

Revamping hospitals' online communication strategies: a humanistic approach to build meaningful brands

La renovación de las estrategias de comunicación online de los hospitales: un enfoque humanista para crear marcas relevantes

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Artículos especiales

Abstract

Introduction: Hospitals implement artificial intelligence, big data, and telehealth to accelerate digital transformation and improve quality standards. However, their corporate communication strategies remain very conservative (brochures, magazines, websites) and inconsistent with their ambitious organizational goals. **Objective:** This literature review-based paper analyzes how hospitals should use technology to revamp their online communication strategies and build more meaningful brands. **Methodology:** To do that, we conducted a literature review on digital hospitals, their branding strategies, and their stakeholders' humanistic needs. Based on that, we proposed an online communication model to help hospitals build credible brands. **Conclusion:** We concluded that these organizations should focus their communication efforts on sharing credible content that describes how their medical initiatives improve society; they should assist their stakeholders in enhancing their global understanding of healthcare; and they should help the Digital Communication Unit lead an intellectual reflection about how to develop a smart hospital from a technology and humanistic perspective.

Keywords: Hospitals; Digital transformation; Corporate communication; Humanities; Branding.

Resumen

Introducción: Los hospitales implementan la inteligencia artificial, el *big data* y la telemedicina para acelerar su transformación digital y mejorar los estándares de calidad. Sin embargo, las estrategias de comunicación corporativa de estas organizaciones siguen siendo muy conservadoras (folletos, revistas, sitios web) e inconsistentes con los objetivos ambiciosos de dichas organizaciones. **Objetivo:** Este artículo de revisión bibliográfica analiza cómo los hospitales deberían utilizar la tecnología para modernizar sus estrategias de comunicación online y construir marcas más relevantes. **Metodología:** Para ello, realizamos una revisión de la literatura sobre los hospitales digitales, sus estrategias de marca y las necesidades humanísticas de sus públicos. Basándonos en dicha revisión, propusimos un modelo de comunicación online para ayudar a los hospitales a construir marcas creíbles. **Conclusión:** Concluimos que dichas organizaciones deberían centrar sus esfuerzos de comunicación en compartir contenido creíble que describa cómo sus iniciativas médicas contribuyen a mejorar la sociedad; además, deberían ayudar a sus públicos a mejorar su comprensión global sobre la atención sanitaria; y, finalmente, deberían facilitar que la Unidad de Comunicación Digital liderar una reflexión intelectual sobre cómo implantar un hospital inteligente desde una perspectiva tecnológica y humanista.

Palabras clave: Hospitales; Transformación digital; Comunicación corporativa; Humanidades; Marca.

Introduction

Hospitals are crucial organizations in society since they protect citizens' healthcare rights. They also promote health education initiatives, implement medical research projects, and develop organizational protocols to raise healthcare quality standards. However, hospitals' communication activities are not consistent with the social impact of their medical activities. Indeed, most implement basic communication initiatives, such as designing brochures, publishing corporate magazines, organizing internal events, or managing corporate websites. In this framework, most hospitals are accelerating their digital transformation processes to improve patients' medical outcomes. Artificial intelligence, big data, deep learning, the Internet of Things, and telehealth have become common words in these organizations. Thanks to this technology, hospitals improve their internal processes, medical protocols, and quality standards; in other words, hospitals are becoming smart organizations where technology and healthcare are perfectly integrated. Nevertheless, this technological revolution does not affect these organizations' corporate communication strategies in the same way. Indeed, most hospitals use social media platforms, mobile apps, and other online tools for basic purposes, such as publishing content about medical treatments or hospital services. In other words, they do not take advantage of the full potential of these technological tools. For this reason, experts in online health communication need to think critically about how to use technology for branding and medical purposes more innovatively. This intellectual reflection is crucial to positively contributing to hospitals' digital transformation processes.

This essay analyzes how hospitals could revamp their online communication strategies to build more credible brands. To do that, we conducted a literature review about digital hospitals (artificial intelligence, big data, telemedicine, health wearables), their branding strategies (websites, patient portals, social media, mobile applications), and their stakeholders' humanistic needs (employees, suppliers, investors, patients, society, media companies, and public health authorities). Then, based on this literature review, we proposed an online communication model to help hospitals develop meaningful brands. This model includes three main parts: the hospital's Digital Communication Unit, its annual content strategy to promote the brand, and the impact of this strategy on the organization's social legacy. Thanks to this model, hospitals can raise the intellectual level of their online communication initiatives and, in this way, efficiently contribute to hospitals' digital transformation processes. This communication model can be applied to hospitals worldwide.

