Social media usage in Indian Hospitals- Current scenarios and way ahead

Vidhi Kalra¹*, Neha Ahire²

1. Student, MBA (HHM), Symbiosis Institute of Health Sciences, SIU Pune
2. Assistant Professor, Symbiosis Institute of Health Sciences, SIU Pune

*Corresponding Author: vidhi.kalramba2021@sihspune.org

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Social media usage by Indian health care organizations has increased significantly in the past few years as the majority of the top ranked hospitals use social media. When used efficiently and effectively, social media aids hospitals through bigger revenue, employee recruitment, and improved patient/customer satisfaction. The study examined the presence of various hospitals on social media platforms. While marketing on social media whether on Facebook, Instagram or YouTube interaction with stakeholders by creating brand awareness and interest lead to exponential growth in the business. It is a low-cost marketing tool which leads to instant dissemination of information and more penetration among users. India’s healthcare industry is one of the fastest budding industries and hence there is a strong potential of market growth in this sector and social media is one of the most accessible, cost effective platform in marketing. Digital savvy population having information at their fingertips with easy access for quick reviews is taking it as an authentic and reliable source of information.

Aim & Objective: To assess and analyse the presence of Indian hospitals on various social media platforms and to study the scope of improvement on the usage of digitized medium.

Methodology: The study adopts a descriptive research design. Primary data was collected from hospital websites and social media platforms viz. Facebook, YouTube, Instagram. Total 266 hospitals were included in the study as these are the most favored ones by the people.

Results – The findings of the study from 266 hospitals across 10 metro cities disclosed that there is limited usage of social media platforms. As very few hospitals among the 266, were noticed not to be present on all the three mentioned social media platforms namely Facebook, Instagram, YouTube. The degree of usage of these platforms varies from hospitals and various cities.

Conclusion: Social media awareness among Indian hospitals is mounting along with its use. Social media usage differs significantly according to the size, place and type of the hospital. Social media in health care requires rational application in emerging economies. Also, the hopes of the users are essential to be met. The use of social media particularly Facebook, is seen predominantly. The people of India, largely those in urban and semi-urban regions, are enormously involved in acknowledging the structure.

Recommendation: The probable influence of social media ratings on consumers’ decision-making shouldn’t be taken too lightly in this fluctuating healthcare setting with amplified consideration to cost as well as quality.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Digital Marketing, Social Media Marketing Platforms

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INTRODUCTION

An economy built on a robust foundation of healthy and happy citizens, is the resultant of flourishing health care sector that is crucial to shape any economy. The nation’s health care industry has shown a pivotal growth rate in the former years due to a number of reasons i.e. growth in the per capita income, alertness about health risk, availability of cost-effective services and accessibility to better healthcare. Today due to tremendous technological growth, the hospitals are well equipped with most advanced world class techniques. Therefore, a growing need is evolved for the best and the most affordable hospitals within the vicinity.

In a hastily changing world where physical and virtual conditions are merging and over 50% people are already searching, surfing, chatting, exchanging the World Wide Web, digital technology appears to have plainly disturbed medical services by altering the way care delivery model gives results, so they stay aware of the pace of decision. India’s digital connectivity is probable to raise to almost 80% reach by 2034, along with rural internet users growing by 58% every year. This trend can initiate the acceptance of online modes of marketing in the healthcare industry.

Among the various techniques of digital marketing viz. SEO (Search Engine Optimization), Content Marketing, Email Marketing, Social Media Advertising and Social Media Marketing, Social Media Marketing is the most commonly accepted tool by the general public. While marketing on social media whether on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc. interaction with stakeholders by creating brand awareness and interest leads to exponential growth in business. It is a low-cost marketing tool which leads to instant dissemination of information and more penetration among users. Many technologies within, and outside digital marketing are present and social media is one of them. With over ¼ of the world in ownership of a smart phone, applications like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, etc. are the innovative and novel engagement tools that links customers to the world around them. If a comparison is done with the speed of acceptance of technologies, telephone took 75 years to reach 50 million users however Facebook reached the equivalent number of handlers in just 3.5 years. More Indians are now using smart phones along with the broadband internet connections to even just get the basic requirements fulfilled like food and healthcare.

