

Digital Health Consumer Behavior in Georgian Healthcare Industry

Anna Gogichadze

Associate Professor, Business and Technology University, Georgia

ORCID: 0000-0001-9463-2145

Abstract:- Digital marketing has become a central marketing instrument that plays a role not only in promoting market offerings but impacts customer satisfaction and has an influence on consumer behavior. Digital opportunities being implemented in the healthcare industry increase access to healthcare services and contribute to generating customer expectations and customer experience, which represent essential issues in marketing management. This paper aims to explore whether consumer satisfaction and consumer purchase behavior are being affected by digital healthcare opportunities in Georgia. The study found that digital platforms can positively influence consumer satisfaction, which may also impact consumer purchase intentions toward digital healthcare services. Implications for healthcare industry marketers were generated through the quantitative data analyses.

Keywords:- digital healthcare, digital transformation, marketing, consumer satisfaction, consumer behavior.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Customer Satisfaction

Patient satisfaction as a complex model involving various issues that convey patient views and perceptions of services delivered by healthcare providers. "Patient satisfaction is basically a match of expectations with experiences of the patient during a treatment process." (Iftikhar, et al., 2011). Meeting customer requirements when delivering healthcare services is the determinant of customer satisfaction (Andrabi, Hamid, Rohul, & Anjum, 2012). Al-Abri and Al-Balushi (2014) suggest that patient satisfaction should be considered the central factor in developing healthcare services as long as the patient satisfaction reflects the service quality delivered to customers.

Iftikhar, et al. (2011) address customer satisfaction components that should not be neglected by healthcare providers and should be considered as central issues structuring consumer satisfaction – e.g., waiting times, visit durations, confidentiality, caretaking processes, environment, amenities, and sanitation. Andrabi, et al. (2012) state that the various factors lower customer satisfaction. Long waiting time is the main reason for customer dissatisfaction. Further, patients even prefer decreasing waiting times to increasing appointment durations (Aldana, Piechulek, & Al-Sabir, 2001). However, the frustration from the waiting time can be counteracted by the doctor's attitude. "A patient forgets the toll that takes him to reach the services if a doctor sees the patient with compassion." (Andrabi, Hamid, Rohul, & Anjum, 2012).

The quality of services is the principal part of healthcare (Andrabi, Hamid, Rohul, & Anjum, 2012). Sufficient operational performance and quality service increase customer satisfaction in the healthcare business (Lee, Lee, & Kang, 2012). "The healthcare managers that endeavor to achieve excellence take patient perception into account when designing the strategies for quality improvement of care." (Al-Abri & Al-Balushi, 2014). Healthcare providers looking forward to meeting customer needs and wants should make an effort to perform relevant marketing activities (Radu, Radu, Condurache, & Lorin Purcarea, 2018). Hence, it is relevant for healthcare marketing to study the needs and wants of potential customers in order to meet their expectations (Radu, et al., 2017).

Interacting with patients is an essential part of the healthcare service as well, as long as patients are customers who experience relationships with medical personnel and generate impressions. However, considering that customers have different views and perceptions, they generate diverse evaluations or expectations of medical services (Radu, Radu, Condurache, & Lorin Purcarea, 2018).

Consumer satisfaction and repurchase intentions are correlated in the healthcare industry. Moreover, satisfied customers are likely to be loyal and give recommendations to others regarding the healthcare provider (Lee, Lee, & Kang, 2012). Suhail and Srinivasulu (2021) also state that consumer loyalty in the healthcare industry is generated through high-quality service that results in customer satisfaction. Additionally, implementing information technologies in the healthcare business can positively impact service quality, build close relationships with customers, and support enhancing customer loyalty (Hong & Lee, 2017).

