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DETERMINING MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION DIMENSIONS OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS IN HUNGARY

Norbert Katona*[1], Rita Szabó[2], András Szeberényi[3]

[1]John von Neumann University, Hungary
[2]Individual Healthcare Marketing and PR Consultant, Hungary
[3]Budapest Metropolitan University, Hungary

While the actors of the developed world are deeply concerned with the complex interpretation of health, studying the path leading to that is a less investigated area, although, among the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a prominent role is given to the complex experience of health and its quality improvement. Regarding the V4 countries, many indicators of health need to be improved, while the quality of online marketing and communication, as well as the social media activities of private healthcare providers, largely determines the intensity and efficiency of using the service they provide. The focus of the online survey, with the involvement of almost 2,000 respondents, was to assess whether the marketing activities of healthcare services and their activities on social media platforms meet the expectations of Hungarian female consumers. Due to the results, social media platforms proved to be extremely critical, although older respondents trust advertisements about marketing services less. In the selection of service providers, patients base their decisions to a decisive extent on the expressions of the community of acquaintances, which assumes the management of a multi-level marketing, and communication tool park, and the emphatic and controlled education of brand ambassadors.

Keywords: SDGs, health and well-being, female decision-makers, social media, influencers

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1948). However, the later definition of the WHO, published in 1984, raised the concept of health to a more complex level. According to this definition, health is, on the one hand, nothing more than the degree to which an individual or a group is able to realize their aspirations and satisfy their needs. On the other hand, it is the ability to change their environment to cope with it. Thus, based on this definition, health can be seen more as a resource of everyday life rather than only a destination (Juhász, 2003). This definition correctly takes into account the physiological, psychological, and social factors of health and illness, as well as the interactions between these factors (Crinson and Martino, 2017). The necessity of a complex approach and interpretation of health is well-proven by the following dimensions (Ewles and Simnett, 1999):

1. physical health – the mechanical functioning of the body;
2. mental health – the ability to think clearly and consistently;
3. emotional health – the ability to recognize and appropriately manage feelings;
4. social health – relationships with others and the ability to develop and maintain them;
5. spiritual health – the sign of our personal worldview, behavioral principles, and peace of mind and peace with ourselves;
6. sexual health – the individual can express his/her sexuality appropriately,

and finally

7. social health – the condition of the health of society is also the health of its members.

All of this clearly shows the path of development that the definition of health has taken up to the present day. Today, we see health not only as the absence of physical diseases (which is otherwise pleasant) or as its treated and maintained state, but rather we feel and experience its emotional, intellectual, spiritual, environmental, financial, occupational, and social aspects (Galderisi et al., 2015). The experienced quality of the complex interpretation of health also plays a significant role in connection with sustainability, as confirmed by UNICEF's sustainability goals (SDGs) adopted in September 2015, where the achievement of health and well-being is ranked third among them (Szeberényi and Bakos, 2022). The support and development of everything in different ways basically determine the complex health status of a region (Upvall and Luzincourt, 2019, Palozzi et al., 2020). However, it is crucial that the achievement of the sustainability goals, based on the last (17th) element of the SDGs system, must be based on synergy, making it also beneficial in relation to healthcare if the private sector is included in the solution (Clarke et al., 2019). Encouraging conscious access to healthcare is particularly important at the individual and integrated levels in the case of the V4 countries, where – although not to an equal extent – a gap can be observed in relation to individual health indicators and services. One can consider the different results of the treatment of COVID (Túri and Virág, 2021), the evolution of the mortality data (Bosakova et al., 2019), the development of mental health statistics (Szőllősi et al., 2022), or the fact that being overweight affects more than 50% of the population (www.visegradfund.org, 2020).

