

# STRATEGIC MARKETING OF HEALTH CARE SERVICES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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**Abstract** - The quality of care provided and the level of patient expectations has led a new envision towards marketing strategies to envisage the healthcare practices in a more deterministic style in increasingly competitive markets. However, inability of healthcare managers to effectively derive, implement and control marketing strategies pause a threat to patients' perception of performance relative to operationalization of healthcare service quality. A gap that need to be filled in! This paper synthesizes findings of research studies through systematic literature review (SLR) to seek out the loophole/s. A disciplined screening process resulted in a final sample of 164 papers published in 71 Journals from 1998 to 2017. The synthesis of empirical and theoretical studies revealed: (a) literature utilises a narrow range of theoretical and conceptual perspectives; (b) strategic marketing is investigated in only few domains of healthcare sector and lacks a broader picture; (c) there is significant potential for future research in this domain and beyond existing theoretical perspectives; (d) suggestions for further advancement is proposed.

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**Keywords** - Healthcare brand, Strategic marketing, Operationalization of service quality

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade Healthcare sector have shown immense revolutionary changes in its setup and management orientation. The prominently included revolutions are flawless financing mechanism, trained and equipped service providers, symmetric information to make decisions, outclass logistics system and quality medicines. However, the ultimate outcome of this advancement resulted in fierce competition along with price escalation making the sector customer, competition, quality and price sensitive. Nowadays the prime focus of practitioners is on how to adapt to these changing conditions: cost containment, strategic marketing, and human resource management, since these areas have undergone the most meaningful changes.

Strategic marketing is playing a vital role in the successful management of healthcare service organization. Position through service excellence (Cronin and Taylor 1992; Quinn 1992) service quality and satisfaction are critical objectives for health care strategic planning (Gilbert, Lumpkin, and Dant 1992; Woodside, Frey, and Daly 1989) and a tool to differential bases of marketing strategies. (Taylor and Cronin 1994; Oliver 1980; Patterson and Johnson 1993) The relation of healthcare brand and strategic marketing is discussed in journals like Journal of Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Management, International Journal of Public Sector Management, Journal of Health Organization and Management etc However the decision towards the right mix of strategic marketing by a particular organization is of immense importance. Healthcare organizations are changing dramatically in the

prospects of patient engagement, increasing transparency, new forms of delivering care, demanding quality outcomes, stability and awareness all impact organizational strategies. (Taylor, 1994) This paper synthesized articles which discussed the impact of strategic marketing for building healthcare reputation in order to deliver customer value. The recent rise in the importance of strategic marketing in healthcare industry is narrated through four reasons by Zallocco and Joseph (1991); firstly, an awareness towards considering the healthcare entity beyond the physical entity and to understand the need to compete in the dynamic market, secondly, considering marketing more than just advertising. Thirdly, need to tackle intense competition in healthcare industry due to saturation and overcapacity of overtly competition. Lastly, need to understand the importance of practicality of strategic process. Further, positioning of healthcare organizations will serve as a vital marketing tool to attain competitive advantage as suggested by San Augustine, Long, and Pantzallis (1992). So the prime focus of this paper is to make the healthcare organizers understand the philosophy of brand image (Balmer, 1998) and strategic marketing as narrated through the systematic review of literature.

## II. PURPOSE

Purpose is to conduct a systematic review of the literature to frame varied dimensions of research articles that are discussed by authors particularly on development of healthcare as a brand/brand image through strategic marketing. Aims/originality of paper is to determine (1) what mix of marketing

strategies have shown to improve the competence of healthcare industry (2) identifies the knowledge gap in investigating the relevance of use of strategic marketing in healthcare brand image. A comprehensive review of published research evidence is derived on the structure, processes and outcome dimensions of marketing strategies for healthcare brand development and sustainability.