India’s healthcare industry is one of the fastest growing industries and hence there is a strong potential of market growth in this sector and social media is one of the most accessible, cost effective platform in marketing. The hospitals in India today are realizing the value and effectiveness of connecting with public on various social media platforms viz. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc. which are most commonly accessed or searched. Digital savvy population having information at their fingertips with easy access for quick reviews is taking it as an authentic and reliable source of information.

Social Media provides health care organizations viz. hospitals an opportunity to engage with their customers at a more effective and acceptable level whereas traditional marketing has a limited capability. The latest trend is that the hospitals can leverage to understand the need of social media marketing.
As the above table shows that out of the various social media platforms that can be adopted for marketing Facebook, YouTube and Instagram are the maximum accessed mediums. It can be said that social media is a goldmine today.

How social media fits in patient life cycle?

There is a need of effective social media presence for hospitals. The patients looking for hospital treatment facility corroborate treatment experience with other patients and seeking multiple opinions must be fulfilled on social media in the form of necessary information, updates, data, reviews, etc.
For hospitals, it is significant to understand how are the effective plans formulated, when social media fits in the patient lifecycle.

The stages in the patient lifecycle can be broadly classified into 4 phases as explained in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Social Media Approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. DISCOVERY</strong></td>
<td>• Publishing related content on disorders / illnesses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Educational posts by health care specialists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. CONSULTATION</strong></td>
<td>• Guaranteeing positive reviews in media and review websites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Adverse opinions being addressed with contextual responses to reduce them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Having professional stalk about the hospital in social networks.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
3. **HOSPITALIZATION**

In this phase, after admission in a hospital, the patient or his/her family is expected to share his/her experience with the others and also to search for second or third opinion from health care specialists.

- Listening to patients
- Tracking them to know whom they share the circumstances with.
- Necessary measures to be taken in real-time to ensure problems.
- If any of the problems is resolved to the patient’s satisfaction to prevent undesirable sentiments from escalating.
- Opportunity to know how services are perceived and using evidence in rectifying internal faults.

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**OUTPATIENT**

After completion of the treatment, the patient discharged, then is equipped with extensive facts and knowledge about the discovery, analysis and treatment.

Patient then usually looks for sharing the information with others who are in quest of assistance on the same matter.

- Leveraging influencers of the brand
- Converting them into promoters,
- Tapping heir special networks.

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**Table No. 2**

Hospital should take necessary measures to prevent spiralling of negative sentiments of their customers as well as they should try to upload/share authentic data on their platform, as it is one of the key aspects that will help in retention of their stakeholders.

The effectiveness of marketing through social media as a tool is emerging as latest successful technique as it is seen that this is proving very helpful in connecting with the stakeholders. It is providing a one-to-one connectivity of doctors with patients.
Social Media Marketing techniques are proving very beneficial in hospital industry by ways elaborated below:

- Enhanced brand building and reputation
- Outspreading loyalty, engagement, and referrals
- Enabling healthy-living information and health
- Crisis communications
- Giving shape to patient expectations and experience to provide patient satisfaction
- Reducing costs with the help of advertising budgets
- Clarity about the patient safety and quality of healthcare

In today’s scenario as this mode of digital marketing is slowly gaining momentum, hence, hospital industry is still facing some challenges in its acceptability by the masses. Some of the major challenges can be highlighted as below:

- Hospitals are not acquainted with the Online Marketing tools and techniques and thus depend on on other conventional approaches.
- Fear that the patient/customer or client confidentiality and safety may be spoiled because of social media.
- Ambiguity in health care marketing along with rapid changes.
- It is no longer sufficient to just connect to the masses. One must also meet the patient’s necessities on one on one basis.
- Making a positive influence of the image and repute of their brand.
- In today’s scenario approximately 72% of adults who use internet are engaged on Social Media, still unaware about the presence of hospitals and the ways in which different Social Media Platforms are used by them as a marketing tool

Whereas, it is said that 90% of millennial use internet as their primary-or only-source of health information.