Digital Hospitals

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence in healthcare refers to using robots and machine learning to copy human cognition, perform medical tasks, and provide new ways of diagnosing and treating patients (Ramon Fernández, 2021). This technology improves the quality of clinical care and increases patient participation and engagement in healthcare and research (Manrique de Lara & Peláez-Ballestas, 2020). Using artificial intelligence is especially useful for some patients. For example, thanks to this technology, patients suffering from chronic conditions can perform tasks traditionally conducted by healthcare professionals more conveniently, at lower costs, and without compromising quality (Hager, Lindblad, Brommels, Salomonsson & Wannheden, 2021). On the other hand, the use of artificial intelligence is also helpful in treating, controlling, and monitoring patients suffering from mental health disorders (Zhang, Lim, Zhou & Dahl, 2021); as well as patients facing epidemics, as was the case some years ago when Apple and Google developed a Bluetooth-based application programming interface that warned users if their phone had been near the phone of a COVID-19 case (Lin & Hou, 2020). Finally, hospitals can use artificial intelligence-based tools to improve medical imaging techniques (Kaissis, Makowski, Rückert & Braren, 2020), as well as some internal processes: online appointments, data recording for diagnosis, and communication relationships among doctors and patients (Dhagarra, Goswami & Kumar, 2020).

Artificial Intelligence helps hospitals become digital organizations; however, before implementing any initiative related to this area, they must ensure they comply with legal frameworks and respect their employees' and patients' rights (Morte Ferrer, 2021). Besides, they must consider the severe safety risks associated with artificial intelligence, such as those related to patients' privacy concerns (Rickert, 2020) or those provoked by limited dataset availability for algorithm training and validation due to the absence of standardized electronic medical records (Kaissis et al., 2020). For example, the application of artificial intelligence for tracking patients can be a

double-edged sword since this technology, combined with facial recognition technology, could pinpoint anyone, anytime, anywhere, and know what they have done (Burr, Taddeo & Floridi, 2020). For this reason, hospitals should implement state-of-the-art security systems to track patients; otherwise, hackers could violate patients' privacy and use their data for criminal activities (Lin et al., 2020). In other words, hospitals need to professionalize their use of artificial intelligence before implementing any initiative (Khan & Alotaibi, 2020), and this way, make sure this technology is beneficial to fulfill patients' needs in terms of information, medical aid, and emotional support (Rubeis, 2022).

Big Data

In healthcare organizations, big data refers to tremendously large data sets intended for computational analysis that can be used to advance research by revealing trends and associations (Howe & Elenberg, 2020). This approach to health-related research allows researchers to extract valuable insights and leads doctors and nurses to work in a more coordinated way (Ferretti, Ienca, Hurst & Vayena, 2020). The use of big data represents five main advantages for these professionals. First, this technology allows doctors and nurses to make better decisions, reduce patient risks, and accelerate their recovery processes (Shilo, Rossman & Segal, 2020). Second, hospitals can use big data to track patients' trajectories in space and time, monitor treatments, and improve patients' medical outcomes (Holmes, Soualmia & Séroussi, 2018). Third, doctors and nurses learn new technological skills, optimize daily tasks, and enhance professional performance (Mori et al, 2020). Fourth, using big data allows hospitals to improve their internal processes and integrate patients in some of them (Bakken, 2021). Fifth, thanks to this technology, hospitals reinforce their relations with external partners, such as public health authorities or patient associations, and promote health equity (Wirth, Meurers, Johns & Prasser, 2021).

Despite these advantages, many patients have concerns about the collection, unauthorized access, errors, and secondary use of their medical information, which is why hospitals and public authorities should reinforce their policies and security systems (Tseng, Hung, Hwang & Chang, 2020). These policies must be consistent with human rights (Holmes et al., 2018), which means, for example, that patients must never be forced to provide any more personal information than what is strictly necessary to receive adequate treatment and that this data should only be used for appropriate purposes (Véliz, 2019). Furthermore, hospitals must respect ethical and legal frameworks and consider the limitations of big data: the accuracy of some data, the adequacy of computation safeguards, and the interoperability issues and security risks (Nageshwaran, Harris & Guerche-Seblain, 2021). To achieve this goal and make sure big data projects are viewed as ethically robust, hospitals need to involve all stakeholders and use a trusted research environment (Reed-Berendt, Dove & Pareek, 2020). Finally, hospitals cannot only focus on the technical aspects of big data; they also have to consider their internal protocols and the basic principles of medicine (Ramon Fernández, 2021) and respect patient's needs in terms of information and emotional support (Cabezón Ruiz & Morilla Romero de la Osa, 2021).

