



Impact of the Internet on healthcare marketing

Khyati Lakhani¹ | Mounica Kodavalla² | Pawan Sharma³ | Sachin Wadekute⁴ | Dr Nadiminti Rajesh Kumar⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5}Department of Pharmaceutical Management, NIPER Ahmedabad

Abstract:

For the last 20 years, the Internet has become one of the most used ways to get information, including healthcare. Healthcare marketing can be a potential driving force for the digital population to use the Internet to surf regarding healthcare information. This paper talks about factors influencing the Internet on Healthcare marketing perceived advantages and disadvantages of its use it.

Introduction:

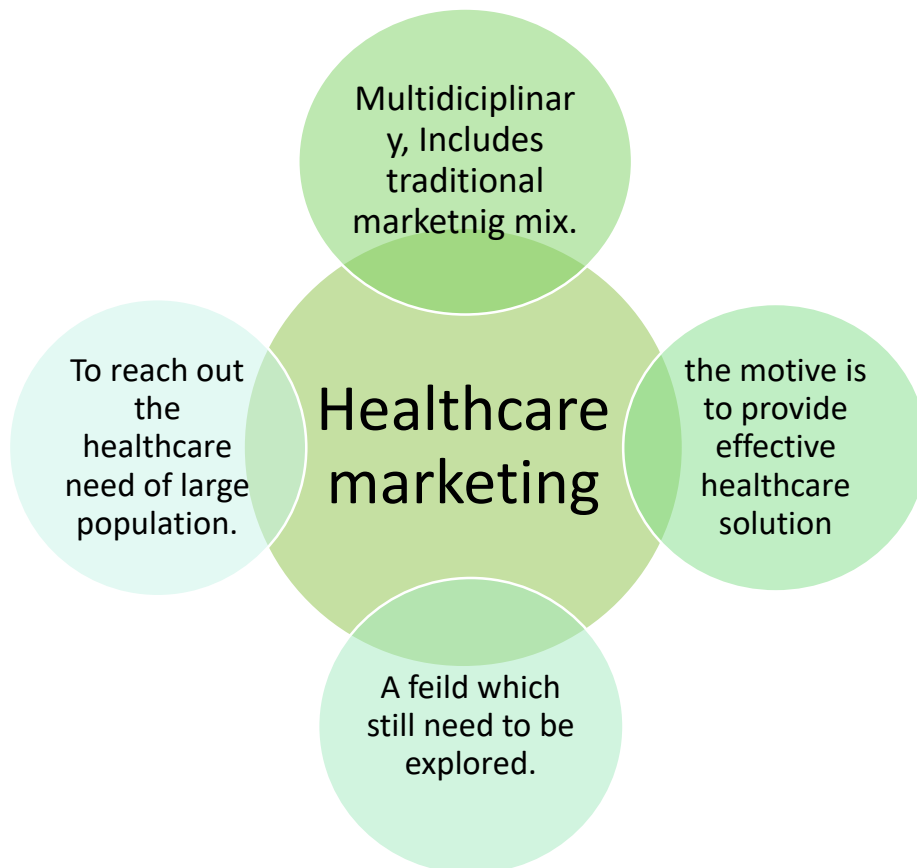
The Internet can be defined as a worldwide network that connects computers. People can share information and converse via the Internet from any location with a web connection.[1]

The Internet has changed our lifestyle and buying behaviour regarding commodities and services. And healthcare information is also included in that.[2] According to Statista, a 4.66 billion digital population is there as of January 2021, and this number is increasing daily.[3] The people searched the information such as signs and symptoms, cause, a medication used for a particular disease, and the complications and preventive measures that can be taken against the disease condition. Two out of three internet users in the U.S. search for healthcare information. [4], [5]Likewis, in Germany, two out of five are surfing the web to find out about health information.[6] The population also uses the web to understand various conditions associated with the body, including depth anatomy 7], [8].

This information collected from the Internet about healthcare can influence an individual's decision which they take for their loved one. Again, it can affect the doctor's consultation decision and influence an individual's eating habits and lifestyle. [9]especially the population who is not literate enough to understand the medical terms and jargon to define healthcare information may face the dangerous outcome when they use the Internet to get insights and educate themselves. Those are self-diagnostic populations[10], [11].

