


Chapter 58

Role of Social Media in Hospital Branding: Insights for Marketing Practitioners

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ABSTRACT

The fierce competition in the healthcare sector has forced the hospitals to go for branding. The hospitals have various options like print, radio, TV, and digital media for conducting their brand management exercise. The analysis showed that the best hospitals around the globe have focused more on social media marketing for their brand-building exercise. This study conducted a rigorous structured literature review to understand the best practices for healthcare branding using social media tools. The study also conducted a benchmark analysis of social media marketing efforts of the leading global hospitals. It also analyzed the popular online healthcare communities to find the best social media marketing practices adopted for hospital brand building. The practical suggestions for how to leverage the various social media channels for better hospital brand building have also been highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

The high internet penetration has enabled quick dissemination of information about various service options to the customers including hospital services (Ahadzadeh, Sharif & Ong, 2018; Patwardhan, Pandey & Dhume, 2017). The advent of web 2.0 gave popularity to social media in healthcare industry (Wang, Huang, & Gan, 2016). 73% of people in the USA are active in at least one social media platform (Patel, 2015). Social media refers to a set of online interactive communication channels through which users can create online communities to create and share information and content quickly, efficiently and in

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real-time. This resulted in interesting consumer insights for the hospitals and inputs for enhancing their branding by improving healthcare services. Microblogs, social networking sites, online forums, wikis, virtual reality, and media-sharing sites are the various types of social media.

Generally, social media is used for commercial businesses to create brand awareness, shaping attitudes, engaging customers and knowing customer views and opinions (Pandey and Shinde 2019; Pandey and Singh, 2012; Smith, Blazovich, and Smith, 2015). The increasing use of social media use in healthcare has led to nomenclature of terms like “Health 2.0” and “Medicine 2.0” (Eysenbach, 2008). Literature has categorized social media in two groups for the patients: - (a) online health communities and (b) web base social networks (Kordzadeh, 2016). Online health communities’ are formed to discuss health-related issues online such as WebMD, Practo, etc. Web-based social networks are general-purpose social networking sites such as Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, etc (De Maetino et al., 2017). Social media has changed the traditional healthcare system by discussing health-related information on online platforms (Li and Wang, 2017). Myers, Kudsi & Ghaaferi, (2017) reported that in surgery learning from other’s experience is quite helpful. The social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. provides a platform to the surgeons to get connected. Such platforms help them to enhance their practice and to improve patient health. For example, International Hernia Collaboration, a Facebook group provides a platform to share experiences and ideas on a particular medical condition or practice (Myers et al., 2017). The increased use of smartphones and tablets has further accelerated the use of social media for healthcare information as a consumer now spending more time online (Pentescu, Cetinã, & Orzan, 2015). Smartphones are easy to carry anywhere and anytime, hence user can access health-related information in real-time besides participating actively in health-related discussions (Benetoli, Chen, & Aslani, 2017). The hospital system is becoming more patient-oriented where social media and digital technologies have started playing a major role (Househ and Kushniruk, 2014).

Healthcare professionals use social media to analyse user opinion about healthcare issues (Frost, Okun, Vaughan, Heywood & Wicks, 2011; Ngai, Tao, Moon, 2015). This also enables hospitals to resolve the patient doubt and allow them to follow a discussion on a particular topic. Thus, the social media helps patient by saving their time and provides timely information about various healthcare options available in the vicinity (Li, Wang, Lin & Hajli, 2018). Few physicians are even using social media to be in directly touch with their patients to get feedback about their health and for giving them further health advice (Patwardhan, Pandey and Dhume, 2014; Ventola, 2014).

Pentescu et al., (2015) argued that although social media is vastly used in other sectors, it’s in the embryonic stage in hospital industry. Furthermore, Li and Wang (2017) also said that despite various advantages of social media, there are some challenges and risks associated with this. One reason could be that healthcare data is more sensitive, so it’s become more difficult to identify patterns, performing data analysis and using these to enhance healthcare services (Abirami and Askarunisa, 2017). The other reasons are the availability of poor data, risk to damage professional image, privacy risk to patient medical condition, legal issues (Ventola, 2014), user consent to share health-related information (McGowan et al., 2012; Li et al., 2018) and influence on patient-physician relationship (Benetoli et al., 2017). Smailhodzic, Hooijsma, Boonstra, & Langley, (2016) said that biased articles or discussion forums to promote a particular brand could be another potential risk.

Literature has shown that the potential of social media has not been utilized in hospitals to its fullest extent (Li et al., 2018). Previous research has reported that its implementation has faced several issues (Househ and Kushniruk, 2014; Lim, 2016). However, it has been noted that even though hospital industry is gradually adopting social media, academic research is still at an embryonic stage. Therefore, more

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