Telemedicine and Health Wearables

Telemedicine enables remote access to healthcare services and mutual interaction among doctors and patients (Mahmoud et al., 2022). Thanks to this technology, hospitals optimize their internal processes and establish new patient relationships based on trust, respect, and data (Bassan, 2020). Hospitals can use telemedicine to implement new methods to share data in different formats without cost and safely (Liu, Crespo & Martínez, 2020). In other words, thanks to telemedicine, hospitals innovate their internal practices, help doctors improve their professional performance, and contribute to reinforcing patients' empowerment (Mina, 2020). On the other hand, telemedicine is exceedingly feasible in some areas of medical consultation, such as nursing, teleradiology, psychotherapy, and teleneurology (Nittari et al., 2020); besides, it is also beneficial to fight pandemics (Ye, 2020). For these reasons, hospitals, in collaboration with universities and public authorities, should develop training sessions to help doctors and nurses reinforce their skills in the professional use of this technology (Tangari, Ikram, Ijaz, Kaafar & Berkovsky, 2021).

Besides telemedicine, some hospitals manage health wearables to collect data about patients' physical, behavioral, and psychological health (Li et al., 2021). These wearables use sensors to collect data transmitted to cloud-based servers and processed by artificial intelligence-based models, improving patients' medical outcomes and hospitals' internal processes (Sarosh, Parah & Bhat, 2022). Thanks to this technology, hospitals enhance collective decisions making processes among doctors, nurses, and patients (Jiang & Shi, 2021), which is especially

important for patients suffering from chronic diseases since health wearables can support self-management and provide medication and appointment reminders (Ni, Wang & Qian, 2021). Despite these advantages, using health wearables represents two main problems for patients: on the one hand, data security and privacy issues can affect them in different ways (Reed-Berendt et al., 2020); and on the other hand, there is a lack of legal framework to regulate the relationships among governments, industry producers, hospitals, third party institutions and patients (Tangari et al., 2021; Mina, 2020).

Branding Smart Hospitals

Websites and Patient Portals

Hospitals are becoming digital organizations where artificial intelligence, big data, and telehealth play a crucial role in improving patients' medical outcomes and transforming these organizations' professional practices (Deloitte, 2017). In this framework, many hospitals use websites as their primary corporate communication tool (Shieh et al., 2020). This tool has become essential for promoting these organizations' brands and reinforcing their relations with stakeholders (Cham, Cheng, Low & Cheok, 2021). Hospitals use websites to explain critical aspects, such as their mission, vision, international accreditations, or doctors' backgrounds (Tarcan, Balcik & Sapaz, 2019). Furthermore, some hospitals use these platforms to launch health education initiatives and make their brand more credible (Stellefson, Paige & Chaney, 2020). They require their doctors and nurses to participate actively in some of these initiatives: consultations, forums, or virtual tours (Author, 2020). Finally, hospitals use their websites to explain their corporate social responsibility policies and prove their engagement with employees, society, and the environment (Creixans, Coenders & Arimany, 2019).

Besides websites, many hospitals propose patient portals where patients can review medical reports, request prescription renewals, manage appointments, and communicate with doctors and nurses (Dumitrascu et al., 2018). These portals are especially beneficial for the older population since they have the highest healthcare needs, especially those suffering from chronic diseases (Sakaguchi-Tang, Bosold, Choi & Turner, 2017). However, many patients, including older populations, do not use these platforms professionally, wasting hospital time and resources (Zhao et al., 2018). To overcome this problem, hospitals need to consider different disparities when developing their patient portals: age, sex, race, ethnicity, preferred language, insurance status, income, level of education, technology access, health literacy, numeracy, functional literacy, illness status, and disability status (Grossman et al., 2019). Besides, they should train employees and provide them with the necessary resources to manage these portals efficiently (Kooij, Groen & van Harten, 2018). When doctors and nurses understand patient portals, they can contribute to promoting their utilization among patients (Janssen et al., 2021), and this way, patient portals can become an accurate branding for the hospital (Hoogenbosch et al., 2018).

Social Media Platforms

The use of social media constitutes an opportunity for hospitals interested in establishing better relationships with stakeholders (Huo et al., 2019). Thanks to these platforms, hospitals provide patients with new medical services and educational content (Chen & Wang, 2021; Chou, 2021). In other words, social media are potent platforms for medical education activities (Sotto, Shar & Mac, 2020). On the other hand, hospitals can use social media to improve their relationships with patients associations by organizing learning sessions, emotional support groups, or workshops about hospitals' internal functioning (Alonso-Cañadas, Galán-Valdivieso, Saraite-Sariene & Caba-Pérez, 2020). Thanks to these initiatives, hospitals become sources of scientific information that efficiently promote health as an essential value for society (Farsi, 2021). Finally, hospitals can use social media platforms to share information with public authorities and media companies, reinforcing their doctors' and nurses' scientific credibility and public awareness (Kordzadeh & Young, 2018). Hospitals can reinforce their brand thanks to these initiatives addressed to patients, patient associations, public authorities, and media companies (Wu et al., 2019).

