

# Medical Marketing: Bridging the Gap

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## ARTICLE HISTORY

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**Abstract:** Marketing communication in healthcare has in the past involved the use of the one way low risk, fear appeals, which have in most cases been ineffective. Analysing the potential of marketing for the medical and healthcare organizations, this research highlighted the significance of a value-based approach, including personalised digital marketing and relevant solutions. Exploring four healthcare campaigns and conducting an online questionnaire with 50 participants, including healthcare and non-healthcare professionals, the study compared the efficiency of affirmative and personalised messaging against fear appeals. The data was collected through self-completed questionnaires with fifty participants; both healthcare professionals (doctors and nurses) and non-healthcare professionals. There is evaluation of the campaigns with the help of the frequency analysis using three campaigns from 2023 and one campaign from 2014. These campaigns were considered according to the tone of the messages where the positive tone, the fear evoke, the tone of personalization, and the solutions offers aspects were considered. The study showed that the solution-oriented campaigns were considered the most persuasive. Micro-campaigns received considerable interest due to its ability to direct the campaign at unique groups and consumers. Compared with fear campaigns, there was very low favour for the latter implying that they are not preferred by the consumer. Such observation re affirms the need especially in health care marketing where the solutions approach and consumer-centric communication dominates to establish a unique connection with the consumers than drawing hence, fully discouraging the use of fear appeals in communication.

**Keywords:** Healthcare marketing, perceived risk, brand loyalty, customer trust, personalized messaging, customized solutions.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing, both traditional and digital, has become the backbone for businesses, raising awareness about business and leading to its development. However, an area where marketing principles are not fully applied is healthcare. Despite being 10% of the GDP of most developed countries, healthcare industries still seem to be working in silo when it comes to using marketing principles (Moncey & Baskaran, 2020). While marketing today is indispensable in business, estimated to reach a cost of \$786.2 billion for digital marketing alone globally by 2026, this is a sign that marketing is important in creating visibility and brand loyalty, as noted by Purcarea, (2019). The healthcare industry still appears hesitant concerning the full application of these principles. For instance, within the UK alone, it is anticipated that £276 billion will be spent on healthcare by the year 2025. Despite this fact, the industry still uses effective market mechanisms such as targeted advertising, personalized messaging and social media outreach that might work towards bridging the gap that exists between healthcare providers their customers, and patients (Krupskyi & Stasiuk, 2023). To further support this assertion, it can be identified that only 35% of the total healthcare services operating within the UK make active utilization of digital marketing techniques to engage with their audience effectively (Aggarwal *et al.*, 2020). This is significant because the problem with the core of this research involves two inefficient marketing strategies that cannot help to build and maintain trust and loyalty from their customers in the healthcare industry.

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## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer trust, perceived risk and customer loyalty act as a guide to marketing and sustaining customer relationship. However, in the healthcare and medical products industry these dynamics have their own specific features due to the specific sensitivity of consumers to questions of safety, effectiveness and compliance with the requirements of the existing legislation (Nelsen, Nelsen & Wallace, 2021). This literature review therefore focuses on how these factors are related, particularly in the context of the UK healthcare industry, comprising organisations such as the National Health Service (NHS) and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

In general, customer trust is widely considered to be a major factor that leads to brand loyalty, especially in such industries as healthcare (Purcarea, 2019). In the UK, trust in medical products is often backed up by links to credible regulatory agencies. Another important factor is the role of the NHS and MHRA as their approval gives confidence in safety and effectiveness of the product. Greszczuk *et al.* (2018) show that UK consumers are more likely to trust medical products connected with the NHS, which is evidence of trust in public healthcare organizations. This trust directly translates to loyalty since customers are more likely to continue patronizing brands that they consider trustworthy, especially for brands in the over-the-counter and other essential healthcare products (Birkhäuser *et al.*, 2017). As Portal *et al.* (2019) noted trust leads to attitudinal loyalty whereby consumers have a favorable attitude towards trusted brands. For instance, companies such as GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) operating in the UK have benefited from this phenomenon because they have long complied with the regulations of the British market and have significantly contributed to public health programs (Berlin & Bänder, 2022) This trust leads to repeat patron-age and brand loyalty especially in industries where the consequences of choosing the wrong brand are dire such as the pharmaceutical and health sectors. However, the competitive nature of the private and NHS-endorsed products may pose some problems in this process of developing trust. A study by Miyake & Kuntsman (2022) shows that consumers are more loyal to products with the NHS logo than those from private brands, especially when there is little information on the effectiveness of products. The private healthcare brands such as Boots have, however, shown that trust can be built through the delivery of quality products and services, customer relations, and product reliability (Nelsen *et al.*, 2021).

