

Analytics of Trust Signals in Hospital Marketing

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Abstract:

Trust has emerged as one of the most critical determinants of patient choice and hospital reputation in an increasingly competitive healthcare environment. While hospitals invest substantially in branding and promotional strategies, patient trust is often shaped more strongly by operational performance and peer-generated electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) than by traditional marketing communication. This study examined how internal hospital performance indicators function as trust signals and how these signals are reflected in online patient reviews, ultimately influencing hospital marketing effectiveness and brand trust.

The study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design using secondary data from a tertiary care hospital over a two-year period. Quantitative analysis utilizes hospital admission and discharge records, including variables such as length of stay, discharge outcomes, gender, age and patient flow trends. These operational indicators are treated as indirect trust proxies representing efficiency, safety, quality, and reliability. Statistical techniques including regression and time-series analysis were carried out to identify relationships between operational performance and patient trust indicators.

The qualitative phase involved analysis of online patient reviews collected from digital platforms such as Google Reviews and hospital feedback portals. Nvivo software was used for sentiment analysis, thematic analysis to identify key trust dimensions such as doctor competence, staff empathy, billing transparency, waiting time, hygiene, and communication quality. The findings from both phases are integrated using joint display analysis to establish the relationship between operational outcomes and external reputation.

The study findings propose the development of a Trust Signal Framework for Hospital Marketing, demonstrating how clinical performance translates into patient experience, online reputation, and brand trust. The analysis revealed that operational indicators such as shorter length of stay (LOS), faster discharge processing, and lower readmission rates were significantly associated with higher patient trust perception. Patients discharged within the expected clinical timeline were more likely to leave positive reviews related to service quality and hospital reliability. Interestingly, patients discussed doctor communication, empathy, and nursing behavior more frequently than clinical outcomes. This indicates that emotional trust may influence online reputation more strongly than technical trust. Regression analysis suggested that good operational performance alone was not sufficient; positive patient-generated reviews significantly strengthened the impact of clinical quality on hospital trust. The research contributes to healthcare marketing literature by bridging hospital operations with trust formation theory and signaling theory, offering practical implications for hospital administrators seeking sustainable competitive advantage through trust-centered marketing strategies.