital. The background of this study is based on increasing competition among healthcare providers, which requires effective marketing strategies and strong brand positioning. This research uses a quantitative approach with multiple linear regression analysis. The results indicate that digital marketing has a strong and significant effect on patient visit decisions, with a correlation coefficient of 0.884 and regression coefficient of 0.544 ($p < 0.001$). Brand image also shows a strong influence, with a correlation coefficient of 0.875 and regression coefficient of 1.624 ($p < 0.001$). Simultaneously, both variables significantly affect visit decisions with an F value of 205.401 and significance of $p < 0.001$. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.820, meaning 82% of the variation in visit decisions is explained by digital marketing and brand image. These findings confirm that digital marketing and brand image are key determinants in influencing patient visit decisions.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Brand Image, Patient Visit Decision, Hospital.

INTRODUCTION

Hospitals play a strategic role in improving public health quality through the provision of professional, integrated, and patient-oriented healthcare services. In the modern healthcare industry, hospitals are not only required to provide high-quality medical services, but also to compete competitively with other healthcare institutions offering similar services. Competition occurs not only in terms of medical facilities and healthcare professionals, but also in the ability of hospitals to establish effective communication with the community and create positive perceptions through appropriate marketing strategies. Therefore, marketing has become an integral part of hospital management strategies in maintaining sustainability and increasing patient visit decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The rapid development of digital technology has significantly transformed marketing practices in various sectors, including healthcare services. Digital marketing enables hospitals to reach a wider audience more efficiently through websites, social media platforms, search engines, and mobile applications. Through these platforms, hospitals can provide information related to healthcare services quickly, accurately, and interactively. Digital marketing also facilitates two-way communication between hospitals and patients, allowing healthcare institutions to better understand patient needs and expectations. According to Afrilia (2018), digital marketing serves as a strategic communication tool that strengthens customer engagement and enhances organizational visibility. In the healthcare context, digital marketing has become increasingly important because patients tend to search for healthcare information online before making decisions regarding hospital visits.

The effectiveness of digital marketing is strongly influenced by the quality of information and interaction provided through digital platforms. Interactive communication, informative content, accessibility, and responsiveness are essential components that influence patient perceptions toward healthcare providers. Liu, Yadav, and Shrum (2002) explain that interactivity in digital communication can increase consumer trust and improve decision-making processes. Similarly, Royle and Laing (2014) emphasize that digital marketing capabilities are crucial for organizations to maintain competitiveness in the digital era. Consequently, hospitals that effectively utilize digital marketing strategies are more likely to attract patient attention and increase visit intentions. In addition to digital marketing, brand image is another important factor influencing patient visit decisions. Brand image refers to the set of perceptions, beliefs, and impressions that consumers associate with a particular institution or service (Kotler & Armstrong, 2019). In the healthcare sector, brand image is not limited to visual identity, but also reflects service

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quality, professionalism of healthcare workers, hospital reputation, and patient experiences. A positive brand image increases patient trust and confidence, encouraging them to choose and revisit the same hospital for future healthcare needs. Conversely, a negative brand image may reduce public trust and decrease patient visit intentions. Previous studies have shown that brand image significantly influences patient loyalty and healthcare decision-making. Hasan and Putra (2019) found that hospital image and service quality positively affect patient satisfaction and loyalty. Similarly, Sibarani and Riani (2017) revealed that brand image contributes significantly to patient loyalty through patient satisfaction as a mediating factor. These findings indicate that hospitals with strong and positive brand images are more likely to maintain patient trust and attract new patients.