Perceived risk plays an essential role in influencing brand loyalty, mainly across the healthcare and medical products sectors as consumers will only use brands to which they perceive as safe and effective. Work done by El Sherif *et al.* (2018) states that perceived risk is a factor contributing to customer indecision concerning the use of medical products. Nonetheless, these outcome come with the assumption of having specific approval such as those of the 'NHS approved UK or MHRA' which makes these findings restricted to the markets that are not developed. Zhou *et al.* (2017) stress the necessity to follow the given regulations and disclose information, however, the propositions of the authors are based more on UK related works that may not include rich relationships with different global regulatory conditions. Likewise, NAMSA (2024) examines difficulties of new or foreign brands but a lack of survey evidence diminishes the author's assertion that perceived risk is invariably a problem for brand uptake. Even authors who state that managing risks regarding the flow of information might be solved through communication and consumer education, such as Bove & Benoit (2020), do not consider the cases when consumers cannot trust the source by default. For instance, the way applied to education of the consumer which led to the success of Sanofi (Perrot *et al.*, 2019) might not work for new brands. In addition, Aggarwal *et al.* (2020) state that perceived risk fully mediates the relationship between trust and loyalty; however, some other factors might also exist, including product quality and brand image. It revealed quite an important perspective but does not provide much insight into how exactly these dynamics change over time due to the absence of a longitudinal dataset.

This literature concerns the influence of perceived risk both on the issues of regulatory approval and on the nature of the relationships between a brand loyalty and its clients in the sphere of healthcare. However, a significant drawback is that the given work is conducted theoretically rather than empirically, and the further discussion mostly refers to case studies of the consolidated company, such as Snofi (Perrot *et al.*, 2019;; Slinn, 2017). Relevant research that has focused on perceived risk has made few attempts to realise competitive forces or the aspect of market familiarity (Bove & Benoit, 2020; Aggarwal *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, while literature review revealed that regulatory endorsement or targeted communication affects consumer attitude and loyalty dominantly and across different healthcare markets, there is little integrated research done in this area. Such research gaps recommend that future work overcome the limitations of this study by employing empirical as well as cross-market research and providing practical implications for firms as they enter or operate within regulated healthcare markets. Such research could offer a better understanding of the relation between perceived risk assurance of trust and brand loyalty in high risk, highly regulated industries.

### 3. METHODS

This study used quantitative research methodology to gather and analyse data, concentration on the aspect of healthcare marketing campaigns. This research was developed a structured questionnaires for the purpose of data collection To implement this research, a cross section of a sample population was reached through the administration of a structured questionnaires, which enabled the researcher to collect primary data that was in line with the objective since it seen from the following; The use of quantitative data was especially appropriate for this research since quantitative data gathers factual responses, mixes the range of feelings, and helps to compare ratings across the groups of participants. This method accords with the other systematic research that found the analysis of the structured data as crucial to studying the customers' behaviours (Susilawati *et al.*, 2025).

This study involved the 50 participants, which include doctors, nurses as well as other practicing medical doctors. To achieve this, the decision was made to target only healthcare professionals to make sure that the collected data shows a level of professional wisdom and practical experience in health care marketing campaigns. This approach avoided the biases that might have been brought by responding population generally and guaranteed that the feedback made was informed by professionals within the health care centers (Ahmed, 2024).

