

Application of Social Media Marketing on Medical Tourism in India with Reference to Pune City

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ABSTRACT

India has been witnessing continuous growth in medical tourism owing to increasing global healthcare expenses, enhanced medical facilities, and growing digital interconnectivity, and Pune is also a leading competitor in terms of providing specialized and low-cost medical services. It is against this background that the study seeks to explore the effects of social media marketing when it comes to creating awareness, trust and destination choice among medical tourists who are looking at Pune. Directed by goals aimed at comprehending digital communication and evaluating the perceived utility of social media, the study should be designed as qualitative, descriptive, and analytical, all relying on secondary data obtained on the basis of scholarly articles, industry reports, websites of hospitals, and social sites. The study of the available literature and documented digital practices demonstrates that social media is the key to improving visibility, creating an impression of hospital credibility, and reaching out to the global patients via testimonials, video-related content, and interactive communication. The results suggest that social media helps a great deal in enhancing the Pune brand as a medical tourism destination by mitigating the information asymmetry, making healthcare brands more human, and increasing the international reach; structural elements like clinical quality, accreditation, and international affiliations continue to play a role in final patient choice. The study concludes that social media is a decisive facilitator of online reputation-building, but its power can be the most significant when combined with the sound healthcare standards. Shortcomings are experienced due to the sole use of secondary data, which does not allow one to see real-time patient behaviour. The study can be developed in the future to include primary data, cross-platform analytics, and comparative research with other medical tourism destinations to create more detailed and implementable results...

Keywords: *Social media marketing, Medical tourism, Pune city, Digital communication, Healthcare marketing.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Over the last few decades, there has been a dramatic change in the manner in which the individual takes care of healthcare services across borders due to globalization and developments in communication technology. This has been promoted by the increased cost of medical treatment in the developed countries making patients consider seeking other locations that offer cheaper but quality services. This has led to the spread of medical tourism all over the world with people flocking to the tourism destination country in search of medical, surgical, or wellness related services (Qizi, 2024). The Asian economies, especially India, Thailand and Singapore have emerged as key players in the industry, owing to their effective healthcare systems and affordable cost. India is one of these and has become one of the top destinations with a blend of highly-qualified medical services, globally-approved hospitals, and rich cultural settings. The emerging industry has brought about new economic, global, and healthcare growth prospects (Can, 2021).

The medical tourism industry in India is boosted by a healthy network of super-specialty hospitals, qualified medical workers, and developed treatment centers. The nation provides extensive quantity of services both cardiac surgeries and organ transplants to cosmetic operations and wellness treatments at a fraction of international prices. India has been known to be clinically excellent, with a shorter length of waiting time, and provides a holistic patient care over the years (Reddy, et al., 2022). The presence of English-speaking medical staff, individualized treatment packages also contribute towards its popularity among foreign patients. With the growing competition in healthcare, the Indian cities are also becoming specialized medical centres. This favourable climate has not only made India a destination in treatment but also a very formidable competitor in the global medical tourism scene (Hosen, 2023).

As online connectivity has increased at a very high rate, human beings currently base their choices of medical destinations on the information that is available online. The social media has become a potent arena through which hospitals, physicians and patients discuss their

experiences, treatment outcomes, and medical advice. This digital revolution has changed the nature of medical tourism because now information is more available, transparent, and interactive (Audi, et al., 2022). The patients in foreign countries can conveniently study on treatment, compare hospitals and even communicate with the care providers directly. The connection created between social media and trust, it provides real time advertising, and authentic patient stories have made social media a potent marketing tool. Due to that fact, healthcare organizations invest more and more in social media marketing to enhance their visibility, credibility, and gain international patient inflows (Abbas Khan, et al., 2024).

In India, Pune is slowly emerging as a potential place of medical tourism because of its well-advanced healthcare facilities and the fast-growing medical specialization. This city boasts of a variety of multi-specialty hospitals, research centres and diagnostic facilities that have qualified doctors and up-to-date technologies. On the one hand, the city of Pune is a cheaper and less crowded alternative compared to the large metros, so it is appealing to international patients that want to have both comfort and quality care (Islam, & Bhuiyan, 2022). The presence of orthopaedics, cardiology, fertility treatment, oncology, and cosmetic surgery in the city adds more strength to the reputation. Since Pune is ever growing in its health services, there is need to strategically use digital and social media communication to increase awareness internationally and bring business in the form of foreign patients (Gupta, 2020).