Today, healthcare marketing has undergone significant changes, with sales promotion (SP) becoming increasingly important. In addition to sales, consumer engagement, and an emphasis on innovative solutions and e-channels have become fundamental indicators of success (Chakraborty and Paul, 2023). COVID also played a crucial role in modernizing healthcare marketing and communication, as the widespread use of digital tools and channels fundamentally altered consumer decision-making behavior and mechanisms (Mason et al., 2020). The appearance of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok, marked a sharp shift and now plays an increasingly significant role in health marketing and PR. It has not only transformed shopping and entertainment habits but also revolutionized communication, offering enormous opportunities

(and numerous pitfalls to avoid). However, the rise of social media brings not only many opportunities but also various risk factors, including complex data analysis and management issues (Kanchan and Gaidhane, 2023). The social media presence of current healthcare providers is not only a passive marketing communication method but also an active and constantly operating interaction toolkit with current and future patients. Activities like writing opinions, sending messages, managing closed groups, etc., require "continuous" attention and "immediate" reactions (Scott and Goode, 2020). The advantage and danger of social media lie in the fact that patients can compare and comment on doctors and private healthcare providers while immediately sharing their experiences and opinions about the treatments they receive, the quality of care, or the perceived expertise of doctors (Malik et al., 2023). The basis of a successful social media presence is the regular publication and sharing of relevant content, along with the management and control of interactions. More important than frequency, however, is consistency, interesting/informative multimedia content (e.g., educational videos, infographics, podcasts, patient stories, staff introductions, etc.), and reactivity, with a focus on providing lasting value to develop a reliable brand presence (Scott and Goode, 2020). Due to the widespread usage of the internet and social media channels, patients are already seeking recommendations, evaluations, and other signs of distinction or reliability for healthcare products and services. This emphasizes the increasing impact of influencers and opinion leaders in health marketing (Gupta et al., 2022). In health marketing, all of this highlights the significant role of satisfied, well-informed, and relevant former patients, which can also affect many health-professional, diagnostic, and ethical issues (Willis et al., 2023).

However, digital development is not static; service providers and professionals are constantly faced with new challenges, such as more aware patients, ad blocking, telemedicine, consumer experience, and multi-channel marketing. They must adapt innovative technology effectively, such as push messages, marketing automation, search engine optimization, 360-degree photos, live videos, podcasts, virtual reality applications, artificial intelligence, and the use of chatbots (Khiong, 2022). Moreover, in addition to the health application possibilities of influencers and social channels, the emergence of the omni-channel sales channel model has had a dramatic impact on health marketing (Mishra, 2021). It is also essential to observe the different ways in which representatives of each generation make decisions, as well as the fact that women play a significant role in purchasing decisions related to healthcare services and products. For example, special decision-making styles can be observed in the case of Generation Z, dividing this age group into four characteristic segments:

1. the members of the first group pay attention to the price-value ratio;
2. the second group optimizes for convenient purchases;
3. the members of the third group are looking for a "good" fair, while;
4. for the members of the fourth group, brand awareness is of particular importance (Thangavel, 2022).

All of these factors give special importance to serving the needs of different generations in terms of healthcare marketing. Additionally, the prominent role of women in consumer decisions is also of particular importance in health marketing (Chetioui, 2023). Many researchers explore the process of women's decision-making in the case of health products and services, focusing partly on public health and public welfare aspects, such as the formation of children's feeding and nutritional habits, or issues related to having children (Buursma et al., 2023; Mallick and Chouchan, 2023; Park et al., 2023). At the same time, it is essential to recognize that the aspects of choosing health services are naturally stratified in the case of women as well. Research conducted in South Asia (Jafree et al., 2020) has shown that the choice of health services is influenced by the generational effect, the family factor, the level of health awareness, the quality of employment, and finally, the quality of the health service itself, which all play crucial roles for women (Zsigmond and Szeberényi, 2023).

Based on the information provided, the objective of this study is to quantitatively examine the online marketing communication and social media activities of private healthcare providers. The study aims to analyze the attitudes, experiences, opinions, and expectations of patients in relation to these marketing activities. The focus is on determining whether the participants' expectations align with the perceived quality and experience of both online and offline marketing activities of private healthcare services. Additionally, the study aims to investigate whether the opinions of well-known/famous individuals positively influence consumer decisions. The research will specifically target women living in Budapest and its surrounding area (Pest County). The reason for selecting this group is the assumption that women play a significant role in selecting service providers and that this geographical area is home to many private healthcare practices and institutions. Therefore, the participants are likely to have relevant experiences and insights on the subject matter.

