

INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON HOSPITAL AND PATIENT LOYALTY IN MAKASSAR HOSPITAL

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ABSTRACT

Background: Competition in the industry is becoming more strict, demanding, and sick. In order to adopt effective marketing strategies, patients' loyalty needs to be maintained. Digital marketing is becoming one of the main solutions in improving the patients' experience as the direct contributors to patient loyalty.

Objective: This research aims to analyze the influence of digital marketing on hospital patients' loyalty in Makassar.

Method: The method applied in this study is analytical correlation with cross-sectional design. In this case, current research was done in three hospitals in Makassar, including Wahidin Sudirohusodo General Hospital, Stella Maris Hospital, and Hasanuddin University Hospital, from March to June 2024. Furthermore, the population involved is all patients who used general payment method. In this case, the sampling was done using proportionate stratified random sampling, with total samples selected is 393 patients. Primary data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, while secondary data were obtained from literature and agencies related. Data analysis was further carried out using the SPSS program, through univariate and bivariate analysis techniques.

Results: Research results reveals that there is a connection between digital marketing and patient loyalty with a significant value (0.000). Overall, this study confirms the importance of implementing effective digital marketing to increase the patients' loyalty at hospital.

Conclusion: This study concludes that digital marketing at home has a significant influence on patient loyalty through patient experience. Effective digital marketing, which includes the use of social media, websites, and mobile applications, is capable of increasing patient experience, which in turn strengthens patient loyalty. Although patients' experience affects loyalty indirectly, results show that digital marketing provides a big contribution to creating a positive experience that influences satisfaction and commitment of the patients.

Keywords: Marketing, digital, loyalty, hospital

INTRODUCTION

Hospitals, as an institutional organizer of service, complex and dense health experts, as well as capital-intensive, must own the ability to attract and retain new customers that are not only originating from products or services, but also related to how organizations serve long-standing customers and the reputation created by the hospital well, both inside and outside of the hospital. Hospitals must have the right marketing strategies and programs to maintain a good response from the old customers because looking for new customers is more difficult and requires more expensive costs compared to maintaining the existing customers (Schiffman et al., 2019).

Health marketing management is defined as a planning and implementation process concept, including pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services that satisfy the needs of individuals and organizations, with the objective of reaching the organization's target effectively and efficiently (Wang & Xu, 2023). Employees' support play a role as moderators who strengthen connections. Through the employees' support, a company can increase job satisfaction and motivation, which have no direct positive impact on customers' satisfaction or organization' performance, especially in the services sector (Makhamreh et al., 2022).

Initial data collected by researchers at Hasanuddin University Teaching Hospital (RSP Universitas Hasanuddin) found that there was an improvement in patient care visits in 2020 by 125% of the amount of patients of the previous year. Meanwhile, in 2021, there was also an improvement by 17.6% of patients. However, the rate decreased in 2022 by 41% of the previous year. Such condition continued in 2023, where the decrease continued to 47%. Patients generally pay their visit cost on their own without depending on referrals provided by BPJS or any other insurance in choosing the hospital they want.

Data collected from previous research conducted at Stella Maris Hospital Makassar shows the number of inpatient visits paid independently or generally in 2020 experienced decreased by 41.5% compared to 2019. In 2021, it also experienced a 6.4% decrease from the previous year. Furthermore, it decreased again in 2022 by 32% and by 43% in 2023 compared to the amount of visits in 2022.

A significant decline is shown by data on visits to Stella Maris Hospital from year to year in the last five years. The decline in 2020 coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, where people were asked not to travel outside the home. In addition there was also a fear of being infected by the virus if they visited risky places such as hospital. This condition continued to decline in the following years until 2023, where there was an increased visit. Based on the information collected, Stella Maris Hospital Makassar has had its own unit that handles marketing since 2023. This unit manages digital marketing media such as social media, YouTube, email, websites, and applications such as WhatsApp. In this case, people prefer to use WhatsApp media to make registration and to look for information on the services they need. Based on the results of short interviews conducted by researchers, patients found it easier to use WhatsApp than having to open a website.