B. Digital Transformation

Healthcare is one of the leading industries which has adopted digital transformation opportunities (Marques & Ferreira, 2019). As described by Vial (2019), digital transformation refers to "a process that aims to improve an entity by triggering significant changes to its properties through combinations of information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies." The development of digital platforms and communication technologies is correlated with improving healthcare services in terms of lowering the costs and fitting them with customer expectations (Radu, Radu, Condurache, & Lorin Purcarea, 2018). Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic period healthcare industry has clearly faced the challenge of digital transformation, which involves hosting more innovative approaches in terms of concentrating on patient

well-being and convenience, as far as digital healthcare platforms offer a simplified healthcare service, which can be easily approached through mobile devices (Baudier, Kondrateva, Ammi, Chang, & Schiavone, 2022). In 2021 World Health Organization introduced the “Global strategy on digital health 2020-2025” document, where digital healthcare is presented as a healthcare priority, creating prospects to deliver affordable, accessible, and secure healthcare services around the globe (WHO, 2021). Overall, adopting new technologies in the healthcare industry may be reflected in improving public well-being and healthcare accessibility (Kostkova, 2015).

Consumers nowadays choose convenience and service quality; they are oriented toward reducing risks and expenses. Further, healthcare customers develop higher satisfaction when offered high-quality care. Thus, refining services and enhancing quality care through innovative technological approaches are vital for healthcare providers to meet customer expectations (Hong & Lee, 2017). Porter and Teisberg (2004) recommend that healthcare organizations prioritize service quality improvement through innovative opportunities.

Kraus, et al. (2021) state that implementing digital opportunities in the healthcare industry increases healthcare quality as long as it contributes to improving organizational procedures. Rubbio, et al. (2008) describe digital healthcare as a prospect for clinics to advance their work processes, refine services and improve the service delivery process. Arni and Laddha (2017) discuss technology development and digital healthcare as an opportunity for enabling healthcare delivery to those communities which have limited access to medical services. According to Kostkova (2015), digital health involves “the use of information and communications technologies to improve human health, healthcare services, and wellness for individuals and across populations.”

Arni and Laddha (2017) state that digital marketing being a central element of business, forces healthcare industries to digital transformation, involving not only digital marketing efforts, but changing healthcare to digital healthcare as well.

C. Healthcare Marketing

Nowadays, it has become necessary for companies to adopt digital marketing practices in case they need to operate in a contemporary business world. Digital marketing is advantageous for companies as long as it enables them to reach their marketing goals faster and do it in a less expensive way (Lodhi & Shoaib, 2017). Radu, et al. (2017) state that using digital media as a marketing communication tool can be an opportunity for healthcare organizations to grow business, and promotional campaigns that run on social media can be highly effective in attracting new customers and stimulating healthcare services.

Digital healthcare can deliver convenience and increase access to medical care. However, accessibility to digital platforms and innovative technologies could be a challenge in terms of usage, where marketing efforts could play an important role and assist customers in technology adoption (Arni & Laddha, 2017).

Digital media is used as a marketing communication instrument by healthcare organizations, as long as it may be highly efficient considering the targeting opportunity that it creates for advertisers (Radu, et al., 2017). Further, digital platforms influence consumer buying behavior, and industries are using e-commerce opportunities to reach their potential customers, increase sales, reduce costs and maintain their competitiveness (Mohan Kumar & Shiva Shanthi, 2016).

Digital marketing encompasses numerous promotional tools that can be used to acquire and retain customers. Along with promotional opportunities, digital platforms enable marketers to interact with customers, which appears to be one of the important tools in terms of making an influence on customer decision-making process (Ramesh & Vidhya, 2019).

According to Radu, et al. (2018), digital marketing contributes to increasing brand visibility and developing close relationships between companies and customers. However, building or sustaining a bond with consumers depends on the reputation created through digital platforms. These days, customers look forward to connecting with healthcare providers easily and getting rapid responses to their interactions (Radu, Radu, Condurache, & Lorin Purcarea, 2018). Digital media is a valuable instrument that enables healthcare organizations to stimulate two-way communication with them (Radu, et al., 2017).

Adopting digital marketing opportunities are likely to positively influence consumer experience (Horlacher, Klarner, & Hess, 2016), and even more - healthcare providers can lead to improved consumer satisfaction (Al-Weshah, Kakeesh, & Al-Ma'aitah, 2021). Technological development benefits marketing as digital platforms enable companies to evaluate consumer needs and wants more effectively (Khatri, 2021).