Material and methods

During the primary research, the researchers employed a questionnaire survey method to gather comprehensive and detailed information on the topic being investigated. The questionnaire consisted of categorical and nominal questions, making it easy for respondents to interpret and for the researchers to process and analyze the data. However, the nature of the questions somewhat limited the application of certain statistical procedures.

The questionnaire comprised a total of 30 questions, covering various aspects, including demographic data, media consumption, information sources related to private healthcare services, advertisements, social media usage, opinions, and decision factors regarding the selection of service providers. Data collection was carried out using an online questionnaire, facilitating quick and cost-effective data gathering. Throughout the data collection period (spring-summer 2022), a total of 1,836 responses were received from the surveyed women residing in Budapest and Pest counties. However, it is essential to note that the sample cannot be considered fully representative despite its substantial size. Consequently, the study's conclusions were based solely on the opinions of the participants who took part in the research.

The data was recorded electronically and stored in a database for subsequent analysis. Data processing and analysis were conducted using the SPSS 27 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program. The researchers employed percentage distribution and cross-tab analysis methods to examine the demographic characteristics of the respondents. For analyzing the opinions related to healthcare providers, the frequency of categories was used. To explore the relationships between variables, ANOVA analysis and Spearman's rank correlation were attempted, but no statistically significant results were found, even with an error margin of $\alpha = 0.1$. Additionally, the Mann-Whitney u-test was utilized to assess the normal distribution pattern of the data, but no significant statistical relationship was observed in this case either.

Results and discussion

According to the survey results, the majority of women in Budapest and Pest counties regularly read online press products. Specifically, online news sites are followed regularly by 65.2% of respondents, while thematic online sites are followed by 81% of them. Among offline press products, thematic magazines are the most popular, with 37.6% of respondents reading them regularly, followed by newspapers at 24.8%. Tabloids and tabloid websites are favored by a smaller percentage of respondents, with 7.3% and 22.3%, respectively. The data indicates that online press products, particularly online news sites and thematic sites, are gaining popularity due to the increased use of the Internet and smartphones, which provide easy access to online content anytime and anywhere. However, offline press products, such as newspapers and magazines, continue to have a significant role in the media landscape but are less favored due to the rise of online content. The survey also explored the regular usage of various online platforms by the respondents. The most popular social media platform among women in Budapest and Pest counties is Facebook, used by 97.8% of the participants. YouTube follows closely, with 79.2% of respondents using it regularly, and Instagram ranks third with 66.2% regular users. The data indicates that Facebook remains the leading social media platform among women in the surveyed area, boasting the largest user base and offering diverse opportunities for interaction and content sharing. YouTube is also highly popular, mainly used for sharing and watching videos, while Instagram is rapidly growing in popularity as a platform for sharing life pictures. The survey shows that LinkedIn and Pinterest are preferred platforms by less than a half of the respondents, while TikTok and Twitter are the least popular choices. The participants primarily focus on sharing and viewing content related to their personal lives, with professional life and interests being of lesser importance. However, when analyzed by age group, the data reveals that TikTok and Instagram are more popular among the younger participants, whereas Facebook and YouTube have higher usage among middle-aged respondents. Further statistical correlation results can be found in Table 1.

The correlation data of Table 1 suggests a strong preference for online platforms, especially social media, among the surveyed women in Budapest and Pest counties. Facebook continues to dominate as the most widely used social media platform, followed closely by YouTube and Instagram, reflecting the changing trends in media consumption and content sharing in the digital age.