Furthermore, data from Wahidin Sudirohusodo Central General Hospital show a decline in the amount of general inpatient visits in 2020 compared to 2019 by 43%. However, in the following years, the visits increased. It was recorded that the visit increased by 14.5% in 2021, 7.5% in 2022, and 15.6% in 2023.

Based on previous studies, factors that influence preference in looking for and using general healthcare service among patients, such as primary health service, include education level, reported health status, smoking habit, household income, public health center condition, participation in healthcare service reformation, as well as health insurance ownership. All of these factors are proven to have significant effect on the utilization of healthcare service in the community, which is further a key in increasing the effectiveness of health reform and healthcare service accessibility at the public level (Zeng et al., 2020). In addition, the demand to service health is affected by other various factors, including economic, social, cultural, and health policy. Economic factors, such as income and service cost, as well as social factors, such as education and health knowledge, affect individual decisions to look for medical services. Government policy about healthcare accessibility, quality, and insurance also plays an important role in forming those requests. Therefore, understanding these factors is important for designing an effective marketing strategy in the health sector (Kurniawan et al., 2021).

Development of information and communication technology allows the community to keep going and do at least a number of activities in daily life virtually rather than in a physically. Telework, telemedicine, e-learning, e-shopping, and video calls are a number of distance online activities (also called "*teleactivity*") that are done to replace jobs, face-to-face meeting, healthcare, education, shopping, and physical meeting (Mouratidis et al., 2021).

Based on the background that has been mentioned, it is necessary to conduct research on the influence of digital marketing on inpatients at Makassar Hospital on inpatient loyalty through the experience of inpatients at Makassar Hospital. It is hoped that with this digital marketing, it can make people who are currently increasingly utilizing digital technology to reach information and health services wherever they are and can feel a good experience so that they are willing to return to use the service at Makassar Hospital.

METHODOLOGY

This research is a quantitative study using observational analytic studies with a cross-sectional study design. This research was conducted at Hasanuddin University Teaching Hospital, Stella Maris Hospital Makassar, and Wahidin Sudirohusodo Central General Hospital, located in South Sulawesi, on March-June 2024. The population of this study is all patients that visit the hospital using general payment method.

Patients who use general payment methods usually consider choosing a hospital service based on the existing references, such as BPJS or other insurance. The samples taken in this study used proportional stratified random sampling, namely Hasanuddin University Hospital by 88 patients, Stella Maris Hospital by 61 patients, and Dr. Wahidin Sudirohusodo Hospital by 244 patients. Data analysis in this study was done statistically to answer the research objectives with univariate analysis consisting of descriptive analysis of respondent characteristics, descriptive analysis of variables in the study, and cross-tabulation analysis between respondent characteristics and variables in the study. Furthermore, bivariate analysis used the Chi-square test because the data scale in the variables in this study was nominal, and the frequency of respondents or samples used was quite large (Sugiyono, 2007). Multivariate analysis is a path analysis because of the presence of independent exogenous and dependent endogenous variables with the AMOS application.

RESULTS

1. Univariate Analysis

The respondents of this study amounted to 393 respondents. This study aims to evaluate a number of general characteristics of the sample including age, gender, occupation, last education, and income. The general characteristics of the respondents can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Respondents' Distribution Based on the Respondents' Characteristics

Characteristics	Research Sample	
	N	%
Gender		
Male	145	36.9
Female	248	63.1
Age		
<20 years	46	11.7
21-40 years	273	69.5
41-60 years	67	17.0
>60 years	7	1.8
Work		
Housewife	43	10.9
Student	109	27.7
Private Employee	60	15.3
Civil servant	52	13.2
Police	6	1.5
Unemployed	58	14.8
Indonesian National Armed Forces	2	.5
Entrepreneur	63	16.0
Last education		
Primary School	4	1.0
Junior High School	16	4.1
Senior High School	186	47.3