In collecting the data structured administrative questionnaire\* was used, majorly, close ended questions were used to facilitate the collection of data. These questions were designed to assess participants' impressions of healthcare marketing campaigns across four key dimensions: positive communications, threat appeal, individualization, and call to action. This is in line with the quantitative research paradigms whereby closed ended questions were used in order to compare and quantify the responses received. Since the purpose was not to obtain quantitative data, there was no need to bias the sample towards any specific geographic region However, since the questionnaires were to be filled online via email, this would ensure that the participants are comfortable at their workstation or at home to completes them.

This data was evaluated using Frequency Analysis, a technique of statistics that focuses in identifying the number of time that certain or certain types of variables appeared in the data set. The use of this method was most appropriate coupled with the nature of survey as it helped the researchers to establish similarities and differences of participants' perceptions. Frequency Analysis was the key in identifying what parts of healthcare marketing campaigns appealed to the participants, thus the impact of the strategies used could be easily determined.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

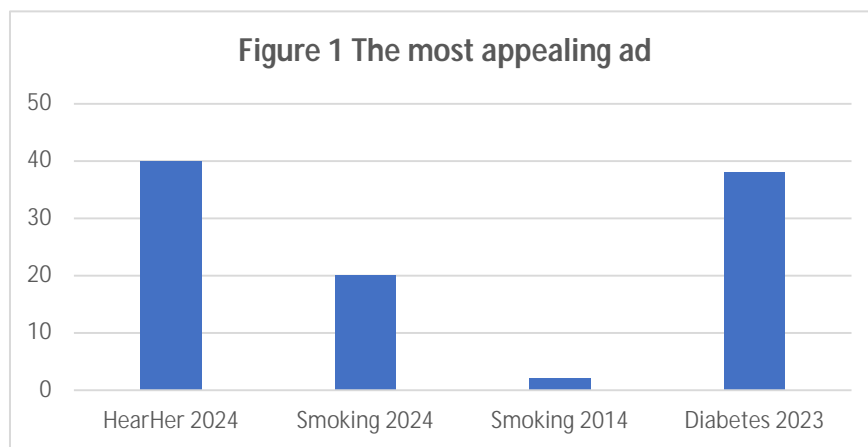
The survey shows that campaigns using positive messaging are more appealing and likely to receive support; compared to those that are negative, fearful, or disgusting. 40% of the participants liked the —HearHerl ad for being more personable. In contrast, smoking and tobacco ads were perceived as more fearful and difficult to relate to

by 31%. The survey also aimed to understand the trends in "fearful" health campaigns over the past 10 years. It was observed that the tobacco ad in 2014 was perceived as more fearful and difficult to relate to by 21% compared to the smoking ad in 2024, which was perceived as such by 10%. 40% of the participants expressed their willingness to support campaigns providing solutions, and 28% preferred more personalized campaigns.

"The Fear-Persuasion Relationship" was previously studied by R.F. Soames Job. On the potential harm of ineffective healthcare campaigns, it states "the ineffective use of fear in health promotion campaigns may have more serious consequences than the tangible waste of time, effort, and money: such campaigns may produce the opposite of the desired effects, making the target audience more likely to continue with the unhealthy behavior. The argument that ineffective fear campaigns may immunize their audience against the message is not new (Greszczuk *et al.*, 2018).

However, the low appeal of the —Smoking 2014 campaign suggests that fear-based strategies might not work at the same level of success in the present context of the healthcare marketing. While implementing the threats of smoking the message of this campaign may not have focused on the personal, which made it not as recognizable or effective. The boring appeal of the —Smoking 2024 campaign is clearly intermediate between that of the 2014 campaign but still below the campaign of —HearHer 2024 and —Diabetes 2023. Most importantly, these results highlight the significance of arriving at campaign messages that not only educate but are also positively framed, targeted and presented in a manner that depicts an individual experience. Thus, it would be best if the healthcare marketers did not rely on fear appeals but concentrate on creating long-lasting relations with the intended audiences (El Sherif *et al.* 2018).

