

The Role of Social Media Marketing in Healthcare Industry (Case of Georgia)

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Abstract: The article shows that social media marketing plays an important role in the modern healthcare industry. Based on the conducted marketing research it has been identified frequencies of respondents' assessments of social media marketing activities carried out by Georgian healthcare organizations, also Frequencies of respondents' engagement in social media concerning healthcare. It is established through regression analysis the impact of social media marketing activities provided by healthcare organizations on consumer engagement.

Key words: Social Media Marketing, Healthcare Industry, Georgia, Marketing Research

JEL: M31

Introduction

Social media is an integral part of modern society and is gradually becoming an important marketing tool that provides companies with ample opportunities to interact with their consumers (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Today, social media is considered an important cultural event all over the world. Therefore, the number of active users of social media is growing significantly every year. In 2022, the number of social media users amounted to 4,7 billion people (59% of the world population), which is 93.6% of the population connected to the Internet (Statista, 2022). Social media plays an important role in the healthcare industry (Moorhead et al., 2013). Recently, the use of social media by health professionals and providers, as well as patients, has increased significantly (Kordzadeh, 2016). Healthcare professionals use social media to build professional relationships with their colleagues and to share information (Rolls et al., 2016). Healthcare providers use social media to promote their organizations, also to establish strong relationships with existing and potential customers, and to raise the

awareness of their own brand (McCann and Barlow, 2015). As for patients, they receive information about their health condition through social media (Ventola, 2014).

Nowadays, healthcare organizations face many challenges. First of all, consumers move from a passive state to an active participant in the process of providing medical services (Danaher and Gallan, 2016; Osei-Frimpong, 2017). They are increasingly using digital applications and various technologies that help them to be directly involved in protecting their well-being. Accordingly, health care organizations try not to stay behind and improve the methods of providing medical services, in which marketing approaches play a special role. Scholars emphasize the fact that one of the tools for success in the field of healthcare is marketing skills (Anderson et al., 2018). According to Google, 77% of patients use search engines prior any doctor's appointment, and a third of patients use social media platforms to find out about the doctor and his or her services (Geekship, 2020). In particular, according to a study by the Pew Research Center, 70% of Internet users in the United States seek health

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37075/SPM.2022.16>

information online (Zhou et al., 2018). Social media can make a significant contribution to improving the quality of medical services, however, we must also consider the associated risks associated with the protection of personal data and the accuracy of information (Alshakhs and Alanzi, 2018). Under the influence of social media marketing, consumer access to digital healthcare tools is expanding. A clear example of this is telemedicine, which is a recent achievement in the field of digital healthcare tools. It provides the exchange of information between healthcare providers and users at a time, location, and touchpoint of their choice via computer, smartphone, or tablet (Swan et al., 2019). In the modern world, the benefits of healthcare consumers are changing. The COVID-19 pandemic is influencing consumer health behavior. According to a study by consulting firm PwC, 32% of US consumers have reduced their healthcare costs (PwC's Health Research Institute, 2020). That's why healthcare providers are using new marketing approaches to attract and retain potential customers.

Today, many medical institutions in Georgia use digital technologies to promote their services and customer relations. Georgian healthcare organizations that pursue social media marketing deserve the trust and goodwill of patients and society. This especially appeared during the COVID-19 pandemic. A common electronic healthcare system has been introduced at the governmental level in Georgia, and the government has made enormous efforts to adapt to the ongoing changes in the global environment to adapt the healthcare system and introduce innovative technologies in the medical field (World Health Organization, 2020). But that is not enough. Unfortunately, many healthcare organizations in Georgia still have an indifferent attitude towards digital marketing. We can say that the use of

social media marketing tools is still perceived as a novelty in the Georgian healthcare industry. Consequently, the level of consumer awareness and satisfaction of their needs in the Georgian medical services market is generally low. Most of the Georgian consumers do not receive adequate and timely information about the current developments in the field of healthcare. One of the reasons for this is that there are fewer studied issues related to the impact of social media marketing on the behavior of local consumers in the healthcare sector in the Georgian reality. In our opinion, the most important of such issues is the following: Impact of Social Media Marketing activities provided by healthcare organizations on Georgian consumer's engagement. This requires well-defined scientific research. With this in mind, the study's goal is to determine how social media marketing activities impact consumer behavior in the healthcare sector. Based on the above, following Research Question are introduced: How Social Media Marketing activities impact on Georgian consumers engagement in the healthcare Industry?

