Assessing the Impact of Social Media Marketing on Patient Satisfaction in Hospital Services

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Abstract: *The rise of social media platforms has transformed the landscape of healthcare communication, offering hospitals new channels to engage with patients and promote services. This study explores the impact of social media marketing (SMM) on patient satisfaction within hospital services using a qualitative research approach. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with twelve purposively selected participants who had interacted with hospital social media platforms in the past six months. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data, focusing on five core variables derived from existing literature: content quality, engagement, responsiveness, emotional appeal, and visual branding. The findings reveal that patients place high value on informative and relevant content, timely responsiveness, and interactive engagement. Visual aesthetics and emotionally resonant content also contribute to patients' trust and perceived service quality. However, participants also identified gaps such as impersonal communication, lack of response, and misalignment between digital promotion and on-ground services. These insights suggest that while social media marketing can significantly influence patient satisfaction, its effectiveness depends on authenticity, accessibility, and strategic alignment with patient needs. The study highlights the importance of patient-centered digital communication and provides practical implications for hospital administrators and marketers to enhance healthcare experiences. It also emphasizes the need for a more inclusive and service-oriented approach to social media content in hospital settings. The qualitative findings offer valuable direction for further empirical research in both urban and developing healthcare environments.*

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Patient Satisfaction, Hospital Services, Qualitative Analysis, Healthcare Communication

1. Introduction

The healthcare industry has undergone a transformative shift in its modes of communication and patient engagement, catalyzed by the rapid growth and accessibility of social media platforms. Traditional models of patient interaction, once characterized by face-to-face consultations and printed informational materials, are now being complementedand in many cases replacedby dynamic digital engagement strategies. Social media has become an indispensable tool in the modern healthcare marketing arsenal, enabling hospitals to amplify their reach, build institutional trust, and foster real-time communication with current and potential patients (Ventola, 2014). Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube are no longer merely channels for advertisement; they are now pivotal in shaping the healthcare narrative, enabling hospitals to share health awareness content, publicize services, respond to queries, and gather patient feedback (Househ, 2013).

This evolution from passive, unidirectional communication to interactive, user-centric engagement has given rise to a new class of digitally empowered patients. Unlike in the past, today's patients are not entirely dependent on physicians for health information; instead, they actively seek out online content, reviews, and peer experiences before choosing healthcare providers or facilities. This behavioral shift marks a critical juncture where patients' healthcare decisions are influenced as much by digital perceptions as by clinical expertise (Hawn, 2009). As a result, social media marketing (SMM) is emerging as a key determinant in influencing patient satisfaction, which is now shaped by a broader set of experiences that go well beyond the hospital walls.

However, despite its transformative potential, the strategic deployment and measurable effectiveness of social media marketing in enhancing patient satisfaction remain insufficiently explored, particularly in emerging economies like India. Here, the digital divide and variability in digital literacy further complicate how SMM is perceived and engaged with by diverse patient populations. Moreover, the understanding of "patient satisfaction" has evolved to incorporate digital touch points such as how easily a hospital can be reached online, how transparent it is about its services, and how quickly and empathetically it responds to digital inquiries (Moorhead et al., 2013). Yet, many hospitals still approach social media as a one-way promotional tool rather than a two-way communication platform that can enhance patient experience and loyalty.

Critically, while social media has redefined marketing across various sectors, its impact within hospital settings remains ambiguous. Hospitals often adopt social media strategies to improve visibility and brand positioning, but many fall short in generating measurable insights into whether these digital engagements translate into tangible outcomes such as improved patient satisfaction, increased trust, or greater service uptake (Thackeray et al., 2012). The gap between promotional content and patient-centric communication suggests a misalignment between institutional marketing goals and patient expectations. In a competitive healthcare landscape, where satisfaction scores influence both public reputation and funding in some models, failing to align digital strategies with patient needs can result in missed opportunities for engagement and improvement.

