


Chapter 6

Sustainability and Healthcare Marketing in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

Healthcare as a dynamic and complex industry requires marketing to achieve business goals and improve the well-being of society. Transformations in the environment, increased competition, changes in consumer behavior force organizations to adapt to the altered landscape. In this regard, marketing plays a pivotal role in defining consumers' attitudes, motivations, and perceptions, building relationships with stakeholders, developing a strategy, and creating value. Moreover, the aging population, chronic diseases, prolonged pains and disabilities, poverty and poor health conditions, and lack of reliable medical services cause an increased burden not only on the healthcare system but also on the economy and society in all counties. Sustainable Development Goals aim to solve the pressing challenges facing the world. The objectives of this chapter are to discuss healthcare marketing in light of the twin transition: sustainability and digitalization. The chapter illustrates sustainable healthcare marketing opportunities in relation to digital advancements including ChatGPT.

1. INTRODUCTION

Demand for marketing in healthcare organizations is growing to effectively communicate with patients, suppliers, governments, and providers but also to successfully respond to their needs and wants. The consumer for healthcare marketing is not only an individual patient or a physician but also companies purchasing care for their employees as well as insurance companies (Berkowitz, 2021).

Marketing communication is an essential part of health promotion as health marketing relates to health promotion programs. According to the definition of WHO (n.d.), “Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health. It moves beyond a focus on individual behavior towards a wide range of social and environmental interventions”. Studies demonstrate that health promotion including education prevents diseases, reduces health

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-0679-6.ch006

risks, and stimulates behavior changes (Pham et al., 2020; Basińska-Zych & Springer, 2021). Thus, the integration of health promotion and social marketing can add value to health improvement and increase effectiveness.

Healthcare marketing is characterized by consumers instead of products or services. For this reason, marketing aims to create a long-term relationship with consumers in order to ensure their satisfaction and loyalty. Marketing aims at understanding the health needs of the target population and responding to the demands with accessible products and services. In addition, the reputation and image of healthcare institutions influence patients' choices. Moreover, marketing can improve healthcare quality, gain employee satisfaction, and allocate human, financial, or material resources efficiently. Furthermore, marketing increases awareness of healthcare issues among the population and contributes to sustainability.

A successful marketing strategy should begin with the research of consumers' needs, desires, and opinions based on which new or improved services must be offered by a healthcare organization. It should be taken into account that patients' behaviors and attitudes are affected by families and friends and hence, can change across countries (Syed et al., 2021). Only under such conditions, it is possible to acquire and maintain consumers, earn income, and gain a competitive advantage in the market. Research, based on a systematic review of relevant papers, confirm the significance of marketing strategies and technological progress for healthcare organizations (Syed et al., 2021).

Recently introduced advanced technologies enable healthcare consumers to access various information and special offers through the Internet, evaluate healthcare services, and share their experiences (Berkowitz, 2021). Patients now know their needs and assess alternatives. Consumers are increasingly seeking values whilst transparency and global competition become paramount (Berkowitz, 2021; Syed et al., 2021).

Researchers underline the importance of communication in healthcare marketing which can be performed through electronic means such as television, outdoor billboards, and especially social media (Syed et al., 2021). Studies show that a huge number of people worldwide use social media and even advertisements directing customers to the Facebook page of a company are considered to be reliable and less annoying than those leading visitors to the brand's webpage (Pelet & Ettis, 2022). However, marketing activities promoting health-related issues can be performed with utmost caution given the powerful effect of social media. For this reason, governments tend to pose regulations on advertisements in order to protect patients since they are unable to distinguish the authenticity of messages (Syed et al., 2021).

In order to address the pressing challenges, the world has faced, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been initiated by the United Nations. Since then, sustainability has become a buzzword. Organizations of all types and sizes are expected to contribute to SDGs. The joint efforts of various agents should ameliorate people's lives on Earth.

Against this background, the purpose of this chapter is to examine healthcare marketing in light of the twin transition - Sustainability and Digitalization. The chapter illustrates sustainable marketing opportunities for healthcare organizations and establishes the links between healthcare marketing, digital transformation, and Sustainability. Social marketing, digital technologies, particularly chat GPT, and ethical considerations are also discussed.

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