

FORMATION OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY WHEN INTRODUCING ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES IN HEALTH CARE INSTITUTIONS

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SUMMARY

Media is the most powerful tool to deliver a message to the whole world and keep a company's reputation strong and pure. ESG principles in a Healthcare sector are in need to be explained and communicated to the public. As they don't look so much profitable for the stakeholders and investors on the surface as the other principles. ESG communication is sharing a healthcare company's environmental, social, and governance performance with the public. Customers are now changing their attitude to the healthcare service and expect it to bare the same responsibility as any other business. And ESG principles are a part of it. According to our survey of consumer perception of healthcare environmental initiatives, respondents would rather support them then neglect. For that the media communication strategy was designed as a recommendation.

KEY WORDS: environmental initiatives, responsible behavior, consumer, marketing, strategy, healthcare service, ESG

FORMIRANJE STRATEGIJE MARKETINŠKE KOMUNIKACIJE PRILIKOM UVOĐENJA OKOLIŠNIH INICIJATIVA U ZDRAVSTVENE USTANOVE

SAŽETAK

Mediji su najmoćniji alat za slanje poruke cijelom svijetu i održavanje reputacije firme snažnom i čistom. Potrebno je objasniti i priopćiti javnosti načela ESG-a u sektoru zdravstva. Budući da na površini ne izgledaju toliko isplativo za učesnike i ulagače kao druga načela. ESG komunikacija dijeli s javnošću ekološke, društvene i upravljačke performanse zdravstvene firme. Kupci sada mijenjaju svoj stav prema zdravstvenim uslugama i očekuju da će snositi istu odgovornost

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kao i bilo koji drugi posao. A ESG principi su dio toga. Prema našem istraživanju percepcije potrošača o ekološkim inicijativama u zdravstvu, ispitanici bi ih radije podržali nego zanemarili. Za to je strategija medijskog komuniciranja osmišljena kao preporuka.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: *ekološke inicijative, odgovorno ponašanje, potrošač, marketing, strategija, zdravstvena služba, ESG*

INTRODUCTION

Today, healthcare institutions play a key role in ensuring the health of citizens, and the environmental behavior of institutions providing healthcare services is becoming an increasingly important aspect. The impact of environmentally responsible behavior of organizations on consumer choice and consumer perception remains an open question. There are quite a lot of studies that confirm that consumers choose organizations that adhere to the principles of sustainable development, support environmental initiatives, and implement ESG strategies (Carey, 2022, Boufounou, et al 2023., Tripopsakul, Puriwat, 2022.). At the same time, it is possible to find studies that show that environmental initiatives do not affect consumer perception of the organization, while elements of social responsibility and transparency in the management of the organization had a positive impact on consumer perception of the company and brand (Tripopsakul, Puriwat, 2022), brand trust, brand image and quality perception (Koh, Burnasheva, Suh, 2022.) Researchers José Ramón Segarra-Moliner (José Ramón Segarra-Moliner) and Inmaculada Bel-Oms (Inmaculada Bel-Oms), based on the analysis of 537 American firms proved that environmental efforts have an impact on CLV (customer lifetime value) and the strength of their influence exceeds the factor of management transparency, but at the same time is inferior to the initiatives of companies on social responsibility (Segarra-Moliner, Bel-Oms, 2023.) Similar results were obtained by researchers from Greece Paraskevi Boufounou et al. Their study, based on a consumer survey, showed that the implementation of ESG strategy with a focus on environmental and social initiatives had a positive impact on consumer perception and choice (Boufounou, Moustairas, Toudas, Malesios. 2023.)