Furthermore, this misalignment is exacerbated by a lack of customization in content delivery. Social media content pushed by hospitals often lacks personalization, relevance, or clarity, leaving patients disengaged or overwhelmed. This disconnect can undermine trust, especially when healthcare institutions appear more focused on self-promotion than on addressing patient concerns or providing valuable, accessible information. Without clear metrics and feedback loops to assess how patients perceive and respond to hospital social media initiatives, institutions may struggle to refine their strategies or measure their return on investment. Therefore, a comprehensive and critical

assessment of the relationship between SMM and patient satisfaction is not only timely but necessary for evidence-based digital healthcare management.

Existing literature provides foundational insights into how social media can be leveraged for general health education and community outreach (Moorhead et al., 2013), but it often stops short of establishing direct causal links between social media engagement and patient satisfaction outcomes within hospital environments. The majority of these studies are rooted in Western contexts, where digital infrastructure and healthcare digitization are more mature. In contrast, research from developing countries, where digital literacy, access, and user behavior differ significantly, is both limited and fragmented (George et al., 2013). This geographical and contextual research gap presents a significant opportunity for localized, empirical inquiry.

Additionally, current studies rarely dissect the multidimensional nature of patient satisfaction in the context of digital engagement. Satisfaction is not a monolithic concept; it includes access to timely and accurate information, perceived credibility of communication, responsiveness of service providers, and the overall emotional experience of interacting with a hospital brand online. These facets are seldom analyzed in depth or connected systematically to SMM strategies. The lack of robust analytical frameworks to interpret how specific components of SMMsuch as frequency of posts, type of content, response rate, and platform choiceimpact these dimensions of patient satisfaction further highlights the need for focused, data-driven research in this area.

In conclusion, while the integration of social media in healthcare communication is an irreversible trend, its full potential in shaping patient satisfaction remains underleveraged and under-researched. Critical, contextualized analysis and empirical exploration are essential to develop actionable insights that can guide hospitals in designing more responsive, patient-centric digital strategies. This study, therefore, aims to bridge that gap by systematically assessing the impact of social media marketing on patient satisfaction in hospital services, with particular attention to the nuances of engagement in developing country contexts.

2.   Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to assess the impact of social media marketing on patient satisfaction in hospital services. The specific objectives are:

- To identify the key components of social media marketing used by hospitals.

- To examine the relationship between hospital social media engagement and patient satisfaction.

- To evaluate the influence of different social media platforms on patients' perceptions of hospital services.

- To provide strategic recommendations for enhancing patient satisfaction through effective social media marketing.

3.   Literature Review

3.1. Content Quality and Relevance

The quality and relevance of content disseminated via social media platforms have become critical determinants of user engagement and satisfaction, particularly in healthcare. High-quality content that is accurate, timely, and tailored to patient needs enhances trust and encourages repeated interactions (Moorhead et al., 2013). In healthcare settings, content must also balance educational and promotional goals to be effective. Ventola (2014) emphasized that social media can be a powerful tool when used to provide health education, updates, and public awareness, provided the content is trustworthy and professionally curated. Content relevancy ensures that users perceive the information as personally valuable, which directly influences their satisfaction and perception of the hospital's competence (Kordzadeh& Young, 2018). Furthermore, the use of multimedia content such as videos, infographics, and animations has been shown to improve comprehension and retention of health information (KamelBoulos et al., 2016).

3.2. Engagement and Responsiveness

Engagement through social media refers to the bidirectional communication between healthcare providers and patients. The responsiveness of hospitals to patient inquiries and comments is a major component of digital interaction and serves as an indicator of service commitment and attentiveness. According to Thackeray et al. (2012), hospitals that actively engage with users through comments, replies, and live events create a virtual space of trust and empowerment. Interactivity not only facilitates better understanding of healthcare services but also makes patients feel valued and connected (Kordzadeh& Young, 2018). When patients perceive healthcare institutions as responsive and communicative online, it improves their psychological comfort and satisfaction (Jha et al., 2016). Moreover, responsiveness acts as a proxy for overall service quality, especially in digital-first or digitally-augmented care environments.

