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Media and Digital Marketing in Bangladesh's Healthcare Sector: Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities

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Media and Digital Marketing in Bangladesh's Healthcare Sector: Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities

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Abstract

This study examines the role of media and digital marketing in Bangladesh's healthcare sector, with a focus on trends, challenges, and opportunities in Dhaka, the country's capital. Despite global attention on digital health communication, limited research addresses its application in urban Bangladeshi contexts. Drawing on qualitative data from 12 in-depth interviews with healthcare marketers, hospital administrators, and media professionals, the study highlights increasing use of social media, SEO, and online campaigns to engage patients. Key challenges include misinformation, low digital literacy, weak regulatory oversight, and financial constraints. However, participants identified opportunities in telemedicine, localized content, and data-driven strategies. By addressing this research gap, the study offers practical insights for healthcare providers, policymakers, and digital marketers. Future research should examine rural healthcare settings, compare public vs. private sector practices, and explore patient perspectives to build a more comprehensive understanding of digital marketing's role in health communication across Bangladesh.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Healthcare Communication, Bangladesh, Urban Health, Media Strategy, Telemedicine, Dhaka, Qualitative Research

Introduction

The landscape of healthcare communication in Bangladesh is changing faster than anyone could have imagined. What once depended on printed leaflets, billboards, and the quiet influence of word of mouth has started to live online. Hospitals that once relied on newspaper ads now compete for visibility through Facebook and Google. Doctors who were once accessible only through appointments are reaching thousands of people through YouTube clips, live health talks, and social media posts. Dhaka, the country's digital and economic heart, stands at the center of this shift. With more than half of its residents using smartphones and social media daily, the city has become the testing ground for how deeply healthcare can integrate into digital life.

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This change is part of a much larger story. Bangladesh's national "Digital Bangladesh" initiative laid the foundation for this evolution. Over the last decade, improved connectivity, affordable data plans, and widespread mobile phone ownership have transformed how citizens find and share information. Healthcare has naturally followed this trend. Patients now Google symptoms before visiting doctors, message clinics for test results, and watch online videos for basic health education. Hospitals have adapted too, building their digital presence not just to advertise services but to engage, inform, and reassure. The shift is as much cultural as it is technological. In a country where healthcare has long been viewed with a mix of trust and skepticism, digital communication has offered new ways to rebuild relationships between patients and providers.

In this new environment, digital marketing has become more than a tool for visibility. It has turned into a form of storytelling and community-building. Hospitals share patient journeys, promote doctor Q&A sessions, and create educational content that feels personal rather than corporate. The conversation is no longer one-way. Patients leave comments, ask questions, and share their experiences publicly. The healthcare sector, once distant and institutional, is now learning to sound human. Yet, this evolution comes with complexity. Digital platforms that build trust can also spread misinformation. Posts meant to educate can be misinterpreted, and privacy breaches can damage credibility overnight. The same systems that connect can also confuse.

Even as the practice grows, academic research on digital healthcare marketing in Bangladesh remains scarce. Globally, many studies have examined how digital communication has transformed patient engagement, especially after COVID-19. Countries such as India, Singapore, and Malaysia have explored how hospitals use social media and analytics to manage relationships and public health messaging. In contrast, Bangladesh's scholarship still focuses mostly on e-health implementation and telemedicine technology rather than the communication strategies that shape public perception. Few studies look at how hospitals and healthcare startups actually manage digital outreach, how agencies craft campaigns for medical clients, or how cultural and regulatory realities influence those decisions. This lack of local evidence leaves policymakers, professionals, and scholars navigating in the dark.

The absence of a clear national framework for healthcare marketing deepens the problem. There are no standardized rules on what hospitals can claim in advertisements, how they should manage patient data online, or where ethical limits should be drawn. While private hospitals compete for patient attention with glossy digital campaigns, public hospitals often lag behind because of budget and bureaucracy. Smaller clinics sometimes cross the line entirely, using exaggerated success stories or unverified testimonials to attract patients. Without oversight, digital health communication risks undermining the very trust it hopes to build.

The purpose of this study is to explore how digital marketing is transforming healthcare communication in Bangladesh, focusing on Dhaka as the urban center of this transition. It brings together perspectives from twelve professionals across hospitals, public institutions, digital agencies, startups, and media outlets.

Through their experiences, the study uncovers how digital strategies are designed, implemented, and evaluated, and how practitioners handle the ethical and logistical challenges that come with them. The research aims to paint a grounded picture of the digital healthcare ecosystem in Bangladesh, one that captures both its promise and its growing pains.

Three questions guide this inquiry. The first asks how digital marketing is transforming the communication ecosystem of healthcare in Bangladesh. The second examines what barriers limit adoption, whether technical, cultural, or regulatory. The third looks at the opportunities for innovation and ethical growth as the sector matures. Together, these questions structure the analysis and shape the themes drawn from the interviews.

The contribution of this study lies in bridging practice and policy. For practitioners, it offers insights into what works and what fails in real-world healthcare marketing. For policymakers, it points out the urgent need for a clear framework that governs digital communication in medicine. For scholars, it expands the conversation on digital transformation by focusing on communication and perception rather than technology alone. Most importantly, the study highlights how human stories, ethics, and data coexist in a space often driven by competition and visibility.

Digital healthcare marketing, as seen through this research, is not simply about promotion. It is a form of public communication that can influence how people understand, trust, and access care. In a country where misinformation can spread faster than verified knowledge and where healthcare inequality remains a persistent challenge, responsible digital communication carries enormous potential. It can help patients make informed choices, encourage preventive care, and strengthen relationships between citizens and medical institutions. Capturing this moment of transformation, with its optimism, contradictions, and slow shifts in culture, gives this research its urgency and value.

Literature Review

Global Overview of Digital Healthcare Marketing

The global healthcare industry has undergone a remarkable communication shift over the past two decades, moving from traditional mass media toward dynamic digital platforms. This shift accelerated sharply after the COVID-19 pandemic, when hospitals, health ministries, and research institutions realized that digital platforms were no longer optional. They had become the backbone of real-time communication, patient education, and reputation management. When physical access to hospitals was limited, social media and telemedicine bridged the gap between patients and healthcare professionals.

A growing body of research shows that digital marketing has become central to how healthcare institutions interact with their audiences. The United States and the United Kingdom were early leaders in integrating health communication with digital tools. Hospitals began using search engine optimization, targeted social media campaigns, and data analytics to reach patients more effectively. Studies by Kumar and Smith (2020) and Tan et al. (2021) found that patient trust was more easily built when hospitals used transparent, data-backed content strategies. The shift to digital spaces also created opportunities for hospitals to humanize their brands. Instead of broadcasting general messages, they began sharing patient success stories, expert interviews, and preventive health tips that resonated on a personal level.

The COVID-19 pandemic magnified this transformation. During lockdowns, many patients could not attend in-person consultations, so hospitals turned to online platforms for both service delivery and information sharing. In Singapore, for example, public hospitals used Facebook Live to host virtual question-and-answer sessions where doctors addressed pandemic-related fears. In the United States, hospitals that already had strong online engagement were better able to manage patient anxiety and misinformation. The World Health Organization (2022) later noted that digital communication became as crucial as clinical capacity in managing public health crises.

Globally, the integration of content marketing and data analytics has changed how hospitals manage trust and retention. Health organizations now track engagement metrics, patient feedback, and sentiment analysis to understand how communication shapes behavior. This shift has led to what some scholars call “precision communication,” where data helps tailor health messages to specific audiences rather than using one-size-fits-all campaigns.

A key feature of successful digital healthcare marketing is its focus on patient-centered engagement. Instead of promoting institutions, modern campaigns promote relationships. Hospitals invest in storytelling that emphasizes empathy, transparency, and social proof. In Europe and North America, healthcare marketers have adopted an “edutainment” model that combining education with simple, engaging content that demystifies complex medical information. For example, animated videos explaining vaccine safety or lifestyle disease prevention have achieved higher retention rates than static press releases.

Despite these advancements, researchers warn that digital health marketing must tread carefully between persuasion and education. If communication becomes overly commercial, it risks eroding patient trust. Scholars such as Prasad and Singh (2022) emphasize that ethical storytelling, rather than aggressive advertising, creates long-term engagement.

The global trend reveals three intertwined principles that define the current phase of healthcare marketing: technological adaptability, ethical communication, and data-driven personalization. Each of these principles

influences how digital healthcare is being shaped in developing countries like Bangladesh, where access, policy, and literacy remain uneven.