Despite the great interest in the topic, it should be noted that researchers mainly consider companies in the financial sector, energy companies, companies producing consumer goods, tourist services, and there are practically no studies that examine the impact of ESG-strategy or its individual elements on consumer perception of medical institutions. Sustainable development strategies (ESG-strategies) cover environmental, social and management efforts of companies, the implementation of which, among other things, helps organizations to improve their reputation, enhance their brand image, and influence consumer perception of these organizations. At the same time, there is a gap in the literature regarding the impact of environmentally responsible behavior of healthcare providers on consumer perceptions. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to assess the impact of environmentally responsible behavior of an organization providing medical services on consumers' perceptions and their attitudes towards the organization.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to assess the impact of environmentally responsible behavior of the organization providing medical services on consumers' perception and their attitude towards the organization, the study conducted an online survey. 108 people participated in the survey and the study was conducted in January 2024. A questionnaire was designed in Google Forms for the survey. The questionnaire had several blocks. The first block consisted of questions that allowed to detail the socio-demographic portrait of respondents in terms of: gender, age, level of education and income. The second block - the main part, the questions were designed to find out what consumers consider environmentally responsible behavior, what patterns of environmentally responsible behavior medical institutions should follow, according to respondents, whether they should inform their consumers about the environmental initiatives implemented by them, whether consumers pay attention to the environmental initiatives of organizations where they receive medical services and how important environmental responsibility of medical institutions is to them

The sample was 63% women and 37% men, with more than 59% of respondents having higher education. The age range was distributed as follows: 69.4% of respondents are between 18 and 29 years old, 9.3% are between 30 and 40 years old, and 21.3% are 40 years and older. Also, more than 76% of respondents have a monthly income per family member over 50,000 rubles.

After completing the questionnaire, respondents were given the opportunity to leave a comment, this was done because respondents' comments can greatly enrich the study, qualitative data can help to understand the research problem more comprehensively and more accurately formulate conclusions for further marketing communication strategy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the respondents' answers showed that only 39% of respondents believe that healthcare institutions should implement environmental initiatives (see Figure 1).

Analysis of respondents' answers to this question by socio-demographic characteristics showed that 56% of young people under 30 are not sure that medical institutions are obliged to implement environmental initiatives, while in the group of respondents 40+ the same opinion is held by 38% of respondents and 50% are sure that medical institutions should deal with environmental improvement. The group of respondents from 30 to 40 years old shows parity: 40 % are sure that medical institutions should deal with environmental improvement issues and 40 % are not sure that medical institutions are obliged to implement environmental initiatives. Thus, we observe that respondents' confidence in the fact that medical institutions should implement environmentally responsible behavior varies by age groups and is higher in the older population.

A number of researchers claim that people with higher levels of education are associated with an increase in environmentally responsible behavior, consumer choice of goods and services with low energy consumption, attention to initiatives aimed at preserving the environment (Piao, Managi, 2023.). Thus, it can be assumed that respondents with higher education, unlike respondents without higher education, will expect environmentally responsible behavior from medical institutions. The results of our study showed that among respondents with higher education, almost half (47%) responded that medical in-

stitutions should not be involved in environmental conservation and another 12% were not sure that medical organizations should implement environmental initiatives. Only 40.9% of respondents with higher education said that medical organizations should implement environmental initiatives. Among the respondents without higher education 55.6% of the respondents believed that medical organizations should not be involved in environmental conservation, another 8.9% were not sure that medical organizations should be involved in environmental issues and only 35.6% of the respondents were sure that medical organizations should implement environmental initiatives. This result may indicate that for medical organizations, respondents consider environmental initiatives as a factor that may reduce the quality of medical services provided, which makes such initiatives undesirable from the respondents' point of view. At the same time, the small sample for which the survey was conducted requires additional verification of the results obtained.