3.3. Trust and Credibility

Trust is central to the effectiveness of healthcare communication, and social media can both build and erode this trust depending on how it is managed. Patients often rely on hospitals' digital presence to evaluate their professionalism and credibility. Hawn (2009) argued that trust is influenced not just by the presence of information, but also by its consistency, accuracy, and the perceived authority behind it. Verified accounts, transparency in communication, and visibility of healthcare professionals contribute to the perceived credibility of hospitals on social media (George et al., 2013). Furthermore, the integration of patient testimonials and online reviews reinforces credibility and influences prospective patients' decisions (Lagu et al., 2010). A well-maintained digital reputation has been found to correlate strongly with offline service choices and patient retention (Griffis et al., 2014).

3.4. Accessibility and Ease of Use

Ease of access to hospital social media pages and the user-friendliness of content layout significantly impact digital health engagement. According to Househ (2013), the effectiveness of social media in healthcare is partly contingent upon how accessible and navigable the platforms are, particularly for older or less tech-savvy populations. The interface design, language clarity, and availability of mobile optimization are critical for ensuring that users can benefit from digital health information without frustration (Moorhead et al., 2013). When patients can easily locate service details, book appointments, or clarify doubts through simple navigation, it reduces their cognitive load and improves satisfaction (Alalwan, 2018).

Additionally, accessibility includes inclusive practices such as multilingual support and visually inclusive designs to cater to diverse patient populations.

3.5. Emotional Appeal

Emotional appeal in social media marketing, particularly within healthcare, plays a pivotal role in influencing patient behavior, trust, and eventual satisfaction. Emotional content humanizes the healthcare experience, allowing patients to connect with services on a more personal level. According to Lee and Hong (2016), emotional cues embedded in social media posts can significantly impact how patients perceive the empathy and compassion of a healthcare institution. Messages that evoke positive emotionssuch as hope, relief, or gratitudeare more likely to be shared and remembered, enhancing brand recall and trustworthiness.

Healthcare providers use storytelling, patient success narratives, and empathetic language to create a psychological connection that boosts patient engagement and loyalty (Paek et al., 2016). In particular, emotionally driven campaigns have been shown to reduce perceived barriers to care and promote a sense of security among vulnerable populations (Men et al., 2020). However, a critical issue lies in striking the right balanceoverly emotional content may sometimes be viewed as manipulative or unprofessional in medical contexts. Therefore, the credibility of emotional messaging must be substantiated with factual clarity and consistency.

3.6. Visual Branding

Visual branding is a core aspect of digital healthcare marketing that includes logos, color schemes, imagery, and aesthetic consistency across platforms. In social media, strong visual identity helps hospitals differentiate themselves in a competitive market, reinforcing trust and recognition. According to Chang (2014), cohesive visual elements are instrumental in conveying professionalism, credibility, and organizational culture to prospective patients. Visual branding is particularly important in healthcare, where visual cues often act as immediate indicators of safety, cleanliness, and competence.

Research by Hsu and Lawrence (2016) found that hospitals that maintain visually appealing and consistent social media accounts are perceived as more organized, reliable, and modern. This, in turn, increases the likelihood of patient trust and engagement. Furthermore, visually rich platforms like Instagram and YouTube enable healthcare marketers to create narratives using colors, symbols, and imagery that appeal emotionally and intellectually to diverse audiences (Lipschultz, 2020). However, poor visual coherence or amateur graphic design can dilute messaging and reduce the effectiveness of promotional efforts. The power of visual branding thus lies in its strategic integration with overall content and brand values.

3.7. Patient Reviews and Testimonials

Patient-generated content, particularly in the form of reviews and testimonials, has emerged as a key driver of digital trust and satisfaction in healthcare. Online testimonials serve as digital word-of-mouth endorsements that significantly shape prospective patients' perceptions of hospital service quality. According to Emmert et al. (2013), patients increasingly rely on reviews posted on hospital websites, social media platforms, and third-party aggregators to assess care experiences before choosing a healthcare provider.

Positive testimonials validate the credibility and effectiveness of hospital services, while negative reviews provide actionable insights into service gaps and patient grievances (Lagu et al., 2010). Additionally, the authenticity and detail of testimonials contribute to their persuasive power, especially when they align with visual branding and institutional messaging (Greaves et al., 2013). However, there is also a risk of misinformation or unverified claims in user-generated content, which can potentially harm the hospital's digital reputation if not managed effectively. Active moderation, transparency in response, and the showcasing of authentic success stories can significantly enhance the trustworthiness and impact of patient testimonials in shaping satisfaction.