Further, online shopping is a satisfactory experience for customers in general - customers appreciate the convenience, customer-friendliness, transparency, and promotional offers when making an online purchase (Mohan Kumar & Shiva Shanthi, 2016). However, Ramesh and Vidhya (2019) state that digital marketing has a significant weakness that negatively affects consumer purchase intentions, which refers to being unable to allow customers to touch products. Still, as stated by Mahalaxmi and Ranjith (2016), shopping through digital channels appears to be preferable for customers, regardless of their financial earnings.

Social media and digital platforms enable healthcare providers to undertake marketing and advertising activities that affect consumer behavior and the customer decision-making process (Radu, et al., 2017). Nizar and Janathanan (2018) suggest that customer purchase behavior can be influenced by the shopping experience they have on the internet. Digital platforms enable clinics to provide customers with more convenient healthcare by giving opportunities to effectively manage patient records and reduce patient waiting times (Rubbio, Bruccoleri, Pietrosi, & Ragonese, 2018).

Along with the treatment and personal communication experience received from a doctor, a healthcare provider's reputation plays a crucial role in consumer behavior. For that reason, prior to receiving the healthcare service, patients shape expectations regarding the healthcare provider, which are based on the recommendations from others or the reputation the provider has. (Radu, Radu, Condurache, & Lorin Purcarea, 2018).

In a purchase decision-making process, when customers plan a doctor visit, they seek information regarding healthcare services or healthcare providers through the internet (Radu, Radu, Condurache, & Lorin Purcarea, 2018). In terms of influencing consumer behavior, sufficient and relevant information delivered through online media can play a role in the customer decision-making when making an online purchase (Nizar & Janathanan, 2018). According to Lodhi and Shoaib (2017), most customers are more influenced by digital advertisements rather than traditional marketing communication practices. Hence, digital media can be considered a principal marketing instrument for the healthcare industry (Radu, Radu, Condurache, & Lorin Purcarea, 2018).

Reza Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) also state that any kind of information that customers get online - positive or negative content, has a major impact on the decision-making process. These days, customers trust reviews or comments generated on digital platforms by other customers, and even more, searching for and selecting physicians on the internet is quite common (Radu, Radu, Condurache, & Lorin Purcarea, 2018).

According to Radu (et al. 2018), reputation in digital media is fundamental when it comes to customer acquisition or customer retention in healthcare business. In terms of information supply, content marketing can be pretty influential for customers when making purchase decisions. (Ramesh & Vidhya, 2019). Moss Rogers (2014) suggests that customer engagement is central when undertaking digital marketing activities, and it can be achieved through consumer-focused and balanced content.

D. Healthcare in Georgia

In 2013 Universal Healthcare Program was activated in Georgia to deliver healthcare services to those communities that do not have access to medical insurance (Verulava, Jorbenadze, & Barkalaia, 2017). In regards to healthcare services consumption, according to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, in 2020, 13,6 million outpatient visits

were performed in Georgia throughout the country (GeoStat, 2021). In September 2021, the Georgian government, with the support of the European Union, launched a digital healthcare project in the country. The project aims to increase access to healthcare services through digital health and telemedicine opportunities. The project was encouraged by the circumstances that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the initial goal was to minimize the damage brought by the pandemic crisis (Kurtsikidze, 2021).

Nevertheless, the project will continue to increase the primary healthcare provision for Georgian communities (Kurtsikidze, 2021). As stated in the National Healthcare Strategy of Georgia 2022-2030, healthcare management information systems empowerment is one of the major goals, which involves improving telemedicine and digital healthcare technologies (MoH, 2022). Apart from government efforts of digital transformation in the Georgian health system, several private healthcare platforms are being introduced in Georgia as well. "Ekimo" (Marketer, 2020) and "Redmed" (CBW, 2020) are digital health platforms that deliver various healthcare services to online customers, such as the possibility of booking the doctor visit at private hospitals, telemedicine opportunities, health-related information, and pharmacy shopping.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Research Hypothesis

Based on the literature review, the research hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Digital healthcare platforms increase satisfaction among customers.