Literature review

Sending messages over the Internet is one of the hallmarks of the 21st century. Such messages influence various aspects of consumer behavior such as obtaining information, forming opinions, making purchasing decisions, and more (Ionas, 2014). The sphere of e-commerce is constantly expanding and understanding the behavior of the users involved is extremely important for companies. For companies to maximize their profits, they need to pay particular attention to expanding their knowledge of the behavior of their customers (Karimi, 2015). However, online mechanisms are fundamentally changing consumer behavior. In the past, people made purchasing decisions based on

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37075/SPM.2022.16>

advertisements or professional advice. Nowadays, when making such a decision, they increasingly consider the discussions and opinions expressed in the online space (Alsubagh, 2015).

Today, social media has a great influence on users' perceptions, attitudes, and opinions, which ultimately affect their decision-making (Xhema, 2019). Social media, providing raising the brands popularity (Al-Sheikh and Hasanat, 2020) and supporting Word of mouth communication (Li & Wu, 2018), enables organizations to make a positive impact on consumers. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that such networking relationships primarily affect consumer trust (Hajli, 2014). Therefore, social media, through trust-building mechanisms, ensures the development of marketing strategies in companies that influence consumer behavior (Usman and Okafor, 2019).

Consumers belong to different online groups. These groups can change consumer behavior when making purchasing decisions (Solomon et al., 2010). In general, purchasing decision making is determined by information obtained from the mass media (Evans et al., 2009). Today, online social networks have the greatest impact on consumer buying behavior (East et al., 2021). Particularly noteworthy in this regard is electronic Word of mouth communication, which allows consumers to share their knowledge, opinions and experiences, what in turn influences other people's buying behavior. Online Word of mouth is more flexible, cheaper, faster, and more effective than other marketing communication tools (Brown et al., 2007). Consumer behavior is also significantly influenced by reference groups, which can be divided into several types. The most important of these is the online community. This is explained by the fact that the exchange of opinions and experiences between members of the

reference group in the online space can lead to the rapid sale of goods or services or, conversely, cause failure (Schiffman et al., 2012). It should also be noted that in recent years, the activity of consumers in the online space is growing at an astonishing rate, which is of great interest to researchers. Studies are particularly concerned with the study of consumers opinions expressed on online sites (Hajli, 2014). For example, Sharma and Rehman (2012) found that positive or negative electronic Word of mouth regarding to company, product, or brand, have a significant impact on sales, image, and consumer buying behavior (Sharma and Rehman, 2012). The same way, Wang et al. (2012) investigated that the relationship between online consumers through different chat groups also influences a purchasing decision that develops in two directions. The first is to recommend a given product to friends and relatives, and the second is to participate directly in the development of the product (Wang et al., 2012).

Modern companies are giving social media platforms a huge role in their customer relationships. Therefore, researchers are especially interested in studying the phenomenon of social media engagement (Colicev et al., 2018; Harmeling et al., 2017; Hollebeek et al., 2014; Kumar and Pansari, 2016). In turn, buyers also welcome companies to engaging in social media, as this process simplifies their relationships with organizations (Dolan et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2018; Lim et al., 2015; Moe et al., 2017; Viswanathan et al., 2018). In addition, recent advances in mobile technology have digitalized the day-to-day transactions of shoppers, making it easier to interact on social media with businesses from various sectors of the economy. For example, social media is actively used in the healthcare industry as a tool to improve the quality of service (Hawkins et al., 2016; Huppertz and Otto, 2018; Ranard et al., 2016).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37075/SPM.2022.16>

Consequently, recent research has focused on both social media strategies and related consumer buying behavior and social media engagement (Glover et al., 2015; Huppertz and Otto, 2018; Lagu et al., 2016; Kumar et al., 2016; Wang and Kim, 2017).