To make this tool constructive following techniques must be considered:

1. **Live blogging:** Health marketers can elevate public awareness through social media marketing.
2. **Successful reach:** Marketers can share success stories about operations, treatments, medical research and momentous achievements by making use social media channels for blogs, micro-blogs, forums, etc.
3. **Connecting physicians and patients:** Creating a relationship between the patients and physicians by gathering feedback to interest potential customers.
4. **Effective communication in times of crisis:** In disasters like flood, earthquake, or diseases outburst (like COVID-19 Pandemic), one needs to be at the center of all.
5. **Delivery of precise information to the patients:** Healthcare facilities should share accurate, timely information concerning about diseases, medications, treatments and competent medical employees.

6. **Relationship transparency:** Demand for crystal clear care quality information online is intensifying rapidly. Emphasizing on quality measures that directly relate to the patient outcomes. Hence, Consumers prioritize safe, high-quality, active care.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Now-a-days, growth of net savvy patients and smart phone dependent doctors in India is giving escalation in the usage of social media initiatives by hospital industry. Websites and social media platforms are being progressively used as a preliminary point by the patients/customers for gathering information about hospitals and other providers because now a day’s healthcare is also treated like a customer purchase as is the case with other provider industries, thus the information found acts as a framework of their choices.

It was also discovered that:

- When shopping for healthcare services, almost half of participants were influenced by social media, and
- 66% of the service takers used their hospital’s website as a medium to get updates about treatment or learn further about the establishment.

According to a study done by Amrita in 2013, “the five most important magnitudes of reach to health services are affordability, adequacy, accommodation, readiness, and accessibility. 72% of the Indian population lives in semi-urban and rural areas. The sturdy mismatched ratio of hospitals to patients, rising costs of health care, swiftly fluctuating demographics, growing population, and heightened demands in pricing for technological health care usage in emerging economies necessitate an exceptional health delivery solution model by means of social media. A more ailment burden lies in the health care delivery in developing country like India. This is due to the absence of appropriate health care infrastructure in the majority of semi-urban and rural regions. Novel procedures need to be introduced in these regions to overcome these issues. People use social media from all over businesses, automobiles, arts, book marking, cooking, entertainment, and general networking in the current scenario. Developed and progressive countries like the United States have developed their communication system for several years now. They have already recognized social media in a number of domains as well as health care. Corresponding practice incidences can be used to provide an innovative dimension to health care in the semi-urban regions of India.”[^6]

One more study in 2015 appropriately puts forward that a growing sum “of hospitals and health systems use social media to permit users to deliver feedback and ratings. The association between ratings on social media and more usual hospital quality metrics remains principally uncertain, raising concern that healthcare consumers may make decisions on mistaken or unsuitable evidence concerning quality.”[^7]

According to Infosys (2014), the future of health care industry is full of opportunities and challenges for the various brands and their sellers. In order to communicate with customers healthcare establishments have taken the preliminary step by executing social media network. It is considered as a time to passage to the next
step where they tend to offer improved patient care via social media channel and also to generate their kind as a believed front-runner in this stage. Primary motive of social media platforms provided the apprehension to support patients in a novel and in a highly connected world digitally.[13]

Another investigation by Pwc (2016),"revealed that there has been an increase in the urgency of addressing the challenges due to evolving trends in the Indian healthcare sector. Some of the key trends have become more patient-focused, value- vs volume-driven, continuum of care and increasing digital incorporation. Patients nowadays are more aware, tech-savvy and keener to embrace evolving technology and want to take control of their well-being and hence are open to new methods of receiving care. They no longer want old-style models of healthcare that are typically dissimilar and siloed. Patients want to evade unnecessary tests and obtain clear information about their treatment with growing healthcare costs and little insurance penetration. A third trend is the range of care beyond the hospital - insufficient number of beds, numerous healthcare providers are concentrating more on how to install digital technologies for distant patient monitoring, like telemonitoring, IoT, connected devices and wearables. This helps boost patient convenience and cuts healthcare costs for provider."[14]