Similarly, there was about 11 tick marks for the happy and fun that can be related to campaigns. This shows that fun-killed approach in communication works in the healthcare settings, although it is less powerful than the solution-seeking or personal appeal campaigns. The least popular campaigns are the fearful ones, and out of the respondents only 4 like this kind of a campaign. This implies that threat-based messages be least persuasive, perhaps because of the negative feelings they elicit, implying a audiences' reaction of averting instead of promoting. To be precise, the results shows how impactful and engaging healthcare campaigns with specific mechanical solutions and tailored messages are needed while not ruled out is the conventional positive and engaging campaigns. Punishment based campaigns however seem to be the most ineffective in motivating people (Gur, 2020). These results support the need to emphasise on positive campaigning, where solutions to the problems are offered and personalised to fit the targeted consumer's interest in health care in an effort to enhance consumer's confidence and loyalty.



**Fig. (1).** The most appealing ad.

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Fig. (1). Presents a comparison of four healthcare marketing campaigns: There are some successful examples: —HearHer 2024, —Smoking 2024, —Smoking 2014, —Diabetes 2023. The chart demonstrates that two campaigns, which were probably most attractive to the surveyed people, received the highest mark of roughly 20. On the other hand the campaign —Smoking 2024 was fairly appealing, —Smoking 2014 appeal was quite low and only a few of the participants felt the campaigns were appealing. It was also established that the —HearHer 2024 and —Diabetes 2023 campaigns received a lot of support due to its positive, call to action feel that worked well with the target group. They probably also used aspects of individualism; detailing particular health threats in ways that could be easily understood and fun. The success of these campaigns is well aligned with finding of past research that healthcare marketing is most effective for audience based on support rather than fear.

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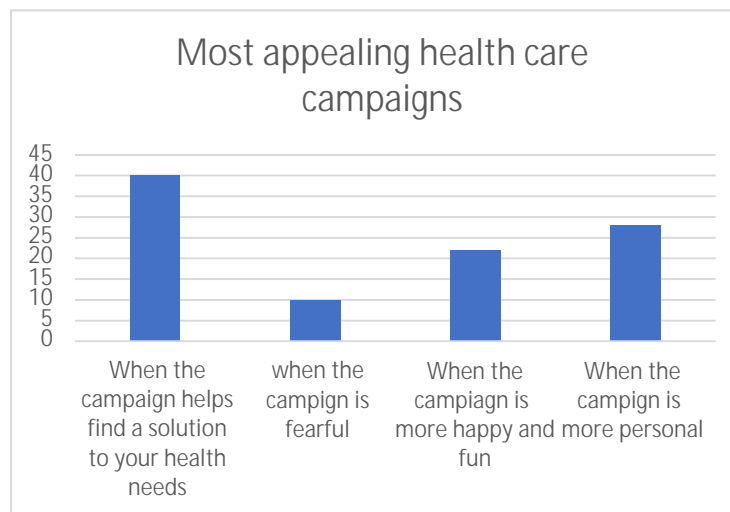
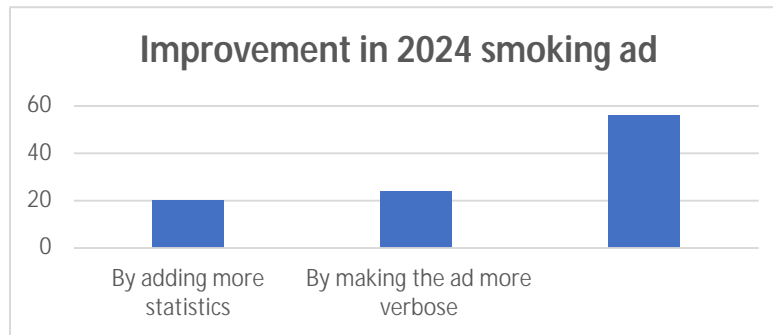


Fig. (2) Most appealing Healthcare campaigns.

