

# A Novel Digital Content Marketing Strategy for Upscaling Medical Tourism in India

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## ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND:** Medical tourism industry is developing at a humongous rate in India as compared to other countries. Nowadays, the digital marketing industry is seeing an exponential rise in India. Big brands are choosing web-based social networking advertising to promote their business. Even in the healthcare industry, particularly hospitals are utilizing advanced digital marketing strategies like content marketing for developing their business. Hospitals can use the social media platform to share health-related information or health advice that users of social media may find very helpful.

**OBJECTIVE:** The purpose of the paper is to explore the role of digital content marketing in the field of Medical Tourism of India and propose a scalable strategy for upscaling Medical Tourism.

**METHODOLOGY:** A descriptive- case based qualitative study was carried out and primary data was collected from 5 different hospitals of Delhi NCR Region. Method of convenient sampling was used. The tool used for data collection was Questionnaire and Personal Interviews with 4 main stakeholders i.e. Administrators, physicians, marketing people and medical tourist department of hospital in order to understand how digital content marketing is helping a particular hospital in upscaling Medical tourism business. The analysis of results was facilitated by using Microsoft Excel.

**RESULTS:** It was found that hospital authorities are now using social media marketing rather than traditional marketing that was done previously, while medical tourists prefer to search for such data on hospital websites (100%). It was also analysed that the accessibility of content and contacts in a new digital platform is crucial for the hospital authority to be built, whereas adequate feedback is important for medical tourists in order to gain a more realistic perspective of the therapy provided and data about the hospital. Measures such as creating content on you tube, offering adequate feedback on social media and hospital websites in the form of testimonials will therefore be more useful for attracting medical tourists.

**KEY WORDS:** Medical Tourism, Digital Content Marketing, Social Media, Marketing strategy, Medical Tourists

## **INTRODUCTION:**

### **Growth of Social Media in India:**

Social media has a major effect on India's medical tourism sector. Web based life has turned into a need in the daily life of public. It enables every one of us to stay in touch with each other with only two or three taps or swipes and can give a consistent information to its users. <sup>1</sup>A recent report shows the number of social network users in India has increased from 2015 to 2023. In 2018, around 326 million social network users were evaluated in India, up from nearly 168 million every 2016. YouTube and Facebook, followed by WhatsApp social implementation, were the most prominent interpersonal organisations in India. Facebook is expected to reach nearly 319 million Indian customers by 2021.

Utilization of social media by such a large number of individuals, it has turned into an incredible channel for organizations to publicize and furthermore to construct a brand image. Indeed, even entrepreneurs utilize internet-based life so B2B organizations can utilize this channel effectively as well. These days, various organizations, MNCs or even hospitals are utilizing digital marketing to develop their business all around. The essential motivation behind why organizations or hospitals implement social media marketing is on the grounds that it is

an outcome situated method of promoting. We become acquainted with where each cash is spent and the precise numbers as far as individuals, the most elevated changes and almost ready to distinguish various channels or medium which help them to develop their business.

### **WHAT IS MEDICAL TOURISM AND ITS DIFFERENT TYPES:**

Medical tourism is described as when individuals living in one nation travel to another nation to receive medical therapy such as oncology, ophthalmology, cardiology, cosmetic surgery, etc. while at the same moment receiving medical care equivalent to or higher than they would have in their own nation. Medical Tourism can be described widely as “provision of cost effective private medical care in collaboration with tourism industry for patients needing surgical and other forms of specialised treatment”. Extensively there are two sorts of tourism: International and Domestic Tourism. Worldwide the tourism is characterized into Outbound and Inbound. Outbound tourism is when patient travel from home nation to remote nation to get medicinal treatment while Inbound tourism is when patients going from an outside nation to the home country looking for best medical care. In opposite, Domestic Tourism alludes to patients venturing out to another part of their own nation for getting medical care.

### **Global scenario of medical tourism market:**

Medical tourists generally choose to relocate to a distant nation for treatment when they see that they can make savings of more than 30 percent of the price they need to bear in their home country. E.g., according to information released by OCED<sup>2</sup>, patients in the US save between 30% and 50% of therapy costs for illnesses such as heart disease when traveling for the same therapy to Asia or America. In 2017, the worldwide market for medical tourism was valued at \$53,768 million and is expected to achieve \$143,461 million by 2025, recording a CAGR of 12.9% between 2018 and 2025.