Digital Healthcare Transformation in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's healthcare system stands at a turning point. Over the last decade, the government's Vision 2021 and its flagship initiative Digital Bangladesh have brought digitalization to nearly every sector, including healthcare. The goal was simple yet ambitious: make public services accessible through information and communication technologies. Healthcare quickly emerged as a central pillar in this transformation.

Under the Digital Health framework, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare introduced e-health platforms for patient registration, telemedicine consultations, and national health record management. Government hospitals began digitizing patient databases, and online portals were launched to provide appointment scheduling, vaccination updates, and test results. Private hospitals also embraced the digital shift, often investing earlier and more aggressively than their public counterparts.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, these early investments became essential. Telemedicine services surged as lockdowns forced patients to seek virtual alternatives. The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) reported a tenfold increase in teleconsultations between 2020 and 2021. Many private hospitals integrated online consultation booking and mobile payment systems. Meanwhile, healthcare startups such as Doctorola and HealthEase began connecting urban patients with specialists across cities through mobile apps.

Despite progress, the transformation remains uneven. Researchers such as Rahman and Sultana (2022) point out that digital adoption is concentrated in urban centers, leaving rural areas underrepresented. Infrastructure limitations, from unstable internet to inadequate hardware, hinder access. Many hospitals lack trained digital marketing teams, which limits their ability to design or evaluate campaigns.

A major constraint is digital literacy among both healthcare professionals and patients. Older doctors often hesitate to engage in online communication because of perceived risks or unfamiliarity with the medium. Patients, especially those from less educated backgrounds, may struggle to distinguish between credible health information and misleading content. This lack of literacy makes the population more vulnerable to misinformation, particularly on social media.

Another persistent issue is data governance. As more hospitals collect patient data through online consultations, the absence of a unified data protection framework creates uncertainty. Scholars such as Alam (2023) argue that without proper legal structures, hospitals risk compromising patient confidentiality, either unintentionally through weak systems or intentionally through marketing-driven data use.

The success of Bangladesh's digital health transformation, therefore, depends on balancing growth with governance. It requires not only investment in technology but also in policy, education, and ethics.

In short, Bangladesh has made impressive strides toward digital integration in healthcare, particularly through government policy and private innovation. Yet the full potential of digital health communication will only be realized when infrastructure gaps narrow and literacy barriers decline.

Regulatory and Data Privacy Challenges

As digital transformation deepens, questions of privacy, consent, and regulation become increasingly urgent. Globally, healthcare communication operates under strict regulatory frameworks such as HIPAA in the United States or GDPR in the European Union. These laws define how patient information can be collected, stored, and shared. Bangladesh, however, lacks a comparable comprehensive policy.

The country's Information and Communication Technology Act (2006) and Digital Security Act (2018) provide some provisions for cybersecurity, but do not address the specific needs of healthcare data. There are no clear rules on how hospitals should manage digital patient records, how consent should be obtained for data usage, or how medical advertisements should be monitored for accuracy. This regulatory vacuum leaves both providers and patients vulnerable.

Private hospitals and digital agencies often interpret these gaps differently. Some enforce internal ethical standards, avoiding sensitive data in marketing. Others operate more freely, using testimonials and patient photos without adequate consent. According to Rahman and Chowdhury (2023), the lack of oversight has allowed misleading claims and exaggerated success stories to circulate unchecked.

The absence of regulation also affects artificial intelligence (AI) and automated tools increasingly used in health marketing. Chatbots and AI-driven diagnostic systems collect large amounts of user data. Without clear boundaries, this data could be misused for profiling or commercial targeting. Globally, the integration of AI in health marketing has sparked debates about accountability. In Bangladesh, these debates are just beginning.

Misinformation further complicates the issue. Social media platforms in Bangladesh frequently circulate unverified medical advice. During the pandemic, claims about home remedies and miracle cures spread widely before official sources could respond. A lack of coordinated communication between the Ministry of Health and private healthcare players made it harder to maintain consistent public messaging. As Hossain (2021) notes, in digital spaces where attention moves faster than verification, trust can collapse overnight.

To strengthen credibility, scholars and practitioners recommend three immediate steps: developing a clear legal framework for digital health communication, establishing a national data protection law, and training

healthcare communicators in ethical digital practices. Without these safeguards, Bangladesh's digital health growth could outpace its capacity for self-regulation.

Conceptual Lens

This research draws on two theoretical foundations, Service-Dominant Logic and Social Capital Theory , to interpret how value is created and sustained within Bangladesh's evolving healthcare marketing ecosystem.

Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2016) views value as co-created through interaction between providers and consumers rather than produced solely by one party. In healthcare, this means that hospitals do not simply deliver care; patients participate actively in creating meaning and trust through their engagement. Digital platforms amplify this co-creation process by allowing real-time feedback, dialogue, and experience sharing. When a hospital posts an awareness campaign and patients respond with stories or gratitude, both parties contribute to a shared narrative of value.

Social Capital Theory complements this idea by emphasizing networks, relationships, and shared norms. In the Bangladeshi context, where personal recommendation still carries more weight than institutional branding, digital interactions can serve as extensions of traditional social networks. Online groups and comment threads act as spaces where trust is collectively negotiated. The more transparent and empathetic a hospital appears, the stronger its social capital becomes.

These frameworks together explain why digital healthcare marketing in Bangladesh is more than just a technological upgrade. It represents a social evolution in how institutions and individuals collaborate to construct trust and meaning. The integration of Service-Dominant Logic and Social Capital Theory thus provides a lens through which to interpret not only the trends and strategies discussed in this study but also the cultural fabric that binds communication, credibility, and care.

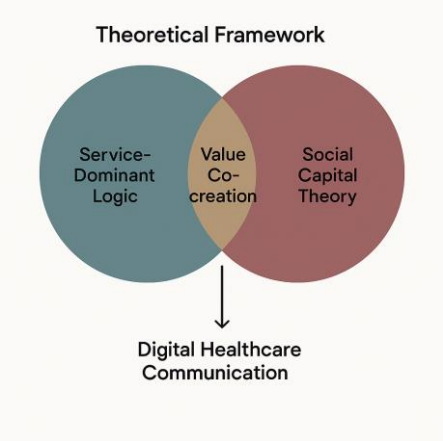


Figure 2.1: Theoretical Framework

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative and exploratory design to capture the nuanced realities of digital marketing within Bangladesh's healthcare sector. This approach allowed the research to explore lived experiences, professional perceptions, and practical insights that cannot be fully represented through quantitative methods. In a field as fluid and human-centered as communication, qualitative inquiry offered the most natural path for uncovering the meaning behind digital transformation.



Figure 3.1: Qualitative Research Process Funnel

The purpose was not to generalize across all hospitals or agencies but to deeply understand how professionals perceive the rise of digital healthcare marketing, how they practice it, and how they navigate its challenges. In keeping with the exploratory nature of the study, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection. This format allowed for guided conversation while giving participants freedom to expand on ideas and reflect openly.

A semi-structured format also supported a balance between consistency and flexibility. Each participant was asked the same set of twelve guiding questions, ensuring comparability, yet the interviews allowed natural follow-ups to probe deeper into individual experiences. Questions were grouped into four thematic areas: emerging trends, challenges and barriers, opportunities for innovation, and ethical or regulatory concerns. This framework reflected the core objectives of the study and provided a logical flow during interviews.

The decision to use a qualitative design was also informed by prior literature. Scholars such as Braun and Clarke (2006) and Creswell (2018) emphasize that exploratory studies work best when the goal is to build understanding rather than test pre-existing theories. Since digital healthcare marketing in Bangladesh has received little scholarly attention, this design provided a foundation for future research by establishing baseline themes grounded in local experience.

To guide analysis, the study employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model. The steps included: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for patterns and themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes, (5) defining and naming the themes, and (6) producing the final report. This process allowed the researcher to move from raw text to structured insights while maintaining a close relationship with the data.

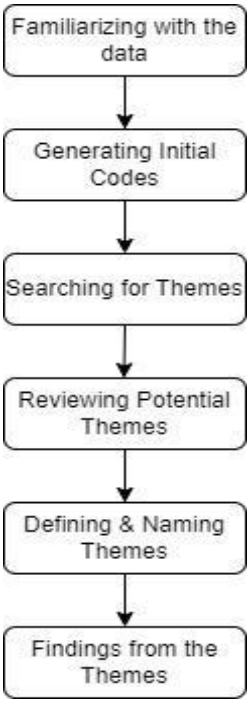


Figure 3.2: Braun and Clarke's Framework

This structured yet flexible design made it possible to capture diverse perspectives from participants who represent different corners of Dhaka's healthcare communication ecosystem. It also ensured that the findings would reflect the complexity of a sector still balancing between traditional and digital modes of operation.