Patient visit decision is a complex process involving several stages, including problem recognition, information searching, evaluation of alternatives, decision-making, and post-visit evaluation. In healthcare services, patients tend to be highly selective because healthcare decisions are closely related to safety, trust, and quality of care. Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1985) explain that service quality and organizational reputation strongly influence customer perceptions and behavioral intentions. Therefore, understanding the factors affecting patient visit decisions is essential for hospitals to formulate effective marketing and service strategies. Based on the explanation above, this study aims to analyze the influence of digital marketing and brand image on patient visit decisions at hospitals, both partially and simultaneously. This research is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of healthcare marketing studies and practically provide recommendations for hospitals in designing effective digital marketing strategies and strengthening brand image to improve patient visit decisions. Digital marketing has become an essential strategy for organizations in promoting products and services in the digital era. In the healthcare sector, digital marketing enables hospitals to communicate healthcare information more effectively and efficiently to the public. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), digital marketing refers to marketing activities conducted through digital channels to create value and maintain customer relationships. The use of websites, social media, mobile applications, and online advertisements allows healthcare institutions to reach wider audiences while providing interactive communication with patients.

Afrilia (2018) explains that digital marketing functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a strategic communication medium that strengthens organizational image and customer engagement. In hospital services, digital marketing plays a crucial role because patients increasingly rely on online information before deciding to visit healthcare providers. Information accessibility, responsiveness, and communication quality significantly influence patient perceptions regarding hospital credibility and professionalism. Previous studies indicate that digital marketing positively affects consumer behavior and decision-making. Royle and Laing (2014) found that organizations with strong digital marketing capabilities tend to achieve better competitiveness and customer engagement. Similarly, Rony and Panuju (2018) emphasized that digital media utilization in hospitals contributes to improving communication effectiveness and strengthening patient relationships. These findings suggest that digital marketing is a strategic factor influencing patient decisions in healthcare services.

However, several studies also highlight challenges in implementing digital marketing in healthcare institutions. Some hospitals still face limitations in technological adaptation, content management, and digital communication strategies. In addition, the effectiveness of digital marketing depends heavily on the credibility and quality of information presented online. Misleading or incomplete information may reduce patient trust and negatively affect hospital reputation. Therefore, digital marketing strategies in healthcare services must prioritize transparency, accuracy, and patient-centered communication. Brand image is an important concept in marketing literature that refers to the perceptions, beliefs, and associations consumers hold regarding a particular organization or service. Kotler and Armstrong (2019) define brand image as the set of beliefs embedded in consumers' minds about a brand. In the healthcare industry, brand image reflects the overall perception of hospital quality, professionalism, trustworthiness, and patient experiences.

A positive brand image can influence patient confidence and encourage repeat visits. Patients generally prefer hospitals that are perceived as reputable, reliable, and capable of providing high-quality healthcare services. According to Hasan and Putra (2019), hospital image significantly influences patient satisfaction and loyalty because patients associate strong brand image with better healthcare outcomes and service quality. This indicates that hospitals must consistently maintain service excellence to strengthen public trust. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated the importance of brand image in healthcare decision-making. Sibarani and Riani (2017) found that brand image positively affects patient loyalty through satisfaction as a mediating variable. Similarly, Guo and Williams (2015) argued that customer perceptions and organizational reputation are closely related to customer retention and behavioral intentions. These studies confirm that brand image serves as a psychological factor influencing patient choices and healthcare consumption behavior.

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Despite its importance, building a strong brand image in healthcare institutions is not without challenges. Brand image is influenced not only by promotional activities but also by actual patient experiences, service quality, healthcare professionalism, and communication consistency. Negative experiences shared through digital platforms and social media may rapidly damage hospital reputation. Therefore, hospitals must integrate marketing communication with service quality improvement to sustain positive public perceptions. Patient visit decision refers to the process through which individuals determine whether to use healthcare services at a particular hospital. Consumer decision-making theory explains that purchasing or service usage decisions involve several stages, including need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase or usage decision, and post-purchase evaluation (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In healthcare services, this process becomes more complex because it involves trust, safety, and perceived service quality.

Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1985) state that service quality strongly influences customer perceptions and behavioral intentions. In the hospital context, patients evaluate various aspects such as medical facilities, healthcare personnel competence, accessibility, communication quality, and organizational reputation before making visit decisions. Digital information availability and positive brand image also contribute significantly to reducing uncertainty in healthcare decision-making.