But what is the main drive that nowadays people are more attracted towards the use of the Internet to get insights regarding healthcare? Probably it is healthcare marketing. Health marketers create, communicate, and distribute health information and interventions using customer-centred and science-based tactics to safeguard and enhance the health of various populations. This is how the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention define healthcare marketing.[12]

Healthcare marketing is a multidisciplinary practice that uses marketing research to educate, motivate, and enlighten people about health issues. Integration of traditional marketing research, theory, and practice with public health research, theory, and training. A complicated framework for developing health interventions, campaigns, communications, and research projects.[12]



This paper discusses factors, practical strategies, perceived benefits, and associated risks, followed by a brief discussion and conclusion.

Discussion:

Factors:

1. Increases in Depression cases are healthcare marketing one of the reasons?

Using the Internet to communicate with friends and family was linked to a reduction in depression. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that social support benefits one's well-being. It adds credence to the notion that the Internet may be used to establish and sustain social bonds. The other side of the coin is the Internet's usage for health-related objectives linked to a surge in depression. This syndrome may occur due to an increased focus on health issues. People have encountered several health-related marketing initiatives while perusing the Internet.[13] Advertisements for healthcare service providers, as well as the medication itself, are examples.[14] Those with undiscovered concerns or health consciousness may self-select online health resources for their well-being, although it is not always essential. Using the Internet to seek health information or interpersonal communication with friends and family to assess their health condition resulted in depression and a general state of bad health in both healthy and unwell people.[15]

2. Has it affected health communication?

With millions of users worldwide, social networking is a global phenomenon. It's a simple way for individuals to stay in touch by exchanging information, photos, stories, and ideas. As a result, social media has grown in importance as a marketing tool. The reputation of sanitary facilities depends on healthcare workers agreeing to become more involved in connecting with patients offline and online. In healthcare information and communication technologies, developing competitiveness, improving quality, and reducing bureaucracy, are some focus areas for improving population health[16].

The research on the link between social media and health has yielded mixed results. On the one hand, research has shown that there is more user-generated content on social media and that information sharing is seen as more democratic and without patient control. It means that users can share health-related information they need, making it more patient-centred. It can lead to confusion and disputes because people are claiming nothing without knowledge of the medical field. There is a need to study the association between social media use and health-related factors, both intrinsically and extrinsically, and a wide range of potentially dangerous outcomes[17].

3. Internet usage - Emotional/Behavioural Health Problems.

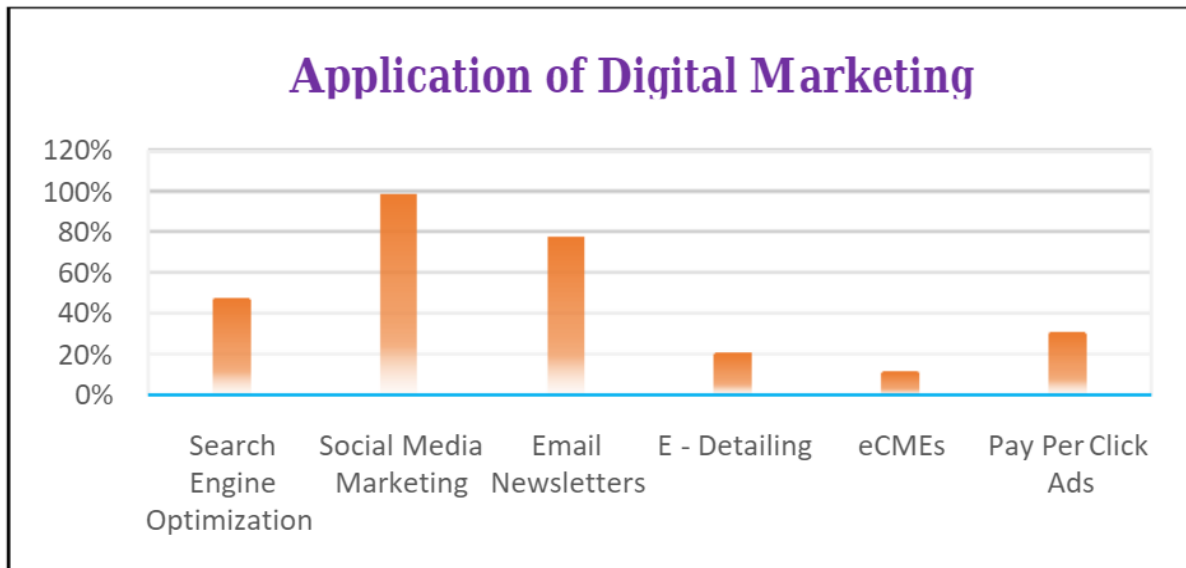
The Internet has become an integral part of our daily lives for both children and adults. When it comes to a youngster, the more they engage in internet-related activities, the more likely it is that it may damage their psychological and physiological behaviour, such as vision problems. Internet use has been linked to a variety of mental health issues as well as emotional states. Previous research with teenagers and young adults has found links between excessive Internet use and emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Participation in aggressive or violent online games may be reflected in a higher level of aggravation[17].