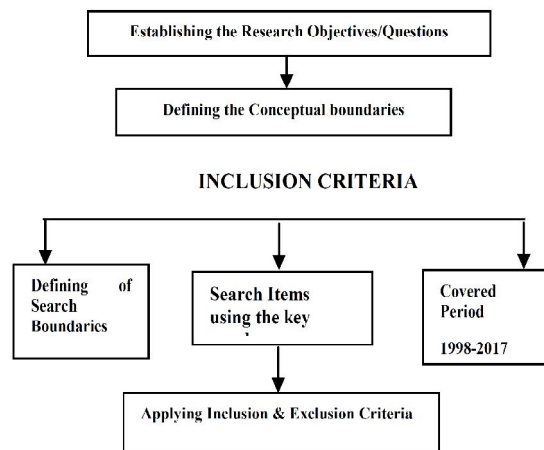
### III. RESEARCH QUESTION

This study seeks to answer the following question. What is the role of strategic marketing in building Healthcare brand?

To answer this question there are four sub questions that are explored through Systematic Literature Review

- Which of the strategic marketing tools are used by the previous researchers in developing Healthcare Brand?
- What is the impact of strategic marketing tools already used on Healthcare Image development?
- Were the strategic marketing tools used adequate enough to create Healthcare brand in healthcare sector?
- Is there any gap that needs to be filled?

### IV. METHODOLOGY (Data Source; Selection & Extraction Criteria)



This paper analysed 164 studies published from 1998 to 2017 in 71 impact factor Journals. The cut off point of 1998 is used in context of Balmers' work on corporate identity and corporate marketing. Those papers that deal with the implication, need and impact of strategic marketing towards healthcare brand image are selected. Paper followed the SLR process advocated by Kent Walker (2010) and Denyer and Tranfield (2009) using four databases.

#### 4.1. Data Source

This paper chose to conduct a systematic review rather than a meta-analysis because of the anticipated heterogeneity in the literature and time constraint. This paper employed formal methods of literature identification, selection of relevant articles, data abstraction, quality assessment, and synthesis of results to review literature on the effectiveness for the implementation of marketing strategies for healthcare providers. In January 2017, this study searched four databases including (1) Emeraldinsight, (2) Jstor (3) Science Direct (4) Google Scholar. It designed search strategies for each database to maximize sensitivity. The articles were selected from 71 impact factor journals found in the selected four databases.

#### 4.2. Study Selection

Initially, it developed a core strategy and text words of key articles identified. The terms used were "Healthcare", "Health care", "Healthcare branding", "National Health Services", "healthcare brand", "healthcare quality indicators", "healthcare image", "hospital service", "Healthcare innovation" "hospital brand image", "patient satisfaction", "Healthcare and Marketing Strategies", "Hospital quality strategy", "Health care and Marketing", "Hospitals and marketing techniques" which formed the basis for databases search resulted in 3772 publications in total prior to any filtration tool. Initial filtration included all articles having strategic marketing AND healthcare/healthcare brand in their keywords and falls between the years 1998-2017. These filtrations skimmed the data roughly to 2480 articles. Other filtration tools for articles selection included: English language; reference list; at least two citations (excluding articles published in 2016 and 2017); relation of healthcare brand/image to strategic marketing & articles published in double peer-reviewed journals. These filtrations skimmed the data to roughly 524 articles. Through abstract reading more articles were excluded that were based on HRM, on individual drug or disease promotion, healthcare management training and issues, healthcare leadership and improving quality standards in relation to management from the review. These filtrations skimmed the data to 255 articles. In full article review only those were included in the SLR that attempt to measure healthcare quality provider (structural and outcome), marketing strategies and healthcare (impact of strategies on performance outcome, on developing and maintaining customer relationship), healthcare brand and customer satisfaction in healthcare (customer value, loyalty) plus removal of duplicates resulted in the final selection of 164 articles. As shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Data Skimming

Systematic Analysis	Obtained papers from Data bases	Emerald insight	Jstor	Science Direct	Google Scholar	Total
Key words and terms identification	Initial Screening (selection of articles after quality assessment and reading title)	2202	341	511	718	3772
Articles identification through quality assessment	Relevant studies identification based on defined criteria	317	25	100	82	524
Articles selection after abstract review	Through title and abstract analysis and deletion of repetitive articles	128	12	69	46	255
Final articles after manual review	Final selection of articles that discussed the relation, impact and influence of marketing strategies on Healthcare	88	10	34	32	164