Participants

The study included twelve participants (P1–P12) who occupy strategic or operational roles in healthcare marketing and communication. These individuals represent a diverse mix of sectors, including private hospitals, public healthcare institutions, digital marketing agencies, healthcare startups, and media organizations. This diversity was deliberate, as digital healthcare communication in Bangladesh is shaped by a network of interdependent actors rather than a single group.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, which prioritizes the selection of information-rich cases. In qualitative research, the goal is not randomization but relevance. Each participant was chosen based on their active involvement in digital communication within the healthcare field and their ability to reflect critically on the opportunities and barriers that define it.

The recruitment process began by identifying professionals with visible roles in healthcare marketing or health-related media communication. Several participants were approached through professional networks and social media platforms such as LinkedIn. Additional participants were located through snowball sampling, where one interviewee recommended another who met the inclusion criteria. This method was particularly helpful in accessing senior professionals in government and media institutions, who are often less reachable through public channels.

To maintain balance, the final group included representation across both public and private sectors. Three participants were from private hospitals, two from public institutions, three from digital agencies, two from healthcare startups, and two from media organizations. This mix allowed for comparison between corporate, governmental, and entrepreneurial approaches to healthcare marketing.

Table 3.1. Participant Demographics

Participant ID	**Gender**	**Age (Range)**	**Experience (Years)**	**Role / Designation**	**Sector**	**Organization Type**	**Location**
P1	Female	30–35	5–7	Senior Marketing Executive	Private	Tertiary Hospital	Dhaka
P2	Male	35–40	7–10	Head of Marketing	Private	Mid-sized Hospital	Dhaka
P3	Female	35–40	8–10	Marketing & Communications Manager	Private	Multispecialty Hospital	Dhaka

P4	Male	45–50	12–15	Deputy Director (Admin & Communication)	Public	Government Medical College Hospital	Dhaka
P5	Female	40–45	15–18	Senior Administrator (Public Relations)	Public	National Hospital	Dhaka
P6	Male	35–40	10–12	Managing Director	Private	Digital Marketing Agency	Dhaka
P7	Female	30–35	8–10	Strategy Director	Private	Digital Media Agency	Dhaka
P8	Male	38–42	10–12	Creative Director	Private	Health Communication Agency	Dhaka
P9	Male	28–33	5–7	Co-founder & CEO	Startup	Telehealth Platform	Dhaka
P10	Female	30–35	4–6	Founder & Managing Director	Startup	Health & Wellness Company	Dhaka

P11	Female	35–40	10–12	Senior Health Correspondent & Program Producer	Media	Television Network	Dhaka
P12	Male	35–40	9–11	Digital Editor, Health Desk	Media	National News Outlet	Dhaka

All participants were based in Dhaka, which remains the epicenter of Bangladesh's healthcare and media industries. While this geographic focus limited the study to urban perspectives, it was a strategic decision. Dhaka represents the country's most digitally mature environment and serves as a realistic starting point for understanding early-stage digital transformation in healthcare communication.

Participants' professional experience ranged from four to eighteen years, and their ages varied between late twenties and early fifties. This spread offered both fresh, innovative perspectives from younger professionals and seasoned reflections from experienced managers and administrators.

Each participant was assigned a code (P1–P12) to maintain anonymity. These identifiers are used throughout the findings section when quoting or referencing individual insights. While anonymity is standard practice in qualitative research, it held particular importance here due to the sensitivity of discussing organizational practices and policies. Some participants, especially those from public institutions, expressed concern about potential misinterpretation of their remarks. Using coded identities helped create a safe space for honest and critical discussion.

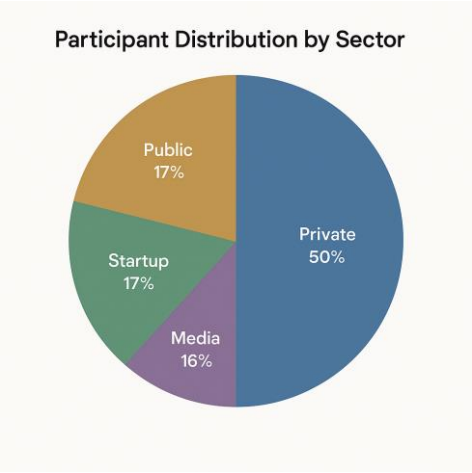


Figure 3.3: Participant Distribution by Sector

Overall, this participant group provided a rich cross-section of Bangladesh's healthcare communication landscape. Their combined experiences offered an integrated view of digital healthcare marketing — from strategic planning and policy framing to creative content design and audience engagement.

Data Collection

Data collection took place over a three-month period between March and June 2025. The process began with outreach messages explaining the study's purpose, confidentiality terms, and expected time commitment. Once participants confirmed interest, each received a digital consent form via email, followed by scheduling of interview sessions.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format. The flexibility of this approach encouraged participants to speak freely while ensuring that all key areas of inquiry were covered. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face in Dhaka or through secure video conferencing platforms such as Zoom. In-person sessions were typically held in office meeting rooms or quiet cafés, ensuring privacy and minimizing external noise.

Before conducting the interviews, a set of guiding questions was developed based on gaps identified in existing literature and aligned with the study's three research questions. These questions were designed to elicit open, reflective responses rather than yes-or-no answers. Each question aimed to uncover both the professional logic and the emotional reasoning behind participants' decisions and perceptions.

The questions were divided into four clusters namely Trends and Practices, Challenges, Opportunities, and Ethics and Impact which mirrored the thematic focus areas of the research design. The goal was to create a balance between direction and openness, ensuring that every conversation flowed naturally while covering the core analytical dimensions of the study.

Table 3.2: Thematic Cluster and Interview Questions

Thematic Cluster	Interview Questions
A. Trends and Practices	1. How has digital marketing evolved in Bangladesh's healthcare sector in recent years? 2. Which digital platforms (Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, SEO, etc.) are most effective for healthcare outreach? 3. Can you describe

	how hospitals or clinics are currently integrating digital tools for patient engagement?
B. Challenges	4. What challenges do healthcare organizations face when implementing digital marketing strategies? 5. How do you handle misinformation or patient trust issues online? 6. What barriers (technical, financial, or cultural) limit digital adoption in healthcare marketing? 7. How effective is government regulation or oversight in this space?
C. Opportunities	8. What opportunities do you see in telemedicine or online consultations? 9. How can data analytics or localized content improve healthcare campaigns? 10. In your opinion, what is the next big shift coming for healthcare marketing in Bangladesh?
D. Ethics and Impact	11. How do you measure the impact of digital campaigns in healthcare? 12. Are there any ethical concerns around targeting patients or promoting medical services online?

These questions were not only informed by theoretical frameworks such as Service-Dominant Logic and Social Capital Theory but also by practical observations of the local communication environment in Dhaka. For instance, the section on Challenges was heavily shaped by previous research highlighting misinformation and regulatory gaps, while the Opportunities cluster drew inspiration from studies that discussed telemedicine and data-driven marketing as potential areas for innovation.

The structure of the questions also reflected a gradual progression beginning with broader reflections on industry trends, moving through professional obstacles and possibilities, and concluding with ethical introspection. This flow encouraged participants to warm up to the conversation before engaging in deeper, more sensitive discussions about policy, privacy, and public accountability.

Each question served as an entry point rather than a boundary. Participants were encouraged to elaborate with real-life examples, case experiences, or contrasting views from peers. Many shared specific campaign stories, including instances of both success and failure, which added rich contextual detail to the data. Several

participants, for example, described moments where digital outreach campaigns backfired due to misinterpretation or lack of clarity that later became key analytic cases in the findings section.

The development of these interview questions also underwent an informal pilot test. Two professionals in healthcare communication, not included in the final sample, were invited to review the guide and provide feedback on clarity and tone. Based on their input, wording was adjusted to make the questions more conversational and less technical, ensuring that participants from varying institutional backgrounds could engage easily.