The market for the medical tourism industry is divided into dental treatment, cardiovascular therapy, cardiovascular treatment, orthopaedic therapy, neurological therapy, therapy for oncology, and various medicines. The fragment of oncology therapy seems to show the fastest growth of the market in the future. India, Thailand, South Korea, Singapore, and Malaysia have been seen as the world's mainstream medical tourism destinations because the medical facilities supplied in these countries are the best in terms of quality and treatment costs.

### **Indian scenario of medical tourism market:**

Rate of development of medical tourism industry is humongous in India when contrasted with other Asian nations. Components like quality, cost, online data accessibility, medicinal office

utilizing the most recent innovation are significantly in charge of the huge development of this area in the nation.<sup>3</sup> India's medical tourism industry is expected to boost dramatically from USD 3 billion to around USD 8 billion by 2020.

The fundamental factor that pulls in medical tourists to India is that the therapeutic treatment is cost saving, and medical services are furnished with latest technology.

### **Digital Marketing in India:**

In India, there is an exponential increase in the digital marketing sector. India is a vastly populated country and studies show that an average<sup>4</sup> Indians spend 4.4 hours a day on the internet using their laptops. The cell phone users in the nation is additionally on the ascent and utilizing their keen gadgets they go through about 3.1 hours on a normal on the web. The market for computerized showcasing is extremely enormous, i.e., 68% of brands are choosing advanced advertising to develop their business. Out of 68%, just 42% of brands are choosing web-based social networking advertising as their promoting stage. This is because customers who are not yet ready to buy stuff online are present in some manner or another via web-based media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Through these web-based social networking stages, organizations ensure that they can contact individuals. At that point they create diverse

advertising methodologies to draw in individuals or carry these individuals to internet-based life stages.

These days even in the healthcare industry particularly hospitals are utilizing advanced digital marketing strategies for developing their business. For instance, hospital websites have a significant influence of its digital presence. It shows hospital services and facilities just as gives data about top specialists and experts from hospitals.

Another form is <sup>5</sup>content marketing. It helps hospitals to generate content because people on internet are always looking for information. Hospitals having access to best doctors in field who can write content is the best part. It can not only be blogs or articles, it can also in the form of videos. People getting education through content marketing is the primary purpose. Hospital's best marketing strategies should merge social media with content marketing. Hospitals can use the social media platform to share health-related information or health advice that users of social media may find very helpful.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

- (1) <sup>6</sup>M.Kousalya Devi (2012) concludes that the internet and their websites provide variable information about their location, services etc. According to this study

Apollo and many other hospitals use social media marketing and are active n many social media platforms, Facebook being the market leader (after analysing 40 hospitals) in India. Basic findings here suggest that patients looking for sustainable Medical Treatment in another country find out information mainly on Internet.

- (2) <sup>7</sup>Charmaine du Plessis (2017) did a Inductive Content Analysis of 51 Practitioners documents relation to B to C content marketing strategies. The research states that three categories may exist, i.e. Comments on content building, particular content platforms, and channels of comprehension. These categories provide adequate proof of how brands use content from social media to affect the target audience.
- (3) <sup>8</sup>Gabriel A. Okwandu conducted a survey focused on identifying hospital marketing policies and variables that mitigate their effective acceptance and execution. Many hospital organisations have been applying marketing strategies, and the hospitals that adopt these perform better than those that do not. Factors that oppose the efficient adoption and execution of marketing strategies include lack of planning, lack of top leadership and

absence of use of all promotional mix components.

- (4) <sup>9</sup>Sandhya Anveker (2012) focuses on an integrated branding strategy by knowing the different value drivers of a medical tourism product's brand image. According to this, developed country such as the USA, Britain and Canada have the most expensive, overloaded health systems, creating long waiting list that generates strong market potential for Indian service providers, but India is still not regarded as a very appealing destination for medical tourism.
- (5) <sup>10</sup>Ghosh (conceptualized the constraint called "Medical tourism Experience" and created a scale measuring it. Seven dimensions were studied, namely quality of therapy, quality of medical service, medical tourism experience, etc.
- (6) <sup>11</sup>Muthyan (2017) emphasized that Health Tourism is a broader word for travel which is focused on medical treatment and the use of health facilities. India has been discovered to be a major player in the facilitation of medical tourism sector. The research indicated that the most significant contributing variables to Medical Tourism's development were the availability of world-class medical services in Indian

Healthcare Organization, success rate of different activities, lower treatment costs, and accessibility of ayurvedic medicines.