Characteristics	Research Sample	
	N	%
D3	21	5.3
D4	3	.8
S1	129	32.8
S2	30	7.6
S3	4	1.0
Income		
< IDR3,500,000.-	180	45.8
> IDR3,500,000.-	152	38.7
≤ IDR3,400,000.-	40	10.2
≥ IDR3,400,000.-	21	5.3
TOTAL	393	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1. shows that from overall subject research, total subjects in the research are 393 subjects. In this case, the percentage of study subjects for female gender was 63.1%, while for male gender was 36.9%. In the age category, the age range of insufficient; starting from 20 years old as many as 46 subjects (11.7%), the age range of 21-40 years as many as 273 subjects (69.5%), the age range of 41-60 years as many as 67 subjects (17%), and the age range over 60 years as many as 7 subjects (1.8%). Education in the study subjects is divided into four categories, with each percentage of the total subjects being elementary school level as many as 4 people (1%), junior high school level as many as 16 people (4.1%), high school level as many as 186 people (47.3%), and college level as many as 187 people (47.6). Based on the income of the study subjects, there are two categories, namely less than IDR 3,500,000 and more than IDR3,500,000, where the percentage of study subjects earning less than IDR 3,500,000 as much as 56% and income less than IDR3,500,000 as much as 44%. Furthermore, the employment is divided into two categories, namely, employed and unemployed, where the employed subjects are 46.6%, while the unemployed subjects are 53.4%.

Table 2. Respondents' Distribution Based on Respondents' Characteristics

Variables	Research Sample	
	N	%
Digital Marketing		
Good	201	51.1
Poor	192	48.9
Loyalty		
Good	220	56.0
Poor	173	44.0
Total	393	100.0

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Based on the table above, the frequency distribution on digital marketing variable obtained from 393 subjects research reveals that 201 subjects (51.1%) are good in digital marketing, while the remaining 192 subjects (48.9%) is poor in digital marketing. Furthermore, the frequency distribution of the patient experience variable reveals that 213 subjects (54.2%) had the good patient experience category, while the remaining 180 subjects (45.8%) obtained poor experience. In addition, the frequency distribution on loyalty variable reveals that those who have good loyalty is 220 subjects (56%), while those who have poor loyalty is 173 subjects (44%).

2. Bivariate Analysis

Cross tabulation and Chi Square Analysis of Digital Marketing with Loyalty

Digital Marketing	Loyalty				Total		P
	Good		Not good				
	n	%	n	%	n	%	0.000
Good	150	74.6%	51	25.4%	201	100.0%	
Poor	70	36.5%	122	63.5%	192	100.0%	
Total	220	56.0%	173	44.0%	393	100.0%	

Source: Primary Data

Based on the cross tabulation results on 393 respondents, respondents with lack of digital marketing good and poor loyalty is as many as 122 respondents (63.5%), while those who have good digital marketing and poor loyalty is as many as 51 respondents (25.4%). The results of the chi-square test were obtained, and the p-value for the relationship between digital marketing and loyalty is 0.000, that is less than 0.05, so there is a relationship between digital marketing and loyalty.

3. Multivariate Analysis

Multivariate analysis test was done to analyze the direct influence between variables, that is between exogenous to endogenous variables through intermediate variable. The following table shows the *path analysis* results on this research's variable variables study.

Influence Between Variables	Path Coefficient	p-value	CR	Conclusion
Patient Experience on Loyalty	0.114	0.027	2.210	Positive and significant

Source: Primary Data

The coefficient value of the relationship between patient experience and loyalty is positive at 0.114. The CR value is >1.96 ($2.210 > 1.96$), and the p value is 0.000 ($0.027 < 0.05$). So, it can be concluded that the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted and the null hypothesis (H_o) is rejected; in other words, there is a direct influence of patients on loyalty.