If hospitals want to achieve this goal, they need to evolve from their traditional journalistic approach to a corporate communication approach focused on fulfilling stakeholders' needs regarding information and social support (Author, 2020). In other words, hospitals must analyze their stakeholders' perceptions, define their brand architecture, and then launch communication campaigns to promote their brand (Odoom, Narteh & Odoom, 2019). Once hospitals have completed this process, they can use social media platforms to share meaningful content and influence their stakeholders (Alonso-Cañadas et al., 2020). On the other hand, hospitals need to involve

their employees in these online activities so that social media become a valid corporate communication tool that accelerates innovation and creativity (Shieh et al., 2020); in other words, these organizations use social media to build the brand in a collective way (Yantian et al., 2022). This approach helps develop emotional relations with stakeholders (Chen et al., 2021) and promotes the scientific credibility of doctors and nurses (Wu et al., 2019).

Mobile Applications

Most hospitals use mobile applications to enhance internal processes, facilitate doctors' and nurses' professional tasks, and improve patients' medical outcomes (Farsi, 2021). Using these applications has become a medical, communication, and management priority, so hospitals should provide employees and patients with learning sessions (Chamberlain et al., 2021). If hospitals manage mobile applications professionally, they can achieve five main objectives. First, becoming a trustworthy source of scientific information and facilitating decision-making processes among doctors, nurses, and patients (Tangari et al., 2021). Second, reinforcing patients' skills in health literacy (Crossley et al., 2020). Third, implementing online communities where doctors, nurses, and patients can meet and fulfill their information and emotional needs (Piculell, Skär, Sanmartin, Anderberg & Bohman, 2021). Fourth, promoting innovation and creativity by using new formats and languages that change patients' perceptions about healthcare (Butow & Hoque, 2020). Fifth, launching more efficient public health campaigns that reinforce the hospital's brand (Mackert et al., 2020).

Patients with a high level of brand engagement perceive a higher brand value (Rasmus, 2021). This is why organizations implement corporate communication activities to reinforce the emotional attachment among their brands and stakeholders (Bian & Haque, 2020). Some try to get consumers to establish meaningful personal memories involving the brand: family, leisure, and social engagements (Rahman, Langner & Temme, 2021). In this framework, mobile apps help hospitals promote the emotional value of their brands. Thanks to these applications, these organizations improve their communication relationships with stakeholders (Chamberlain et al., 2021) and become a source of scientific information that promotes healthy habits and transforms societies (Kreps, 2020). The use of mobile apps helps hospitals promote some humanistic values, such as compassion, honesty, and empathy (Shafiee, Ansari, Mahjob, 2022), which positively influence citizens' behaviors as well as the achievement of different goals established by societies: multiculturalism, sustainability, tolerance (De Las Heras-Pedrosa, Rando-Cueto, Jambrino-Maldonado & Paniagua-Rojano, 2020).

Stakeholders' Humanistic Needs

Employees, Suppliers, and Investors

Doctors and nurses are considered human brands with unique personalities (Shafiee et al., 2022). Their reputation is highly influenced by their professional skills and their patients' medical outcomes (Steenbruggen et al., 2021). Regardless of their medical expertise, these professionals use a primary tool that directly determines their professional tasks: communication (Butow et al., 2020). Hospitals need to reinforce their doctor's skills in communication because, on the one hand, they need to educate patients in different areas - disease monitoring, health prevention- (Marca-Frances, Frigola-Reig, Menéndez-Signorini, Compte-Pujol & Massana-Morera, 2020); and on the other hand, they must provide them with emotional support adapted to their needs, personal backgrounds, and medical requirements (Wang, Wu, Lei, Shen & Feng, 2020). Besides doctors, hospitals should also implement training sessions to reinforce their nurses' communication skills (Nichols, Dababnah, Berger, Long & Sacco, 2021). These skills help them establish dynamic relationships with patients through cooperation, leadership, and collective decision-making processes (Rodrigues, Belarmino, Custódio, Gomes & Ferreira, 2020). Besides, thanks to these skills, nurses reinforce their public image and credibility (Godsey, Houghton & Hayes, 2020).

