

Marketing of Health Services In Pandemic Context. Case Study Romania

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Abstract

The main purpose of this work is to identify the interest given to health services in the pandemic context. The promotion segment of all the information related to both the situation in which the entire health system was and the degree of information of the current and potential consumers of these services is a rather controversial topic in the period traversed by the population of the entire globe. The multitude of works addressed in all aspects – from the issue of the costs of information and health services to the emotional impact on the population, precedes our study.

Key words: marketing, health services, online platforms

J.E.L. classification: M31, I19

1. Introduction

At EU level, European Health Services is in a full process of reform. Under the latest economic and social transformations, European Union is seeking the reform of all health systems of the Member States to ensure the highest quality services.

At national level, Romanian health system is a difficult sector of the national economy. Insufficient funds, poor health of the population, the situation of medical doctors working simultaneously in the public and private sectors, the worrying for the costs of drugs, fight against corruption intra-system, and not the latest, quality of care are the main problems of this system.

The purpose of the research is to review the specialized literature during the pandemic caused by the infection with the SARS-COV19 virus. A series of specialists, researchers as well as practitioners from different adjacent fields but also directly looking at this subject, have looked for solutions that they have disseminated internationally. Their objective was mainly to look for solutions for this crisis in the health system as well as to identify levers to mitigate the impact of this pandemic on any person.

In period that we tried to analyse we observe the increasing demand for health services, because pandemic context was somehow understand in a lot of ways: from consolidation of knowledge, attitudes and behaviour to denying myths and misconceptions. Consumers of health services were influenced by a lot of information. So, we try to present in what way information has been received and when is the main reason for a change of behaviour, change that is measured by attitude and action for both side – consumers and hospitals/other institutes that offers health services.

2. Theoretical background

Marketing in healthcare involves the creation, communication and provision of information and health interventions, using patient-centred and science-based strategies for the protection and promotion of the health of various groups of populations.

Most of the papers related to marketing in health services have many objectives but main of them has like purpose to:

- ✓ promotes the use of marketing research for educating, motivating and informing the public about the messages of health;

- ✓ an integration of the traditional field of marketing with research, theory and practice on public health;
- ✓ a complex framework that provides guidance for the design of interventions health, campaigns and research projects;
- ✓ a wide range of strategies and techniques that can be used to create synergies between public health research, and communication messages health behaviours.

The purpose of marketing communication is to increase knowledge and awareness of a health problem or solution, to influence perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and social norms, but also to demonstrate or illustrate skills. Many authors consider that is very important to offer a way to display the benefit of behaviour change (Muntean and Puțan, 2015).

In health services, for most consumers who are sick and looking online information, virtual communities play a significant role; they provide to patients both the chance to get practical information of encouragement such as "virtual" secondary opinions as well as support, because the internet is perceived as an environment where individuals can share emotions in a safe environment and alleviate their loneliness through the relationships established within community whose members consider them "real, practical and civic".

The role of emotions in services has attracted attention in understanding consumer experiences and behaviours. Emotions are ubiquitous and generally, in marketing, they influence information processing, measures the consequences of stimuli used in marketing, mediates behavioural intentions and measures consumer welfare.

Negative emotions that are specific to health services in Romania, terror, worry, embarrassment and shame while the emotions most rarely felt were fear, disappointment, anger and rage.

The COVID-19 ("coronavirus") pandemic was accompanied by an unprecedented "infodemia". An avalanche of information about the virus, often false or inaccurate and spreading rapidly on social media platforms, can - according to the World Health Organization (WHO) - create confusion and mistrust and undermine an effective response.

Due to isolation measures, millions of people have been forced to remain in their homes, which has led to increased use of social media platforms, including as a means of accessing information, in the context of online platforms, fact-checkers and users. Social media platforms report millions of fake or misleading posts. Given the novelty of the virus, the lack of knowledge about it has proven to be a breeding ground for spreading false or misleading claims.

Cooperation with social media platforms is a key element both in developing a comprehensive assessment of the challenge of "infodemia" and in responding effectively to it.