4. Long-term healthcare solutions with marketing.

Using electronic information and telecommunications technology to assist long-distance clinical healthcare, health-related education, public health, and health administration is referred to as telehealth. Electronic information and communication technologies are used to provide and support healthcare when a significant distance separates patients and physicians. Clinical video teleconferencing is a better advancement for providing cost-effective care to patients in their homes. [18]But how a patient in need will come to know about this kind of service? Healthcare marketing provides this liberty to needy people. E.g. services like 108 ambulances, the service is just one phone call away. Nowadays, the government also encourages this kind of practice; they made virtual campaigns to spread awareness regarding various health conditions such as anaemia [19]. Arogya-setu application[20] and Co-WIN[21] portal are also one of the best examples; E.g., the helpline numbers available online or provide information and health solutions through various tested programs. One can also find the contact of an expert for any health-related query. E.g., covid helpline number[20], [21].

Digital Marketing strategy in the pharmaceutical industry.

1. Value-driven content creation- developing a vibrant message can help. Content that gives insight into relevant information and answers common questions can increase the audience.
2. Augmented reality and virtual reality- can be used to build a bridge between the customers and the company. Product demonstrations can be efficient through these techniques.
3. Artificial intelligence assistant- can be used to make conversations with the customers to guide them through the websites or answer questions, or even connect them to any marketer within the company
4. Industry influencers- a celebrity or famous figure using the product can always be used as an influencer by the pharmaceutical company to endorse their product to the target customers.
5. Blockchain can be used to promote the company's growth [22].



Perceived benefit through healthcare marketing and Positive impact of the Internet.

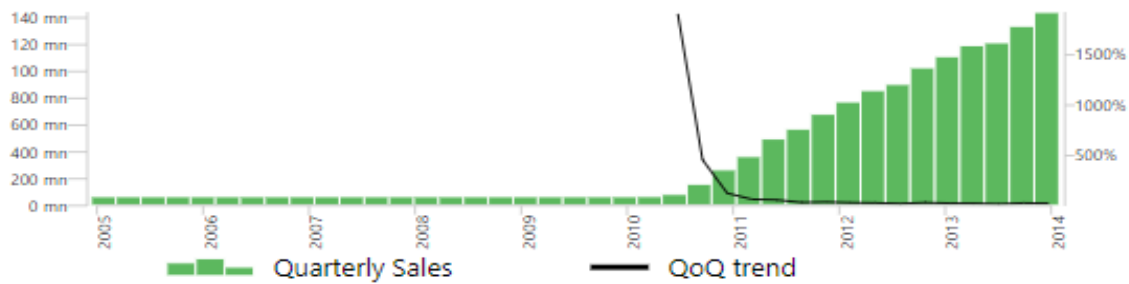
Digital marketing is effective as people tend to remember what they see more than what they read. It has been proved that visuals are compelling; hence marketing via the online mode using videos and images is more attractive and practical.

B2C marketing- through the various platforms, the pharma companies can directly market their products to the customers. Also, by doing so, the customers can get verified and reliable information.

Targeting the customers- Through digital marketing strategies, the customers can decide the category of products they choose and directly group the different customers. In pharma, the classes are made based on diseases.

