

Digital Marketing Strategy for Patient Visit Decisions with Brand Awareness as an Intervening Variable at Fatma Eye Hospital

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Abstract

This study investigates the effect of digital marketing on patient visit decisions with brand awareness as an intervening variable at Fatma Eye Hospital. A quantitative explanatory design was employed using purposive sampling with 100 respondents. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using SEM-PLS. The result reveal that digital marketing significantly influences both brand awareness and patient visit decisions. Brand awareness also has a significant effect on patient visit decisions and mediates the relationship between digital marketing and patient decisions. These findings confirm the role brand awareness as a cognitive mechanism linking digital marketing to behavioral outcomes. The study provides theoretical and practical implications for optimizing integrated digital marketing strategies to enhance hospital competitiveness and patient acquisition.

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has transformed how companies, including healthcare service institutions, market their services. In the context of hospitals, digital marketing has become an important strategy to increase public awareness of the services offered and to encourage patients' decisions to visit. In today's digital era, where competition in the healthcare industry especially among hospitals is becoming increasingly intense, hospitals can no longer rely solely on offline reputation or word-of-mouth referrals. They must think about how to develop brand awareness promotion through the digital world, particularly through the use of social media.

Modern patients (consumers) actively seek health information online before deciding to visit a hospital. According to APJII data, internet penetration in Indonesia has reached more than 78% of the population, changing how consumers, including patients, interact with service providers. Fatma Eye Hospital, as one of three specialized eye hospitals in East Java and the only one in Sidoarjo Regency, faces increasing competition not only from other eye specialist hospitals but also from private hospitals with eye clinics and other eye care providers offering similar services.

Therefore, the utilization of digital marketing strategies such as social media, websites, SEO, and online advertising becomes a key strategy in increasing visibility and building brand awareness among the public, particularly in the Sidoarjo area and its surroundings. However, digital marketing strategies do not automatically lead directly to visit decisions (Variable Y). There is a cognitive process that prospective patients must go through. One crucial bridge in this process is Brand Awareness (Variable Z). A good digital marketing strategy (Variable X) will first build brand awareness. Prospective patients must be aware that there is an eye specialist hospital in Sidoarjo Fatma Eye Hospital know its leading services, and remember its name when they need eye healthcare services. Once this brand awareness is firmly established, prospective patients are more likely to consider and ultimately decide to visit.

The current phenomenon shows that many hospitals actively engage in digital promotion, but it is not necessarily effective in significantly increasing the number of visits. This raises questions: Are the digital marketing strategies implemented effective in building brand awareness? And is brand awareness the factor that actually drives patients' decisions to visit. Ultimately, the most important aspect of branding is that the relationship built with consumers has the power to influence their choices and loyalty (Hovde et al., 1943).

One common communication channel recently adopted by companies in their marketing activities is social media. Social media can be defined as online applications, platforms, or mass media tools that facilitate interaction, collaboration, or content sharing among users (Hovde et al., 1943). According to (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), marketers recognize the opportunities and attractiveness presented by social media as a crucial part of branding actions for businesses (Hanna et al., 2011). However, research has observed that social media marketing activities generally focus on customer satisfaction and its impact on customer behavior (Simon & Tossan, 2018).

Social media is an online environment where people with similar interests gather to share thoughts, comments, and ideas (Simon & Tossan, 2018). The use of online media is based on internet and mobile technology platforms. Marketing actions by businesses are essential and can be divided into two aspects. First, the perceived impact on consumers regarding products and brands, and the influence they create among other consumers (Kim & Ko, 2012). Research shows that social media influences trust intentions and facilitates knowledge and experience sharing among consumers (Hajli, 2015). Second, social media is used by businesses as a platform for direct marketing actions. In this case, social media transcends time and space limitations in business interactions with potential consumers and increases a sense of closeness (Hanna et al., 2011).

Through social media tools, businesses have the opportunity to promote products and brands, conduct promotions and advertising at low cost, and receive feedback from customers (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). Studies (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014) found that social media has become central to current business strategies. Competitors' activities on social media motivate marketers to engage in social marketing. Media also serves as a source of up-to-date information for customers (Hamid et al., 2016), as information is shared simultaneously and in real time. Unlike traditional mass communication channels, social media facilitates interaction, content sharing, and collaboration between businesses and customers (Wang, 2012). By utilizing social media as an interactive communication tool, businesses can understand customer needs, opinions, and feedback in real time (Vukasovič, 2013).