Today, the formation of a vision for customer relations is considered as the most important resource and intangible asset of the organization (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Pansari and Kumar, 2017; Verhoef et al., 2010). Indeed, customers involved in social media not only build positive relationships with companies and demonstrate loyalty, but also become brand ambassadors (Brodie et al., 2013). Recent research has found that customer engagement in social media facilitates the process of co-creating a market characteristics of new product and company values (Hollebeek et al., 2019; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Kumar and Pansari, 2016).

Research suggests that customer engagement improves cognitive processes, positive attitudes, emotional benefits, and social identity. Consequently, customer engagement is defined as a particular mental state that is created in customers during their relationships with organizations and brands (Hollebeek, 2011).

Consumer engagement through social media is especially important in the health sector. For example, hospital-sponsored events such as health posting, preventive webinars and online discussions make it easier to communicate with clients. Consequently, such activities ensure that customers form a positive attitude and improve their experience (Kumar and Pansari, 2016; Vivek et al., 2012).

Social media platforms are changing customer engagement in several ways. First, social media platforms can trigger customer engagement behavior by forcing organizations to analyze customer interaction data to offer better service (Carlson et al., 2019). On the other hand, through social

media it is possible to achieve high results of customer engagement. Social media platforms allow users to connect with a diverse audience, both in terms of users and organizations (Schivinski et al., 2016). Third, social media platforms today offer location-based services that help attract new customers and build relationships with them (Wang and Stefanone, 2013). Based on the above literature review, following hypothesis (H) is introduced:

H: Social Media Marketing provided by healthcare organizations has a positive impact on consumer engagement.

Methodology

In our study, an electronic questionnaire was used as the main method of data collection. In addition, in this study, we conducted a survey using a self-administered method. Such an approach has led to the fact that the method of self-administration in collecting data directly from respondents is simple, relatively fast, and inexpensive (Saunders et al., 2019). The answers to the questions are presented in multiple-choice, and a 5-point Likert scale is used (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree). A systematic random sampling method was used. The confidence interval is 95% and the margin of errors is set to be equal to 4%. A total of 425 questionnaires were collected. Statistical analysis of the obtained data was performed as follows: we first transferred the data from the questionnaire to the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, and then the data was processed using statistical software which is a package for Social Science (SPSS) -21. From the statistical analysis methods we used Regression Analysis. In similar studies, managers use the Cronbach's alpha coefficient to determine reliability measures. The reliability coefficient is considered acceptable if it is 0.60 or higher (Nunnally, 1967). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37075/SPM.2022.16>

0.894, which can be considered as a significantly higher reliable coefficient.

Results and discussion

Our marketing research revealed the respondents' characteristics in the sample, grouped by different aspects. Sampling

characteristics according to the number of respondents and the percentage is shown in Table 1. The survey showed that most respondents (47.1%) belong to the age category of 18 to 24 years, while the minority (1.6%) are 65 years or older. 63.5% of the respondents are women, and 36.5% are men.