- (7) <sup>12</sup>Santosh Kumar (2009) conducted an ophthalmic hospital case study with the aid of Situational Analysis. As hospitals here have globally skilled and experienced physicians, clinical results in India have been discovered to be on par with the finest centres in the world. Cost of the Medical procedures in India are approximately one-fifth to 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the cost in west. 40 percent use the Internet as a search instrument and 20 percent use local newspapers and magazines.

## **METHODOLOGY:**

A descriptive case based qualitative study was conducted to design a novel digital content marketing strategy for upscaling medical tourism in India. Primary data was used in this study. Primary data included the questionnaires that were prepared separately for the hospital authority that included physicians, marketing people & medical tourists department and for the medical tourists. The criteria that medical tourists choose India over any other country, sources for selecting the hospital and feature that a digital platform must have were included in the study. In case of hospital authority, digital marketing tool that is mostly used by the patients for gathering

information, and feature that a digital platform must have were included in the study.

The sampling technique used was convenience sampling and sample size from 5 hospitals were taken and it comprises of:

- Personal interviews of 12 medical tourists – average of 2 or 3 medical tourists from each hospital on the basis of availability.
- Personal interviews with marketing head of individual hospital i.e., total of 5 people.
- Personal interaction with physicians, and people from medical tourist’s department if the hospital is having a medical tourists department.

Questionnaire that was prepared separately for the medical tourists and hospital authority was reviewed to understand the differences in the opinions and then proposed a valuable strategy to address the gaps. Questionnaire based interaction was held with the patients (medical tourists) to know the factors that encouraged them to seek healthcare in India. Various physicians were also interviewed to know about the influence of digital content marketing in the medical tourism because nowadays hospitals are creating content on social media like YouTube with the help of doctors.

Various articles from medical journals and websites were taken into account to understand

the industry trends. All the results were entered into excel sheet and analysed. Results were expressed as number, percentages.

### ANALYSIS:

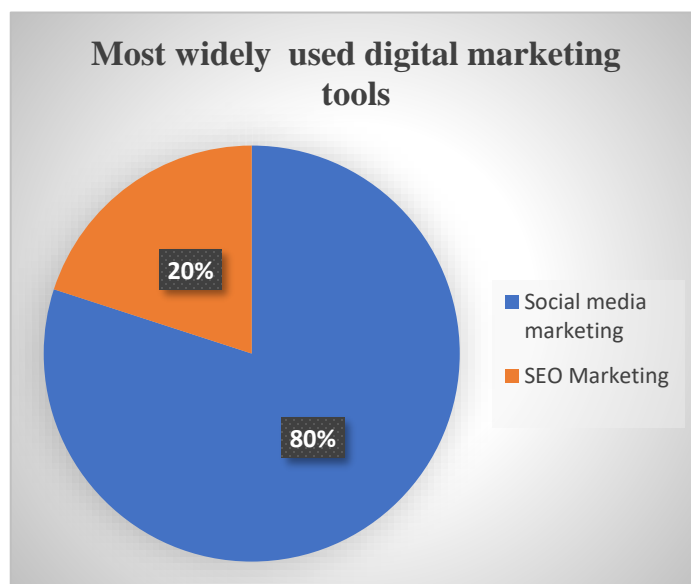
The data analysis was presented under the heading of:

- I. HOSPITAL AUTHORITY
- II. MEDICAL TOURISTS

### HOSPITAL AUTHORITY:

**(a) Digital Marketing tool used:** After analysing the data collected from questionnaires, it was found that amongst the four marketing tools (Social media, SEO, affiliate, Email), Social media and SEO marketing were found to be most desirable tool in order to promote medical tourism.

CHART 1



	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4
Hospital 1	Social-media Marketing	E-mail marketing	SEO marketing	Affiliate Marketing
Hospital 2	Social-media Marketing	SEO marketing	Affiliate Marketing	E-mail marketing
Hospital 3	SEO marketing	Social-media Marketing	Affiliate Marketing	E-mail marketing
Hospital 4	Social-media Marketing	SEO marketing	E-mail marketing	Affiliate Marketing
Hospital 5	Social-media Marketing	SEO marketing	Affiliate Marketing	E-mail marketing