H2: Customer satisfaction triggers repurchase intentions of digital healthcare services among digital healthcare platform customers.

H3: Digital healthcare platforms increase customer accessibility to healthcare services.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted under the quantitative approach, and hypotheses were tested against the empirical evidence. The data were collected through the online, self-administered survey on the Survey Monkey platform, which was distributed through social media - an individually created Facebook page. The participants were recruited randomly as the questionnaire link was boosted on social media, targeting all users located in Georgia above 18 years of age. According to GeoStat (2021), the Georgian population is 3,7 million citizens as of January 2020, and approximately 86.1% of the population has access to the internet. The questionnaire was piloted prior to its introduction in order to avoid any question-related ambiguity.

III. RESULTS

The data were collected through a geographic segmentation tool on Facebook. The survey link, posted on a dedicated page, was open for two weeks and reached about 120,000 Facebook users (at least one impression per user). 338 responses were collected, 93 of which were disregarded, due to not completing the questionnaire. 245 responses were used for data analyses in total.

A. Respondents Demographics

The majority of respondents identified themselves in 25-34 (29%) and 35-44 (28%) age groups (Figure 1). Most of the participants were female (72%) (Figure 2) and employed (74%) (Figure 3). Common household earnings (Figure 4) were between under 2000 GEL (31%) or between 2000-4000 GEL (37%).

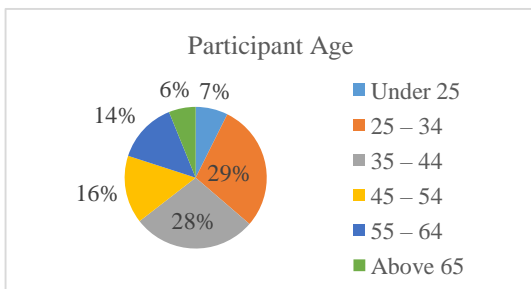


Fig. 1: Participant Age

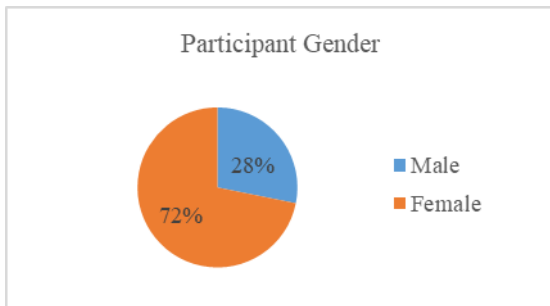


Fig. 2: Participant Gender

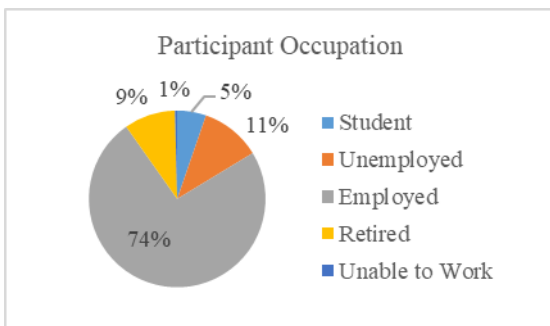


Fig. 3: Participant Occupation

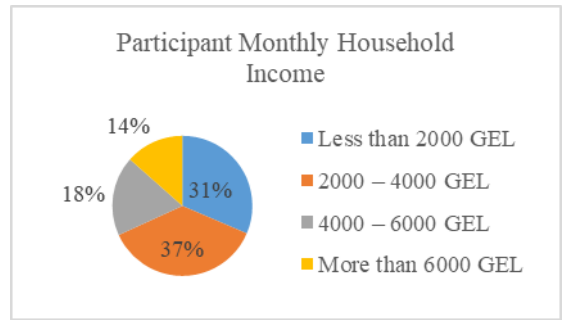


Fig. 4: Participant Monthly Household Income

B. Consumption of Digital Healthcare Platforms

Descriptive statistics showed that 60% of customers had consumed digital healthcare platforms (Figure 5). The cross-tabulation showed that digital healthcare platforms are mostly consumed by customers aged 35-44 (Figure 6) and household income of more than 6000 GEL (Figure 7). Also, platforms are found to be consumed mainly by customers who identify themselves as employed or unable to work (Figure 8).