Despite the popularity of social media marketing in healthcare promotion, a specific influence of social media marketing on the medical tourism in such cities as Pune still needs to be investigated systematically. Learning how social media affects the perceptions of the patients, the credibility of the hospital, and the destination choice can assist healthcare providers in creating more efficient digital strategies. There is also the need to determine the most effective platforms and the nature of content that attract international medical travellers. The study seeks to analyze how social media marketing can be applied to enhance the status of Pune in the Indian medical tourism market. The study aims at delivering important information to hospitals, policymakers, and other tourism stakeholders aiming at improving medical tourism in Pune and India in general by examining the existing practices, issues and opportunity of the same.

The study starts with an Introduction that describes the development of medical tourism in India and the increase of the role of social media and then continues with the Literature Review that provides an overview of the information on digital transformation, globalization, ICT and healthcare communication. The Research Gap determines the absence of city-level analysis of Pune. The Methodology describes the qualitative and descriptive secondary-data method. The Objectives help to direct the investigation into the awareness and the usefulness of the social media. Findings are interpreted in Results and Discussion and key insights, limitations, implications, and future recommendations are presented in the Conclusion.

Elfaki, K. E., & Ahmed, E. M. (2024) stated that digital technology adoption has a substantial positive effect on green sustainable economic growth in Asian-Pacific countries, with globalization having an insignificant yet positive effect. Green total factor productivity growth indicates high levels of contributions by digital adoption, innovation and environmental integration. To sum up, digital technology and globalization should be introduced into growth models because both contribute to innovation, the transfer of knowledge, and international cooperation, which help to achieve Sustainable Development Goals, as well as promote the long-term sustainable development.

Yufriadi, F., et al., (2024) explored the fact that the digital revolution has greatly changed the trade mechanics, bringing a lot of potentials to grow and, at the same time, posing a threat of speedy technological change. It puts into the perspective of the framework provided by Giddens the way in which agents and digital tools redefine contemporary trade relations. Finally, the new age of technology requires a delicate approach towards the integration of technology because it is necessary to balance the challenges involved in adapting to the shifting global environment of trade with the emerging opportunities.

Limna, P. (2023) examined how healthcare is being transformed tremendously by digital by improving patient outcomes, decreasing expenses, and making it more easily accessible as a result of new tools including telemedicine, EHR, wearables, and mobile health applications. Although these are beneficial, issues such as privacy of data, regulatory limits as well as resistance by the providers are obstacles to adoption. To conclude, digital technologies have tremendous potential to transform the healthcare system, and the further work should be aimed at eliminating these obstacles to make sure that global changes can be achieved in the long term.

Reddy, H., et al., (2022) explored how despite technological progress in healthcare and AI in the world, there are significant challenges in its implementation, including affordability, low internet penetration and device availability, and health illiteracy. The digital divide was worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which pointed to the disparity in access to such basic services as telemedicine. To sum up, it is essential to make healthcare technologies accessible, affordable, and universally related in order to strengthen the health systems of the world and secure equal health outcomes.

Audi, M., et al., (2022) studied that ICT development in developing nations is largely boosted due to globalization, economic, social, and political globalization, and physical capital all play a positive role. In the developed nations on the other hand, aggregate, political and social globalization is more likely to bring down the ICT development with economic globalization and the physical capital being the boosters of the same. Mutual relationships are proven by causality results among the majority of the variables. Finally, emerging countries ought to intensify aggregate as well as disaggregate globalization in order to hasten the growth of ICT.

Can, K. (2021) discussed a gradual increase in the utilization of modern-day communication tools,

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

specifically mobile phones and the internet as the use of the old methods such as postal services and fixed-line phones decreased by the use of digital substitutes. This change points out the increasing reliance of society on quicker, more productive technologies. To sum it up, the shift of digital communication can be attributed to changing preferences and the necessity to ensure the instant connectivity focusing on the modernization as the key to further growth and the competitiveness on the global arena.

Gupta, A. (2020) delved into the issue that globalization has both direct and indirect impact on the health of the general population, especially in developing countries. It highlights the importance of having a well-defined conceptual framework in order to see how the forces of global economy, social and institutional forces are affecting the health systems and risk factors. To sum up, the evaluation of these impacts is needed to inform the study and influence the national health policies so that the effects of globalization could be controlled to maximize the benefit in terms of population health.