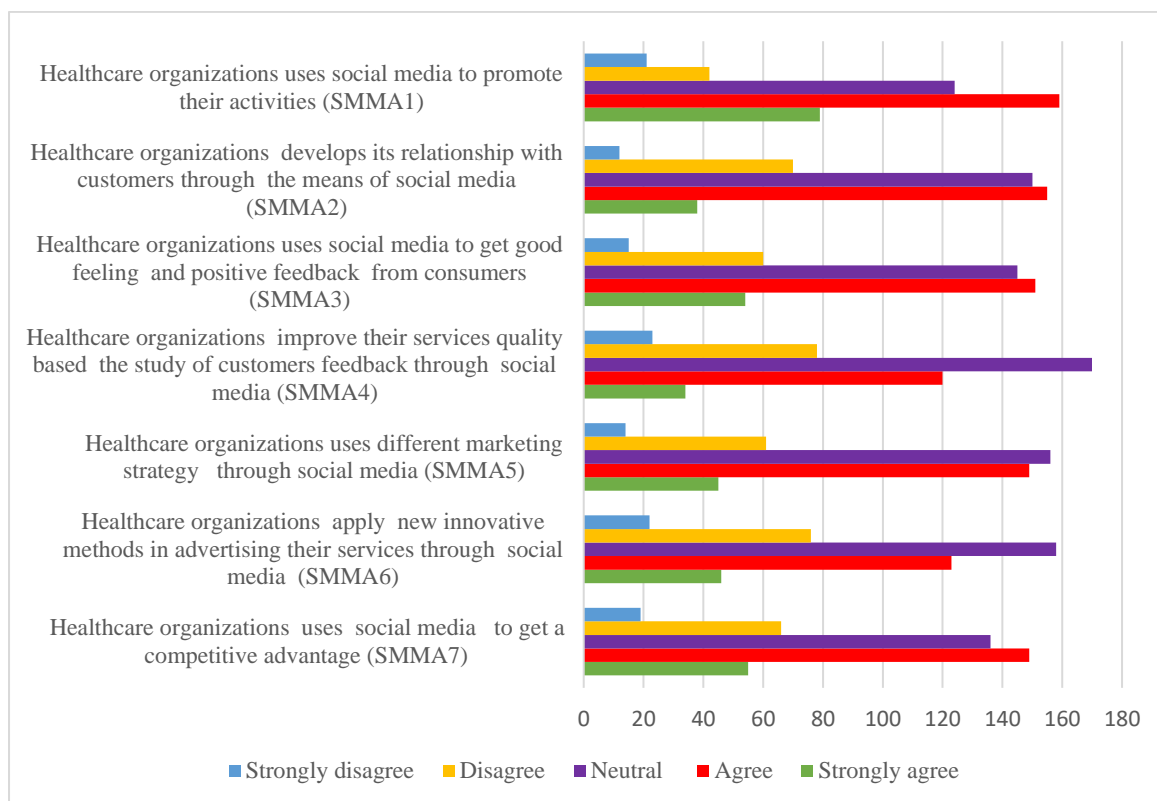
Table 1: Sampling characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency / Percentage	Characteristics	Frequency / Percentage
Age		Government Employee	73 (17,2%)
18-24	200 (47,1%)	Private Employee	174 (40,9%)
25-35	138 (32,5%)	Other	17 (4%)
36-45	29 (6,8%)	Marital status	
46-55	30 (7,1%)	Single	293 (68,9%)
56-65	21 (4,9%)	Married	112 (26,4%)
More than 65	7 (1,6%)	Divorced	15 (3,5%)
Gender		Widowed	5 (1,2%)
Male	155 (36,5%)	Personal monthly income	
Female	270 (63,5%)	Below 500 USD	163 (38,4%)
Education		501-1000 USD	127 (29,8%)
Pre high school	39 (9,2%)	1001-1500 USD	29 (6,8%)
Vocational	26 (6,1%)	1500-2000 USD	17 (4%)
Bachelor's degree	164 (38,6%)	Over 2000 USD	10 (2,4%)
Master's degree	150 (35,3%)	Private (n/a)	79 (18,6%)
Ph.D.	46 (10,8%)		
Job			
Student	134 (31,5%)		
Owner/Entrepreneur	27 (6,4%)		

Source: own elaboration

We were interested in the respondents' opinions regarding the social media marketing activities carried out by health organizations. Respondents were instructed to express their attitudes on a 5-point scale. The results of the study are given in Figure 1. As the analysis shows, most respondents refrained from radical responses to the marketing activities carried out by health organizations on social media and mostly showed a positive attitude. Table 2 shows the mean score rating of social

media marketing activities conducted by health organizations. Most respondents' choices are associated with healthcare organizations using social media to promote their activities (mean=3.548). While the least-healthcare organizations improve their service, quality based on the study of consumers' feedback through social media (mean=3.151). Frequencies of evaluation of the attributes of it are presented in Table 2.