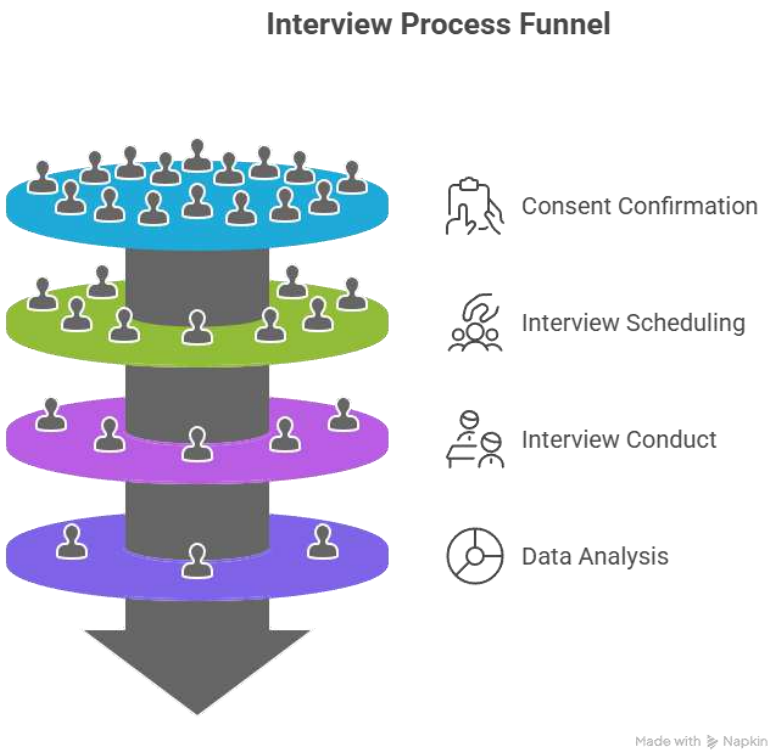


Figure 3.3: Interview Process Funnel

The inclusion of these twelve questions ensured a consistent line of inquiry while allowing for flexibility in exploring unique insights. Their structure also made it easier to apply Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis, since the raw data already followed a logical thematic alignment. This continuity between data collection and analysis helped maintain coherence throughout the research process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical responsibility was at the heart of this research. Because the study dealt with human participants and explored sensitive professional experiences, each stage of the process was guided by strict ethical awareness. The purpose was to ensure that participants could speak freely about their experiences without fear of exposure or misrepresentation, while maintaining full respect for privacy, consent, and transparency.

Before beginning data collection, the research proposal was submitted for review and received formal ethical clearance from the university's institutional ethics committee. This approval confirmed that the study complied with all requirements related to informed consent, confidentiality, and participant welfare. Once approval was granted, each potential participant received a clear and accessible information sheet explaining the study's objectives, procedures, and expected outcomes. This sheet also stated explicitly that participation was voluntary, and that respondents could withdraw from the study at any point without explanation or consequence.

All twelve participants (P1–P12) provided informed consent before their interviews. Consent was documented through signed or digitally verified forms, depending on whether interviews were held in person or online. The form covered permission to record interviews, assurance of anonymity, and the right to review quotations before publication. Several participants, particularly those in senior administrative positions, requested confirmation that their statements would not be linked to identifiable organizations. To address this, all identifying information was removed during transcription.

Anonymity was maintained through the use of coded identifiers such as P1 to P12 that replaced participants' names in both transcripts and analysis files. These codes appear throughout the findings section to preserve the authenticity of their voices while protecting their identities. Only the researcher had access to the key linking participant names with codes, and this key was deleted immediately after data validation.

All interview recordings, transcripts, and notes were stored in password-protected digital folders. Data were encrypted and backed up on a secure drive to prevent unauthorized access. No data were shared with third parties or uploaded to external storage services. In line with university policy, all research materials will be securely archived for a limited retention period before deletion.

Participants were also protected through non-disclosure of institutional affiliations. Given the competitive nature of healthcare marketing in Dhaka, many respondents discussed internal strategies, budget concerns, and communication policies that could be sensitive. The study therefore prioritized confidentiality not only at the individual level but also at the organizational level. In presenting quotes, references to specific hospitals, agencies, or startups were replaced with neutral descriptors such as "a private hospital" or "a digital agency."

In addition to procedural ethics, the researcher maintained an awareness of relational ethics, the ongoing responsibility to treat participants with respect, empathy, and fairness throughout the study. Interviews often involved discussions of professional frustration, burnout, or ethical tension. When such moments arose, the researcher responded with sensitivity and ensured that participants felt comfortable pausing or redirecting the conversation.

A commitment to reflexivity was also embedded in the research design. The researcher maintained a reflexive journal to record personal reactions, assumptions, and emotional responses during data collection and analysis. This reflective process helped identify potential biases that could influence interpretation. For example, the researcher, having prior professional experience in communication, remained conscious of the risk of projecting personal expectations onto participants' accounts. These reflections were revisited during thematic coding to ensure that emerging patterns were grounded in participant perspectives rather than researcher interpretation.

Throughout the project, communication with participants remained open. After transcription, selected quotations were shared with the respective participants for confirmation, a step known as member checking. This practice strengthened validity and ensured that participants felt ownership over how their words were represented. Several participants provided small clarifications or requested that certain phrases be reworded to better reflect their intentions. These edits were incorporated into the final transcripts before analysis.

The ethical process did not end with data collection. In reporting findings, care was taken to avoid sensationalizing or oversimplifying complex issues. The goal was not to expose problems or assign blame, but to amplify professional voices and contribute constructively to the growing conversation around healthcare communication in Bangladesh. Quotes were presented contextually and respectfully, emphasizing insight over criticism.

This multi-layered ethical approach ensured that the study adhered to both the letter and the spirit of responsible qualitative research. It allowed participants to share candid reflections about their work and their challenges while knowing that their privacy was fully protected. The integrity of this process forms the foundation for the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings that follow.

Findings and Analysis

The interviews with twelve participants (P1–P12) revealed a rich, multi-layered view of how digital marketing is reshaping healthcare communication in Dhaka. The themes that emerged align closely with the four main clusters identified in the research design: trends and practices, challenges, opportunities, and ethical and regulatory concerns. Together, these themes illustrate a sector in transition — one that is learning to balance innovation, competition, and ethical responsibility while redefining how healthcare information circulates in digital spaces.

Trends and Practices

Across all interviews, participants described a clear and rapid shift from traditional marketing toward digital-first communication strategies. Nearly every respondent highlighted the growing dominance of Facebook

and YouTube as the main tools for audience outreach. These platforms were viewed as essential for visibility and patient engagement.

According to P1, a marketing executive from a private hospital, "*Facebook is where our patients live now. It's no longer just a social platform, it's our front desk.*" This sentiment was echoed by P11, who works in media, noting that short, emotionally resonant health videos have outperformed conventional advertisements. "*When you tell a story that feels human, people listen,*" she explained.

Facebook's visual and interactive format allows hospitals to promote awareness campaigns, live sessions, and quick consultations. YouTube, on the other hand, offers more depth. Participants observed that patients tend to use YouTube to learn about procedures, side effects, or doctor qualifications. This aligns with P3's comment that, "*A well-made YouTube video from a doctor gets more trust than a thousand words on a website.*"

A major trend emerging from these interviews is the transition from corporate communication to patient-centered storytelling. Hospitals are moving away from institutional language and focusing instead on individual experiences, often using testimonials, recovery stories, or physician Q&A sessions to build credibility. P1 explained that their most successful campaigns feature "real patient journeys," while P3 added that "*storytelling makes people feel seen and understood*."

Beyond social media, several participants described the growing integration of digital automation tools such as chatbots, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, and telemedicine interfaces. P2 shared that their hospital recently launched a Messenger chatbot that answers common questions about doctor availability and test prices. "*Patients appreciate quick replies. They feel we care about their time,*" he noted. Similarly, P6, a digital agency director, explained how CRM systems help track engagement metrics, automate follow-up reminders, and analyze which campaigns generate actual patient bookings.

Telemedicine platforms are also becoming central to digital marketing strategies. P9, who runs a telehealth startup, emphasized that "*every teleconsultation is also a marketing touchpoint*." The ability to offer virtual consultations extends the hospital's brand beyond physical boundaries, creating what several participants called a "24-hour presence."

These technological tools are not only improving operational efficiency but also deepening patient interaction. Hospitals now monitor audience behavior across platforms, allowing them to tailor communication to patient preferences. For example, analytics tools show which health topics attract the most engagement, helping teams design targeted content strategies.