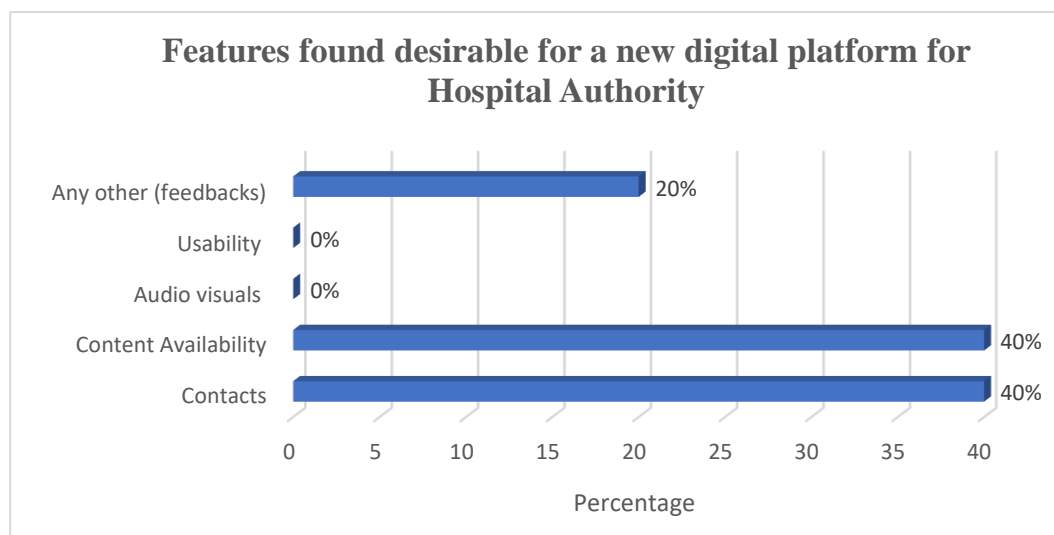
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**TABLE 1**

Amongst the five hospitals that were surveyed, four hospitals (80%) preferred Social media marketing which is through Facebook, Instagram, You-tube as their first option for enhancing medical tourism in their respective hospital followed by 20% using SEO marketing as their first option. (chart 1). The Hospital authority thinks that various social media platforms can provide valuable information about their services, location etc in a better way since the usage of social-media in past few years has increased to a large extent and is expected to rise even more.

(a) **Feature a digital platform must have:** It was found that according to hospital authority content availability (40%) and contacts information (40%) should be the features that a new digital platform should have if designed especially for medical tourists. (chart-2). Also, few suggested that patient feedback should be included as one of the essential features that a digital platform can provide (20%) because feedback is a way by which the patient feels more connected to the organisation as well as sometimes their queries are also resolved.