Source: own elaboration

Figure 1: Frequencies of respondents' assessments of social media marketing activities carried out by healthcare organizations

Table 2: Mean score about the items of social media marketing activity

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
SMMA1	425	1.0	5.0	3.548	1.0565	1.116
SMMA2	425	1.0	5.0	3.322	0.9477	0.898
SMMA3	425	1.0	5.0	3.398	0.9950	0.990
SMMA4	425	1.0	5.0	3.151	0.9910	0.982
SMMA5	425	1.0	5.0	3.353	0.9628	0.927
SMMA6	425	1.0	5.0	3.224	1.0299	1.061
SMMA7	425	1.0	5.0	3.365	1.0353	1.072
Valid (listwise)	N 425					

Notes: Mean values are obtained on a scale of 1-5 where: 1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3=neutral; 4= agree; 5= strongly agree

Source: own elaboration

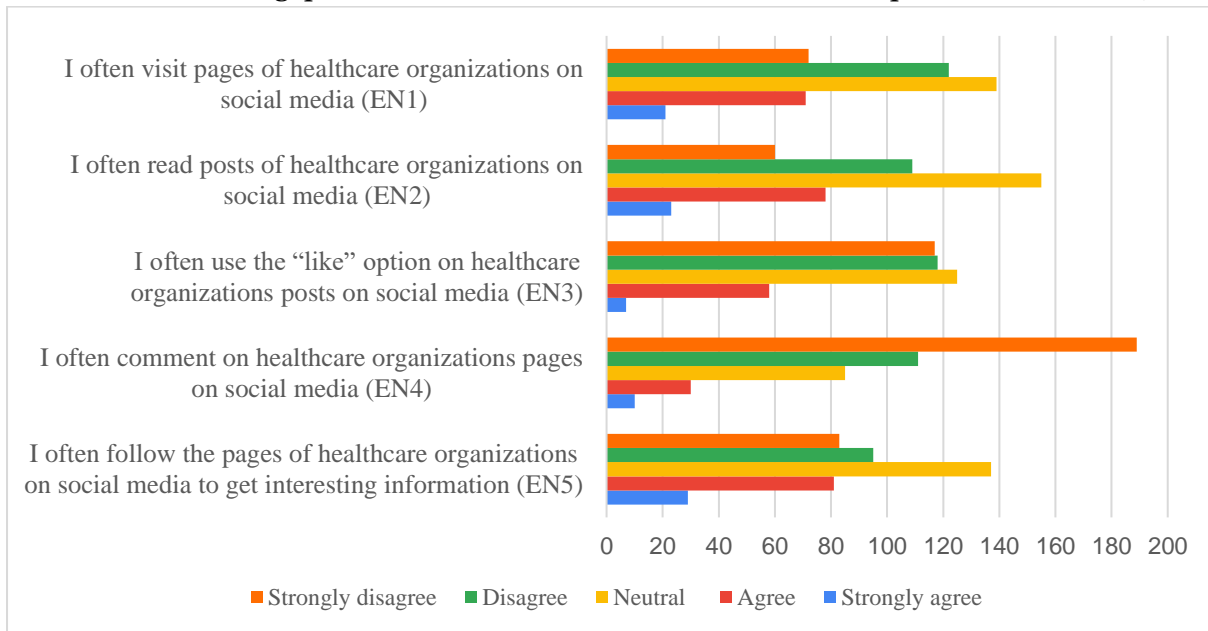
To determine Georgian consumers' engagement in social media regarding healthcare, the respondents were asked to express their attitude towards the characteristics that define such activities on a 5-point scale. The results of the study are given

in Figure 2. As the analysis shows, most respondents have a primarily neutral attitude towards the items that define such engagement. The exception is the comments made by respondents on the posts of healthcare organizations on social media,

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37075/SPM.2022.16>

which, for the most part, receive the lowest rates. Table 3 shows the mean score rating of engagement on social media regarding healthcare. Most respondent's choices were associated with reading posts of healthcare

organizations on social media (mean=2.753). While the least-commenting on healthcare organization's pages on social media (mean=1.967). Frequencies of evaluation of the attributes are presented in Table 3.