Fig. (2). Helps in understanding which healthcare campaigns are appealing to people. These are petty-selves, joyful and humorous, scares, and find-solution-to-health-problem campaigns. The most attractive campaigns thereby represented by the highest bar are those that assist people in getting a solution to whatever ails them. This has been apparently the most responded category with about 22 respondents who preferred this kind of campaign. This implies that people would rather conform to healthcare campaigns that are solution-oriented and provide them with the solutions to some of the problems they may be facing in their health. Consequently, the other closest campaigns which are more personalized were the next most attractive, with 13 persons being picked. This means that when a campaign is personalized and closely relates to an individual, then it will have a greater impact in healthcare. The results imply that people might be more affiliated with campaigns which pertain to their self-interest, which, in turn, may mean that individuals are more inclined to commit towards meaningful messages that are closer to them.



**Fig. (3)** Improvement in 2024 smoking ad.

Fig. (3) Depicts the respondents' perceptions of what would make the anti-smoking campaign better. From this figure, the most crucial modification that could be made, according to about 28 respondents, is by "adding desired behavior in the campaign to obtain." This seems to imply that the participants acknowledged poor framing of the campaign and conducting it without clearly stating what desired behavior prospects should adopt. From the perspective of this study, this knowledge emphasises the role of behavioral signification in societal marketing communication, especially in the healthcare sector.

The findings of this study are in accord with previous literature concerning the nature and contents of healthcare marketing and the role of trust and perceived risk. With these identified, using the argument of Ajina (2019), it is possible to assert that perceived risks are best eliminated by contextualising the targeted behaviour to be as tangible as possible. In supporting the assertion made by Hariyanti *et al.* (2023), the study also stressed that action-based communications are important in trust and brand patronage creation. This is being supported by Agarwal *et al.* (2020) who confirmed that there is a positive correlation of consumer trust to business sustainability in healthcare. Moreover, Hariyanti *et al.* (2023) also gave another support that proved how education reduces anxiety and how people came up with better decisions.

Further, literature support the transition from the perceived mass marketing type of healthcare communication to personalized HC communication such as the assertion by Purcarea (2023) that healthcare should be marketed as an individual product. The idea of mass campaigns may sound effective in practice when implemented but does not cater for specific needs or stimulate a change on people's habits regarding health. Scholars like Fuchs *et al.* (2017) and Gammoh *et al.* (2020) also observed that it is true that such general messages may not find a favourable reception from consumers. However, other studies including that of smith *et al.*, (2021) actually expound that mass communication can also be useful in creating awareness of health issues to the public. Still, this work has demonstrated that, in line with this argument, the results of this triangulation for the message of segmenting, action-orientation, and message tailoring are not only more persuasive than mass media appeals, but also suitable in light of improvements in the characteristics of consumer in healthcare.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, traditional and digital marketing approaches are crucial for raising awareness and encouraging desired behaviors in their target audience. However, in the healthcare industry, these tools can be more effective if approached with personalized, empathetic, and positive messaging. While mass media techniques are valuable, they require more personalized and focused messaging to resonate with the audience. Persuasion using fear-based techniques is generally more harmful and often discourages the target market. This research has identified the significant mediating role of perceived risk in the relationship between customer trust and brand loyalty within the



healthcare and medical products sector in the UK. The results indicate that while customer trust is a crucial element in developing brand loyalty, the perceived risks associated with healthcare products can very strongly affect this relationship. For example, perceived risks from product safety or efficiency may result in less trust in an entity and thus negatively affect brand loyalty. The available evidence shows that effective marketing strategies can be one of the direct and positive ways of mitigating perceived risks and hence increasing customer trust in a brand, leading to strong brand loyalty.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

One significant weakness of this study is the minimal finding of existing theoretical materials that substantiate or justify the theoretical model used in this research. Since the theoretical foundations are being examined, the presented results may not be supported by a sufficient number of empirical sources. Also, there is a rationale that the sample of participants for the current study is not very large, and, therefore, the results cannot be generalized for all healthcare consumers. Another limitation of the focus on healthcare professionals is the exclusion of the wider population of actual consumers, including what one might call 'feature customers' of healthcare marketing messages. In addition, there is a threat of common method variance, whereby the information given is only based on the participants' perception and experience. Future work might develop these limitations by using larger and more including samples and by studying consumer behaviour even more explicitly.

## HUMAN AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

No Animals/Humans were used for studies that are basis of this research.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Keyaan Nanjwani declares no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

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