**CHART 2**

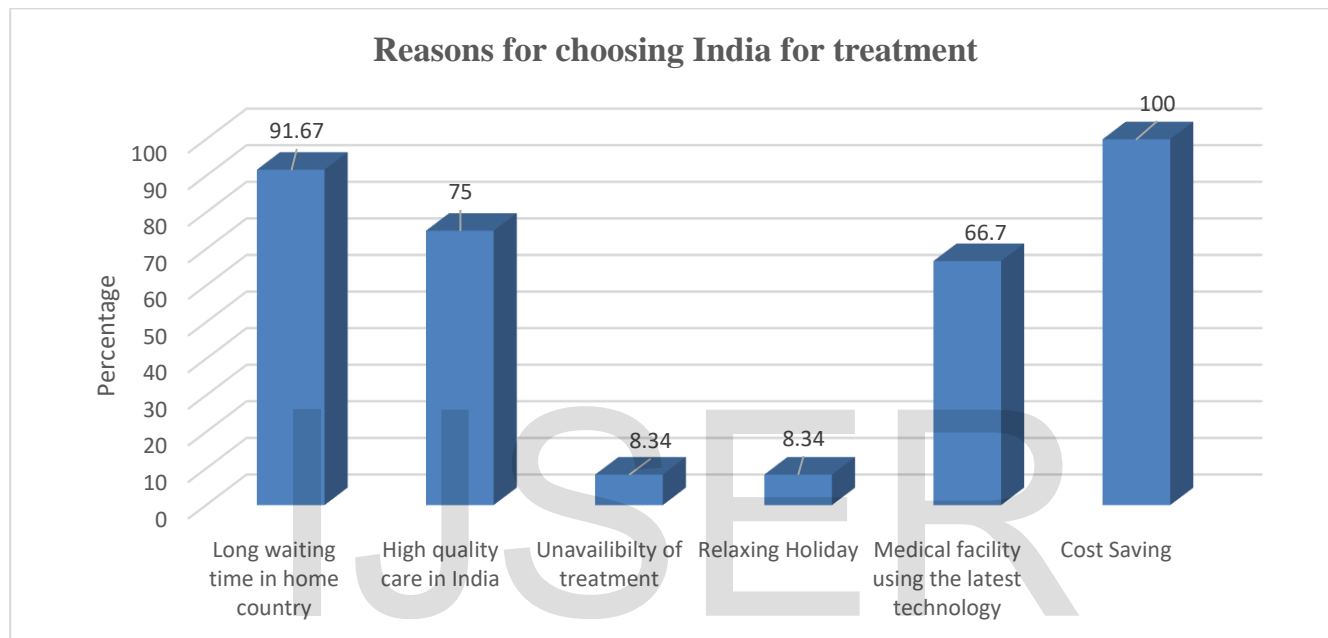


**MEDICAL TOURISTS:**

(a) **Reasons for choosing India** – There are multiple reasons why people prefer India over their Home country. For maximum people long waiting time in their country for treatment (91.67%) and high cost incurred for treatment

(100%) is the primary reason for choosing India followed by high quality of care in India (75%) and Medical facility using Latest Technology (66.7%). (chart 3).

**CHART 3**



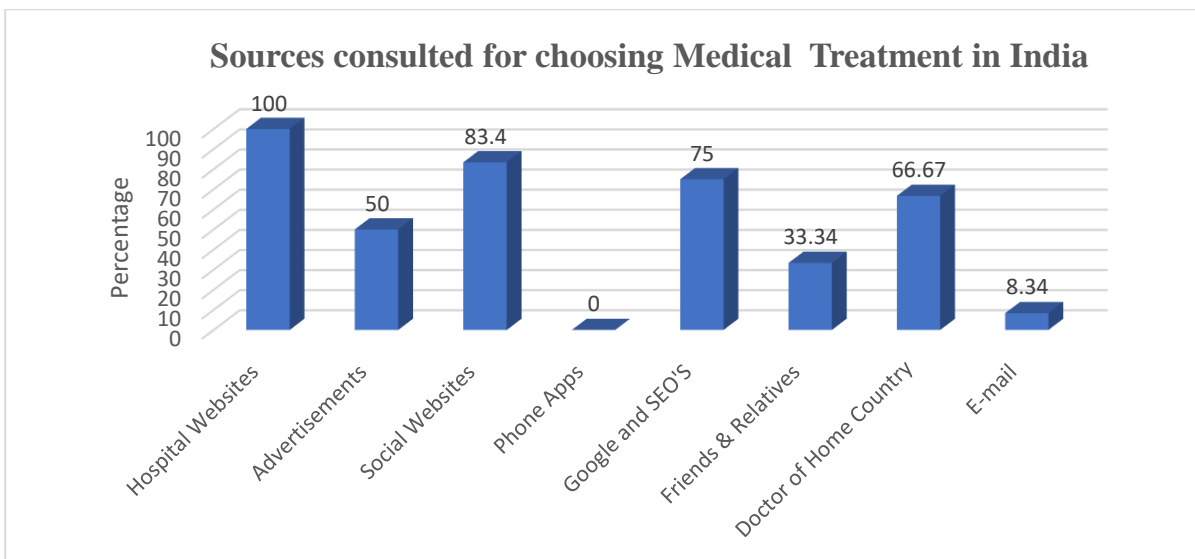
**(b) Sources consulted for selecting India:**

According to our study, Medical tourists ranked hospital websites (100%) as their first option for gathering information about a particular hospital and its services for their treatment because they think that hospital websites will provide better and real information and data about their hospital policies and treatment. It was

followed by Social media websites like Facebook, Instagram, you-tube etc or which 83.4% agreed. Also, google and other search engines (75%) are also referred by medical tourists to collect information about the different hospitals available and their cost for the treatment they are looking for. (chart 4)