Besides employees (doctors, nurses), hospitals consider other stakeholders' needs, such as suppliers and investors. In light of consumers' increasing distrust of brands, many companies, including hospitals, resort to corporate communication to promote their uniqueness (Hart & Phau, 2022); and to achieve this objective, they try to build their brand in a collective way along with all their stakeholders (Adebesin & Mwalugha, 2020). Promoting a multidisciplinary approach that integrates all stakeholders makes hospitals' brands more credible from a scientific and social perspective (Merminod & Benaroyo, 2021). On the other hand, hospitals implement communication initiatives consistent with the value of transparency (Castiglia & Dettori, 2022) and ethics because they base their

brand reputation on their contribution to improving society and reinforcing stakeholders' rights (Jenkins, Ilicic, Barklamb & McCaffrey, 2020; Sander, Föhl, Walter & Demmer, 2021). By integrating all these stakeholders and values, hospitals become genuine brands essential to society (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021).

Patients and Society

Patients interacting with doctors face several barriers, such as their lack of knowledge of medicine or their difficulties understanding the hospital system (Marca-Frances et al., 2020). Regardless of their diseases, all patients need quality healthcare at three levels: employees, hospitals, and the healthcare system (Steenbruggen et al., 2021). However, the concept of quality also refers to other areas, such as patients' rights to access medical information (Driever, Stiggelbout & Brand, 2020) or patients' need to protect the privacy of their information - treatments, diagnoses, personal data- (Lv & Qiao, 2020). On the other hand, patients want to be treated as human beings, meaning hospitals must respect the values of compassion, respect, and empathy (Mheidly & Fares, 2020). This emotional support reinforces patients' empowerment and relationships with doctors and nurses (Tsai, Lun, Carcioppolo & Chuan, 2021). Finally, when patients, doctors, and nurses establish respectful relationships focused on humanistic values, they can implement efficient collective decision-making processes (Mackert et al., 2020).

Patients want to be treated as human beings, meaning hospitals must respect the values of compassion, respect, and empathy

Consumers are more demanding of brands and have become critical of companies' corporate communication activities (Rindell & Santos, 2021). To address this situation efficiently, some organizations have implemented corporate social responsibility programs that position the brand as interested in improving society (Correa et al., 2021). They invest in this area to reinforce their public image, reputation, and relations with stakeholders; in this way, they build moral capital that acts as insurance in case the company faces social issues (Zhao et al., 2021). This moral capital is also significant for hospitals since these organizations protect people's healthcare rights and manage different outbreaks and emergencies affecting society (Lithopoulos, Evans, Faulkner & Rhodes, 2021). For this reason, hospitals should reinforce their investments in corporate social responsibility by implementing three main initiatives. First, organizing workshops to protect their employees' mental health and emotional intelligence (Chen & Liu, 2023). Second, contribute to the common good by assisting citizens in fighting misinformation about healthcare and protecting their right to quality information (Kessler & Bachmann, 2022). Third, implementing internal policies to protect the environment (Loučanová et al. 2021).

Media Companies and Public Health Authorities

In recent years, companies' corporate communication departments have increased their influence on media companies' professional activities (Bedi, 2021). This influence is challenging for journalists covering health issues since they must balance companies' business interests and society's public health priorities (Klemm, Das & Hartmann, 2019). To do that efficiently, journalists require hospitals to share meaningful content that helps citizens protect their healthcare rights (Khullar, 2019). This quality content is helpful for media companies and hospitals since most patients link hospital reputation with the global concept of quality: medical service, information, and relationships with doctors (Ziemba, Arenberg, Reustle, Allaf, & Haldeman, 2019). For this reason, more and more hospitals recruit experts in health communication who can produce this content and, in this way, influence journalists' perceptions about the hospital brand (Salari, Noroozi & Parsapour, 2022). On the other hand, hospitals train their doctors and nurses to interact efficiently with external media companies (Mason, Glickstein & Westphaln, 2018), including using the hospital's corporate profiles on social media platforms (Chaudhri, Oomen, Pridmore & Joon, 2021).

Hospitals interact with media companies and other stakeholders to promote their public image and reinforce their brand equity (Górska-Warsewicz, 2022). This last concept refers to stakeholders' perceptions about hospitals' social impact; in other words, brand equity measures how hospitals serve society (Kumar & Gupta, 2021). All stakeholders have high expectations that hospitals will provide them with quality services, which is especially important for public health authorities (Liu, Fowler, Roberts & Herovic, 2018). Hospitals collaborate with these authorities for different purposes: one of the most critical areas is public health education campaigns (Elrod &

Fortenberry, 2020). These campaigns aim to change the behaviors and attitudes of some at-risk populations, such as patients suffering from chronic diseases or people living in isolated places (Zhao, 2020). When implementing these campaigns, hospitals and public authorities resort to different initiatives, such as events, media relations, mobile apps, or social media platforms (Mackert et al., 2020). Thanks to these campaigns, hospitals accelerate their corporate processes to build the brand collectively with their stakeholders (Shi, Poorisat & Salmon, 2018).