3.8. Patient Satisfaction

Patient satisfaction is a multidimensional construct encompassing both clinical and non-clinical experiences, including digital interactions. With the rise of digital healthcare ecosystems, social media is now a touchpoint that influences how patients perceive the overall quality of care. According to Anderson et al. (2011), positive digital engagement

improves patient satisfaction by increasing transparency and perceived responsiveness. Satisfaction is also closely tied to how well hospitals manage expectations through social media and whether their online representations align with offline service realities (Anhang Price et al., 2014). Social media marketing can therefore act as a strategic extension of patient-centered care when appropriately aligned with communication, engagement, and service delivery models (Liu et al., 2022). Empirical evidence has shown that patients are more likely to choose, recommend, and revisit hospitals that maintain an active and informative social media presence (Hawn, 2009; Griffis et al., 2014).

3.9. Other studies

Venugopal and Das (2022) examined how rural consumers' social media habits significantly influenced their online consumption behavior. Their study revealed that digital engagement through platforms like Facebook and YouTube not only shaped purchase intentions but also altered consumer trust and brand loyalty. This aligns closely with the current study's focus on patient satisfaction, as healthcare consumersespecially in semi-urban and rural settings—are increasingly making decisions based on online marketing content shared by hospitals. The authors emphasize that effective content must be relatable, accessible, and educational to build trust, which supports the notion that hospital social media strategies must be tailored to patient demographics for greater satisfaction outcomes.

In a pandemic-focused study, Venugopal et al. (2020) explored how both beneficial and harmful aspects of social media influenced public behavior in Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh. They found that while social media served as a vital tool for spreading health awareness during COVID-19, misinformation and lack of institutional engagement weakened public trust. This duality underlines the critical need for credible, consistent, and responsive social media content from hospitals. These findings validate the importance of responsiveness and trust-building in healthcare social media marketing, both of which are key determinants of patient satisfaction addressed in the present study.

Further emphasizing regional consumer behavior, Venugopal, Vakamullu, and Mishra (2022)

analyzed the role of social media in rural online shopping behavior. They found that emotional resonance, brand familiarity, and local cultural alignment significantly influenced user trust and engagement. These factors are mirrored in healthcare marketing as wellpatients, particularly from rural areas, respond more positively to emotionally appealing and culturally contextual content. This supports the inclusion of variables such as emotional appeal and visual branding in evaluating patient satisfaction with hospital social media strategies.

Venugopal and Kappagantula (2024), while exploring digital engagement in religious tourism, introduced predictive models to classify behavioral responses to online content. Though the context differs, the methodological insights are transferable. Their use of predictive and classification models demonstrates the power of audience segmentation based on engagement patternsa useful approach in healthcare marketing for tailoring content to diverse patient groups. Additionally, the study showed that trust in digital platforms is often shaped by content relevance and response quality, reinforcing the present study's emphasis on hospital responsiveness and content quality.

Exploring technology acceptance among younger generations, Venugopal (2024) assessed Gen Z's perspectives toward ChatGPT in academic contexts. Findings revealed that Gen Z values immediate feedback, digital accessibility, and interactivitytraits they expect in all service domains, including healthcare. These expectations overlap with patient satisfaction dimensions such as responsiveness and engagement on social media platforms. The generational preferences highlighted in this study underscore the need for hospital social media teams to adopt agile and interactive communication strategies to meet evolving patient demands.

Venugopal, Das, and Badawy (2023) investigated ecological consciousness among Gen Z, finding that digital narratives with a sustainability focus positively influenced attitudes. Although this study dealt with environmental topics, the takeaway for healthcare is the importance of message framing and ethical communication in influencing perceptions. Hospitals promoting their services through responsible and transparent digital

campaigns are more likely to gain patient trust and satisfaction, a trend this research seeks to evaluate.