Despite the evidence of the broader impact of digital adoption on sustainable growth (Elfaki and Ahmed, 2024), the transformation of the trade in the digital age (Yufriadi et al., 2024), the role of digital healthcare in improving care (Limna, 2023), the global digital divide that persists (Reddy et al., 2022), and the varying impacts of globalization on ICT development (Audi et al., 2022), none of the existing studies focuses on how these technological and communication changes affect medical tourism. The necessity to comprehend localised dynamics of digital communication is also supported by studies on the contemporary communication trends (Can, 2021) and the health-related implications of the globalization (Gupta, 2020). Nevertheless, there is no study that directly examines the role of social media marketing in creating medical tourism awareness, trust building, and destination selection in the development of a rising healthcare centre such as Pune. This city-blindness, sectoral inquiry leaves a distinct research gap that needs to be filled through in-depth inquiry.

Research methodology & objectives

The study is qualitative research undertaking to understand how social media marketing can be utilized in marketing medical tourism in the Pune city. The study has the research design that is both descriptive and analytical as it can encompass a deep insight into the current digital marketing practices and the perceived impact on medical tourism. The study is fully based on secondary sources, which are academic journals, government reports, hospital websites, social media, and industry publications. The method allows the researcher to examine the documented trends, analyze the existing information, and discuss the way healthcare institutions in Pune use social media to achieve visibility, engagement, and reach patients. Qualitative aspect of the study enables pattern, and strategy to be fully interpreted without statistical testing, which gives in depth analysis of the role of social media in medical tourism that changes over time.

To understand how social media communication contributes to creating awareness and shaping impressions of Pune as a medical tourism destination.

To describe the perceived role and usefulness of social media marketing in supporting and strengthening medical tourism in Pune.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Obj. 1: To understand how social media communication contributes to creating awareness and shaping impressions of Pune as a medical tourism destination.

The social media communication has proved to be the compelling factor towards developing international awareness of Pune as a viable medical tourism destination. The use of digital communication has become a structured strategy in healthcare institutions that are growing within the city as a way of emphasizing the medical skills, technological advantages and lower costs. Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn provide platforms on which hospitals can provide filtered information that meets the expectations of patients worldwide when it comes to transparency and professional reliability (Lagad, et al., 2025). By means of the high-quality multimedia content, which is explained virtual procedure, tours of the hospital, and a presentation of the doctors, users can have a realistic impression of the healthcare setting before they arrive at the location. These e-story's decrease the psychological distance and overcome uncertainties that were traditionally attributed to cross-border healthcare. In addition, the competitive advantages of Pune are most likely to increase in the presence of social media, in comparison to metropolitan counterparts, indicating the existence of modern infrastructure and patient-centered care. Social media, therefore, becomes an agenizing factor in the formation of the global healthcare identity of Pune (CHERUKURI, 2024).

Another significant feature of the impact of social media is that it is a trust-building tool of international medical travellers assessing Pune. Patient testimonials, results of the procedures, and real time engagement form an ecosystem in which a currency of credibility is represented by authenticity. Those patterns of communication largely influence the first impressions because it is possible that potential patients base on the online reviews and experience-related information more than on conventional marketing channels (Poornima, & Subramanian, 2024, May). By using the WhatsApp Business, Messenger or Instagram Direct, hospitals strategically address the queries, clarify the concerns, and give pre-consultation information and, thus, create a personalized interaction. This responsiveness is part of the perceived safety and professionalism which are crucial determinants in medical tourism choice making. The effectiveness with which global patients are becoming more focused on digital transparency makes it true that the capability of the city to describe its healthcare value using consistent, authentic, and dialogue-based social media communications makes Pune a reliable and attractive choice in terms of medical tourism (Shetty, & Upadhye, 2023).

Social media also creates perceptions of Pune by affecting destination appeal regarding relative digital presence. Likes, shares, engagement rates, and follower growth are the forms of social media analytics that are used by global patients when seeking treatment options, yet they are the indicators of institutional popularity and service quality (indirectly). The healthcare providers of Pune use targeted advertisements, search engine optimization, and multilingual promotion in reaching geographically distributed audiences (Sharda, et al., 2025). These strategies do not only boost visibility but also put medical competencies of Pune into the frames of bigger cultural, touristic, and wellness stories. Combining the healthcare information with the destination qualities like Pune weather, hospitality, and facilitating recovery environment reinforces its demand as an all-inclusive medical tourism ecosystem. With the growing importance of digital interaction as a destination selection factor, the strategic deployment of social media communication can also allow the Pune to establish differentiated and competitive positioning in the global medical tourism arena (Rajput, et al., 2022).