Digital marketing allows companies to measure the impact of their marketing effects. Through digital marketing, consumer can give their views and suggestions to pharma companies. In doing so, the company gets a better idea about the client's needs and paves the way for further implementations. By sending online surveys, the company's market researchers have easy access to measure the impact of their marketing strategies. They can also measure the customer's behavioural patterns with the existing data. It helps to uplift the scope for prolonged, steady improvement. It is done by visualizing the clients' sales and categorizing them into categories. Moreover, when all the data is stored digitally, market researchers have easy and reliable access to information with the help of analytics. Hence the research process is enhanced[23].

Gilenvya Quarterly Sales * Trend



* Mock sales data used and is representative only

It helps overall brand development and brand equity- when the product is present in the digital space, the target customers can be nurtured to be aware of the product. Digital marketing helps the customers to be educated about the brand and its consequences. It helps maintain transparency in the treatment efficacy as it gives patients information about the pharmaceutical product. Thus, customers know how pharmaceutical product affects their bodies [24].

It empowers patients to take responsibility for their health. With all the information available on the product's website and many other sites, pharma product consumers can decide which product they would like to choose based on the cost and side effects. They can make their medical regimen with the help of a physician by being more educated about the products available. It helps enhance the drug development process- digital marketing can also aid the clinical trial process as there is a direct connection with the customers. Surveys on the product's marketing websites can give them an idea of the side effects, and the manufacturers can work to reduce them.[25], [26]

As every coin has two sides, let's discuss some detrimental effects.

Perceived risks and negative impact:

Doctors usually agree that the Internet can supply patients with sufficient information. However, 40% of doctors fear this will harm the doctor-patient relationship. Doctors are concerned that Internet use could lead to patient confusion, excessive expectations, and increased lawsuits. Furthermore, doctors are worried that explaining to patients that information gathered on the Internet is not accurate or complete, potentially irrelevant, will harm their relationship. Doctors are concerned about possible Internet health misinformation and, more crucially, patient misinterpretation of that misinformation[27].

Of the 4.5 billion corrupted data records in the first half of 2018, more than 56% were caused by social media accidents. 3/4 of the top 10 health news of 2018 contain misleading or misleading information. More channels need more time, but medical professionals are already limited in time. 74% of the patients who searched for their symptoms online were stressed by the search results[28].

Problems with DTCA medicines can have serious unintended consequences. It includes, but is not limited to, patients who require medication from the Internet and non-U.S. pharmacies without a prescription, the supervision of a cure, or even awareness of the medicine. Patients may not be aware of the full range of other treatment options that are more appropriate and cheaper than the drugs advertised. Side effects are often not comprehensive in advertising and marketing communications. In addition, all drugs have risks and benefits, and patients are not aware of drug drugs, herbs, drug supplements, or drug foods interaction[29]

Consumers look at product information on the Internet to help alleviate their symptoms. It poses a big problem for healthcare professionals because consumers demand unnecessary medications based on data collected from drug advertisements. Another problem is that consumers may trust the website more than healthcare professionals. Lack of trust between consumers and healthcare professionals creates barriers between seeking medical care and acceptance by healthcare professionals[30].

The website is usually not created by a health care professional and therefore lacks the authority to determine specific errors. Consumers should question these sites. Most companies employ non-medical personnel with the technical skills required to build a website but may make mistakes in the transcription of information so that it won't be noticed[30].

Reference:

1. "[Internet Description, History, & Facts Britannica.](#)"
2. A. Fittler, R. G. Vida, M. Káplár, and L. Botz, "Consumers turning to the internet pharmacy market: Cross-sectional study on the frequency and attitudes of Hungarian patients purchasing medications online," *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, vol. 20, no. 8, Aug. 2018, DOI: 10.2196/11115.
3. "Supplementary notes." [Online]. Available: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/>.
4. U. S. Results, "2018 CONSUMER SURVEY ON DIGITAL HEALTH," 2018.
5. S. Fox and M. Duggan, "Health Online 2013 35% of U.S. adults have gone online to figure out a medical condition; of these, half followed up with a visit to a medical professional," 2013. [Online]. Available: <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Health-online.aspx>.
6. A. Berg, "Digital Health."
7. R. E. Rice, "Influences, usage, and outcomes of Internet health information searching: Multivariate results from the Pew surveys," *International Journal of Medical Informatics*, vol. 75, no. 1, pp. 8–28, 2006, DOI: 10.1016/j.ijmedinf.2005.07.032.
8. P. C. I. Pang, K. Verspoor, S. Chang, and J. Pearce, "Conceptualizing health information seeking behaviours and exploratory search: the result of a qualitative study," *Health and Technology*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 45–55, Jun. 2015, doi: 10.1007/s12553-015-0096-0.
9. A. Bochet *et al.*, "Cyberchondria," *Revue Medicale Suisse*, vol. 10, no. 440. Editions Medecine et Hygiene, p. 4, Sep. 03, 2014, doi: 10.1145/1629096.1629101.
10. R. L. Bach and A. Wenz, "Studying health-related internet and mobile device use using web logs and smartphone records," *PLoS ONE*, vol. 15, no. 6, Jun. 2020, doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0234663.
11. H. Ashrafian, T. Toma, L. Harling, K. Kerr, T. Athanasiou, and A. Darzi, "Social networking strategies that aim to reduce obesity have achieved significant although modest results," *Health Affairs*, vol. 33, no. 9, pp. 1641–1647, 2014, doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.2014.0370.
12. "Health Marketing Basics _ Gateway to Health Communication _ CDC."
13. K. Bessiere, S. Pressman, S. Kiesler, and R. Kraut, "Effects of Internet use on health and depression: A longitudinal study," *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2010, doi: 10.2196/jmir.1149.
14. C. Lee Ventola, "Direct-to-Consumer Pharmaceutical Advertising," 2011. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3278148/>.
15. F. Lega, "Developing a marketing function in public healthcare systems: A framework for action," *Health Policy*, vol. 78, no. 2–3, pp. 340–352, Oct. 2006, doi: 10.1016/j.healthpol.2005.11.013.

16. W. Y. S. Chou, Y. M. Hunt, E. B. Beckjord, R. P. Moser, and B. W. Hesse, "Social media use in the United States: Implications for health communication," *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2009, doi: 10.2196/jmir.1249.
17. V. Pakalniškienė, R. Jusienė, S. B. Sebre, J. C. L. Wu, and I. Laurinaitytė, "Children's internet use profiles in relation to behavioural problems in lithuania, Latvia, and taiwan," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 17, no. 22, pp. 1–19, Nov. 2020, doi: 10.3390/ijerph17228490.
18. S. G. Bollmeier, P. Finnegan, and S. K. Griggs, "Direct to Consumer Telemedicine: Is Healthcare From Home Best?," 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7431063/>.
19. □ □, "Month-wise Reports ANEMIA PREVALENCE." [Online]. Available: <https://anemiamukt Bharat.info>.
20. 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://www.aarogyasetu.gov.in>.
21. "Co-WIN Application."
22. "5 Digital Marketing Strategies for the Pharma Industry _ DMI."
23. "5 ways digital pharmaceutical marketing is transforming the industry _ Gramener Blog."
24. "Impact of Digital Marketing in the Pharmaceutical Industry - Way WeDesign."
25. M. Radu, G. Radu, A. Condurache, and V. Lorin Purcărea, "The influence of digital media on the success of a health care unit," *Journal of medicine and life*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 254–256, Jul. 2018, doi: 10.25122/jml-2018-0064.
26. G. Radu *et al.*, "The adaptation of health care marketing to the digital era." [Online]. Available: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>.
27. J. Laugesen, K. Hassanein, and Y. Yuan, "The impact of internet health information on patient compliance: A research model and an empirical study," *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, vol. 17, no. 6, p. e143, Jun. 2015, doi: 10.2196/jmir.4333.
28. M. Clark, "The Pros and Cons of Social Media in Healthcare (/blog/pros-and-cons-of-social-media-in-healthcare)." [Online]. Available: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcasbandage/id1483257086>.
29. "Are there any consumer benefits of direct consumer advertisement of pharmaceuticals _."
30. A. Chandra and C. Wyble, "PROS AND CONS OF MARKETING PHARMACEUTICALS ON THE INTERNET." [Online]. Available: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237606172>.