Regarding the marketing communication activities of private healthcare providers, we first examined the process of information acquisition. The survey results show that before using private healthcare services, respondents obtain information about doctors and healthcare institutions from several sources. This process is typically referred to as active information-seeking habits. Information from the service provider's website is the most popular among respondents, with 74.2% choosing this source. It is followed by information from family members and friends (64.2%) and online reviews (51.2%), which can be very helpful in making a decision. Information found on the Internet, including advertisements appearing in search engines and on social media channels, plays an important role in obtaining information (43.1% and 17.6% respectively). Only 36.6% of respondents take information from doctors and professionals into account. Information from the employer benefit package (21.9%) and online and printed newsletters sent by the service provider (7% and 3%) play a limited role in obtaining information, which is also relevant information from the advertiser's side. The results also show that events related to health preservation serve as a source of information for only a very small percentage of respondents (0.2%). It is of a particular importance for marketing specialists that a very high percentage of respondents, 99.2%, come across advertisements for private healthcare services while searching for information. This shows that service providers pay a lot of attention to their advertisements and their promotion, and their targeting settings are effective. Online news sites and social media channels are the most common places where respondents come across advertisements for private healthcare services (62.4% and 71.4% respectively). Television and radio are less popular places to advertise health services (10.2% and 0.5% respectively), while billboards and tabloids are the least popular (3.3% and 0% respectively). In newsletters sent by service providers and online applications, a relatively low percentage of respondents come across advertisements for private healthcare services (22.1% and 8.6% respectively), although these data still represent a significant number both within the sample and in practice, given the known newsletter reading habits. Based on the related question of the questionnaire, the majority of respondents do not consider receiving frequent newsletters acceptable. 45.3 percent of the respondents consider receiving newsletters less frequently, and only 5.5 percent think it is acceptable to receive newsletters several times a week. More than 46 percent of people did not subscribe to a newsletter, indicating that they do not consider newsletters to be important or simply find them uninteresting. The results also show that consumer evaluation networks, such as sebeszem.hu, appear in a relatively high percentage (15.3%) among the frequently visited places where respondents come across advertisements for private healthcare services. It is typical for the majority of respondents (78.6%) to read/listen to/click on advertisements for private healthcare services, for example when seeking a solution to a given health problem. This indicates that advertisements and services provided by private healthcare providers can be attractive to people. At the same time, more than half of the respondents (66.7%) consider information published in the advertisements of private healthcare providers to be half authentic and half advertising, while only

Table 1 Results of Pearson's chi-square test for the distribution of social media use by age groups

Pearson Chi-Square tests	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	461,917*	3	0.000
Likelihood ratio	484,663	3	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	81,233	1	0.000

Symmetric measures		Value	Approximate significance
Nominal by nominal	Phi	0.592	0.000
	Cramer's V	0.592	0.000

Source: Own edited table based on primary research, 2023

* – 0 cells (0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 84.47

Table 2 Results of Pearson's chi-square test between trust in media information and age

Pearson Chi-Square tests	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	190,376*	6	0.000
Likelihood ratio	210,879	6	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	172,529	1	0.000

Symmetric measures		Value	Approximate significance
Nominal by nominal	Phi	0.380	0.000
	Cramer's V	0.269	0.000

Source: Own edited table based on primary research, 2023

* 5 cells (33,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 19

33.2% consider them reliable. The results indicate that the advertisements of private healthcare providers are not completely credible for women in Budapest and Pest County, based on the sample. An important connection is that an opposite correlation between trust and age was demonstrated: members of the younger age group consider the displayed information to be more reliable. This trust decreases with increasing age within the sample. The statistical results of this are contained in Table 2.

Based on their opinions, online press products (71.7%), internet search engines (69.6%), Facebook (70.8%), consumer rating networks (52.2%), and Instagram (13.8%) are the most effective platforms for advertisements of private healthcare providers. This highlights the significance of online platforms and consumer reviews in the decision-making process for choosing healthcare services. Print media products, television, and radio are less popular for displaying advertisements of private healthcare providers, and these platforms are more preferred by the older age group.

The following question aimed to assess how much people trust the opinions written about the private healthcare services they have already used. The answers show that more than two-thirds of respondents (65.8%) consider half of the information to be real but do not fully trust it. Only a small percentage of respondents (33.7%) fully trust such opinions, while very few (0.5%) consider them completely unreliable. Based on the results, it can be concluded that although respondents take the opinions into account, they do not necessarily fully trust them.