Brand awareness refers to the level of consumer recognition, acceptance, and recall of a product or brand (Larry Percy & John R. Rossiter, 1992). Brand awareness is the ability of potential buyers to recognize or recall that a brand belongs to a certain product category. Brand awareness reflects the strength of a brand in consumers' memory, indicating their ability to recall or recognize it under different conditions. Brand awareness reduces purchase time and perceived risk (Verbeke et al., 2005).

Brand awareness consists of four levels: (1) brand recognition, (2) brand recall, (3) top-of-mind brand, and (4) dominant brand. Brand recognition relates to familiarity, while brand recall refers to the first brand that comes to mind when thinking of a product category [21]. Being the top-of-mind brand means dominating the category in consumers' minds.

Brand awareness reflects tangible indicators such as name, symbol, sign, and slogan, while brand image represents the brand's position in the consumer's mind beyond these indicators. Brand image reflects consumers' perceptions and preferences based on brand associations stored

in memory. It is shaped by marketing communication, consumption experiences, and social influence, which in turn affect attitudes, trust, and perception of brand messages (Selnes, 1993).

As a marketing tool, social media offers significant opportunities to build brands and strengthen customer relationships. In recent years, businesses have seen social media as the most effective way to communicate and empower consumers to create unique brand identities and enhance brand communication (Seo & Park, 2018). Research (Chou et al., 2022) shows that social media is an important tool in building and increasing brand awareness.

The ultimate goal of social media marketing activities is to gain new customers, increase sales, strengthen word-of-mouth communication, and create customer loyalty. Social media also influences customer trust, purchase intention, and facilitates interaction among consumers (Hajli, 2015). It is an efficient way for businesses to interact with consumers and build a positive brand image (Fortezza & Pencarelli, 2015).

Studies have shown that social media marketing activities affect customer attitudes, brand awareness and loyalty, and repurchase behavior. Social media marketing also influences brand awareness, purchase intention, and brand loyalty (Tatar & Eren-Erdoğan, 2016). Brand awareness enables consumers to become familiar with and remember a brand (T. Jakeli K., 2012), even at the recognition stage, creating familiarity and signaling commitment (Aaker, 1992).

The level of brand awareness is directly proportional to advertising exposure and repetition (Bravo Gil et al., 2007). Therefore, a brand's presence on social media is highly functional in informing customers and increasing familiarity and awareness. Once consumers have experienced the brand and it meets their expectations, increased awareness and brand image significantly influence purchasing behavior (Koniewski, 2012).

Consumers who are familiar with a brand are more likely to choose it again (Barreda et al., 2015). High brand awareness contributes to brand image and loyalty and significantly influences market share. In other words, brand awareness and brand image are significant sources of brand loyalty (Baldauf et al., 2003). Research (Perera & Dissanayake, 2013) found a strong positive correlation between brand awareness and brand loyalty in the context of foreign cosmetic brands in Sri Lanka.

Despite this, some studies indicate that digital marketing does not always directly influence loyalty. Indicators of digital marketing according to (Ibrahim, 2022) include: (1) Content Marketing, (2) Social Media Marketing, (3) Online Advertising, (4) SEO/SEM, (5) Email & Direct Marketing, and (6) Website/Online Platform Quality.

Based on the above explanation, the main issue in this study is the suboptimal implementation of digital marketing strategies at Fatma Eye Hospital, considering the rapid growth of competition in healthcare services. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effect of digital marketing as an intervening variable to identify effective strategies in increasing patient visits to the hospital.

This study proposes a theoretical novelty in developing a patient brand awareness model by positioning brand awareness as a cognitive intervening mechanism between digital marketing strategies and patient visit decisions, particularly in the context of specialized eye healthcare services that involve high involvement and perceived risk.