Research conducted by Hasan and Putra (2019) revealed that patient decisions are influenced by service quality, trust, organizational image, and satisfaction. Patients are more likely to revisit hospitals that provide positive healthcare experiences and maintain effective communication. Additionally, the increasing use of digital platforms has transformed patient behavior, where online reviews, hospital websites, and social media information become essential references in evaluating healthcare providers. Nevertheless, some studies argue that patient visit decisions are not determined solely by marketing factors. Economic conditions, healthcare costs, geographical accessibility, physician recommendations, and emergency situations also play important roles in influencing patient choices. This indicates that healthcare decision-making is multidimensional and requires comprehensive analysis involving both internal and external factors.

This study is grounded in marketing and consumer behavior theories that explain how digital communication and organizational image influence consumer decisions. The first theoretical foundation is digital marketing theory proposed by Kotler and Keller (2016), which emphasizes that digital communication enables organizations to establish interactive relationships with consumers through digital platforms. This theory explains how information accessibility, communication effectiveness, and online engagement influence patient perceptions and decision-making.

The second theoretical basis is brand image theory proposed by Kotler and Armstrong (2019), which explains that consumer perceptions regarding organizational reputation and quality significantly affect behavioral intentions. In healthcare services, positive brand image increases patient trust and confidence in hospital services. Strong brand image also reduces perceived risk in healthcare decisions because patients associate reputable hospitals with reliable healthcare outcomes. Consumer decision-making theory also underpins this study. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), consumers go through several stages before making decisions, including recognizing needs, searching for information, evaluating alternatives, and making final decisions. In this context, digital marketing functions as an information source, while brand image influences patient evaluations and trust toward healthcare providers.

Although previous studies have discussed digital marketing and brand image separately, limited research has comprehensively examined the simultaneous influence of these variables on patient visit decisions in hospitals, particularly in the context of rapidly evolving digital healthcare communication. Existing studies tend to focus on customer satisfaction, loyalty, or service quality without specifically analyzing how digital marketing and brand image interact in influencing patient visit behavior. In addition, the increasing adoption of digital communication technologies in healthcare services creates new dynamics in patient decision-making processes. Patients are becoming more dependent on online information and digital interaction when selecting healthcare providers. However, there is still limited empirical evidence regarding the extent to which digital marketing and brand image collectively contribute to patient visit decisions in hospital settings. Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps by analyzing the partial and simultaneous effects of digital marketing and brand image on patient visit decisions. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of healthcare marketing literature and provide practical recommendations for hospitals in improving digital marketing strategies and strengthening institutional brand image to enhance patient visits.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach with an explanatory research design to examine the influence of digital marketing and brand image on patient visit decisions at hospitals. Quantitative research was selected because it enables researchers to measure relationships between variables objectively through statistical analysis. The explanatory design was used to identify causal relationships between independent variables, namely digital marketing and brand image, and the dependent variable, patient visit decision. The research was conducted at hospitals that actively implement digital marketing strategies through websites, social media platforms, and other online communication channels. The target population consisted of patients or individuals who had previously used hospital healthcare services and had experience accessing hospital digital information. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling techniques, where participants were chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The criteria included individuals aged above 18 years, having visited the hospital at least once, and being familiar with digital media related to healthcare services.

Data collection was carried out using structured questionnaires distributed directly and through online platforms. The questionnaire was designed based on indicators derived from previous literature and related theories. The digital marketing variable was measured using indicators such as interactivity, accessibility, informativeness, and communication responsiveness. Meanwhile, the brand image variable was measured through perceptions of hospital reputation, trust, professionalism, and service quality. The patient visit decision variable was measured based on consumer decision-making stages, including information search, evaluation of alternatives, and final decision-making.