Proposal Model

Digital Communication Unit

Hospitals should implement a Digital Communication Unit employing experts in this area, as well as public health, artificial intelligence, and management (Author, 2020). This unit assumes four primary responsibilities. First, define the hospital's brand positioning and implement online strategies to develop its performance (Khosravizadeh et al., 2021). Second, lead the hospital's digital transformation by promoting artificial intelligence and big data from a medical and corporate communication perspective (Shi, Jiang, Hu & Shang, 2020). Third, change doctors' and nurses' mentalities concerning online communication and explain its positive impact on the hospital's functioning (Li & Xu, 2020). Fourth, reinforce patients' rights -transparency, autonomy, and clear information- and promote online relationships among patients, doctors, and nurses (Ramon Fernández, 2021).

The Digital Communication Unit's director has a solid background in corporate communication, humanities, public health, and artificial intelligence. Besides, they have academic experience in health communication –teaching activities and research projects with universities- and have previously worked in the healthcare industry: hospitals, patients' associations, public health authorities, or pharmaceutical companies. This multidisciplinary background allows the Digital Communication Unit's director to understand public health trends, patients' global needs, and the hospital's business priorities. Based on this knowledge, they develop and implement online communication initiatives that fulfill every stakeholder's intellectual needs and reinforce the hospital's brand credibility. In other words, the Digital Communication Unit's director leads a digital revolution transforming the hospital from a medical and branding perspective.

The Digital Communication Unit aims to improve the quality of medical services proposed to patients by integrating online communication platforms into the hospital's protocols and healthcare professionals' practices. Nevertheless, before implementing any initiative, this department's employees conduct qualitative and quantitative research to understand doctors', nurses', and patient's needs as well as the impact of these technological platforms on each. Based on these insights, they update protocols, organizational processes, and codes of ethics to integrate these platforms and improve the quality of medical services. Finally, they implement online communication initiatives to explain how the hospital's digital transformation improves patients' experiences and contributes to developing stakeholders' social consciousness.

Employees at the Digital Communication Unit interact with internal stakeholders, such as medical departments, administration units, and the hospital's board committee. They establish professional relationships based on objectives, budgets, protocols, and evaluation systems. These relationships aim for two main goals: on the one hand, promoting the professional use of online communication tools for medical and branding purposes and, on the other hand, educating internal stakeholders on innovation, digital transformation, and patients' rights. Thanks to these relationships, internal stakeholders reinforce their skills in knowledge management, informed decisions, and brand value creation. When all employees at the hospital use online communication platforms professionally, they strengthen patients' empowerment and increase healthcare quality standards.

Besides internal stakeholders, this Unit interacts with external stakeholders: media companies, public authorities, suppliers, social leaders, university professors, researchers, and technology companies. They interact with external stakeholders to improve the hospital's medical services and the patient's experience. Thanks to these relationships, experts in online communication identify professional gaps and define learning programs to improve hospital employees' performance. This way, hospitals reinforce their scientific credibility and improve society from a medical, social, and educational perspective. When hospitals prove with facts their positive influence on society, they become reputed organizations that determine public opinion in different areas, such as healthcare, medical education, or patient rights (see Figure 1).

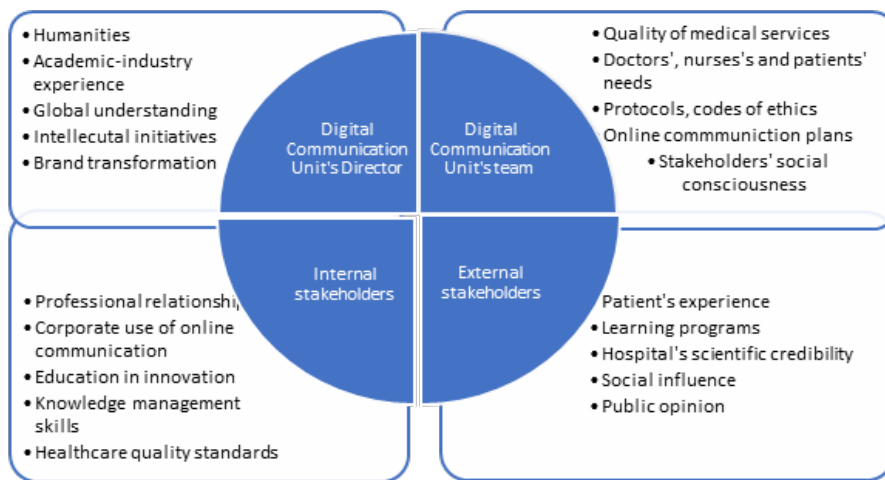


Figure 1. Digital Communication Unit.