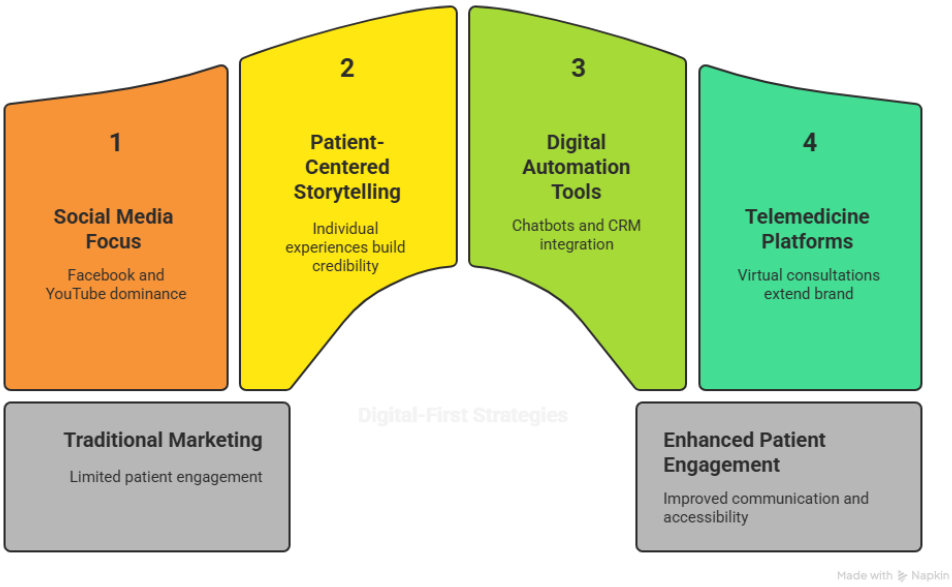


Figure 4.1: Key Stages of Digital Transformation in Healthcare Marketing

Overall, participants agreed that digital transformation has democratized healthcare communication. Small clinics now compete with large hospitals in visibility, provided they invest in storytelling and authenticity. The transition, however, remains uneven and fraught with institutional and cultural hurdles, which are explored in the next section.

Challenges

While enthusiasm for digital marketing is strong, participants were candid about the difficulties of implementation. Limited resources and digital literacy emerged as the most consistent themes, particularly among administrators from public institutions. P4 described how public hospitals often lack dedicated communication teams or budgets. "*Our priorities are patient care and infrastructure, so marketing feels secondary*," he said. P5 added that even when funding is available, bureaucratic delays often slow down approval for campaigns.

In private institutions, the problem is less about funding and more about understanding. Several participants admitted that senior management sometimes underestimates the complexity of digital marketing. P2 noted, "*Many executives think digital marketing is just boosting a post. They don't realize it's about strategy, content, and continuous engagement.*"

The digital literacy gap extends to healthcare professionals as well. Doctors, especially senior practitioners, often hesitate to appear in videos or online discussions due to concerns about professionalism or fear of misinterpretation. P8, a creative director at a health communication agency, explained, "*We have to coach doctors on how to speak naturally. Many still see media presence as self-promotion.*"

A second major challenge identified by nearly all participants is the spread of misinformation and the lack of regulatory oversight. False claims, miracle cures, and fear-driven campaigns circulate widely on social media, often from unverified sources. P7 lamented, "*We spend half our time correcting misinformation rather than promoting actual services*." P12, a digital editor at a national news outlet, echoed this concern, pointing out that "*the absence of fact-checking and coordination between health institutions makes misinformation spread like wildfire*."

A third barrier is cultural discomfort with marketing in medical contexts. Many respondents mentioned that healthcare marketing still carries stigma in Bangladesh. P8 explained that some professionals consider it "inappropriate" to promote medical services publicly, fearing it might appear exploitative. This perception limits the creativity and openness of campaigns. P2 observed that "*we walk a fine line that too quiet, and people do not know we exist; too visible, and people question our ethics*."

This tension reflects deeper cultural values surrounding healthcare in Bangladesh, where medicine is traditionally viewed as a noble service rather than a commercial field. Balancing business objectives with social expectations requires careful tone and ethical sensitivity.

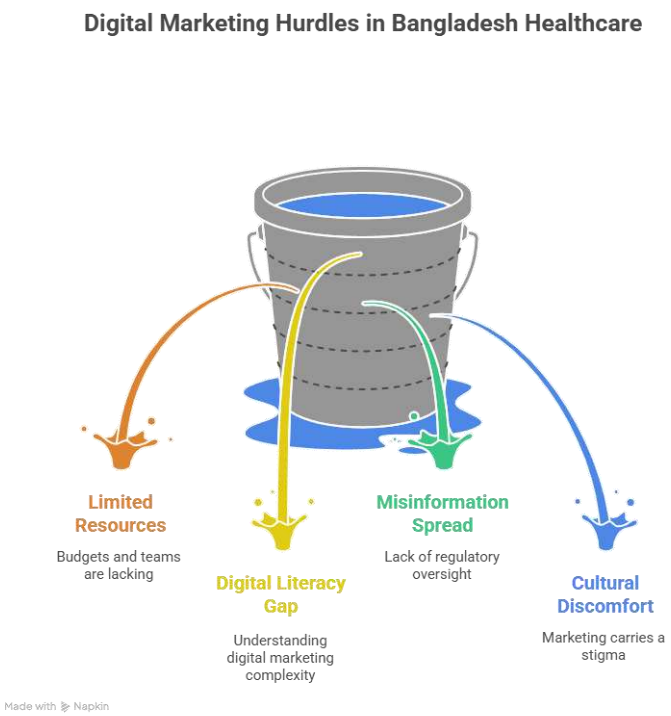


Figure 4.2: Digital Marketing Hurdles in Bangladesh Healthcare

In summary, the sector's challenges stem not only from structural limitations but also from psychological and cultural barriers. The participants described a professional landscape where digital marketing is necessary but still not fully accepted, creating ongoing tension between innovation and restraint.

Opportunities

Although participants spoke at length about obstacles, their tone shifted noticeably when discussing future possibilities. Every interview revealed a sense of optimism about where digital healthcare communication could go, particularly in expanding access and improving patient relationships.

The most dominant theme in this cluster was the transformative role of telemedicine. Participants described teleconsultations as one of the most important innovations to emerge during the pandemic. For P9, who manages a telehealth startup, telemedicine is "*no longer just an emergency tool but a permanent channel for care.*" He explained that digital platforms have made healthcare more inclusive, particularly for patients living outside Dhaka or for those unable to travel easily due to mobility or financial limitations. P10, a health and wellness entrepreneur, agreed that telemedicine bridges structural inequalities. "*We're connecting people who used to be invisible in the system,"* she said, emphasizing that online consultations create continuity of care and open opportunities for preventive health education.

Several participants framed telemedicine not only as a service but also as a communication strategy. By offering live video consultations and post-appointment follow-ups through email or chat, hospitals build long-term relationships with patients. P6, who runs a digital agency specializing in healthcare, described it as *"relationship marketing disguised as service delivery."* Patients begin to associate online responsiveness with overall institutional reliability.

Another opportunity that appeared repeatedly in the interviews was data-driven personalization. Participants recognized that hospitals now have access to unprecedented volumes of information like appointment data, engagement metrics, and feedback patterns which can be used ethically to improve campaigns. P6 emphasized that *"data tells us what patients actually care about, not what we assume they care about."* For example, when his team analyzed post engagement trends, they discovered that wellness topics such as stress management received more interaction than posts about treatment packages. Insights like this have encouraged hospitals to redesign content strategies around patient needs rather than institutional achievements.

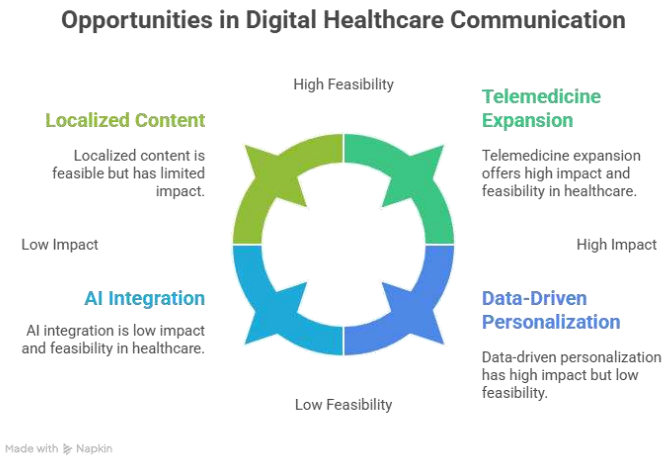


Figure 4.2: Opportunities in Digital Healthcare Communication

P8 highlighted how localized Bangla content continues to outperform English campaigns across digital platforms. *"Language is identity,"* she said. *"People trust messages that sound like they come from home."* Several participants also mentioned the importance of regional dialects and culturally familiar imagery. Localization, they argued, is not just translation but adaptation, a process that transforms formal medical information into relatable everyday language. P9 shared that when his company introduced Bangla voice notes explaining how to use their app, daily active users nearly doubled within a month.