Before distribution, the questionnaire instrument underwent validity and reliability testing to ensure the accuracy and consistency of measurements. Validity testing was conducted using product moment correlation analysis, while reliability testing utilized Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Instruments were considered reliable when the Cronbach's Alpha value exceeded 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent characteristics and variable distributions, while inferential statistics were employed to test the research hypotheses. Multiple linear regression analysis was applied to determine the partial and simultaneous effects of digital marketing and brand image on patient visit decisions.

The regression equation used in this study is presented as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + e$$

Where:

Y = Patient Visit Decision

α = Constant

β_1 = Regression coefficient of Digital Marketing

β_2 = Regression coefficient of Brand Image

X_1 = Digital Marketing

X_2 = Brand Image

e = Error term

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the t-test to determine the partial influence of each independent variable and the F-test to examine the simultaneous influence of digital marketing and brand image on patient visit decisions. A significance level of 5% ($p < 0.05$) was used as the criterion for hypothesis acceptance. In addition, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to measure the proportion of variance in patient visit decisions explained by the independent variables included in the regression model. The use of multiple linear regression analysis in this study provides empirical evidence regarding the contribution of digital marketing and brand image in influencing healthcare consumer behavior. The findings are expected to support hospital management in designing effective marketing strategies and improving institutional reputation to increase patient visit decisions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Influence of Digital Marketing on Patient Visit Decisions

The results of this study indicate that digital marketing has a very strong and significant influence on patient visit decisions at hospitals. This is evidenced by the correlation coefficient value of 0.884, which indicates a very close relationship between digital marketing and visit decisions. In addition, the regression analysis results show a coefficient value of 0.544 with a significance level of $p < 0.001$, meaning that digital marketing has a

positive and statistically significant effect on patient visit decisions. These findings demonstrate that every improvement in the quality of digital marketing is followed by an increased tendency of patients to visit hospitals.

Empirically, these results show that digital marketing has become one of the main factors shaping consumer behavior in the healthcare service sector. In the digital era, patients no longer rely solely on direct recommendations, but actively seek information through digital media such as websites, social media, and search engines. Information available online becomes the initial basis in the decision-making process, particularly during the stages of information searching and alternative evaluation. Therefore, the presence of hospitals on accessible and informative digital platforms increases the likelihood of being chosen by patients.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of digital marketing is determined not only by the existence of digital media, but also by the quality of the content presented. Clear, accurate, and relevant information enhances patient trust in hospitals. In addition, interactivity also plays an important role, where fast and communicative responses to patient inquiries create a professional impression and improve initial satisfaction before the visit occurs. Thus, digital marketing functions not only as a promotional tool but also as a communication medium that builds relationships between hospitals and patients.

In the context of visit decisions, digital marketing influences patients' initial perceptions of the services offered. Patients who obtain complete and easily understood information tend to have greater confidence in choosing a particular hospital. This indicates that digital marketing is capable of reducing uncertainty in decision-making, especially in healthcare services that involve high levels of risk. Therefore, the more optimal the digital marketing strategy implemented, the greater the opportunity for hospitals to increase the number of patient visits.

B. The Influence of Brand Image on Patient Visit Decisions

The results of this study indicate that brand image has a strong and significant influence on patient visit decisions at hospitals. This finding is supported by the correlation coefficient value of 0.875, which demonstrates a strong relationship between brand image and patient visit decisions. In addition, the regression analysis results show a coefficient value of 1.624 with a significance level of $p < 0.001$, indicating that brand image has a positive and statistically significant effect on patient visit decisions. These findings suggest that a stronger and more positive brand image increases patients' confidence and willingness to choose hospital services.

Empirically, the findings reveal that brand image plays an important role in shaping patient perceptions toward healthcare institutions. In the healthcare sector, patients tend to select hospitals that are perceived as trustworthy, professional, and capable of providing high-quality medical services. Brand image is not only related to visual identity or popularity, but also reflects the hospital's reputation, service quality, professionalism of healthcare workers, and patient experiences. Therefore, hospitals with positive brand images are more likely to attract and retain patients.