DISCUSSION

There is a direct influence of experience on patient loyalty, with a positive coefficient value of 0.114 ($CR > 1.96$ and $p\text{-value} < 0$). The positive path coefficient value of 0.114 indicates that improvement of patients' experience will directly affect the patients' loyalty. Although its influence is relatively small (coefficient value is close to zero), such influence is significant statistically. The CR (Critical Ratio) value obtained is 2.210, which is bigger than 1.96, showing that the relationship is significant at the 95% confidence level. Furthermore, p-value of 0.027 was obtained. Since it is smaller than 0.05, it confirms significance, so there is a relationship. This happens in a way that is a very small coincidence. Experience is an important factor that influences loyalty. When the patient's own experience is positive, including in terms of satisfying service, comfortable facilities, or good interaction with the medical staff, they are more likely to remain loyal (for example, returning to use the service or recommending it to others). Although its influence is not big, patients' experience still must be noticed as an important element in the strategy to improve patient's loyalty. Overall, this shows that hospital or healthcare facility that improves patient experience, will contribute to patients' loyalty, although its influence is not dominant and is necessarily combined with other factors.

The subjects' characteristics studied include gender, age, level of education, income, and employment. Subject's demographics as shown in Table 1, a description of the demographic data from all over subjects, show that most are in the range of 21-40 years, and followed by the range of 41-60 years. In this case, the average age of the subjects studied based on each hospital was 27.95 ± 9.83 years at Wahidin Sudirohusodo Hospital, 30 ± 13.49 at Stella Maris Hospital, and 33.47 ± 13.47 years at RSPTN of Unhas. Comparison between age based on category and average for these three hospitals showed statistically significant results ($P < 0.05$). Then, the study subjects based on gender showed that women had higher incomes than men (63.1%), with the majority being high school and college graduates (47.3% and 47.6%). As many as 53.4% of the study subjects are currently unemployed, with more than 50% of subjects earning more than IDR 3,500,000. Thus, in this case, gender, education level, education, income, and occupation did not show statistically significant results ($P > 0.05$) among the three hospitals.

A study conducted in 2022 shows that the patients' characteristic and visit data at Bhayangkara Hospital of Class III Nganjuk in 2022 revealed that most of its respondents is female by 54 people (54%) with the oldest age being at the range of 26-35 years by 40 people (40%). Furthermore, most of the education is diploma/bachelor degrees, as many as 76 people (76%) with most of the employment is private employee by 79 people (79%) and most income rate being at IDR 1,000,000 - IDR 2,000,000 as many as 34 people (34%) (Seger, 2024).

The results of this study are in accordance with the demographic descriptions contained in previous studies, namely those conducted in Tasikmalaya Regency in 2021, where the highest demographic segmentation was the age of 18-35 years old (31.6%), the most gender was female (56.6%), the highest psychographic segmentation was ER polyclinic visits (31.6%), the most common method of payment for services was insurance (82.7%), and the highest behavioural segmentation was old patient visits (66%).

Based on the results of the hypothesis test, it is known that there is a positive and significant relationship between age and the subject's interest in making a visit. This means that the higher or more mature the age, the greater the patient's interest in visiting the hospital. Conversely, the younger a person's age will make the patient's interest in visiting the hospital smaller. These results are similar to the studies of Arifin (2019) and Harun & Listyowati (2022) which state that there is a significant relationship between age and interest in patient visits. Meanwhile, based on the results of the hypothesis test between gender and visits to the hospital, there is no significant relationship. These results are similar to the studies of Guswaman et al. (2019) and Amly et al. (2020) which state that there is no significant relationship between gender and visits to the hospital in the three hospitals in this study.

Age is an important determinant of health with profound implications for health care needs, related beliefs, and health behaviors, which are important for the integration of health and social services. The female gender in this study is more dominant because women are weaker and have a greater risk of being exposed to disease because in addition to taking care of the house, women also have to take care of children, and not infrequently they also work to help their husbands earn a living. This is also related to women who are pregnant and must have regular pregnancy check-ups during pregnancy and the delivery process. Based on previous studies, the number of patients visiting obstetric clinics is the third highest (Lestari et al., 2021).