Study done by Anita Gupta (2013), “described the use of social media marketing in health promotion and education and numerous interventions done, via social media marketing tools in encouraging public health. And discusses that, like every coin social media also has two sides as it provides big chance for health promotion in the public health community, allowing public health professionals to range out far-off and wide and straight to the public on several public health issues and at the same time its vigilant use is imperative to preventing colossal harm. Social media is a communication boon for the public health community that has the potential to promote and modify many health-related behaviours and problems predominantly in times of crisis.”[8]

Further, Linda M. Gallant (2011) concluded that, “the results of the study deliver insights into how hospitals and other health-based websites that can use several media in online environments for future health advocacy as the National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy demands for enhancement of health websites to promote health in an improved way. Online media formats reinforce e-patients engagement in health information while strengthening health care institutions goals in providing health care resources for good health outcomes. More precisely, the findings give guidance on how 6 kinds of online interactive media (social media, web-based broadcasting, blogs, web-enabled e-patient communication tools, online health tools, and mobile applications) can be used to tactically manage health communication messages and data to toughen participatory medicine i.e. is a movement in which networked patients move from being meagre passengers to accountable drivers of their health, and in which providers inspire and value them.”[9]

KPMG (2019) highlighted speedy acceptance of digital media consumption, it was crucial for organizations to piece and comprehend the present and potential digital India. The previous initial adopters of digital media were fairly a homogeneous group who used up content on the internet even before the enormous fall in data charges in 2016 and the user base of broadband subscribers today i.e. 563 million is much higher and more varied. The aim was to study the predictable Indian digital billion by 2030, means to commerce and their policies must adapt to aid the huge user base efficiently. The digital consumer in 2030 will likely be 1. Not English speaking 2.
Mobile phone handler 3. From an advanced rural area and non-metro urban location 4. Progressively eager to pay for content online, were the hypothesis. Built on the basis of socio-economic data and usually detected consumption features, they have advanced 4 core consumer models and be certain for easier analysis of these billion consumers that will help to build a framework.[15]

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive approach to study the usage of social media by Indian Hospitals.

Study Variables –

✓ Digital marketing tools. (SEO, SMM, Content Marketing, E-mail Marketing, Social Media Advertising)
✓ Social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram)
✓ Literature review and extensive research about diverse hospitals and their presence over online medium.

- **Inclusion Criteria:** Three main social media platforms considered for study, i.e. Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.
- **Exclusion Criteria:** The social media platforms apart from the above three (Example – Twitter, LinkedIn) are not considered for study.

Outcome Variables –

Creating an understanding of hospitals towards significance of social media marketing in today’s environment.

Study Procedure –

✓ Detailed operative study of social media marketing platforms along with comprehensively understanding the digital marketing tools.
✓ A systematic literature review and intensive research about diverse hospitals and their presence over online medium.

a. **Data Source and the Collection Technique –**

i. **Sample Size:** 266 hospitals from 10 selected cities.
ii. **Sample Technique:** Random Sampling
iii. **Secondary Data:** Data collected from sites of different hospitals, web-based media networks viz. YouTube channel, Facebook, Instagram and Google appraisals and surveys. Likewise, gathered data from various articles and journals.
Data Analysis –

The data from the observations was entered into Microsoft Excel and analysed using PivotTable.

Significance of study –

Highlight the significance of the digital medium in real time and understanding what is the current state of the hospitals on the online platforms and the gaps that are needed to be bridged. It is a low-cost marketing tool which leads to instant dissemination of information and more penetration among users. India’s healthcare industry is one of the fastest budding industries and hence there is a strong potential of market growth in this sector and social media is one of the most accessible, cost effective platform in marketing. Digital savvy population having information at their fingertips with easy access for quick reviews is taking it as an authentic and reliable source of information.

Limitation –

- Only secondary data was collected through websites and social media pages of different hospitals which made the criteria for the study limited.

- Furthermore, it might not include viewpoint of the stakeholders’ viz. hospitals and patients, ones using the social media websites not frequently due to the absence of decent internet availability.

- It is also worth stating that this type study may also have demographic related biases, for instance like younger people visiting online sites more frequently.

- Limited time for study.