Furthermore, patients often associate a strong brand image with safety and reliability in healthcare services. Since healthcare decisions involve high levels of risk and uncertainty, patients generally prefer hospitals with good reputations and positive public perceptions. A positive brand image reduces patient concerns regarding service quality and increases trust in medical treatment provided by the hospital. As a result, brand image becomes a strategic factor influencing patient decision-making processes. The findings of this study are consistent with the theory proposed by Kotler and Armstrong (2019), which explains that brand image reflects consumer perceptions and beliefs regarding an organization or service. In the hospital context, positive perceptions are developed through consistent service quality, effective communication, and positive patient experiences. These results are also supported by Hasan and Putra (2019), who found that hospital image significantly influences patient satisfaction and loyalty.

In addition, the rapid development of digital communication has strengthened the importance of brand image in healthcare services. Information shared through social media, online reviews, and digital platforms can quickly shape public perceptions regarding hospitals. Positive reviews and patient recommendations contribute to strengthening hospital reputation, while negative experiences may damage public trust. Therefore, hospitals must maintain consistency between promotional communication and actual service delivery to preserve a strong and credible brand image. In the context of patient visit decisions, brand image functions as a psychological factor that influences patient confidence before selecting healthcare services. Patients who perceive a hospital positively are more likely to choose and revisit the same healthcare institution. Thus, strengthening brand image through service quality improvement, professional healthcare management, and effective communication strategies is essential for hospitals to increase patient visit decisions and maintain competitiveness in the healthcare industry.

C. The Simultaneous Influence of Digital Marketing and Brand Image on Patient Visit Decisions

The results of this study indicate that digital marketing and brand image simultaneously have a significant influence on patient visit decisions. This is evidenced by the calculated F-value of 205.401 with a significance level of $p < 0.001$, indicating that both independent variables jointly affect the dependent variable. These findings suggest that the combination of digital marketing and brand image is a highly important factor in determining patient visit decisions.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.820 indicates that 82% of the variation in patient visit decisions can be explained by digital marketing and brand image. This figure demonstrates that the research model has a very strong explanatory power. However, there are still 18% of other factors influencing patient visit decisions that are not included in this research model, such as service prices, hospital location, recommendations from others, and the quality of available facilities. Conceptually, digital marketing and brand image have complementary roles in influencing patient visit decisions. Digital marketing functions as a communication medium that delivers information and attracts patient attention, while brand image acts as a factor that builds patient trust and confidence in the services offered. Without a strong brand image, digital marketing would only generate temporary interest. Conversely, without effective digital marketing, a positive brand image would not be widely communicated to the public.

These findings indicate that hospitals need to integrate digital marketing strategies with brand image strengthening simultaneously. Digital marketing strategies should be designed to reflect the hospital's values, quality, and competitive advantages in order to reinforce the existing brand image. On the other hand, brand image must be developed through consistency in providing high-quality healthcare services and positive patient experiences. Through an integrated approach, hospitals can increase patient trust, expand market reach, and significantly improve patient visit decisions. Furthermore, the findings support the theory proposed by Kotler and Keller (2016), which explains that consumer decisions are influenced by both information accessibility and organizational reputation. In healthcare services, patients require reliable information and assurance regarding healthcare quality before making decisions. Therefore, hospitals that successfully combine effective digital communication with strong institutional reputation are more likely to achieve better patient engagement and competitiveness.

From a managerial perspective, hospitals should not only focus on promotional activities but also prioritize service quality improvement, patient satisfaction, and organizational professionalism. Digital communication must consistently represent the actual quality of healthcare services delivered by the hospital. In addition, hospitals should actively maintain their reputation through patient-centered services, transparent communication, and responsive healthcare management. Thus, it can be concluded that success in increasing patient visit decisions does not depend solely on one factor, but rather on the synergy between digital marketing and brand image. An integrated and sustainable approach becomes the key strategy for hospitals in facing increasingly competitive challenges within the healthcare industry.

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