The idea of cross-sector collaboration emerged as another strong theme. Many participants called for partnerships between healthcare providers, media professionals, and technology experts to strengthen communication strategies. P11, a senior health correspondent, suggested that *"media can amplify credible information if hospitals treat us as collaborators, not outsiders."* P12 added that shared campaigns between news outlets and hospitals could help combat misinformation more effectively than fragmented individual efforts.

Innovation in digital tools also opened discussions about future integration of AI and automation in healthcare marketing. While participants were cautious about data ethics, they saw great potential in using AI to improve responsiveness and accessibility. For example, AI-powered chatbots could provide multilingual support and help triage patient questions before human intervention. P6 predicted that *"the next phase of healthcare marketing will be smart automation, a system that not only responds but learns from interactions."*

Another opportunity lies in the evolution of healthcare from treatment-centered to wellness-centered communication. P10 explained that her startup's campaigns focus on holistic health, combining diet, exercise, and mental well-being advice with traditional medicine. *"People no longer see hospitals as the only source of health information,"* she said. *"They follow nutritionists, fitness coaches, and mental health advocates online. That's where collaboration can happen."*

Participants also recognized the potential for ethical storytelling as a competitive advantage. While sensationalism can generate temporary attention, consistent honesty and empathy create sustainable brand value. P3 mentioned that her hospital's most effective campaign was a series of candid videos featuring doctors explaining both the benefits and limitations of certain treatments. *"Patients respected the honesty,"* she said. *"It felt like we were talking to them, not selling to them."*

Collectively, these opportunities reflect a sector ready for evolution. Participants view digital communication not merely as a marketing tool but as a driver of healthcare equity and social impact. They envision a future where technology and empathy coexist so that personalized, localized, and ethically grounded communication can strengthen both institutions and public trust.

Ethical and Regulatory Concerns

Despite optimism, participants repeatedly emphasized that ethical uncertainty and regulatory absence remain the most urgent issues in digital healthcare communication. Every group such as hospital managers, agency executives, media professionals, and startup founders expressed concern about the lack of clear national guidelines.

P4, a public hospital administrator, stated bluntly that *"there are no official rules defining what healthcare organizations can or cannot post online."* P7, who works in digital strategy, added that this gap leaves room for unethical practices. *"We have clinics making exaggerated promises because no one is monitoring them,"* she said. The interviews revealed that without a standardized framework, institutions often rely on self-imposed ethical rules, which vary widely in quality and interpretation.

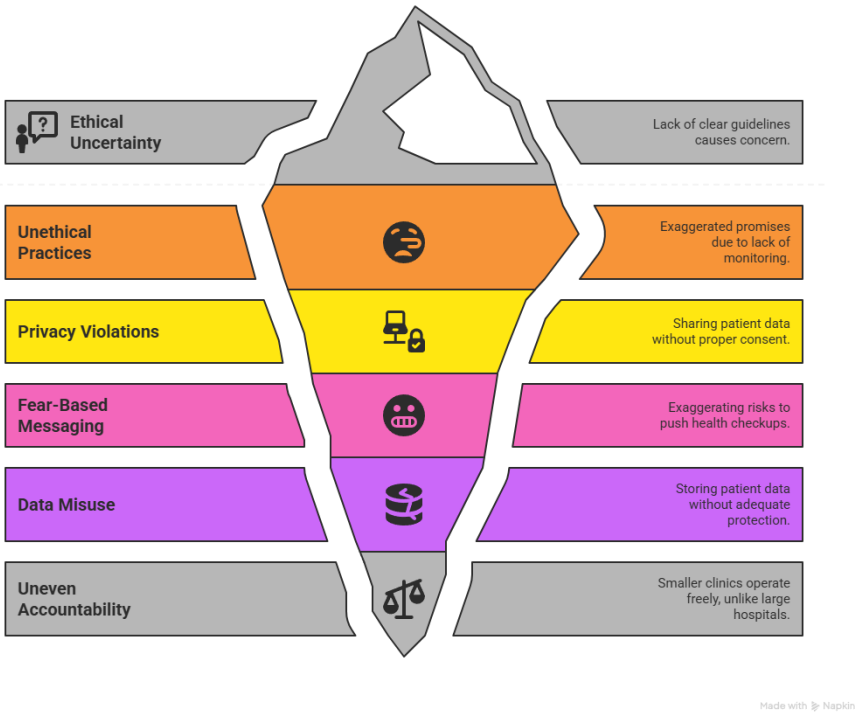


Figure 4.3: Layers of Ethical Uncertainty in Digital Healthcare Communication

Several participants also discussed the problem of privacy and consent in online communication. P12, a digital editor, pointed out that *"some hospitals share patient stories or before-and-after photos without proper written consent."* This behavior, while sometimes unintentional, undermines patient trust and violates confidentiality principles. Participants urged the creation of a formal consent protocol for all digital marketing in healthcare, including patient testimonials and case stories.

The issue of fear-based messaging surfaced repeatedly across interviews. P5, from a public hospital, described campaigns that exaggerate risks to push preventive health checkups. *"When fear becomes the main driver, you lose credibility,"* he said. P8 agreed, warning that emotionally manipulative content damages the ethical integrity of the profession. Ethical storytelling, she argued, requires "a fine balance between urgency and empathy."

Another recurring topic was the potential misuse of health data collected through online systems. P9 raised the concern that startups and private hospitals might store or analyze patient data without adequate protection. While most participants agreed that data analytics is valuable for understanding patient behavior, they stressed the need for clear regulations outlining what information can be collected and how it can be used.

P11 summarized this concern succinctly: *"We have jumped into digital health without building the ethical scaffolding around it."* Participants suggested that the Ministry of Health should establish a National Digital

Health Communication Framework that defines ethical standards for advertising, consent, data management, and misinformation control.

The lack of regulatory structure also contributes to uneven accountability. Large hospitals with international affiliations tend to follow stricter internal policies, while smaller clinics or local pages operate freely. As P7 put it, *"We have a two-tier system, one side professional and the other chaotic."* This imbalance risks eroding trust in digital healthcare communication as a whole.

Participants proposed several solutions, including public-private collaborations to draft ethical codes, capacity-building workshops for marketers and healthcare professionals, and integration of ethics training into medical and communication curricula. They also called for national-level monitoring bodies similar to media councils that could review and flag unethical content.

Ultimately, the findings reveal that trust and regulation are intertwined. Without transparent, standardized ethical practices, digital healthcare marketing cannot achieve legitimacy in the eyes of patients or professionals. Participants across all groups agreed that the sector must move from improvisation to institution — from ad hoc decision-making to a coherent ethical structure that protects both communicators and the public.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how digital marketing is transforming healthcare communication in Bangladesh, what challenges hinder its adoption, and what opportunities exist for ethical and innovative growth. Through the voices of twelve professionals, the findings present a vivid picture of an industry that is learning to navigate technology, trust, and culture all at once. When these insights are placed alongside existing global literature, several patterns of convergence and divergence become clear.

The discussion below cross-analyzes these themes with prior scholarship, linking them to theoretical perspectives such as Service-Dominant Logic and Social Capital Theory to interpret how value, trust, and communication evolve in this digital healthcare ecosystem.

The study's findings strongly align with global literature that positions digital communication as a fundamental driver of transformation in healthcare. As seen in prior studies from Singapore, India, and the United States, the pandemic accelerated digital adoption across health systems, turning online communication into both a lifeline and a strategic necessity (Khan & Al Amin, 2021; Tan et al., 2021). In Bangladesh, participants described a similar surge in the use of Facebook, YouTube, and telemedicine during COVID-19. Hospitals that once relied on print and television began developing digital strategies that blended marketing with patient education.