Lastly, Venugopal, Das, and Vakamullu (2023) identified critical drivers of online shopping growth from a rural perspective, such as digital trust, timely responses, and perceived service value. These dimensions are not limited to retail but are highly relevant to healthcare consumers who often equate digital interactions with service quality. Their insights lend support to the current study's conceptual framework, reinforcing the importance of responsiveness, emotional connection, and clear branding in fostering patient satisfaction via social media marketing.

4. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore how social media marketing influences patient satisfaction with hospital services. The research was rooted in an interpretivist paradigm, aiming to understand patients' subjective experiences and perceptions. A focus group discussion (FGD) method was used to gather in-depth insights, as it facilitates interactive dialogue and reveals shared and contrasting opinions. Twelve participants who had interacted with hospital social media platforms in the past six months were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring a mix of age groups, genders, and healthcare service experiences.

A semi-structured discussion guide was developed based on five key thematic areas identified from literature: content quality, engagement, responsiveness, emotional appeal, and visual branding. The FGD, lasting approximately 90 minutes, was audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase process. Both inductive and deductive coding approaches were employed to extract patterns and themes from the data, ensuring a rich and nuanced interpretation of participant responses.

Ethical considerations were strictly followed, with informed consent obtained from all participants and confidentiality maintained throughout. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to uncover the depth of patient sentiments and digital expectations, which are often overlooked in quantitative surveys. The findings are intended to help hospital marketers align their social media strategies with what patients truly value, ultimately improving satisfaction and service engagement in an increasingly digital healthcare environment.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Qualitative Analysis of the Literature Review

5.1.1. Content Quality

The literature consistently emphasizes the central role of content quality in influencing patient trust, awareness, and satisfaction. High-quality, informative, and health-literate content builds the credibility of healthcare providers (Ventola, 2014). The narratives, educational materials, and clarity in messaging are linked to improved health literacy and service uptake. A common qualitative insight is that authenticity and empathy embedded in content enhance psychological assurance and user confidence, particularly in critical care segments (Grajales et al., 2014).

Emerging Insight: Patients perceive hospitals that share consistent, relevant content as more transparent and trustworthy, promoting a sense of partnership in healthcare decisions.

5.1.2. Engagement

Engagement, in a qualitative sense, is more than likes or sharesit signifies two-way interaction that fosters relationship-building. Studies highlight that when hospitals respond to queries, conduct polls, and share interactive content, it enhances the perceived accessibility and responsiveness of the institution (Neiger et al., 2013). Engagement is also shown to amplify social support, especially when health campaigns encourage participation and sharing of personal stories.

Emerging Insight: Engagement drives an emotional connection, making patients feel heard and valued, which is fundamental for satisfaction and loyalty.

5.1.3. Responsiveness

Responsiveness is portrayed as a critical aspect of digital professionalism. Timely, respectful, and helpful replies to online inquiries reflect positively on the hospital's service orientation (Park et al., 2016). The literature qualitatively notes that delayed or robotic responses can lead to frustration, distrust, or even reputational damage.

Emerging Insight: Responsiveness is not just operationalit acts as a proxy for service quality, signalling attentiveness and patient-centric culture.

5.1.4. Emotional Appeal

Emotional appeal plays a transformative role in patient perception. Emotional storytelling and empathetic communication, when used appropriately, evoke feelings of hope, trust, and empathy (Men et al., 2020). However, qualitative concerns are raised about potential emotional manipulation, especially if emotions are exaggerated without authentic backing.

Emerging Insight: When grounded in real patient experiences or caregiving contexts, emotional appeal becomes a powerful catalyst for trust and reassurance.

5.1.5. Visual Branding

Visual branding provides the first impression and strongly influences digital identity. Hospitals with consistent visual themes and professional aesthetics are seen as more organized, modern, and credible (Chang, 2014). The literature notes that poor design, cluttered posts, or inconsistent visuals create cognitive dissonance, reducing user trust.

Emerging Insight: Visual branding acts as a visual handshakeit reassures users before they engage with content or services, particularly in highly competitive or sensitive service areas.

5.1.6. Patient Reviews and Testimonials

Testimonials serve as digital word-of-mouth, offering authentic, peer-driven insights into hospital services (Emmert et al., 2013). Positive reviews amplify reputation and foster social proof, while negative reviews expose systemic issues. Qualitative findings show that response to reviews (especially negative ones) matters as much as the reviews themselves.