Annual Content Strategy

Hospitals develop an annual content strategy consistent with the organization's objectives and stakeholders' needs (Author, 2020). This strategy is essential to building a credible brand (Lithopoulos et al., 2021), reinforcing the hospital's public image, and enhancing stakeholders' health literacy skills (Ratzan, Sommariva & Rauh, 2020). Nevertheless, before developing any strategy, hospitals analyze their stakeholders' information needs (Alonso-Cañadas et al., 2020). Then, they find synergies between these needs and the hospital brand's strategic priorities: this way, these organizations implement credible communication initiatives and become genuine brands (Hart et al., 2022).

Hospitals focus their annual content strategy on health education initiatives since they have the scientific credibility and the social responsibility to educate citizens in this area. The hospital's Digital Communication Unit resorts to websites, patient portals, mobile apps, and social media platforms. Besides, they organize training sessions for patients, doctors, and nurses; implement research projects in collaboration with patients' associations and universities; and launch health education programs with public authorities. Concerning the topics, hospitals consider the leading public health priorities established by the World Health Organization -see Table 1 in the appendix- (World Health Organization, 2023). Finally, these organizations use the knowledge gathered from these initiatives to update their internal protocols and improve patients' medical outcomes.

Besides promoting health education, the hospital's Digital Communication Unit implements initiatives to reinforce patient's rights. They organize online workshops to educate patients, doctors, and nurses; besides, they develop different materials such as corporate videos, legal protocols, and annual reports. Concerning the content, hospitals consider the European Charter of Patient's Rights, approved by the European Commission in 2002, which lists the 14 most crucial patient rights (see Table 1 in the appendix). On the other hand, the hospital's Digital Communication Unit evaluates doctors' and nurses' behaviors when using technological platforms to ensure they respect patient's rights. This way, health communication experts reinforce patient empowerment, improve collective decision-making processes, and protect the hospital's brand credibility.

Hospitals' communication efforts focus on health education and patient rights; however, they also include content about innovations in medical treatments, scientific research, and patient experience. Technological innovations are drastically changing hospitals; nevertheless, most patients and healthcare professionals do not have skills in this area. For this reason, the Digital Communication Unit implements pedagogical initiatives to explain how big data, artificial intelligence, and other technological tools impact healthcare systems, hospital protocols, ethical standards, legal frameworks, and patients' experiences. To do that, they publish scientific papers and books, produce videos, and organize workshops and training sessions. Concerning the topics, they consider the main innovations that will determine the hospital industry in the next decade -see Table 1 in the appendix- (Time, 2019).

Finally, hospitals analyze social issues impacting healthcare and patients' experiences. These organizations are not isolated: they are part of society, play a crucial role in citizens' lives, and contribute to countries' development. For this reason, the Digital Communication Unit analyzes different issues (climate change, public debts, geopolitics) from various perspectives (public health, economics, law) and explains how they affect the organization's functioning and

patients' experiences. To do that, they consider different reports published by organizations specializing in this area, such as Human Rights Career (2023), which lists the most essential issues influencing society annually (see Table 1 in the appendix). Thanks to this multidisciplinary approach, hospitals help stakeholders raise their intellectual level, understand healthcare in more detail, and protect their rights more efficiently.

Social Legacy

Hospitals' corporate communication strategies cannot only prioritize branding objectives but should also aim to transform society and reinforce these organizations' social legacy (Luo, Oh, Jean & Choe, 2020). Transforming society involves reinforcing patients' rights - quality information, informed consent, dignity, and privacy (McKeown et al., 2021)-, as well as leading a technological revolution that reduces health inequalities, improves patients' medical outcomes, and raises healthcare standards (Murdoch, 2021). Besides, this social transformation should be consistent with ethical standards and legal frameworks (Zerka et al., 2020). When hospitals assume this social responsibility, they contribute to the common good and become credible brands (Bash, Rajitha & Afreen, 2022).

Patients are not clients or users: they are human beings with the right to healthcare. Their solid cultural backgrounds positively affect their relationships with doctors and nurses. Thanks to patients, hospitals improve their medical services, develop new research projects, and implement health education campaigns. For these reasons, hospitals' online communication strategies should reinforce the added value of patients. In other words, the hospital's Digital Communication Unit should promote patients' dignity and explain how patients improve healthcare systems. Promoting patients' dignity at all levels makes hospitals' brands more credible, strengthening healthcare's value in society and reinforcing patients' empowerment.