As a research gap, previous studies such as Goh et al. (2016) in *Information Systems Research* focused mainly on online communities and paid little attention to healthcare contexts, especially regional specialist hospitals. This study is expected to contribute new contextual insights to hospital management literature, where digital marketing is treated not as a single concept but as an integrated strategy relevant to the healthcare sector.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach using a causal associative (explanatory) research design to examine the cause-and-effect relationships among variables. The population consists of patients or prospective patients of Fatma Eye Hospital, as well as visitors to its website and social media platforms. The sampling technique used in this study is non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling method, where respondents are selected based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The criteria include individuals aged 17 years and above who are aware of, follow, or have visited the social media accounts or website of Fatma Eye Hospital, and who have previously visited the hospital. A total sample of 100 respondents is considered adequate for SEM-PLS analysis, as it meets the minimum recommended sample size requirements (Subhaktiyasa, 2024).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a Likert scale (1–5), developed based on the indicators of each research variable. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with the assistance of SmartPLS software. This method is suitable for testing mediation models with relatively small sample sizes while providing comprehensive estimations of relationships among variables (Subhaktiyasa, 2024).

Table 1. Operational Definition and Variable Indicators

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators
Digital Marketing Strategy (X)	Definition: Respondents' perceptions of Fatma Eye Hospital's marketing activities on digital platforms.	1. Content quality (education, relevance)
		2. Social media interaction (responsiveness, engagement)
		3. Ease of search
		4. Website quality ("Brand Digital: Simple Ways Top Brands Succeed in the Digital World," 2010).
Brand Awareness (Z)	Definition: The level of respondents' awareness and ability to recognize or recall Fatma Eye Hospital.	1. Recognition (ability to recognize the hospital's logo or brand)
		2. Recall (remembering Fatma Eye Hospital when thinking about eye care)
		3. Top of mind (Fatma Eye Hospital is the first hospital that comes to mind when experiencing eye problems) (Aaker, 1992).
Patient Visit Decision (Y)	Definition: The process through which respondents move from consideration to the final decision to use Fatma Eye Hospital services.	1. Interest in seeking information
		2. Confidence
		3. Recommendation (Simon & Tossan, 2018).

Data Analysis Method

The data analysis in this study utilizes Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS 3 software. SEM-PLS is a component-based predictive modeling

approach that shifts from traditional theory testing toward prediction-oriented analysis. Partial Least Squares (PLS) is a robust statistical method that does not rely heavily on assumptions and involves several tests, including validity, reliability, and hypothesis testing.

The SEM-PLS testing process consists of two main stages:

1. Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

This stage evaluates the relationship between variables and their indicators. It includes:

a. Validity Test

Convergent Validity: assessed using factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Expected factor loading > 0.70

Expected AVE > 0.50

Discriminant Validity: assessed using HTMT and cross loadings

Expected value > 0.70

b. Reliability Test

Composite Reliability: expected value > 0.70

Cronbach's Alpha: expected value > 0.60

2. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

This stage examines causal relationships among latent variables. It includes:

R-Square (R^2): measures the coefficient of determination of endogenous variables

Path Coefficients: indicate the direction and strength of relationships between variables

T-Statistic: used to test the significance of hypotheses

Predictive Relevance (Q^2): assesses how well the model predicts observed values using blindfolding procedures

Model Fit: evaluated using the SRMR value

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Characteristics (Descriptive Analysis)

The respondents in this study consisted of 100 patients or prospective patients of Fatma Eye Hospital. Their characteristics were classified based on gender, age, and sources of information about the hospital. Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Respondent Demographics

Criteria	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	43	43
	Female	57	57
	Total	100	100
Age	17–24 years	17	17
	25–34 years	24	24
	35–49 years	29	29
	50–64 years	22	22
	> 65 years	8	8
	Total	100	100
Source of Information about Fatma Eye Hospital	Social Media	33	33
	Website	29	29
	Recommendation	23	23
	Others	15	15

Based on Table 1, the majority of respondents were female (57.0%). In terms of age distribution, 17 respondents were aged 17–24 years, 24 respondents were aged 25–34 years, 29 respondents were aged 35–49 years, 22 respondents were aged 50–64 years, and 8 respondents were over 65 years old.

Regarding the source of information, most respondents became aware of Fatma Eye Hospital through social media (33 respondents), followed by the website (29 respondents), recommendations (23 respondents), and other sources (15 respondents).

Overall, the results indicate that the majority of respondents were female patients or prospective patients aged between 35–49 years and primarily obtained information about Fatma Eye Hospital through social media.

Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables

The variables analyzed in this study include Digital Marketing (X), Brand Awareness (Z), and Patient Visit Decision (Y). Tabel 2 Statistik Deskriptif Variabel Penelitian

Variable	Indikator	Mean	Mode	Overall Mode
Digital Marketing (X)	X11	4.01	4,00	4
	X12	4.03	4,00	
	X13	3.99	4,00	
	X14	3.95	4,00	
	X15	4.02	4,00	
	X16	3.95	4,00	
	X17	3.92	4,00	
	X18	3.94	4,00	
Brand Awareness (Z)	X21	3.80	4,00	4
	X22	3.93	4,00	
	X23	3.88	4,00	
	X24	3.95	4,00	
	X25	3.87	4,00	
Patient Visit Decision (Y)	X11	3.92	4,00	4
	X12	4.17	4,00	
	X13	4.00	4,00	
	X14	4.04	4,00	
	X15	4.10	4,00	
	X16	3.94	4,00	

The Digital Marketing variable (X) is generally perceived as good, as indicated by an overall mode value of 4. This is reflected in several aspects: the health information provided through social media and the website is easy to understand; the digital content offers useful educational value; the hospital responds actively to inquiries via social media; social media interactions foster trust and a sense of closeness; the hospital is easily found through search engines; service information is easily accessible online; the website appears professional and attractive; and the website helps patients understand the available services.

Similarly, the Brand Awareness variable (Z) is also perceived as good, with an overall mode value of 4. This is demonstrated by respondents' ability to recognize the hospital's name and logo, distinguish it from other eye hospitals, recall it when thinking about eye care services, and consider it as the first hospital that comes to mind when experiencing eye-related problems.

The Patient Visit Decision variable (Y) is likewise perceived positively, with an overall mode value of 4. This is reflected in respondents' interest in seeking further information after

viewing digital promotions, the influence of digital information on their visit considerations, their confidence in the hospital's service quality, increased trust due to digital information, willingness to recommend the hospital, and their decision to visit based on the information received.

Data Analysis Results

Data analysis was conducted to test the research hypotheses using Partial Least Squares (PLS) with SmartPLS software.

Outer Model Evaluation

The evaluation of the outer model includes tests of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability. Table 4.3 Evaluation of the PLS Measurement Model

Variable	λ	<i>Cronbach Alpha</i>	<i>Composite Reliability</i>	AVE	
Digital Marketing (X)	X11	0.880	0,964	0,970	0,800
	X12	0.889			
	X13	0.900			
	X14	0.919			
	X15	0.888			
	X16	0.901			
	X17	0.883			
	X18	0.894			
Brand Awareness (Z)	Z1	0.938	0,965	0,972	0,876
	Z2	0.933			
	Z3	0.944			
	Z4	0.936			
	Z5	0.928			
Patient Visit Decision (Y)	Y1	0.894	0,953	0,962	0,808
	Y2	0.913			
	Y3	0.904			
	Y4	0.917			
	Y5	0.883			
	Y6	0.883			
Model Fit					
SRMR		0,051			
Chi Square		277,660			
NFI		0,883			
RMS Theta		0,163			

The results show that all indicator loading factors exceed 0.50, indicating that they meet the criteria for convergent validity. Furthermore, the composite reliability values for all constructs are greater than 0.70, Cronbach's alpha values exceed 0.60, and AVE values are above 0.50. These results indicate that the measurement model is reliable.

Regarding model fit, the SRMR value is 0.063, which is below the threshold of 0.10, indicating a good model fit. The RMS Theta value is 0.163 (> 0.080), and the NFI value is 0.883 (< 0.90). Based on these indicators, the model is considered adequately fit with the data.

Inner Model Evaluation

The inner model evaluation aims to examine the relationships among latent variables. The R-square value for Brand Awareness is 0.258, indicating that 25.8% of the variance in Brand Awareness is explained by Digital Marketing, Table 4.4 Coefficient of Determination (R²)

Variable	Variable Name	R-square
Z	Brand Awareness	0,258

Y Patient Visit Decision 0,561

Meanwhile, the R-square value for Patient Visit Decision is 0.561, meaning that 56.1% of the variance in patient visit decisions is explained by Digital Marketing and Brand Awareness.

Partial Least Squares (PLS) Testing

The analysis and hypothesis testing in this study were conducted using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method with the WarpPLS software. The results of the data analysis are presented in Figure 4.1.