Emerging Insight: Testimonials function as experience mirrorsthey help new patients relate, empathize, and decide, while also giving institutions a pulse on public sentiment.

5.1.2. Cross-Variable Themes and Synthesized Insights

1. *Humanization of Healthcare:* All variablesespecially emotional appeal, engagement, and testimonialscontribute to humanizing the digital presence of hospitals, which fosters empathy, reliability, and trust.

2. *Perceived Professionalism:* Responsiveness, content quality, and visual branding collectively enhance perceived organizational competence, influencing satisfaction and decision-making.

3. *Digital Reputation Management:* Patient reviews, responsiveness, and visual cues shape brand perception, which can either reinforce or damage patient trust in the long term.

4. *Integrated Strategy Matters:* These variables are interdependent. For example, a well-designed post (visual branding) must also carry meaningful content and evoke emotion while encouraging engagement and follow-up responsiveness.

Conclusion of the Qualitative Analysis

The collective literature underscores that social media marketing in healthcare is no longer optionalit is a strategic necessity. These variables, when aligned properly, create a digitally empathetic ecosystem that boosts patient satisfaction by meeting both emotional and informational needs. However, authenticity, strategic coherence, and ethical communication remain the cornerstones for sustained impact.

5.2. Qualitative Analysis on Focus Group Discussion

5.2.1. Content Quality

- *"I follow my hospital's page just to get updates about new facilities. They sometimes post good health tips too."*

- *"Sometimes the posts are too technical. I wish they used simpler language to explain health issues."*

- *"I like when they share awareness campaigns about diseases – it helps me stay informed."*

- *"Most of the content is repetitive. They should post about new treatments or doctor availability."*

5.2.2. Engagement

- *"I once commented on a health post and surprisingly, the hospital replied within a day – that was impressive."*

- *"They ask questions on social media, but never respond when we answer or ask something."*

- *"Their Instagram page is more engaging than their Facebook – they use polls and short reels."*

- *"They should do live Q&A sessions with doctors. It would be more interactive."*

5.2.3. Responsiveness

- *"I messaged them to book an appointment, but no one replied for two days."*

- *"The chatbot on their website was useful, but I prefer human replies."*

- *"Quick replies from hospitals on social media make me feel like they care."*

- *"Some private hospitals reply instantly on WhatsApp or Instagram, while government hospitals are silent online."*

5.2.4. Emotional Appeal

- *"When they shared recovery stories of other patients, it gave me hope during my illness."*

- *"Sometimes the emotional posts feel a bit dramatic, like they're trying too hard to gain sympathy."*

- *"Seeing real patients talking about their journey made me feel more confident about choosing that hospital."*

- *"I cried when I saw a video of a cancer survivor thanking the doctors – it was very touching."*

5.2.5. Visual Branding

- *"Their page looks very clean and professional. It matches their actual hospital image."*

- *"Bad graphics and too many colors make it look cheap. It affects my trust in the hospital."*

- *"The logo and branding are consistent. It gives a feeling of organization and professionalism."*

- *"Their social media feels outdated – it looks like no one's handling the page properly."*

5.2.6. Patient Reviews and Testimonials

- *"Before I booked my surgery, I read all the reviews on Google and their Facebook page."*

- *"Some testimonials sound fake. They're too perfect to be real."*

- *"Negative reviews actually helped me set realistic expectations."*

- *"I trust video testimonials more than written ones. Seeing someone speak feels more genuine."*

5.2.7. Trust and Credibility

- *"If a hospital is active on social media, I feel like they are modern and transparent."*

- *"Social media presence doesn't matter to me. I care about the doctor's reputation more."*

- *"I trust hospitals that post medical achievements and real-time updates."*

5.2.8. Improvement Measures

- *"They should post more in regional languages to connect with rural people."*

- *"Information about free camps and checkups should be posted more clearly."*

- *"It would be great if appointment booking was integrated directly through their social pages."*

- *"They should stop posting just advertisements and focus on patient education."*

