



# Impact and Challenges of Digital Marketing in Health Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Tufael<sup>1\*</sup>, Md Sohel Rana<sup>2</sup>, Shib Shankar Das<sup>3</sup>, Moazzam Hossian<sup>4</sup>, Md Samiul Bashir<sup>5</sup>

## Abstract

**Objective:** This study aims to explore the impact and challenges of digital marketing in the healthcare industry, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has accelerated the adoption of digital marketing strategies due to the decline of traditional methods. **Methods:** A comprehensive literature review was conducted, systematically gathering and analyzing recent publications from primary databases, including Google Scholar, Biomed Central, NCBI, ProQuest, BASE, Science Direct, and Neliti. The inclusion criteria focused on recent studies within the last five years, incorporating older studies for foundational knowledge. Articles were categorized based on thematic relevance, such as digital marketing strategies, patient engagement, regulatory issues, and technological advancements, followed by a critical appraisal of methodological rigor and relevance. **Results:** The findings highlight the transformative potential of digital marketing in the healthcare sector, offering significant benefits such as enhanced patient engagement, satisfaction, and business growth. However, challenges such as regulatory compliance, security concerns, disparities in digital literacy, and resource allocation were identified. These challenges necessitate

strategic planning, investment in resources, and continuous education to optimize digital marketing initiatives. **Conclusion:** Digital marketing has become indispensable for healthcare providers in the digital era. By effectively addressing the identified challenges, healthcare organizations can improve operational efficiency, expand their market reach, and enhance patient care experiences, thereby achieving sustainable growth and improved patient outcomes.

**Keywords:** Digital Marketing, Health Care Industries, COVID-19 Pandemic, Digital Era, Hospitals.

## Introduction

The healthcare industry is currently experiencing significant pressure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as noted by Arni and Laddha (Arni et al., 2017). The pandemic has caused widespread disruptions, affecting the global economy, various industries, and organizational strategies, particularly in marketing and spending. Due to lockdowns and social distancing measures, traditional marketing methods have become less effective, making digital marketing crucial for reaching consumers (Al-Weshah et al., 2021). With many patients in quarantine and fears of contracting COVID-19 discouraging visits to healthcare facilities, the volume and revenue from prescribing drugs significantly decreased in 2020 (Bala et al., 2018). Khan and Nawaz observed that digital marketing strategies have increased for several years, with increasing

**Significance** | Analysing the transformative role of digital marketing in healthcare during COVID-19 reveals its effectiveness in enhancing patient engagement, expanding business, and increasing trust and loyalty.

\*Correspondence. Tufael, Department of Biochemistry, Ibn Sina Diagnostic and Imaging Centre, Dhaka, Bangladesh.  
E-mail: tofayelahmed083@gmail.com

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## Author Affiliation.

<sup>1</sup> Department of Biochemistry, Ibn Sina Diagnostic and Imaging Center, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Laboratory Medicine, National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Laboratory Medicine, Upazila Health Complex, Serajdikhan, Munshigonj, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Laboratory Medicine, Upazila Health Complex, Dagonbuiyan, Feni, Bangladesh

<sup>5</sup> Department of Laboratory Medicine, Upazila health complex, kurigram sadar, kurigram, Bangladesh.

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investments in these approaches. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital marketing in the healthcare industry, which is expected to boost both direct visits and telemedicine consultations, ultimately enhancing hospital revenues (Bizhanova et al., 2019). The advent of the Internet, the World Wide Web, and various digital technologies ranging from desktops and laptops to smartphones and tablets has transformed marketing practices (Dastane., 2020). Patients, now more than ever, utilize digital platforms to seek information about health services and products, favouring convenience in selecting and purchasing these goods or services. For healthcare organizations, particularly during the pandemic, digital media and new technology platforms offer opportunities to enter new markets, provide innovative services, and compete effectively with larger enterprises. (de Ruyter et al., 2021) found that most consumers search online for information about treatment options or to learn about healthcare issues and providers.

Digital marketing, defined as achieving marketing goals through the application of technology and digital media, has seen significant adoption in the healthcare sector. Hospitals, for instance, have increased their use of digital technology by 50% to engage with healthcare consumers. According to Ruyter and Khan (Goestjahjani et al., 2022), 48% of healthcare executives recognize revenue growth as a key benefit of digital investments. Modern consumers demand a seamless and trustworthy user experience, and with technological advancements, there is a growing need for innovative healthcare applications. Consequently, implementing health marketing strategies on digital platforms is essential for the continued growth and success of the healthcare sector.

### Methodology

The research conducted employs a comprehensive literature review methodology to explore the Impact and Challenges of Digital Marketing in Healthcare Industries during the Digital Era and the COVID-19 Pandemic ( Haudi et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2021). This approach was chosen due to the constraints imposed by the pandemic, which limited direct data collection efforts (Magano et al., 2020). A literature review involves systematically gathering and analyzing existing research materials such as books, academic journals, and other relevant publications to gain insights into a specific research problem or objective (Melovic et al., 2020).