High education levels in subjects indicate a high interest in visiting hospitals. The results of this study are similar to the research of Harun and Listyowati (2022) which states that there is a significant relationship between education and interest in visiting hospitals. The results of the study also show that in general, unemployed subjects visit hospitals more often than employed subjects. This may be because unemployed subjects tend to have a history of illness that prevents them from working, or unemployed subjects have more free time than employed subjects (Harun et al., 2022).

This study is in contrast to previous studies which stated that there is a positive and significant relationship between work and interest in visiting the hospital, meaning that the better a person's job, the greater the patient's interest in visiting the hospital (Yeta et al., 2020). Then, it was also found that subjects with higher incomes generally made more visits to the hospital. These results differ from research conducted by Harun and Listyowati (2022) which stated that there is a positive and significant relationship between income and interest in visiting the hospital, meaning that the high interest in visiting the hospital is caused by the patient's high income.

There is an influence of hospital digital marketing on loyalty. Based on the statistical analysis conducted, it is known that there is an influence of hospital digital marketing on loyalty with a p-value of 0.000 ($0.000 < 0.05$). So, it can be concluded that the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted and the null hypothesis (H_o) is rejected; in other words, there is an influence of digital marketing on loyalty. This indicates that effective digital marketing efforts can increase patient loyalty to the hospital, which can further contribute to long-term patient retention and build stronger relationships between patients and hospitals.

The statistical test results obtained a p-value = 0.000 which is smaller than $\alpha = 0.05$ ($p < 0.05$), so it shows that the null hypothesis (H_o) is rejected which means there is a statistically significant relationship between hospital digital marketing and patient loyalty. The p-value $< \alpha$ means that the p-value is smaller than the significance level (0.05) so this shows that the relationship between hospital digital marketing and patient loyalty is statistically significant. This indicates that these results did not occur by chance. In this study, H_o is rejected, meaning the hypothesis that states there is no relationship between digital marketing and loyalty is rejected. Thus, the alternative hypothesis (H_a) which states that there is a positive relationship is accepted. Furthermore, it can be concluded that based on these results, digital marketing has a significant relationship with patient loyalty. This means that a good digital marketing strategy can increase patient loyalty to the hospital, which has the potential to increase patient retention and affect the overall reputation of the hospital.

Research (2022) concluded that successful digital marketing contributes directly to upgrading customer loyalty, especially through personalization and superior customer experience. Positive experiences, such as easy navigation and interesting design, contribute in a significant way to an increase in customer loyalty. More customers who actively interact with a brand through more digital channels tend to remain loyal. Ajina, USA (2019) research concluded that marketing quality and interactive content can become a key strategy for strengthening customer loyalty in the private housing sector. This is important for House Sick in creating a long-term connection with the patient. Appropriate content with needed information positively impacts satisfaction and loyalty to customers. Accurate, clear, and easy-to-understand information increases trust in the patient in the health institution. Features that allow two-way communication between House Sick and patients, such as responding quickly to questions on social media or websites, encourage a connection that is more emotionally strong with customers. Research by Al-Weshah, GA, Kakeesh, DF, & Al-Ma'aitah, NA (2021) concludes that a planned digital marketing strategy with Good can, in a way, significantly increase patient satisfaction internationally. This can help House Sick Jordan increase power competition in the service market for global health.

Study Pratami, JF, Gaffar, V., Dirgantari, PD, Furqon, C., & Maryati, M. (2023) concluded that a good digital experience is essential in managing patient loyalty. Facilities that can utilize digital technology for increased comfort, communication, and accessibility will have more success in building long-term connections with patients. Respond quickly from facility health through digital channels, such as social media or applications, providing feelings of being noticed and improved satisfaction as well as loyalty from patients. Hospitals and facilities need to utilize digital technology to create a better experience for more patients and improve interaction as well as comfort.