#### 4.3. Data extraction

Information on the following characteristics was extracted from each paper after reviewing:

- Study design (descriptive studies, reviews, intervention studies, observational studies, etc.).
- Dimension of marketing objectives—classification based on Donabedian's model (structure, process and outcome). 'Structure' represents features of care and quality including material resources, human resources and organizational structure and influence of marketing strategies on the whole. 'Process' refers to interactions between users and the healthcare structure through activities related to provision of care. 'Outcome' indicates the effects of quality provision on health status. The Donabedian system-based framework is used to determine how the structure affects processes and outcomes, and the outcomes reflect the combined effects of structure and processes in the healthcare sector. (Donabedian, A., 1988; Saleh et al., 2015)
- Healthcare brand—all the marketing tools used in the context of developing or maintaining healthcare brand and healthcare image.
- Study focus—findings were organized into coherent themes which are classified into ten main areas of focus which reflect following themes: Healthcare Brand/Image, Patient Satisfaction, Patient-Provider Relationship, Quality Indicators, Strategic Marketing, Cost Reduction, Social Marketing, Strategic Issues, HC Strategic Design and Technology Orientation.

- Any other factor that may lead to a different dimension

#### 4.4. Data Synthesis

Table 3 indicates the inclination of studies and their study focus to examine the relationship between various intervention characteristics and their outcomes. Final output provide a glimpse of what exactly is the academic and practical contribution of marketing strategies on healthcare brand//image and how it overall contributes towards quality provision and patient satisfaction. Results help in findings the research gaps and interventions that are of interest to educators and policymakers.

Table 3: Characteristics of Reviewed Articles

Characteristics of reviewed articles (164)	Number	Approx. Percentage
Structure	82	50%
Process	46	28%
Outcome	36	22%
Study Focus (164)		
Healthcare Brand	05	03%
Patient-Provider Relationship	05	03%
Patient Satisfaction	24	15%
Strategic Marketing	33	20%
Cost reduction	13	08%
Social Marketing	15	09%
Quality Indicators	19	11%
SLR	02	01%
Strategic Issues	03	02%
HC Strategic Design	28	17%
Technology Orientation	11	07%
Miscellaneous	06	04%

## V. DISCUSSION

This paper examined the outcomes of interventions according to those features that help portray the current picture of how much and in which dimensions does marketing strategies and tools helped in healthcare brand image development and gaps that needs to be fulfilled in future. As depicted in the table 3 above, a disciplined screening process resulted in a final sample of 164 papers published in 71 Journals from 1998 to 2017. First of all the selected research articles were analyzed as per the dimension of marketing objectives—classification based on Donabedian's model of structure, process and outcome domains. The result depicts that approx. 50% of the selected articles discussed the features of the healthcare settings in which the care and quality is provided, including material resources, organizational structure, patient- provider relationship tools, influence of marketing strategies in particular domain of healthcare, service quality strategies, technology orientation which discussed tools like EHR social network involvement etc, health literacy, and promotion of medical tourism. Out of 164 articles 46(28%) articles discussed the process, techniques and tools to understand the procedures for better interactions between users and the healthcare structure. Articles included in Process discussed reforms and strategic designs to understand operationalization, business models, and optimization of marketing strategies for a particular sector of healthcare and to understand ethical issues towards healthcare development trends. Outcome indicates the effects or consequences of quality provision on health status. So 22% of the articles selected in the study were related to cost effectiveness, quality results, impact on patient satisfaction and loyalty, operational effectiveness and customer relationship. According to the results of systematic literature review; Role of marketing tools and strategies in healthcare sector is gaining wide attention of healthcare managers and educators (Ashford, 1999; Corbin, 2001; Medves et al, 2010) Studies depicted the impact of Healthcare Marketing (Willcocks et al, 1998; Godiwalla et al, 2002; Kay, 2007; Talbot et al, 2013; Haughton et al, 2015) and implications of strategic marketing tools on healthcare brand development (Smith, 2010; Solayappan et al, 2010; Luu and Trong, 2012; Rutitis et al, 2012; Rutitis et al, 2014; Charanah et al, 2015). In 2008, Evans and colleagues concluded through systematic review importance of health messages and campaigns for health brand image development. Few articles discussed the impact of organizational culture and role of Innovativeness on healthcare setup. (Rabhani et al, 2009; Acar, 2012; Pels et al., 2015) Social marketing is a growing concern in healthcare, pharmaceuticals' and hospitals. (Morris et al, 2009; Alkhateeb et al, 2013; Adzharuddin et al., 2015) and impact of Healthcare IT services (Abekah et al., 2007; Huang et al, 2011; Bhuyan, 2014;