- The study is limited to India.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

Social Media Marketing if used holistically can be beneficial to:

- Increase in Revenue,
- Quality Employee Recruitment, and
- Enhanced Customer Satisfaction.

Presence of hospitals over different Social Media Platforms

Digital media is a two-way network that appears to be a lot more effective for hospitals to link with the customers/visitors rather than using it like a one-way marketing mode.

Results were evaluated against some of the best practices for marketing in order to determine practical repercussions and conclusions for hospitals. Overall, hospitals were aware of the utmost importance of differentiating their messages, but they are way short of benchmarks, including Frequency of Posts and Media Type Used.
As shown in the above graph, key presence of hospitals is over Facebook, followed by YouTube and then Instagram. It was also observed that the posts shared in the form of a video had much more viewership, existence, shares, outreach as compared to the normal post in the form of texts, or message.

Research shows that 95% of the top ranked hospitals use Social Media as a successful tool of digital marketing. 7 in 10 hospitals seem to use social media. 90% of the hospitals having Facebook page along with other social media accounts didn’t link their official websites with the social media pages that is proving to be a negative factor for hospitals as it hampers to show their presence online. The flow of information on hospital Facebook pages, is supremely one-way; however, hospitals, particularly bigger hospitals, have made boundless attempt to have interaction with their Facebook customers/traffic at the same time as marketing themselves, although such
communication is minimal. It is also discovered that it's extremely significant for hospitals to reinforce a big visitor base on Facebook because the greater the site visitors a medical institution draws to its Facebook page, the more might be the ‘Likes’ on ‘Posts’ more will be the ‘Comments’ on those posts, and the more the hospital will get cited and endorsed.

Also, the use of memes, caricatures, and posters to share a message was considered to be more successful, desirable, and acceptable among the readers. Hospitals use Social Media as a strategy to educate customers, make them aware about the services being rendered by the hospitals, however it is seen that they lose a great opportunity to enhance customers connectivity due to lack of active engagement through various Social Media platforms. Thereby failing to build loyalty among patients.

**Classification of hospitals on the basis of ratings received**

266 hospitals are taken in total, out of which 76 hospitals have reviews below 100, excluding these so as to get a reasonable understanding of the compliance of people regarding the hospitals, following table shows the Google Ratings in different intervals and the number of hospitals falling under the respective ratings, considering only those hospitals having 100+ reviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Google Rating</th>
<th>Number of Hospitals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Above 4.5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 – 4</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – 3.5</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 – 3</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or Below</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Rating</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table No.4 Classification of hospitals on the basis of ratings received*
Figure No. 3 Classification of hospitals on the basis of ratings received

It can be said from the above pie chart and table, that maximum number of hospitals have 3.5 - 3 rating given by people over digital platforms, followed by 4 - 3.5 rating, 4.5 - 4 rating, above 4.5 rating having 8% of the hospitals having 3 or below rating, which is a matter of apprehension, and shows the immense need and requirement of the hospitals to augment their services offline and most importantly online.

And maximum concentration of hospitals in the rating 3 - 4 tells the lack of fineness of majority hospitals across the metro cities, the hospitals that people look up to for treatment are lagging behind and need to improve in order to meet the need of the varying environment and most prominently to satisfy the patients and provide them adequate information and suitable knowledge to everyone.

And as specified above that out of 266 hospitals there are still 76 hospitals with very less reviews online, which shows their lack of existence over the digital platforms and how it is hindering the image of the hospitals as people now a days are proactive and check the online reviews before availing services from any industry, healthcare being the most important service at present, so it is high time that the hospital facilities embark their presence through digital medium that will benefit them as it would create a goodwill and also the patients visiting will have prior knowledge about the facility.

Hence, it can be illustrated that a cost-effective technique of consumer engagement i.e. social media marketing/existence is underutilized.

DISCUSSION

The fascinating fact about the nature of Indian public not only from urban area but also from semi urban and rural area is that they are very keen about knowing, understanding and accepting new systems by means of digital platform because of the tremendous reach of the internet in the most distant areas too. As entry of the
healthcare sector on the digital platforms viz. social media is quite new, can be very much valuable, adequate, holistic, and trustworthy approach if utilized wisely leading to exponential progression of the hospital industry.