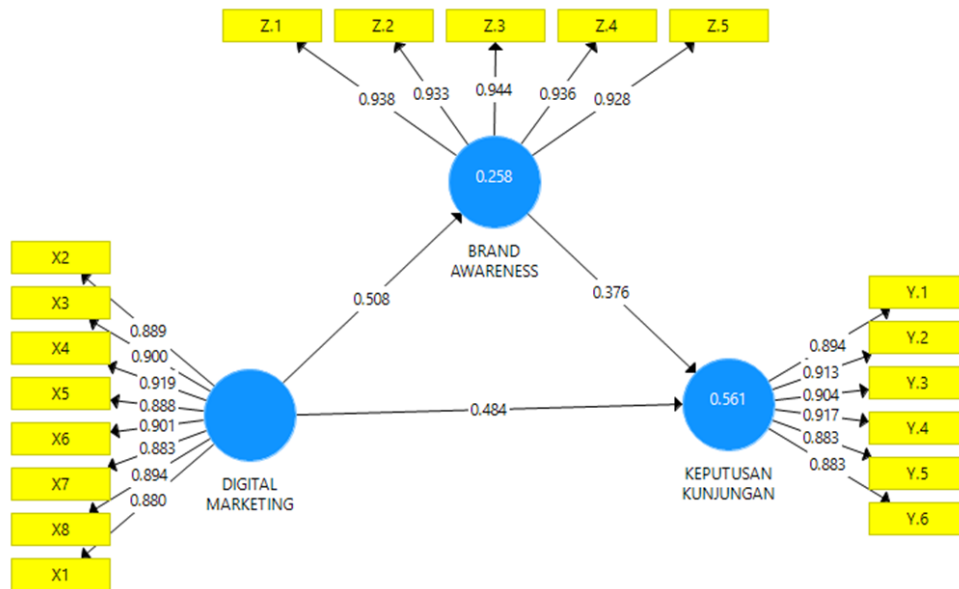


Figure 4.1 Full PLS Model
Source: Appendix 4

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted using probability values (p-values), similar to the t-test in regression analysis. In this study, the calculated p-values were compared with a significance level (α) of 5%. The summary of the hypothesis testing results is presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Path	Regression Coefficient	SE	t Statistic	P Values	Result
X -> Z	0,508	0.110	4.607	0.000	H1 Accepted
X -> Y	0,484	0.092	5.252	0.000	H2 Accepted
Z -> Y	0,376	0.095	3.935	0.000	H3 Accepted

Source: Appendix 4

The results presented in Table 4.5 and Figure 4.1 are derived from the PLS analysis and will be further interpreted to address the proposed hypotheses. The explanations of the hypothesis testing results are as follows:

- Effect of Digital Marketing on Brand Awareness**, The path coefficient is 0.508 with a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating that Digital Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness. Therefore, H1 is accepted.
- Effect of Digital Marketing on Patient Visit Decision**, The path coefficient is 0.484 with a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating that Digital Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Patient Visit Decision. Thus, H2 is accepted.
- Effect of Brand Awareness on Patient Visit Decision**, The path coefficient is 0.376

with a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating that Brand Awareness has a positive and significant effect on Patient Visit Decision. Therefore, H3 is accepted.

Indirect Effect Testing (Mediation)

At this stage, the testing was conducted to examine the effect of exogenous variables on endogenous variables by involving an intervening (mediating) variable. A summary of the indirect effect testing results is presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Summary of Indirect Effect Testing Results

Path	Regression Coefficient	SE	t Statistic	P Values	Result
X -> Z -> Y	0,191	0.059	3.251	0.001	H4 Accepted

The results in Table 4.6 show that the path coefficient of Digital Marketing on Patient Visit Decision through Brand Awareness is 0.191 with a p-value of 0.001. Since the p-value is less than $\alpha = 0.05$, Digital Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Patient Visit Decision through the mediation of Brand Awareness.

This indicates that Brand Awareness acts as an intervening variable in the relationship between Digital Marketing and Patient Visit Decision. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that Digital Marketing has a positive and significant effect on patient visit decisions through Brand Awareness as an intervening variable is supported (H4 accepted).