Cranfield et al., 2015) Much work is done on healthcare reforms and procedural structures. (John et al, 2012; Alkhateeb, 2013) Few authors talked about the patient- provider relationship. (Duggirala et al., 2008; Sanjaya et al, 2011; Kanibir et al., 2012) Much work is done to predict consumer behaviour particularly in drug usage (Chiu, 2005; Aziz et al., 2016) and on patient satisfaction in relation to hospital system (Baalbaki, 2008; Narayanan, 2009; Amin et al., 2013) and healthcare service quality (Komashie et al, 2007; Badri et al, 2009; Elg et al, 2011; Pai et al, 2013; Abdallah, 2014; Rama et al, 2016). Yet, prime emphasis is on promotion of individual segments like pharmacy promotional activities. (Nikolopoulos, 2016) However, true narration for what activities to be followed at the particular instance lacks. Healthcare industry is also challenged to reduce cost and protect environmental hazards (Sena, 2016; Fitzpatrick, 2010; Elsevier Clinical Decision Support, 2013). So emphasis of articles was on cost management tools (Etemad et al., 2003; Hilsenrath 2011) and price optimization (Tordoff et al, 2005; Hu, Jia, 2016). Keeping track of patients' knowledge leads to patient centred approach. (Kemp et al, 2017). Some authors discussed new perspectives as medical tourism (Mukherjee, 2008 & 2014; Noor et al, 2015; Ordabayeva et al, 2016) and scenario-based road-mapping. (Lee & Geum, 2017) Overall, there is heterogeneity and intermingling of curricular content and methods. It was difficult to find any study that compared and evaluated different marketing techniques to have a good fit for healthcare brand.

## VI. LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study despite all efforts to minimize them are several. First, only published data is considered leading to possibility of publication bias. Secondly, due to time constraints databases involved are limited. Thirdly, we limited our studies to those articles published in English language and articles published after 1997. Finally our review focused on interventions aimed at the marketing strategies that are used in healthcare sector so the results can't be generalized for all the industry types.

## VII. FUTUTRE RECOMMENDATIONS

Though the concept of organizational sustainability is prominent among healthcare industry, however, as demonstrated through discussion that the integrated components of the healthcare brand model essential to embedded sustainability into an organization's infrastructure is yet lacking. Rigours research is required to find a suitable fit. There is a need to create brand image through strategic marketing based on their internal capabilities and external position. Healthcare organizations must consider innovative knowledge as a new input and develop intelligent

marketing strategies as discussed in this paper (more than internal capability and external position as existing inputs). Also to inculcate user involvement practices in healthcare policies and legislation.

Future sustainability initiatives should be focused on targets for cost reduction by addressing issues related to health, quality and safety and by increasing operational efficiency. Future studies can focus on comparing other databases to find concurrence or addition of other dimensions like resources and cost structure for marketing strategies implementation in the healthcare organizations.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, attributes like patients' participations, service quality, level of patient satisfaction, branding of services are fundamentals attributes and skills used to develop a positive brand image of healthcare sector in consumers mind. However, there is need to develop a coherent study that discuss the overall framework for the development of healthcare sector as a brand. Also evidence based decisions through rationale thinking is required. Further there is a need to develop standard instrument to measure marketing objectives on healthcare to develop brand image.

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