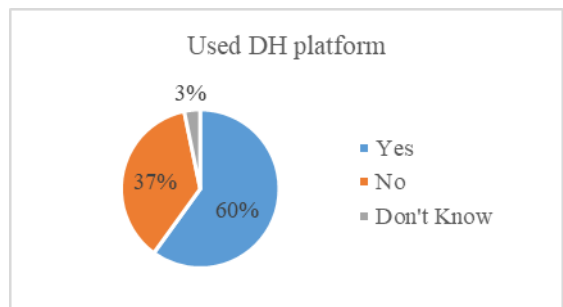


Fig. 5: Used DH Platform

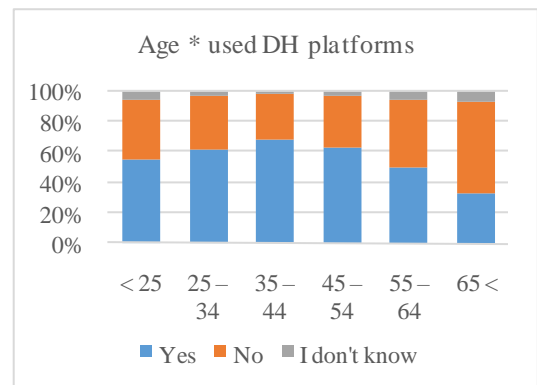


Fig. 6: Age* Used DH Platform

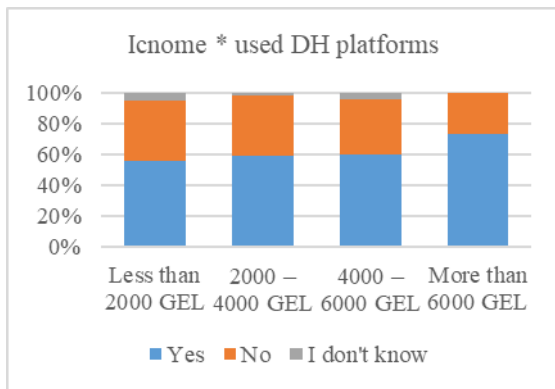


Fig. 7: Income* Used DH Platform

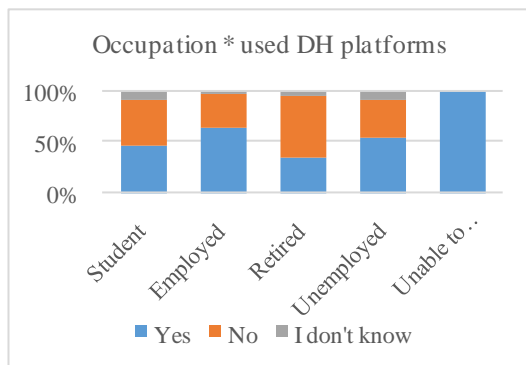


Fig. 8: Occupation* Used DH Platform

C. Motivations for Digital Healthcare Platform Consumption

Descriptive statistics showed that 90% of respondents would consume digital healthcare platforms if the platform would save their time. 89% of respondents would consume digital healthcare platforms if offered promotions and 77% of respondents would consume digital healthcare platforms if they were unable to perform a visit to doctor at medical clinic (Figure 9).

80% of respondents who have never consumed digital healthcare platforms or do not know they have ever consumed, would consume digital healthcare platforms if the platform saved their time. 79% of respondents would consume digital healthcare platforms if offered promotions and 64% of respondents would consume digital healthcare platforms if they were unable to perform a visit to doctor at medical clinic (Figure 10).