This alignment reinforces what global research has already established, that digital marketing in healthcare is moving from a focus on persuasion to one centered on empathy and connection. Participants repeatedly emphasized storytelling, transparency, and accessibility as the core of successful digital campaigns. This matches the argument made by Kumar and Smith (2020), who found that patients respond most positively to emotionally intelligent communication that acknowledges vulnerability and builds trust.

Yet, while the pattern of digital uptake mirrors international trends, the scale and speed of adoption vary due to local realities. Developed countries benefit from robust digital infrastructure, clearer regulations, and higher levels of health literacy. In contrast, Bangladeshi institutions operate in a more fragmented environment, where innovation often outpaces policy. The digital revolution is visible, but it remains uneven.

Another point of convergence with global research is the integration of data-driven decision-making into communication strategy. Hospitals and agencies in Dhaka are beginning to rely on analytics to understand audience engagement, just as health organizations in other regions have done. This reflects the worldwide shift from intuition-based marketing toward measurable outcomes. Participants, however, stressed that while data is valuable, interpretation requires sensitivity. Cultural nuance, language preferences, and socio-economic factors cannot be captured entirely through metrics.

Globally, studies have shown that patient-centered engagement leads to stronger loyalty and satisfaction (Prasad & Singh, 2022). In this study, professionals echoed that insight, noting that patients appreciate responsiveness, personalized content, and transparency. For example, live sessions where doctors answer real-time questions were cited as far more effective than traditional advertisements. This confirms the transition identified by international scholars from institutional to conversational marketing, where the emphasis is on dialogue rather than monologue.

While the findings align with global patterns in principle, several barriers are uniquely contextual to Bangladesh. Two major ones stand out: hierarchical bureaucracy and cultural resistance to marketing within healthcare.

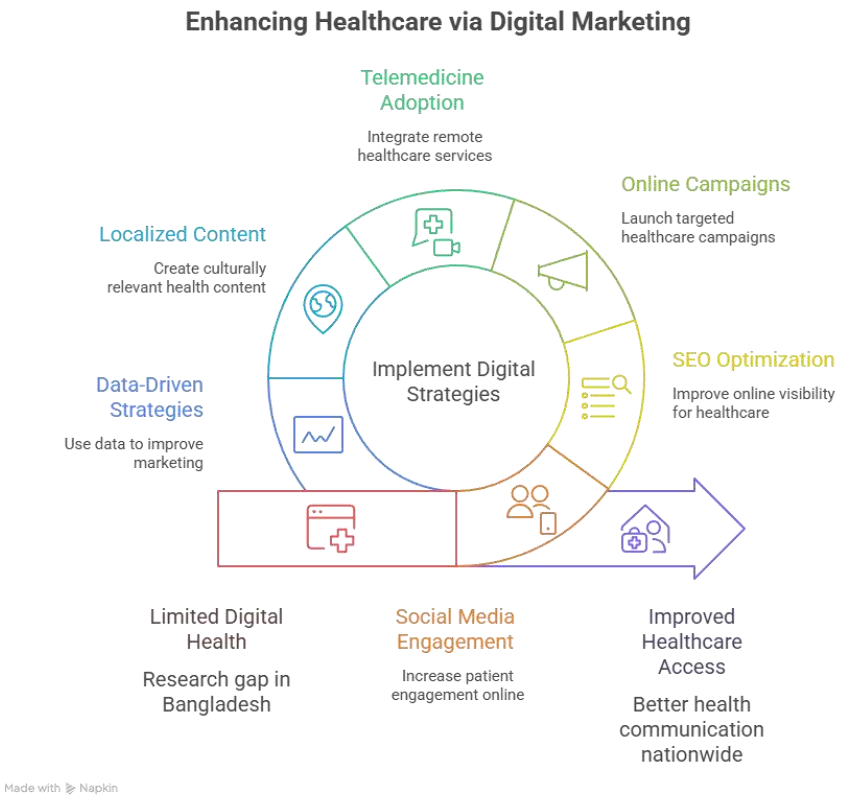


Figure 4.4: Enhancing Healthcare via Digital Marketing

The bureaucratic structure of many Bangladeshi institutions slows the decision-making process, particularly in public hospitals. P4 and P5 highlighted that digital initiatives often require multiple layers of approval, creating long delays that make it difficult to respond to fast-moving online trends. This challenge is not widely reported in Western literature, where hospitals usually operate under autonomous communication teams with dedicated budgets. In Bangladesh, decision-making authority often rests with administrators who may not fully grasp the urgency or technical nature of digital engagement.

The second barrier is cultural. Participants discussed a lingering discomfort with the idea of marketing healthcare services. This stems from traditional views that medicine should be a selfless vocation rather than a competitive business. As P8 observed, even skilled professionals hesitate to appear in digital campaigns, fearing it may seem unprofessional. Such sentiments have no close parallel in global contexts where healthcare marketing is normalized as part of institutional transparency.

This cultural tension reveals the need to reinterpret marketing as a form of public education rather than profit-making. When hospitals communicate ethically and transparently, marketing becomes an act of service, not self-promotion. Studies from Indonesia and India have similarly noted that cultural values strongly influence digital adoption in healthcare (Hidayat et al., 2020). In Bangladesh, success will depend on reframing digital marketing within social and ethical frameworks that align with local norms of care and dignity.

Another locally specific issue is the shortage of skilled professionals who understand both digital communication and medical ethics. Participants reported that most hospitals lack specialized staff, forcing marketing tasks to fall under general administration. This gap in human resources contrasts sharply with global systems where health communication is treated as a specialized discipline.

In summary, while the global direction of digital transformation is evident in Bangladesh, the country's bureaucratic rigidity, cultural conservatism, and resource limitations slow its full realization. Addressing these issues will require policy reform, professional training, and a reframing of marketing as a social good rather than an economic pursuit.

The findings resonate strongly with Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), which views value as something co-created through interaction rather than delivered unilaterally. In healthcare, this means that hospitals, doctors, and patients participate together in creating the meaning and experience of care.

Digital platforms in Bangladesh exemplify this process of co-creation. When hospitals post educational content and patients respond with feedback, questions, or personal stories, a shared narrative emerges. P1 and P3 noted that campaigns built around patient testimonials often gain the highest engagement because they make patients feel part of the institution's story. This interaction transforms the patient from a passive consumer into an active collaborator.

SDL also helps explain how digital marketing extends beyond economic value to create social and emotional value. Participants such as P9 and P10 described telemedicine as not only a revenue-generating tool but also a platform for building relationships and inclusion. Through continuous digital interaction, patients begin to perceive hospitals as accessible partners rather than distant authorities.

This dynamic aligns with Vargo and Lusch's (2016) argument that all service systems, including healthcare, depend on networks of mutual participation. The Bangladeshi context adds a unique layer to this theory. Because of the country's community-oriented culture, value co-creation often takes on collective forms. Patients share information in online forums, family members participate in decision-making, and local influencers amplify messages. Digital healthcare marketing, therefore, functions not only as institutional communication but also as social collaboration that extends into the wider community.

By applying SDL, the study illustrates that digital healthcare marketing is not simply about promoting services. It is a system of shared value creation where engagement, responsiveness, and trust collectively shape patient experience.

The concept of Social Capital further deepens understanding of how trust operates in Bangladesh's digital healthcare ecosystem. Social Capital Theory emphasizes the value of networks, shared norms, and mutual trust

in shaping collective outcomes. In healthcare communication, this translates into how relationships and credibility flow across digital platforms.

Participants repeatedly emphasized that trust remains the single most important factor influencing patient behavior. In an environment saturated with misinformation, people rely on social validation to determine which information to believe. As P12 explained, *"People trust what their peers share more than what any hospital says."* This observation aligns with Putnam's (2000) view that social capital develops through community networks and collective trust rather than institutional authority.

In Bangladesh, digital spaces such as Facebook groups or health forums act as modern equivalents of community networks. Patients exchange doctor recommendations, discuss symptoms, and evaluate hospitals collectively. Each interaction builds a layer of shared confidence that influences decision-making. Hospitals that engage openly within these networks gain reputational benefits that extend beyond their own marketing.

The role of social capital also explains why localized content and cultural sensitivity matter so deeply. When hospitals communicate in Bangla using familiar idioms or visual symbols, they tap into existing social trust. Participants like P8 and P9 observed that localized campaigns feel more credible precisely because they resonate emotionally and socially. This connection reflects the bridging function of social capital, turning abstract information into shared understanding.