CHART 4

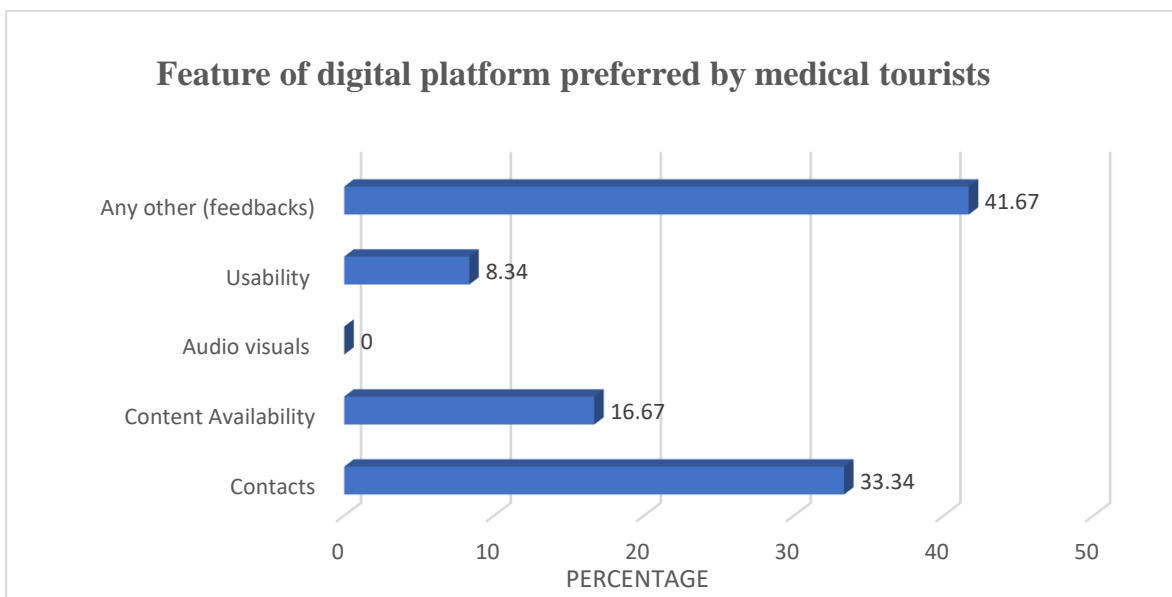


**c) Feature a digital platform must have:**

According to medical tourists, one essential feature that a digital platform should have is patient's feedback (41.67%) about the organization and its services. This is because through feedback, medical tourists get to know how well the hospital is functioning and also get

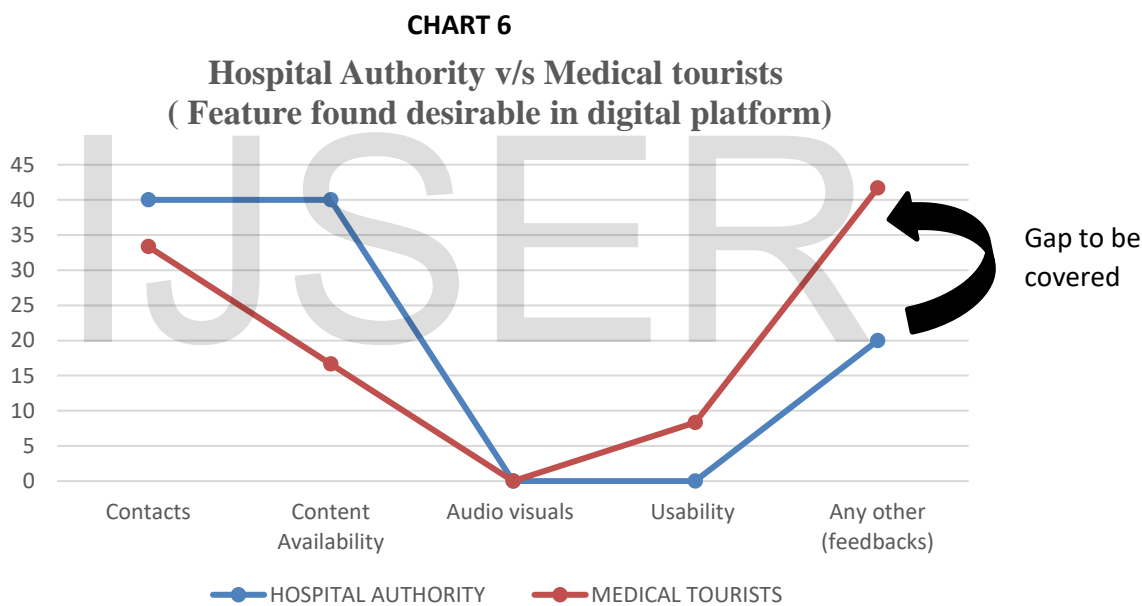
to know about the specialities provided by the respective hospital. This is followed by availability of contacts of doctors and surgeons (33.34%) and content availability (16.67%) .(chart 5)