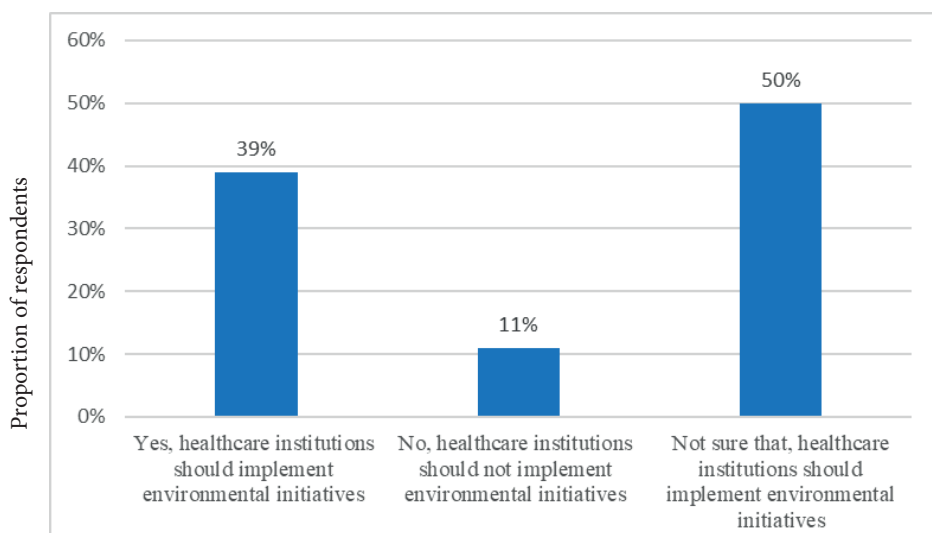


Figure 1: Respondents' views on the need for medical institutions to implement environmental initiatives

Source: compiled by the authors on the basis of the survey results

According to the survey results, the largest number of respondents believe that medical institutions should implement waste sorting (88%), 35% of respondents noted that medical institutions should use recyclable materials. The least obvious environmental initiative from the respondents' point of view turned out to be the repair of old equipment instead of buying new equipment. (see Table 1). Apparently, the respondents feared that this environmental initiative would lead to the fact that the medical institution repairing the equipment would provide services using outdated equipment, thus the implementation of this initiative is perceived as a deliberate reduction in the quality of services and refusal to use modern technologies and equipment.

initiatives	Response rate (% of total)
Garbage sorting	88%
Utilization of secondary raw materials	35%
Subbotniks	30%
Water saving	30%
Saving electricity	30%
Repairing old equipment as an alternative to buying new	12%

Table 1: Environmental initiatives to be implemented by health care facilities

Source: compiled by the authors on the basis of the survey results

One of the research questions was an attempt to find out whether respondents pay attention to the organization's implementation of environmental initiatives when choosing a medical institution. The survey yielded the following results (see Figure 2).

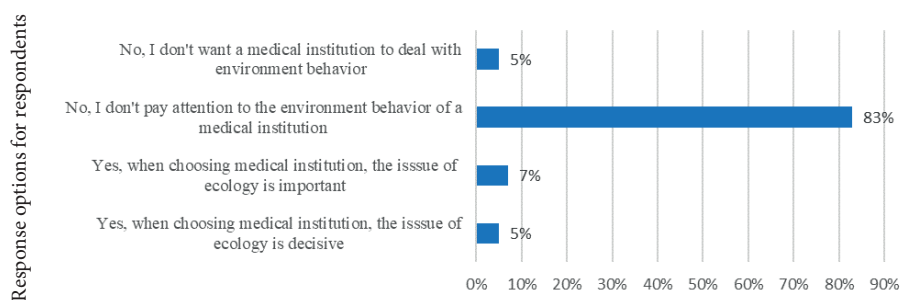


Figure 2: Importance of the organization's environmental behavior for respondents when choosing a health care facility

Source: compiled by the authors on the basis of the survey results

The analysis of comments left by respondents allowed us to better understand their attitude to environmental initiatives implemented by medical institutions and, in general, to participation in the implementation of environmental initiatives. It should be noted that comments were left by respondents of different age, gender, and income, which indicates a high interest in the issues of environmentally responsible behavior of medical institutions among respondents.