The results of the statistical test in the study by Fitrianna & Aurinawati (2020) obtained a p-value = 0.000 which is smaller than $\alpha = 0.05$ ($p < 0.05$). This shows that digital marketing increases brand awareness and influences decision-making to visit the hospital. The results of the study show that digital marketing has a significant impact on building brand awareness and increasing patient loyalty through improving experiences with hospital services. Furthermore, research conducted by Khiong (2022) analyzed the impact of digital marketing on the hospital sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results showed that digital marketing not only increases brand awareness but also strengthens patient loyalty and relationships by creating more advantages through digital platforms and social media. Research conducted by Subramaniam et al. (2019) also conducted the same investigation, where they found that digital marketing increases hospital visits, which in turn increases patient loyalty in hospitals in Dubai. The results show that digital marketing increases patient engagement and strengthens loyalty to medical facilities through attractive promotions on social media and hospital websites. Research by Qian et al. (2018) reviewed the implementation of digital marketing in 12 hospitals and evaluated its efficiency. The findings of this study indicate that digital marketing can increase patient loyalty with the introduction of hospital services through more digital channels introduced, thereby improving patient perceptions and experiences in the hospital.

Another study conducted by Sembiluh & Sulistiadi (2022) explains that digital marketing can increase patient loyalty with increased trust in the hospital. During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital marketing strategies have become very important to attract patients in new and growing market reach, as well as to educate patients about hospital services. This study emphasizes the importance of implementing an efficient digital platform in improving patient connections and strengthening loyalty through easy access to information. Research by Burhan & Sulistiadi (2022) also further emphasizes that digital marketing plays a major role in introducing hospitals to new patients and encouraging old patients to return to the hospital. Digital-based marketing helps hospitals stay relevant in a competitive market and builds a positive image that drives patient loyalty. The right marketing strategy helps in increasing patient engagement with hospital services. Rony & Panuju's (2018) research revealed that the implementation of digital marketing implemented at PHC Surabaya Hospital helped increase interaction with sick patients. As a result, patients tend to be more loyal and recommend the hospital to others. Effective marketing in the digital space focuses on features that make it easier for patients to access information and interact with the hospital in an easier way.

Based on research conducted by Savitri et al. (2022), digital marketing not only increases patient satisfaction but also helps build loyalty. Well-done digital marketing increases patient engagement with hospital services, which further strengthens loyalty. This study highlights the importance of using social media and relevant content in a hospital's digital marketing strategy. Keegan & Rowley (2017) further added that the use of digital marketing can build a closer relationship between the Hospital and patients.

By building trust through informative and responsive digital platforms, hospitals can improve patient satisfaction and foster loyalty. Digital marketing that focuses on improving patient experience is a key factor in maintaining long-term relationships. This study shows that digital marketing, especially through social media and other digital platforms, not only plays a role in attracting new patients but is also very effective in building and maintaining patient loyalty.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that there is a relationship between digital marketing and patient loyalty with a significant value (0.000). Overall, this study confirms the importance of implementing effective digital marketing to increase patient loyalty in hospitals. This study concludes that digital marketing at home has a significant influence on patient loyalty through patient experience. Effective digital marketing that includes the use of social media, websites, and mobile applications can improve patient experience which ultimately strengthens patient loyalty. Although patient experience itself does not directly affect loyalty, the results of the study show that digital marketing makes a major contribution to creating a positive experience that affects patient satisfaction and commitment. Furthermore, it is recommended that Hospital management strengthen its digital marketing strategy, namely by developing websites, mobile applications, and using social media in a more interactive way. This technology can provide services that are more accessible to patients, improve experience and support patient loyalty.

DECLARATIONS

Ethics approval and consent to participate: No. 484/UN4.14.1/TP.01.02/2024 by Faculty of Public Health Hasanuddin University

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

The article has not been published in any other journal and is not currently under consideration by any other journal.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

No other data will be shared related to this research.

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