Conducting this literature review encompassed several key steps aimed at ensuring a thorough and balanced examination of the topic (Nunan et al., 2019). Initially, sources were carefully selected to encompass a wide range of perspectives. Primary databases such as Google Scholar, Biomed Central, NCBI, ProQuest, BASE, Science Direct, and Neliti were utilized to gather pertinent articles related to digital marketing in healthcare, ensuring a broad coverage of the subject matter (Purcare., 2019).

### Methods

The inclusion criteria focused on recent publications within the last five years to ensure the relevance and currency of the information (Purwanti., 2022; Setiawati et al., 2021). However, older studies were also incorporated if they provided foundational knowledge or were still pertinent to understanding the evolution and challenges of digital marketing in healthcare (Purwanti., 2021).

Once the articles were collected, they were grouped based on thematic relevance, such as digital marketing strategies, patient engagement, regulatory issues, and technological advancements (Tancharoenwong., 2018). This categorization facilitated a structured approach to reviewing and synthesizing the findings, identifying key themes, trends, and gaps in the literature (Pourkarim et al., 2022).

Each selected article underwent a critical appraisal process to evaluate its methodological rigor, relevance to the research questions, and contributions to the field (Savitri et al., 2022; Qian et al., 2018). This critical assessment helped identify each study's strengths and weaknesses, as well as similarities and differences between various research findings. It also highlighted areas where further research is needed to address existing gaps and expand knowledge in the field of digital marketing within healthcare (Wijaya et al., 2021).

The literature review's findings underscored the transformative impact of digital marketing in healthcare. Several significant benefits were identified, including enhanced patient engagement, satisfaction, and business expansion opportunities (Wisetsri et al., 2021). Digital marketing enables healthcare providers to reach a global audience, personalize marketing efforts based on demographic and behavioral data, and foster direct communication with patients through platforms like social media (Rahadjeng et al., 2022).

### Digital Marketing

Digital marketing strategies were found to be cost-effective compared to traditional marketing methods, allowing healthcare organizations to optimize resource allocation and improve operational efficiency (Yamin., 2017). The continuous availability and accessibility of digital platforms further contribute to increased sales and profitability, particularly through e-commerce models that minimize overhead costs.

However, alongside these benefits, the literature also highlighted several challenges inherent in digital marketing within the healthcare sector. Security and privacy concerns associated with handling sensitive patient information online remain paramount, necessitating strict compliance with regulations such as HIPAA in the United States (Anderson et al., 2019). Healthcare providers must navigate complex regulatory landscapes to protect patient data while leveraging digital marketing strategies effectively.

### Healthcare Organizations

Regulatory compliance emerged as another significant challenge, given the stringent legal and ethical standards that govern healthcare marketing practices. Integrating digital marketing initiatives with traditional offline strategies posed additional complexities, requiring a cohesive approach to ensure consistency and effectiveness across all channels (Arnold et al., 2018).

Disparities in digital literacy among both healthcare providers and patients were identified as potential barriers to adopting and utilizing digital marketing tools effectively (Brantnell., 2019). Addressing these gaps through training and education initiatives is crucial to maximizing the benefits of digital marketing and ensuring equitable access to healthcare information and services.

Resource allocation was also cited as a challenge, particularly for smaller healthcare organizations with limited budgets and infrastructure (Hardwick., 2020). Investing in digital marketing capabilities requires significant financial resources and skilled personnel, which may pose barriers to entry for some providers.

Despite these challenges, the literature review emphasized the strategic importance of digital marketing in enhancing patient satisfaction, loyalty, and overall healthcare outcomes. By embracing digital strategies and overcoming these challenges, healthcare providers can improve operational efficiency, expand their market reach, and ultimately deliver better patient care experiences (Kuser., 2018).

This research employed a literature review methodology to comprehensively examine the impact and challenges of digital marketing in healthcare during the digital era and the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings underscored the transformative potential of digital marketing in improving patient engagement, operational efficiency, and business growth (Langan et al., 2019). However, effective implementation requires navigating significant challenges such as regulatory compliance, security concerns, digital literacy gaps, resource constraints, and integration issues. Addressing these challenges through strategic planning, investment in resources, and ongoing education is essential for healthcare providers seeking to harness the full potential of digital marketing to achieve sustainable growth and improved patient outcomes.

### Conclusion

Digital technology marketing has significantly transformed engagement on social media and marketing platforms, enhanced the analysis of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and driven a growing demand for digital content and product searches. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this growth, highlighting the pivotal role of digital marketing in various sectors, including healthcare. Hospitals, in particular, have leveraged digital marketing to attract new patients, expand their reach, build trust and loyalty, increase brand awareness, and promote their services. Successful digital marketing strategies require hospitals to select methods and channels aligned with their specific goals carefully.

This involves setting clear objectives, analyzing the target audience, and determining an appropriate budget and marketing frequency. Effective implementation necessitates assigning responsibility for the strategy and continuously monitoring and evaluating its performance. By doing so, hospitals can achieve their marketing objectives efficiently, ultimately enhancing patient engagement and satisfaction.

### Author contributions

T., Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft Preparation, M.S.R, Literature Review, Data Collection, Writing - Review and Editing, Data Analysis, S.S.D, Writing - Review and Editing, M.S.B, Conceptualization, Writing - Review and Editing. All authors read and approved the paper for publication.

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### Competing financial interests

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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