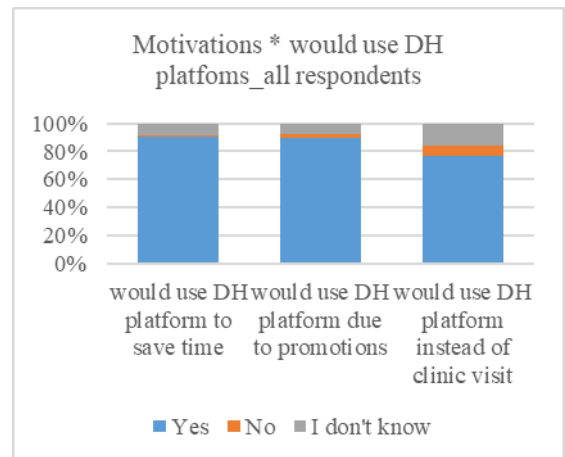


Fig. 9: Motivations* would use DH Platforms_all Respondents

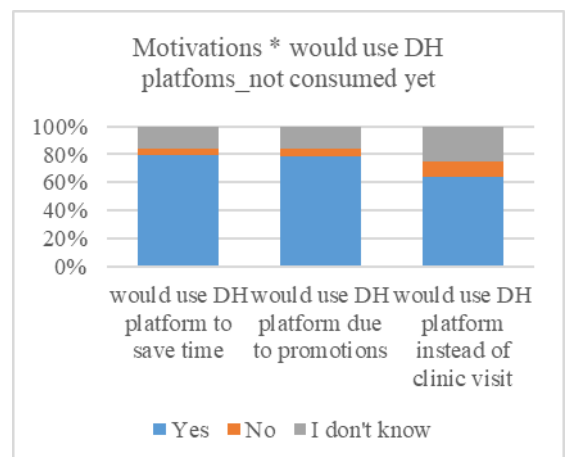


Fig. 10: Motivations* would use DH Platforms_not consumed yet

D. Consumption of Digital Healthcare Platform Services

Descriptive statistics showed that respondents would consume digital healthcare platforms to receive different services. 81% of respondents would use the digital healthcare platform to book a doctor appointment, 47% would use it to find information about a doctor, 19% would use it to perform a video consultation with a doctor, 44% would use it to find information about medical services, 57% would find the price of medical services and 42% would buy a pharmacy product (Figure 11).

E. Consumer Preferences towards Healthcare Services

Descriptive statistics showed respondents' preferences regarding the manner of booking a doctor appointment. 30% of respondents prefer to make a phone call to the clinic call center to book an appointment. 60% of respondents prefer to book an appointment on a digital healthcare platform, and 10% of respondents prefer to book an appointment by making a call to a doctor's private phone number (Figure 12).

As for the approach of consulting with a doctor, descriptive statistics showed that 66% of respondents prefer to make a doctor appointment at a clinic, 20% prefer to consult with a doctor by phone call, and 14% of respondents prefer to consult by a video call (Figure 13).