Figure No. 4 Benefits to the stakeholders

Benefits to the Stakeholders

- Patients coming from rural areas/villages and also from semi-urban and urban areas, if accessed social media to decide which hospital they need to visit for a problem, will prevent them from wasting their time, money, efforts in physically finding the healthcare facility and will also give a sense of satisfaction to some extent as they might be having some prior knowledge about that particular hospital/facility already.

- Genuine customer reaching to the hospital.
- Functional as well as financial benefits.
- Acceptance of patients towards hospitals become easy.
- Escalate patient loyalty.
- Enhance hospital-patient relationship.
- Getting new customers via word of mouth.

Communication with Consumers

It is not at all enough to only create an account and posting few images. The majority of the winning social media sites recurrently communicate with viewers and providing them with valuable material. Social media existence of the hospitals can be made extremely valuable to existing as well as budding viewers and most importantly to patients by:

- Providing generalized information regarding healthcare and common illnesses.
- Inspiring patients to give their views and feedback,
- Linking the patients with treatments and healthcare facilities based on their requirements provided via comments or inquiries.

Aid to Hospitals (Healthcare Providers)

Hospitals benefits from digital platforms on various grounds. “As discussed in an article on Healthcare Dive, busy timetables and lengthy shifts make it hard for them to connect with other providers.”
Sharing stories of other providers, clinicians can provide different thoughts that support development of patient care. Also, as social media updates are commonly brief and very precise, hospitals can increase efficiency at the time of revealing novel additions in the different departments/ specialties.
Privacy Anxieties and Fears

Hospitals should be vigilant that the HIPAA laws shouldn’t be violated while sharing of patient information. In any online communication it is best for the patients to take the lead. This gives an opportunity and complete right to the patients to disclose their private health data in whatever amount they are comfortable with. But irrespective of who commences the communication, providers should sustain the maximum level of skill, competence, expertise and know-how.

Consistent Surveying

Whatsoever technique is selected, either social media or online networking or both, even when it is just reassuring patients involvement by hospital’s website and its built-in features, it is extremely imperative to be on top of its presence online. Hospitals may even want to consider appointing or hiring a social media expert to manage the digital platforms. This will lead to an active extension of the facility’s scope and improvement of its reputation among the public.

CONCLUSION

The study on the above topic was based on the secondary data collected from websites and social media pages of the hospitals itself which helped in reaching to a conclusion that the hospitals will have to start contemplating their marketing strategies by adopting social media as a more effective and modernistic tool, and at the same time they will have to remain honest in 3 ways:

1. By intuitive studying how they can penetrate the minds of Indian public.
2. Providing cost effective treatments, services, and medication.
3. Providing bona fide information via social media and promoting IEC i.e. information, education, communication.

Social media awareness among Indian hospitals is mounting along with its use. Beyond the conventional marketing role of digital medium, social media serves as a mouthpiece for health education, engagement with societies, groups and communities, together with community aid.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Understanding and accepting new systems by means of digital platform because of the tremendous reach of the internet in the most distant areas too.

- As entry of the healthcare sector on the digital platforms viz. social media is quite new, can be very much valuable, adequate, holistic, and trustworthy approach if utilized wisely leading to exponential progression of the hospital industry.
• Digital media is a two-way network that appears to be a lot more effective for hospitals to link with the customers/visitors rather than using it like a one-way marketing mode.

• It is also discovered that it's extremely significant for hospitals to reinforce a big visitor base on Facebook because the greater the site visitors a medical institution draws to its Facebook page, the more might be the ‘Likes’ on ‘Posts’ more will be the ‘Comments’ on those posts, and the more the hospital will get cited and endorsed.

• Also, the use of memes, caricatures, posters to share a message was considered to be more successful, desirable, and acceptable among the readers.

• The hospitals that people look up to for treatment are lagging behind and need to improve in order to meet the need of the varying environment and most prominently to satisfy the patients and provide them adequate information and suitable knowledge to everyone.

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