Next, we discussed the authority of opinions from former patients and whether positive or negative opinions influence their decisions. The answers show that the majority of respondents (58.7%) prefer to consider positive opinions, while only a few (11.8%) primarily take positive opinions into account. Very few respondents (0.1%) take negative reviews into consideration. The results indicate that positive reviews have a greater impact on people than negative reviews. Additionally, the majority of people (67.6%) do not base their choice on the experiences of known/famous people, while only a minority of them (32.4%) said that this information influences their decisions to a small extent.

Regarding the social media activities of private healthcare providers, according to most respondents, Facebook is the most important social media platform for private healthcare providers. YouTube also plays a significant role in sharing content. Instagram and LinkedIn proved to be less important, while the role of Pinterest and Twitter can be considered negligible. The most frequently shared content includes the presentation of treatments and services, discounts, and sales. Information about diseases, prevention, and a healthy lifestyle is also relevant to them.

Most respondents do not follow the social media channels of private healthcare providers which indicates that the providers still have significant steps to take to develop their social media presence and fill it with authentic content. For the respondents visiting the pages, the most important type of content is the presentation of treatments/services, which was indicated by 70.5% of the respondents. This is followed by patient opinions/success stories (44.7%) and information about prevention and a healthy lifestyle (52.6%). The presentation of the staff and information related to diseases also received considerable interest, with approximately 40% of respondents marking it.

The most common form of sharing is text with images (94.9%) while illustrated guides and infographics (37.1%) and videos (34.6%) also play a significant role on social media channels. Animations are less popular (16%) and text without images was marked by only a small percentage.

Regarding the content and frequency of publication, the results show that the vast majority of respondents (49.6%) do not follow the social media channels of private healthcare providers. Those who follow usually prefer text and image posts (94.9%) and most of them (28%) consider it acceptable to post several times a week. For those who follow shares, posting several times a day is less acceptable, with only 2.7% considering it appropriate.

In addition to frequency, content is also an important aspect for users, as many of them like to read success stories (44.7%), as well as information about healthy lifestyles and prevention (52.6%). Most users are curious to see the presentation of treatments/services (70.5%). Infographics and videos are also popular formats that users like to see in social media posts.

Conclusions

A significant number of female respondents in Budapest and Pest counties use social media to gather information about healthcare services. Among the most popular platforms are Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Most of the respondents consider it somewhat typical for them to read advertisements for health services, and their decisions are usually influenced by positive opinions. Social media platforms have proven to be extremely critical, although older respondents tend to trust marketing advertisements less. Regarding newsletters, research participants generally expect them less often, and online sharing frequency is the most popular among them. In terms of content created by healthcare providers, the opinions of patients and shared success stories are the most attractive, but the detailed presentation of the staff also generates high interest. However, based on the results, it can be clearly established that the presentation of treatments and services might be the most popular type of content. Regarding the frequency of sharing, it is suggested that healthcare providers share content on the most popular platforms only once a week, but in the form of much more detailed and meaningful posts (including images, infographics, and videos). These posts should focus on information tailored to the needs of those interested, patient success stories, the presentation of the service provider's employees, as well as a detailed presentation of the services and treatments. Based on

the research, the choice of healthcare provider is most influenced by the opinions of former patients, but other factors such as: the recommendations of family members, friends, and online evaluations, also play a significant role in the selection process. Respondents generally find that healthcare providers are present in the online space, especially on social media, but the amount and quality of information vary widely. The results highlight that respondents' expectations regarding online marketing activities are higher than the experiences they have gained in this regard in reality. It should be emphasized that service users recommend practices to their acquaintances, taking into account a number of factors, including quality, prices, communication, availability, and shared opinions of former patients. This directs the attention of practices and institutions to the importance of methodical management of their online presence. In conclusion, a successful marketing and communication presence can have an overall positive effect on health awareness and effectively guide patients to appropriate service providers and health educational elements, thus contributing to the fulfillment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This approach can serve the cause of sustainability at a regional level as well.

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Contact address

Norbert Katona, John von Neumann University, Hungary, 6000 Kecskemét, Izsáki út 10

+363 09 96 03 21

katona.norbert@nje.hu