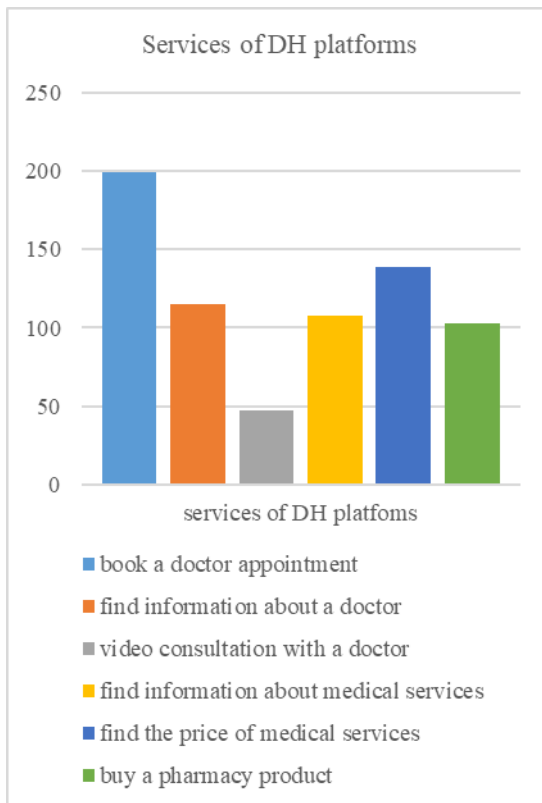


Fig. 11: Service of DH Platforms

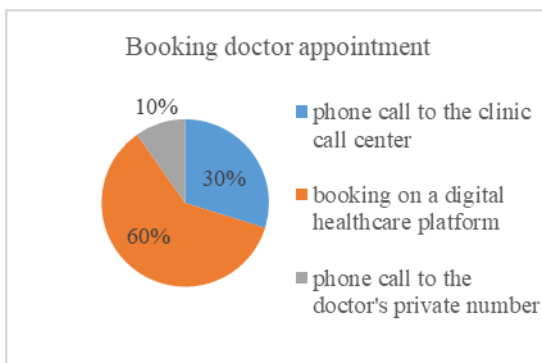


Fig. 12: Booking doctor appointment

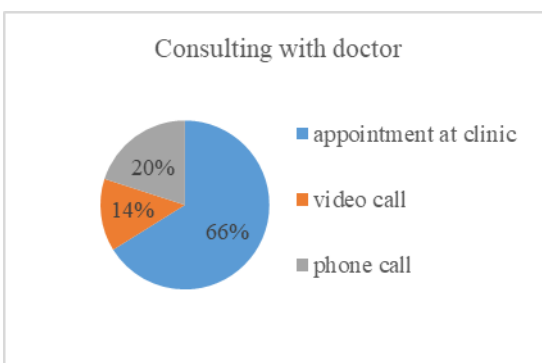


Fig. 13: Consulting with doctor

F. Analyzing Hypotheses

a) Analyzing H1

Hypothesis #1 involved the relationship between the digital healthcare platforms and satisfaction among customers. The hypothesis was tested through the Chi-Square test, indicating the likelihood that the variables in the H1 are associated and showing statistically significant differences between the observed and the expected frequencies (in a normal distribution) of the variables.

H1: Digital healthcare platforms increase satisfaction among customers.

The hypothesis was analyzed based on the data collected from those participants, who positively responded to the question of whether they have ever consumed the digital healthcare platform. 147 responses from total 338 responses were analyzed due to disregarding the responses from those participants who did not complete the questionnaire or negatively responded to the question of whether they have ever consumed the digital healthcare platform.

The test showed that the frequency distribution for customer satisfaction due to the consumption of digital healthcare platforms is relatively high compared to its expected frequency distribution. The Asymptotic Significance or the p-value of Chi-Square was less than 0.05 (Asymp. Sig. in the Chi-Square output = 0.000). H1 was accepted as the relationship between digital healthcare platforms' consumption, and customer satisfaction is significant.

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Yes	129	49.0	80.0
No	6	49.0	-43.0
I don't know	12	49.0	-37.0
Total	147		

Table 1: Satisfaction_consumtion

	Satisfaction_consumtion
Chi-Square	196.286 ^a
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Table 2: Test Statistics

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 49.0.

b) Analyzing H2

Hypothesis #2 involved the relationship between customer satisfaction and repurchase intentions of digital healthcare services among customers. The hypothesis was tested through the Chi-Square test, indicating the likelihood that the variables in the H2 are associated and showing statistically significant

differences between the observed and the expected frequencies (in a normal distribution) of the variables.

H2: Customer satisfaction triggers repurchase intentions of digital healthcare services among digital healthcare platform customers.

The hypothesis was analyzed based on the data collected from those participants, who positively responded to the question of whether they are satisfied with the consumption of digital healthcare platforms. 129 responses from total 338 responses were analyzed due to disregarding the responses from those participants who did not complete the questionnaire or negatively responded to the question of whether they are satisfied with the consumption of digital healthcare platforms.

The test showed that the frequency distribution for the repurchase intentions of digital healthcare platform services due to customer satisfaction is relatively high compared to its expected frequency distribution. The Asymptotic Significance or the p-value of Chi-Square was less than 0.05 (Asymp. Sig. in the Chi-Square output = 0.000). H2 was accepted as the relationship between customer satisfaction, and repurchase intentions of digital healthcare services is significant.