Table 1: Pune Medical Tourism Social Media Index

Factor	Score
Visibility generated through social media posts	8.5
Impact of patient testimonials on trust	9.2
Engagement responsiveness (queries, chats)	8.8
Influence of video content (tours, procedures)	9.0
Effectiveness of targeted ads for global reach	8.3
Perceived credibility from online reviews	9.1
Destination attractiveness shaped via social media	8.7

Source: Poornima, & Subramanian, 2024, May

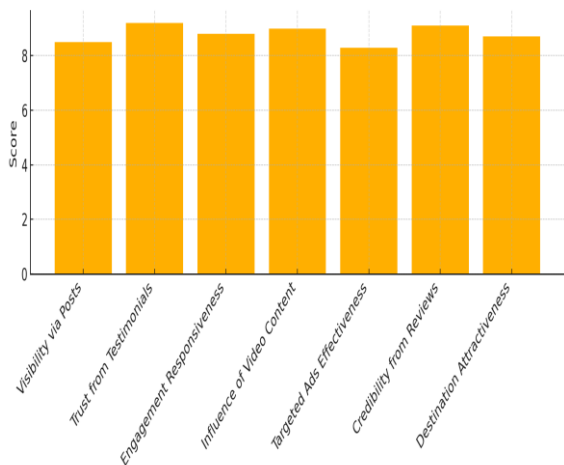


Figure 1: Social Media Awareness Impact Scores

Obj. 2: To describe the perceived role and usefulness of social media marketing in supporting and strengthening medical tourism in Pune.

The fact that social media marketing enhances the role of medical tourism in Pune is directly related to the capacity of this tool to advance the visibility and communicate the value to the international markets. Health care organizations consider social media as a vital means of demonstrating medical competence, technological prowess, accreditation of the hospital, and affordability. Availability of such sites as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube allows hospitals to target international patients, who heavily rely on the online information when traveling to foreign countries seeking treatment (Buyuk, 2024). The speed of social media gives hospitals the ability to spread correct and updated information and emphasize on the differentiating characteristics, including the availability of specialists or novel procedures. These messages influence the views of credibility and reliability prior to the actual contact with the patient. As a result, social media is no longer seen as a promotional tool, but a necessary digital interface that creates first impressions and lures global medical tourists to Pune (Khare, & Randhave, 2024).

The aspect of building trust and interaction among the potential medical tourists is also seen as very helpful in social media marketing. Hospitals in Pune have realized that authenticity of the testimonials, reviews, and experience-based content that patients share online tends to influence their decision to visit a hospital. The interactive characteristics of the website (live chats, real-time responses, virtual Q&A, and patient support groups) strengthen the sense of confidence by allowing direct contact between medical employees and potential patients (Venkatesh, et al., 2024). Through these interactions, there is less uncertainty and less gap in information, particularly to international patients who might be having some concerns about safety, care quality, or travel arrangements. The perceived usefulness of the social media is in the ability to make healthcare institutions approachable and transparent. Social media empowers the image of a Pune as a reliable medical destination and recovery center, by providing two-way communication (Pandey, & Pandey, 2024).

Strategically, the healthcare providers in Pune view social media marketing as an important instrument of increasing competitiveness in the medical tourism arena worldwide. Located in the international markets, these actions allow the hospitals to access niche international consumers that are in need of specialized treatment, through targeted advertising, location-based promotions, and search-optimized content. The social media analytics, including engagement rates, impressions, audience demographic, and sentiment score, help the institutions to refine their messaging and enhance their brand position (Paliwal, et al., 2024). Also, a combination of medical-related information and cultural, wellness, and hospitality factors can also make Pune more attractive as a full-fledged healing and recovery destination. Its perceived usefulness is not limited to marketing since it is useful in strategic planning, patient relationship management, and differentiating services. With increasing trends of global healthcare consumers using digital information, social media is an important asset that help Pune to compete with other well-established medical tourism destinations and

enhance its range of international patients (Saini, et al., 2023).