CHART 5



**(d) Comparison between Hospital authority V/s Medical Tourists:**

After analysing the questionnaires of Hospital authority and Medical tourists, it was found that Medical tourists considers the patient’s feedback to be the most important feature in a digital platform (41.67 %) and 20% of hospital authority considers that patient’s feedback should be incorporated while designing digital platform for Medical tourists. This shows that for medical tourists, feedback plays a very important role because feedback content helps them to compare different organizations and see which organization is providing what type of services. This not only increase patient’s engagement but improves organization’s reputation. This gap can be minimised by providing strategies for upscaling medical tourism in that respective organization. (chart 6)



**KEY FINDINGS:**

1.After taking personal interviews and filling up of the questionnaires by Inbound medical tourists, it was found that most of the medical tourists were from countries like South Africa, Afghanistan, Iraq, Fiji. It was found that Medical

tourists come to India primarily for Oncology treatment followed by Cardiology, Orthopaedics and neurology respectively.

**2.Hospital Authority:**

(a) Social Media Marketing and SEO Marketing are the preferred digital marketing tools used by

the hospital authority for promoting Medical Tourism as it is the most cost-effective marketing tool or way of promoting their respective services. Also, the users of Social media have increased to a large extent so this tool is the best way to cover maximum people.

(b) It was found from the study that not all the hospitals had a separate Medical Tourism Department. 2 out of 5 hospital didn't had a medical tourism department.

c) According to Hospital Authority the content availability and contact information are the features that a digital platform must have in order to attract medical tourists because content availability makes them more aware of the procedure, its cost and even about the speciality of the hospital. Also, the information of contacts is also essential because this is the way through which the patient or medical tourist will connect to the hospital asking for queries and booking whether through e-mails or via contact number.

### **3. Medical Tourists:**

(a) According to Medical Tourists the primary reason for choosing India is Long waiting time in their home country and high cost of treatment incurred to them in their country as compared to low cost and high-quality treatment in India.

(b) Sources that are most preferred by medical tourists for selecting India and its hospitals are the main Hospital Websites (all the tourists

agreed on the fact they search hospital websites first in order to gather information). Also, 83.4% of the tourist said that the next best option for them is to gather information through social media platforms.

c) For most of the medical tourists surveyed, the primary feature they wanted to be included in the digital platform is the patient feedback as it allows to get more meaningful insights of the treatment and services offered followed by information regarding contacts.

### **4. Comparison**

From analysis, it was concluded that the Medical tourists were more inclined towards the patient feedback in comparison to that of hospital authority that were in favour of contacts and content availability. It was also noted that, while the hospital is more focused on social media marketing, tourists use hospital websites more to obtain data.

### **LIMITATIONS:**

1. Study was only limited to hospitals Delhi NCR Region.
2. Small sample size due to limited accessibility to medical tourists and marketing department.

### **DISCUSSION:**

According to the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), India has the opportunity to attract more than one million health visitors each year

with globally known healthcare experts, holistic medicinal facilities and low treatment costs. The nation provides a distinctive combination of technologies such as yoga, Ayurveda and meditation and contemporary medical technologies. According to the hospital authority, ethical treatment and adequate clinical outcome data along with other variables such as price, quality, use of latest technology, etc. play a major role in attracting visitors to a big extent. Though digital marketing is playing a great role in attracting medical tourists but there are few problems that hospital faces in order to promote the content. A problem with SEO'S being the most common one. In this the other sites are using your name for SEO. Secondly, in few hospitals proper research is not being carried out about what medium of digital marketing will work best for the target segment. For Example: If we are targeting people of Nigeria and we know that they use Instagram more than Facebook in terms of social media usage then the appropriate medium to promote the content will be Instagram as it will attract more patients rather than advertising on Facebook alone. Thirdly, blogs are not used as much as it can be used for promoting content digitally.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1) Use of blogs should be increased. Blog topics should be chosen wisely, so that you can attract the right crowd to your website.

- 2) Blog can include special travel packages offered by the hospital that would interest potential patients.
- 3) Proper feedback mechanism should be incorporated while designing a digital platform in order to attract medical tourists because feedback content helps them to compare different organizations and see which organization is providing what type of services.
- 4) YouTube content marketing can also be done to increase the potential tourists.

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