Promoting patients' dignity involves integrating healthcare priorities, social issues, and patients' rights into the hospital's online communication initiatives. These organizations have the scientific credibility and social responsibility to analyze healthcare issues from many different perspectives (economics, public health, law, humanities), raising the intellectual level of their stakeholders and contributing to the common good. To do that, the hospital's Digital Communication Unit conducts quantitative and qualitative research, produces materials (scientific papers, books), and organizes events (debates, workshops). Thanks to this approach, hospitals develop quality knowledge, educate stakeholders in different areas (prevention, treatments, healthy habits), and reinforce their scientific credibility.

When hospitals focus branding efforts on promoting patients' dignity and raising stakeholders' intellectual level, they become meaningful organizations. Their scientific credibility and social influence help hospitals enrich their relationships with stakeholders: employees, patients, media companies, public authorities, suppliers, education institutions, NGOs, religious organizations, and minority groups. Besides, they influence them at many levels: knowledge, emotional support, and social impact. In other words, hospitals become credible institutions reinforcing their stakeholders' social consciousness and leading the change in all social aspects affecting healthcare: education, mentalities, innovation, investments, crises, and policies. This way, hospitals become the most critical institutions in protecting the value of healthcare and respecting patients' rights.

Artificial intelligence, big data, mobile applications, social media platforms, and telemedicine have drastically changed hospitals' internal functioning and healthcare professionals' routines. However, respecting human values remains more critical than using medical technologies. For this reason, the hospital's Digital Communication Unit promotes values such as integrity, excellence, compassion, altruism, respect, empathy, and service, integrating them into the organization's online communication initiatives. Respecting these values helps hospitals reinforce their brands. Besides, it also allows doctors and nurses to improve their professional practices and, in this way, establish better relationships with patients. In other words, promoting human values helps hospitals become smart organizations from a technological and humanistic perspective.

Hospitals' online communication initiatives promote patients' dignity, intellectual interests, social consciousness, and smart humanism. Besides, they consider healthcare determinants, people's lives, social trends, and cultural challenges. Based on that, hospitals use objective facts to prove how they contribute to developing the common good. This long-term approach focused on social needs reinforces hospitals' scientific credibility. These organizations become active citizens who use online communication to improve people's lives and reinforce social structures. Thanks to this socially responsible approach, hospitals build their brand collectively with their stakeholders and become reputed organizations that lead a social, legal, economic, and political transformation that guarantees people's right to healthcare (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Hospitals' Reputation Process

Conclusion

Promoting their brands has become a priority for most hospitals. This intangible asset affects their internal functioning, stakeholder relationships, research outcomes, and economic results. For this reason, many hospitals implement corporate communication strategies and reproduce what other companies from other industries do to promote their brands: marketing activities, media relations, corporate events, and online branding initiatives. However, hospitals cannot follow this aggressive logic since they assume a crucial responsibility that cannot be reduced to commercial interests: protecting people's healthcare rights. Besides, hospitals respect strict legal frameworks and ethical standards that affect their medical and communication practices. Finally, hospitals, in collaboration with public authorities and patient associations, promote health education initiatives to protect people against diseases and outbreaks. For these reasons, hospitals must be creative and find a smart way to implement corporate communication initiatives that help them promote their brands and reinforce their social legitimacy.

This essay aimed to analyze how hospitals could revamp their online communication strategies to build more credible brands. To conclude this reflection, we highlight three main ideas hospitals can consider for revamping their branding strategies. First, hospitals should focus their branding efforts on credible content proving their positive impact on society. In other words, experts in online health communication must lead an internal transformation that helps hospitals improve their internal processes, medical protocols, and relations with stakeholders; based on that, they implement online communication initiatives that positively influence stakeholders

Second, hospitals should follow smart logic that helps stakeholders raise their intellectual level and global understanding of healthcare: editing books, publishing scientific papers, and organizing conferences. Hospitals should not focus their branding efforts on empty initiatives such as participating in rankings, awards, or other public recognitions. Developing a reputed brand takes time: hospitals should not try to accelerate this process dishonestly since their credibility will be seriously damaged in the long term. Third, the Digital Communication Unit must become an internal think tank that analyzes health communication initiatives from different perspectives (public health, economy, law, reputation) and advises the hospital's Board Committee on using technology to achieve medical, organizational, and branding objectives. In other words, this unit's primary function does not consist of publishing basic content on online platforms but leading an intellectual reflection that helps hospitals become smart organizations from a technology and humanistic perspective.

Hospitals must be creative and find a smart way to implement corporate communication initiatives that help them promote their brands and reinforce their social legitimacy

Authors' contributions

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Data analyzed in this paper are available by contacting the corresponding author.

Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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