Summary of Themes Identified

Theme	Tone	Nature of Comments
Content Quality	Mixed	Informative but needs clarity & diversity
Engagement	Mixed	Desire for interactivity & acknowledgment
Responsiveness	Mixed	Variable by hospital type/platform
Emotional Appeal	Mostly Positive	Inspiring, but must stay authentic
Visual Branding	Mixed	Professionalism influences perception
Reviews/Testimonials	Mixed	Valued for trust but credibility matters
Trust & Credibility	Mixed	Social media presence linked to trust
Suggestions for Improvement	Constructive	More local language, direct utility

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the patient comments reveals a complex yet insightful understanding of how social media marketing influences patient satisfaction in hospital services. One of the dominant themes emerging from the discussion is the importance of content quality. Patients expressed appreciation for informative, educational content such as health tips and awareness posts, indicating that such content enhances their trust and engagement with the hospital. However, some participants criticized the overly technical language or the repetitive nature of posts, which suggests a disconnect between healthcare communicators and their target audiences. This highlights the need for clear, accessible, and relevant communication tailored to the diverse health literacy levels of the audience.

Engagement emerged as another significant theme, with participants responding positively to interactive content such as polls, comments, and reels. Some noted that hospitals that actively engage with user responses are perceived as more caring and responsive. However, others pointed out the one-sided nature of communication, where hospitals initiate interaction but fail to follow through. This suggests that tokenistic engagement efforts, which are not backed by meaningful interaction, may actually harm the hospital's credibility. The lack of sustained two-way engagement reflects a missed opportunity for relationship-building and patient involvement in the healthcare journey.

The analysis also reveals a high value placed on responsiveness. Timely replies to queries, appointment requests, or comments were linked to feelings of respect, attentiveness, and care. Participants viewed responsiveness not only as a digital service metric but as an indicator of organizational discipline and patient-centric culture. Delays or absence of responses, particularly in public or rural hospitals, were associated with neglect and inefficiency. This emphasizes the role of digital responsiveness in shaping patient expectations and service satisfaction, especially in a competitive healthcare environment.

Emotional appeal in hospital posts was another theme that elicited a variety of responses. Positive narratives, such as recovery stories and expressions of gratitude from survivors, had a strong emotional impact on patients. These posts helped humanize the hospital, creating empathy and emotional reassurance, especially for individuals dealing with fear or uncertainty about medical procedures. However, participants also voiced concerns about emotional manipulation when content appeared too dramatic or insincere. This reveals the fine line between authentic storytelling and emotional exploitation, suggesting that hospitals must be careful in curating emotionally resonant content.

Visual branding was recognized as a powerful but often underestimated aspect of social media marketing. Patients connected professional visual elementsconsistent logos, clear graphics, and organized layouts with trustworthiness and competence. Conversely, poor aesthetics or outdated visuals were interpreted as signs of mismanagement or lack of innovation. This reinforces the idea that visual coherence and digital professionalism directly influence patient perceptions, particularly among digital-native users.

Patient reviews and testimonials were found to be a crucial source of trust and validation. Participants widely admitted to relying on reviews before deciding on hospitals or doctors. While video testimonials were considered more trustworthy than written ones, the authenticity of reviews was often questioned, especially when overly positive or generic. Interestingly, negative reviews were not always seen as deterrents; instead, they provided transparency and helped manage expectations. This highlights the importance of balanced reputation management responding to negative feedback professionally may enhance trust more than curating only positive feedback.

Finally, participants made several constructive suggestions, indicating their desire for improved relevance and inclusivity. Calls for regional language content, appointment booking integration, and clearer promotion of free camps suggest that patients are looking for functional utility and accessibility rather than just promotional messages. This reinforces the idea that social media marketing in healthcare should move from being ad-centric to service-oriented, aligning digital communication with real patient needs.

In conclusion, the qualitative analysis of the FGD comments underscores the multidimensional nature of patient satisfaction in the digital healthcare landscape. Social media marketing strategies must be holistic, combining high-quality content, meaningful engagement, timely responsiveness, emotional authenticity, visual professionalism, and trustworthy reviews to truly enhance patient satisfaction. Hospitals that understand and operationalize these insights will likely see improved digital reputation, patient loyalty, and service utilization.

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