Source: own elaboration

Figure 2: Frequencies of respondents' engagement in social media concerning healthcare

Table 3: Mean score about the items of social media engagement

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
EN1	425	1.0	5.0	2.640	1.0967	1.203
EN2	425	1.0	5.0	2.753	1.0784	1.163
EN3	425	1.0	5.0	2.341	1.0723	1.150
EN4	425	1.0	5.0	1.967	1.0679	1.140
EN5	425	1.0	5.0	2.713	1.1786	1.389
Valid N (listwise)	425					

Notes: Mean values are obtained on a scale of 1-5 where: 1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3=neutral; 4= agree; 5= strongly agree

Source: SPSS output based on own data

Next, we explored whether there is a connection between social media marketing activities and consumer engagement. As it turned out, such a connection is statistically reliable ($P < 0.001$), and the correlation coefficient is positive ($r = 0.267$) (Table 4). As mentioned above, the hypothesis relates to the impact of social media marketing activities on customer engagement. Regression analysis is

used to test the hypothesis. Table 4 shows that the model we developed is reliable ($P < 0.001$); $F = 32.581 > F_{critical} = 3.84$. The hypothesis is supported. Consequently, social media marketing activities have a positive impact on customer engagement. In addition, $R^2 = 0.072$, which allows us to say that 7.2% of the activities are caused by engagement, which is

quietly low. Accordingly, the rest is due to other factors.

Table 4: Regression analysis of the impact of social media activity on consumer engagement

	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard Error of Estimate		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Significance level
	0.267	0.072	0.069	4.222	Regression	580.65	1	580.6	32.581	0.000
					Residual	7538.47	423	17.8		
					Total	8119.12	424			
	Unstandardized Coefficients				Standardized Coefficients					
(Constant)	B	Standard Error		Beta		t		Significance level		
Activity	7.440	0.895		0.267		8.310		0.000		
	0.213	0.037				5.708		0.000		

Notes: Dependent Variable :Engagement; Predictors: (Constant), Activity

Source: SPSS output based on own data

To process the obtained data, we used a linear regression model (Malhotra, 2010), which has the following form:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_i + e_i \quad (1)$$

Where: Y_i = dependent or criterion variable; β_0 =intercept of the line; β_1 =slope of the line; X_i = independent or predictor variable; e_i is the error term associated with the i th observation. In this case dependent or criterion variable is Engagement, and independent or predictor variable - Activity. By inserting the data in Table 4, we get the following equation:

$$\text{Engagement} = 7.440 + 0.213(\text{Activity}) \quad (2)$$

Equation (2) allows us to assume that a one-unit increase in social media marketing activity will result in a 0.213 unit increase in customer engagement.

Conclusion

The role of social media marketing has grown immeasurably in the modern world. Marketers have new opportunities to operate in the marketplace, as social media provides companies with a chance to run a successful business. Following global trends, many Georgian companies are actively running their online platforms and making social media an integral part of their marketing activities. This research has shown increasing trends in the use of social media in different segments of the population. Georgian consumers are

particularly interested in health-related information and are increasingly using online space to access medical care. Healthcare organizations in the Georgian medical services market indeed have official accounts on various social networks. However, according to our research, Georgian consumers still show a moderate activity level. At the same time, the trust of Georgian consumers in the information posted on social media is not so high.

Social media indeed has a lot of users in Georgia. The activities carried out by health organizations on social media have a significant impact on the choice of Georgian consumers. The regression analysis obtained statistically significant values that represent the relationship between social media activities provided by healthcare organizations and consumer engagement.

This research has several theoretical and practical implications for the use of social media marketing in healthcare. First of all, we should note that although the topic of social media marketing is quite broad and a lot of research has been devoted to it, significant shortcomings in this area are still observed. By this, we mean that there are fewer studies that link social media marketing activities carried out by healthcare organizations with variables that determine consumer behavior, such as consumer engagement. From a managerial point of view, the study results will help Georgian managers employed in the health

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37075/SPM.2022.16>

sector to broaden their understanding of how social media marketing activities are an effective means of communicating with existing and potential customers.

The present research is the basis for further study of social media marketing activity and relevant consumer behavior in the Georgian medical services market. First of all, it

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