Furthermore, the collective nature of digital engagement contributes to community health literacy. When individuals learn through social sharing, they also teach others indirectly. A successful awareness campaign can thus ripple through networks, reaching audiences beyond the hospital's direct reach. Participants gave examples of Facebook health tips being re-shared hundreds of times, effectively turning patients into secondary communicators. This aligns with theories of participatory health communication, which emphasize peer-to-peer influence as a vital channel for spreading accurate health information.

Social capital, however, is fragile. Participants warned that unethical marketing or misinformation can quickly erode trust. Once damaged, reputational recovery is slow. This reinforces the earlier point that ethics and regulation are not optional add-ons but essential components of sustainable digital healthcare communication.

Together, Service-Dominant Logic and Social Capital Theory provide a coherent lens for interpreting how Bangladesh's digital healthcare ecosystem operates. The first explains the process of value creation through interaction, while the second explains how trust sustains those interactions within a social framework.

Digital healthcare marketing in Bangladesh thrives when hospitals and patients co-create meaning through ongoing dialogue, but this co-creation is only sustainable if social trust is nurtured through ethical practice and community relevance. In this sense, technology serves as a bridge, not a substitute, for human connection.

The discussion therefore extends beyond marketing to broader questions of public health communication and social responsibility. As hospitals, startups, and media organizations continue to expand their digital presence, the balance between innovation and integrity will determine how far the sector can evolve. Sustainable success will depend not only on technological advancement but on the ability to cultivate social capital through genuine, transparent, and participatory engagement.

In sum, the findings confirm that Bangladesh's healthcare sector mirrors global patterns of digital transformation while also reflecting deeply local dynamics of hierarchy, culture, and community. The next section will synthesize these insights into actionable recommendations and highlight how an ethical, data-informed, and socially grounded approach can shape the future of healthcare communication in Bangladesh.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary

The findings of this study reveal a healthcare communication sector in Bangladesh that is evolving rapidly but unevenly. Digital marketing has moved from the periphery of healthcare institutions to the center of their communication strategies. Hospitals, startups, and media professionals now rely on digital platforms to educate, engage, and build trust with patients. Yet, beneath this progress lies a complex reality shaped by systemic inertia, fragmented governance, and lingering ethical uncertainty.

Dhaka, as the country's most digitally connected hub, has become the testing ground for this transformation. Professionals across private hospitals, public institutions, digital agencies, and media organizations described an environment full of innovation and energy. They also spoke of constant struggle with limited budgets, slow bureaucratic processes, and cultural hesitation around marketing medical services.

The rise of digital engagement has brought both inclusion and imbalance. On one hand, telemedicine and social media have democratized access to healthcare information, giving patients a stronger voice and connecting them directly with experts. On the other, the absence of clear regulations leaves room for misinformation, data misuse, and sensationalism. Hospitals with greater resources and digital literacy thrive, while smaller clinics struggle to keep up.

This duality captures Bangladesh's digital healthcare journey. It mirrors global transformations in spirit but diverges in execution. Participants in this study saw digital marketing not as a luxury but as a necessity, an essential part of modern healthcare delivery that extends far beyond advertising. However, they also recognized that sustainable progress will depend on trust, ethics, and collective coordination among all sectors.

The results align with global scholarship suggesting that digital healthcare communication works best when guided by empathy, transparency, and human-centered design. At the same time, Bangladesh's experience adds new dimensions to this understanding by showing how cultural norms, institutional hierarchies, and resource gaps influence digital adoption. The picture that emerges is one of cautious optimism, a system that is learning to adapt but still finding its ethical and regulatory footing.

Recommendations

The insights gathered from the twelve participants point to several actionable paths that can help Bangladesh build a more sustainable, ethical, and inclusive digital healthcare ecosystem. These recommendations are directed at policymakers, healthcare administrators, and communication professionals who shape the digital presence of healthcare institutions.

1. Establish a National Digital Health Communication Framework

The most urgent need is for a unified national framework that governs online healthcare communication. This framework should define ethical boundaries for advertising, set guidelines for content accuracy, and outline consent and privacy protocols for patient data. It should also clarify accountability mechanisms for misinformation. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, in collaboration with professional associations and digital media regulators, could lead this initiative. Establishing clear standards would reduce ambiguity and create a fair, transparent environment for both public and private actors.

2. Strengthen Training and Literacy Programs for Hospital Communication Teams

Most participants agreed that digital healthcare marketing requires specialized skills that are still developing in Bangladesh. Training programs should therefore focus on both technical and ethical dimensions of digital communication. Hospitals can partner with universities and professional associations to offer certificate programs in healthcare marketing, digital storytelling, and analytics. Increasing digital literacy among healthcare professionals such as including administrators and doctors will also reduce the communication gap between management and marketing teams. In the long term, such training will help embed digital thinking across institutional culture rather than isolating it within a few individuals or departments.

3. Promote Ethical Storytelling and Data Protection Standards

Ethical storytelling emerged as a recurring concern in the interviews. To address this, healthcare institutions should adopt internal codes of conduct for all content that features patients or health outcomes. These guidelines should mandate written consent for testimonials, avoid sensationalism, and ensure accuracy in medical claims. Additionally, hospitals and digital agencies must implement strong data protection systems to prevent

misuse of patient information. Adopting data encryption, secure consent forms, and restricted data access policies will help maintain public confidence.

4. Encourage Cross-Sector Partnerships between Media, Startups, and Government

The interviews revealed a shared belief that collaboration is essential to strengthen digital health communication. Media organizations possess expertise in mass communication, startups bring technological innovation, and government agencies provide policy oversight. Coordinated partnerships among these entities could produce national awareness campaigns on issues such as vaccination, mental health, and chronic disease prevention. Such campaigns could also serve as models for ethical communication by demonstrating factual, empathetic storytelling.

Joint platforms or advisory councils could be established where these sectors share insights and monitor public health narratives online. By working together, institutions can reduce duplication of effort and combat misinformation more effectively.

5. Foster Localized and Inclusive Communication

As several participants highlighted, content in Bangla and regional dialects achieves higher engagement and better understanding. Future campaigns should continue to emphasize localization, ensuring that information reaches diverse audiences regardless of language or literacy level. Hospitals could also collaborate with community organizations to extend digital literacy training and awareness programs to underrepresented groups. This will help bridge the digital divide between urban and rural populations.

6. Integrate Digital Ethics into Medical and Communication Education

Long-term ethical consistency requires education at the foundational level. Medical and communication curricula should include modules on digital media ethics, online patient interaction, and responsible health promotion. These additions will ensure that future healthcare professionals understand both the power and the responsibility that come with digital communication.

Collectively, these recommendations point toward a future where technology, ethics, and education move in harmony. Digital healthcare marketing can become a tool for empowerment rather than manipulation if guided by clear frameworks and shared responsibility.

Future Research

While this study offers a detailed look into professional perspectives, it also opens new questions for further exploration. Future research should build on these insights to capture a more comprehensive understanding of digital healthcare communication across different contexts in Bangladesh.

Comparative Studies between Urban and Rural Digitalization

This study focused primarily on Dhaka, where digital infrastructure is advanced and communication teams are relatively skilled. Future work should compare these findings with rural or semi-urban settings, where healthcare marketing may be less formalized. Such comparative studies could highlight disparities in access, digital literacy, and communication strategies, helping policymakers design targeted interventions that close the digital divide.

Patient-Side Perspectives on Trust, Privacy, and Health Literacy

Another crucial area for future research is the patient perspective. This study captured professional voices, but understanding how patients interpret, trust, and act upon digital healthcare information is equally vital. Future studies could use focus groups or digital ethnography to analyze how patients navigate online medical content, assess credibility, and manage privacy.

Cross-National or Regional Comparisons

Bangladesh's experience shares similarities with neighboring South Asian countries that are undergoing parallel transitions in digital healthcare. Comparative research across the region could help identify best practices and regional policy models. Collaborative research among academic institutions could further contribute to building a South Asian framework for ethical digital health communication.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that digital healthcare marketing in Bangladesh is not merely a communication trend but a structural shift in how care, trust, and information are shared. Its success will depend on collective responsibility, ethical integrity, and the willingness to see digital communication not only as a business function but as a public service.

Author Declaration

The author declares that this manuscript is an original work based on independent research and has not been published or submitted elsewhere, in whole or in part. All sources of information and prior studies have been properly cited within the text. Ethical approval for the study was obtained on 27th February 2025, from the Research Ethics Committee of Daffodil International University for this research before data collection. Written consent was secured from all participants, and their confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. The author assumes full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the data, analysis, and interpretations presented in this paper.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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