Analyzing the comments, we can conclude that respondents generally confirm the importance and relevance of addressing environmental issues, but at the same time point out that medical institutions should not be involved in the implementation of such initiatives, as their main task is to provide medical services. Respondents expressed concerns that adding an environmental aspect could increase the workload of specialists and reduce the quality of medical services. Moreover, when commenting on their position, many respondents indicated that they perceive saving resources by medical institutions and using recyclable materials as a risk to their health when receiving medical services. According to respondents, any changes in the way health services are delivered and the resources that support them can affect patient perceptions and negatively affect trust in the institution.

CONCLUSION

Analyzing the results of the survey and the comments left by respondents, we can conclude that today the society as a whole does not show proper interest in environmental initiatives implemented by medical institutions, moreover, there is a pronounced negativity towards such initiatives. Respondents express skepticism and concern about the environmental

initiatives of medical institutions, explaining that the implementation of environmental initiatives will distract employees of medical institutions from their main activities, which will affect the quality of their work. The main concern is that saving on resources may have a negative impact on the quality of medical services and may be a potential health risk for patients. At the same time, the respondents themselves identified the reason for their attitude as insufficient activity on the part of the state in environmental propaganda, lack of communication companies to inform citizens and promote environmental initiatives and environmentally responsible behavior, lack of information on ways to support, which indicates the need for explanatory work to inform the population about the importance and safety of environmental initiatives of medical institutions for the quality of services provided and the health of patients.

It is necessary to develop communications aimed at forming an attitude towards environmentally responsible behavior of medical institutions as socially approved behavior, which will increase support for such initiatives on the part of consumers of medical services.

Based on the analysis of the comments left by the respondents, we can form the main recommendations for the formation of marketing communication strategy.

When developing a communication strategy, it is necessary to use the principles of transparency; all environmental initiatives should clearly demonstrate to consumers of health services that environmental efforts will not affect the quality and safety of the services being denied. For example, not through savings, but through more efficient use of resources and modernization of the equipment used, use of environmentally friendly detergents and energy- saving equipment, without saving on materials that directly affect the health of patients.

Opinion leaders and authoritative organizations should be involved to increase the effectiveness of the communication campaign by increasing the credibility of the information broadcast. This can help to improve the perception of environmental initiatives among patients, raise awareness and support the image of the health care institution as a socially responsible market actor.

When running a communication campaign, it is necessary to provide for the possibility of creating feedback and discussion, where consumers of medical services can share their ideas and suggestions for improving the environmentally responsible behavior of the medical institution, it will also help to create a sense of involvement and collective responsibility, and specialists can assess the attitude to the initiatives being implemented and opportunities for their development.

Having analyzed the results of the survey and respondents' comments, the following are the most effective communication channels that should be used in the further forma-

tion of marketing communication strategy when introducing environmental initiatives in medical institutions:

1. Use of social networks and bloggers. Today, many medical institutions create and develop their own official accounts in social networks such as VKontakte, Odnoklassniki and Telegram. Creating posts, videos and infographics on environmental topics can help inform health service users about environmental initiatives, and engaging and collaborating with popular bloggers and opinion leaders from the medical field can help attract more attention, increase reach and build trust with the target audience.
2. Creating an official website and thematic sections. It is necessary to create special sections on the medical institution's website that will be dedicated to environmental initiatives and will provide detailed information on the institution's current environmental projects and the opportunity for feedback from consumers of medical services. This will help to create a stronger communication with the target audience.
3. Email newsletters and sms alerts. It is necessary to create mailings about the implementation of environmental initiatives and their impact on the quality of services to consumers of health care facilities.
4. Printed materials and information stands on the territory of the medical center. It is necessary to distribute brochures, leaflets and posters in medical centers, clinics and hospitals with information about the implementation of environmental initiatives and their positive effect. It is also possible to use information stands in reception wards to raise awareness among the visitors of the health care facility.

The proposed communication channels will help to raise awareness of environmental initiatives among the population, as well as to form a positive attitude towards medical institutions as entities taking social responsibility.

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