DISCUSSION

1. The Effect of Digital Marketing on Brand Awareness

The results of the analysis indicate that the Digital Marketing variable has a positive and significant effect on Brand Awareness. This implies that the better the digital marketing strategy implemented by Fatma Eye Hospital, the higher the level of brand awareness achieved. However, this finding is not consistent with previous studies (Tatar & Eren-Erdoğan, 2016), (Fortezza & Pencarelli, 2015), which suggest that digital marketing does not always have a significant impact on brand awareness.

Based on the findings of this study, Digital Marketing is measured through several indicators, including the clarity of health information delivered via social media and the website, the usefulness of educational digital content, responsiveness in answering inquiries through social media, the level of engagement that builds trust and closeness, ease of access through search engines, accessibility of service information online, and the attractiveness and professionalism of the website.

These findings indicate that the digital marketing efforts of Fatma Eye Hospital are perceived positively, which contributes to improved brand awareness and, ultimately, better patient visit decisions. The implementation of digital marketing strategies enables the hospital to reach a wider audience in a fast, targeted, and interactive manner. Through social media and digital advertising, the hospital can create appealing visual content, enhance engagement, and monitor campaign performance in real time, thereby strengthening trust and brand recognition.

2. The Effect of Digital Marketing on Patient Visit Decision

The analysis results show that Digital Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Patient Visit Decision. This means that improvements in digital marketing strategies lead to better

patient visit decisions. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Investigación et al., 2024), (Yen et al., 2020), (Barreda et al., 2015), which also confirm that digital marketing significantly influences patient decision-making.

Digital Marketing in this study is reflected through indicators such as accessible and understandable health information, informative and educational content, responsiveness on social media, interactive communication that builds trust, ease of searching for hospital information, and a professional and user-friendly website.

The findings suggest that effective digital marketing improves access to service information, simplifies online registration, and enhances patient trust through educational content. This, in turn, facilitates patients in making visit decisions due to the availability of fast, transparent, and reliable information, ultimately increasing patient satisfaction and loyalty.

3. The Effect of Brand Awareness on Patient Visit Decision

The analysis results indicate that Brand Awareness has a positive and significant effect on Patient Visit Decision. This suggests that higher levels of brand awareness lead to better patient visit decisions.

Brand Awareness in this study is measured through indicators such as the ability to recognize the hospital's name and logo, distinguish it from competitors, recall it when thinking about eye healthcare services, and consider it as the first choice when experiencing eye-related problems.

These findings indicate that strong brand awareness contributes to improved patient visit decisions. From a healthcare marketing perspective, a high level of brand awareness reflects a strong correlation between brand recognition and consumer behavior. When a hospital is widely recognized (high recall and recognition), it is more likely to occupy a top-of-mind position among consumers when they need healthcare services.

A well-established brand creates a sense of trust and familiarity, which reduces uncertainty and encourages patients to choose the hospital over less familiar alternatives. Combined with high-quality services, strong brand awareness leads to positive perceptions and increased patient satisfaction, ultimately influencing both initial visits and repeat visits (loyalty).

4. The Effect of Digital Marketing on Patient Visit Decision through Brand Awareness

The analysis results indicate that Digital Marketing has a positive and significant effect on Patient Visit Decision through the mediating role of Brand Awareness. This means that effective digital marketing enhances brand awareness, which subsequently leads to improved patient visit decisions.

In the healthcare sector, digital marketing serves as a bridge that connects services with potential patients in a more personal, fast, and interactive manner. The use of social media platforms (such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube), websites, and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) increases brand visibility in digital environments.

Educational and interactive content plays a key role in building brand awareness, enabling potential patients to recognize and remember the healthcare provider compared to competitors. A high level of brand awareness increases the likelihood that the hospital will be considered during the decision-making process.

Furthermore, effective digital interactions particularly through social media and websites

have been shown to increase both new and returning patient visits. Digital marketing also fosters online trust, which is a crucial factor influencing patients' decisions to utilize healthcare services.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion presented, it can be concluded that in order to enhance brand awareness, Fatma Eye Hospital needs to focus on the implementation of effective digital marketing strategies. Meanwhile, to improve patient visit decisions, the hospital should consider several key factors, including digital marketing strategies and brand awareness.

For Fatma Eye Hospital, these aspects serve as an effective competitiveness strategy in optimizing brand awareness and increasing patient visit decisions.

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