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Yes	128	64.5	63.5
I don't know	1	64.5	-63.5
Total	129		

Table 3: Repeated_purchase

Repeated_purchase	
Chi-Square	125.031 ^a
df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Table 4: Test Statistics

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 64.5.

c) Analyzing H3

Hypothesis #3 involved the relationship between the digital healthcare platforms and customer attitudes towards increasing accessibility of healthcare services. The hypothesis was tested through the Chi-Square test, indicating the likelihood that the variables in the H3 are associated and showing statistically significant differences between the observed and the expected frequencies (in a normal distribution) of the variables.

H3: Digital healthcare platforms increase customer accessibility to healthcare services.

The hypothesis was analyzed based on the data collected from those participants, who positively responded to the question of whether they are satisfied with the consumption of digital healthcare platforms. 245 responses from total 338 responses were analyzed due to disregarding the responses from those participants who did not complete the questionnaire.

The test showed that the frequency distribution for the customer attitudes towards increasing accessibility of healthcare services due to the consumption of digital healthcare platforms is relatively high compared to its expected frequency distribution. The Asymptotic Significance or the p-value of Chi-Square was less than 0.05 (Asymp. Sig. in the Chi-Square output = 0.000). H3 was accepted as the relationship between digital healthcare platforms consumption and customer attitudes towards increasing accessibility of healthcare services is significant.

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Yes	220	81.7	138.3
No	5	81.7	-76.7
I don't know	20	81.7	-61.7
Total	245		

Table 5: Accessibility_increase

accessibility_increase	
Chi-Square	352.857 ^a
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Table 6: Test Statistics

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 81.7.

IV. FINDINGS

The results of the study positively answered the main questions, which involved finding whether consumer satisfaction and consumer purchase behavior are being affected by digital healthcare opportunities in Georgia. The main finding is that customers in Georgia are satisfied with the consumption of digital healthcare platforms, and moreover, they are satisfied with the existence of these platforms. The study showed that customer satisfaction has an influence over repurchase intentions – users who have a positive experience in consuming digital healthcare platforms express an inclination to consume the platforms again.

Accepting H3 revealed that customers view digital healthcare platforms as an opportunity to increase healthcare service accessibility. According to the results, the majority of customers have already consumed digital healthcare platforms, but however, there occurs to be a large part of the community (37%) who has not yet tried digital healthcare. The study also showed that the largest share of digital healthcare platform users could be found among employed communities. Also, the relationship between digital healthcare consumption and household income was found – the higher the customer household income, the greater the consumption of digital healthcare platforms.

Further, the research showed that customers express motivation to consume digital healthcare platforms in different circumstances. Most customers who have already consumed digital healthcare platforms express willingness to apply for digital healthcare if it would save their time, if they were offered promotional offerings or if they would not be able to perform a visit to a doctor at a medical clinic. Similar results were shown among customers who have not yet consumed digital healthcare platforms – time-saving opportunities, promotional offerings, and substitution for clinic visits could play a role in digital healthcare adoption by customers.

As for the services that customers may receive through digital healthcare platforms, booking a doctor appointment or finding the service price is the most desirable, whereas performing a video consultation with the doctor is the least desirable service customers may get through the platforms. The finding was reinforced by analyzing customer preferences towards the appointment booking method – customers prefer to book an appointment using the digital healthcare platform rather than calling the clinic call center. As for the approach to a doctor appointment, they mostly have a preference for visiting a doctor at a clinic rather than consulting by a video call.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research revealed that customer satisfaction could be affected by delivering healthcare services on the digital platform. Hence, medical facilities considering customer satisfaction an essential marketing issue may discuss digital healthcare as their marketing instrument. However, the study showed that a reasonable share of customers has not yet consumed digital healthcare as a tool that increases their access to healthcare services. Marketers working on digital healthcare can consider increasing awareness of digital healthcare platforms and promote digital healthcare services by communicating the benefits the customers can get through the platforms. Customer benefits can involve time-saving opportunities and promotional offerings, which were revealed by the study that may act as a motivator to increase the digital healthcare platform consumption. Finding that customers mostly expect to receive service of appointment booking through a digital healthcare platform may be used as a key communication message, followed by the supplementary services including finding information about medical

services, purchasing a pharmacy product, or consulting with a doctor by a video call.

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