Table 2: Social Media Usefulness Scores

Indicator	Score
Perceived usefulness for global visibility	8.9
Contribution to patient trust-building	9.3
Effectiveness of interactive engagement	8.7
Support for institutional brand positioning	8.8
Influence on international patient decision-making	9.1
Role in competitive differentiation	8.6
Strategic value for long-term medical tourism growth	9.0

Source: Saini, et al., 2023

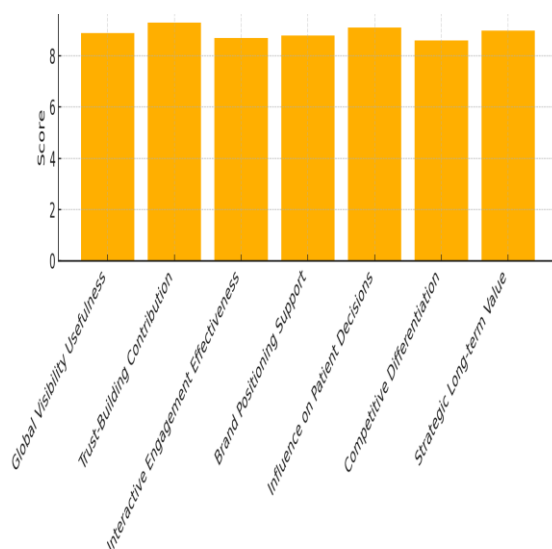


Figure 2: Social Media Usefulness Scores

4. DISCUSSION

The role of social media in the medical tourism sector in Pune, as described by Fazil, et al., (2024) stresses the ability of the platform to transform the mindset of the global population in terms of medical tourism. Chaudhri, et al., (2021) emphasizes the purposeful use of such platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube by hospitals in order to provide expert content, patient experiences, and virtual tours of the facilities, which, in turn, build a clear and credible online presence (Ghahramani, et al., 2022). This is in line with the general literature that foreign patients are progressively relying on online stories and live communication to assess treatment destinations (Tsoy, et al., 2021). Social media communication also enhances the visibility and authenticity, which reduce the uncertainty surrounding cross-border healthcare hence making Pune a viable and reputable medical tourism destination (Swastiningsih, et al., 2024). The role of social media in this perspective is

that it acts as an efficient facilitator that enhances branding, increases the digital presence and combines informational and emotional aspects that drive patient decisions (Poornima, & Subramanian, 2024, May).

Conversely, the focus of social media as one of the primary motivators of medical tourism by Suryani, (2024) is subject to doubt when it comes to the interpretation of the results (Bruce, et al., 2024). Whereas it is true that social platforms assist in making decisions to travel to receive medical treatment more visible and engaging, the structural elements that affect the choice of destination more significantly are hospital accreditation, clinical expertise, international insurance networks, and the reputation of destinations in general (Shahzad, et al., 2024). Other difficulties that are brought out by secondary data used in the analysis include intermittent digital contact, disparities in credibility of the online materials, and unequal accessibility of healthcare facilities in Pune by the whole world (Ibrahim, et al., 2024). These issues indicate that social media, despite its usefulness, cannot potentially cause major inflows of international patients on its own (Williamson, & Prybutok, 2024). Rather, its success is determined by simultaneous changes in the quality of healthcare, regulatory convergence, and global collaboration (Khan, et al., 2024). In this view, social media still is an add-on, but not the key driver of the development of medical tourism in Pune (Abbas Khan, et al., 2024).

5. CONCLUSION

Social media marketing presents itself as a revolutionary notion in terms of increasing visibility, trust, and destination appeal to the Pune medical tourism industry, which allows hospitals to convey skills, openness, and patient-based value to the international markets. Although it continues to gain momentum, the current analysis is limited by the fact that the secondary data has been used and it may not give much insight into patient behaviour, platform-specific effects of engagement and the actual conversion patterns of medical tourists. Despite these restrictions, the results have significant implications on healthcare providers and policymakers, as the combination of strong social media strategies and intensified clinical quality, accreditation, balance between regulatory and international collaboration is essential. Primary data (interviews, surveys, digital analytics, or cross-platform comparisons) should be included in the future studies to embrace the current perception and behavioural responses of the patient. The increase in the range of comparison of Pune and other medical tourism centres, both locally and internationally, would add additional insights to the field and aid in evidence-based digital marketing choices.

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