They promoted accurate and well-documented information on COVID-19 issued by World Health Organization, national health authorities and professional media channels. Online platforms have downgraded content that has been found to be fake or misleading after verification and has limited advertisements that promote fake products and services. In line with the standards of their user community, online platforms have removed content that could harm citizens' health or public safety.

3. Research methodology

The purpose of our research is to present the general framework offered by the specialized literature regarding the promotion of medical services among consumers and direct participants in the marketing communication process.

The research method used is qualitative analyse and the preparation of a map around some basic notions and terms that have as their core the way of popularizing information on everything that this emerging virus means, as well as concepts related to costs, patients and the policy of solving the situation- the issue (Donthu, 2021)

The query of the Web of Science database, during October 2022, with the key terms "marketing in health services-pandemic-Romania" as the search engine, allowed the identification of a series of writings that concentrate an important mass of information around the concept of information - promotion-obtaining feed-back from consumers/patients. The period of analysis was the last 5 years, 2019-2022.

As we mentioned, this study allows us to establish a starting point for the extensive research of which it is a part, so that we can analyse a current situation regarding the information campaigns carried out in the online environment as well as physically built around this topic.

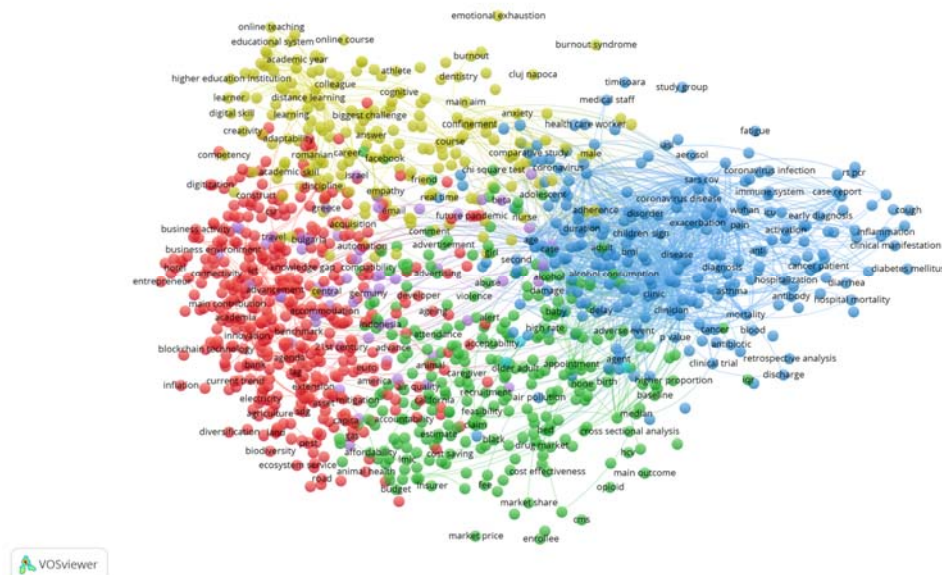
The analysis of the database configured around the search engines within the Web of Science Platform allowed the grouping of the extracted information around some key terms, forming clusters (Ellegaard and Wallin, 2015).

Cluster analysis, also known as segmentation or taxonomy analysis, aims to identify a set of homogeneous groups by grouping elements in such a way as to minimize variation within the group and maximize variation between groups. Cluster analysis is therefore a multivariate analysis technique that includes several algorithms for classifying objects (elements or individuals) into homogeneous groups. The variables or cases are sorted into groups (clusters) so that between the members of the same cluster there are as many similarities as possible, and between the members of different clusters there are as few similarities as possible. For this, first, the choice of the distance between the elements is taken into account, then the choice of the grouping algorithm and finally the level is decided (Anderberg, 1973).

4. Findings

The results obtained allowed us to identify 4,634 published articles, scientific works, but also chapters in specialized books, proceedings of some conferences, etc. These were extracted using the VOSviewer program and processed, thus obtaining the map below (Van Eck, Waltman, 2014).

Figure no. 1 Processing the database with the help of VOSviewer – Marketing in pandemic context. Health services in Romania



Source: Own processing

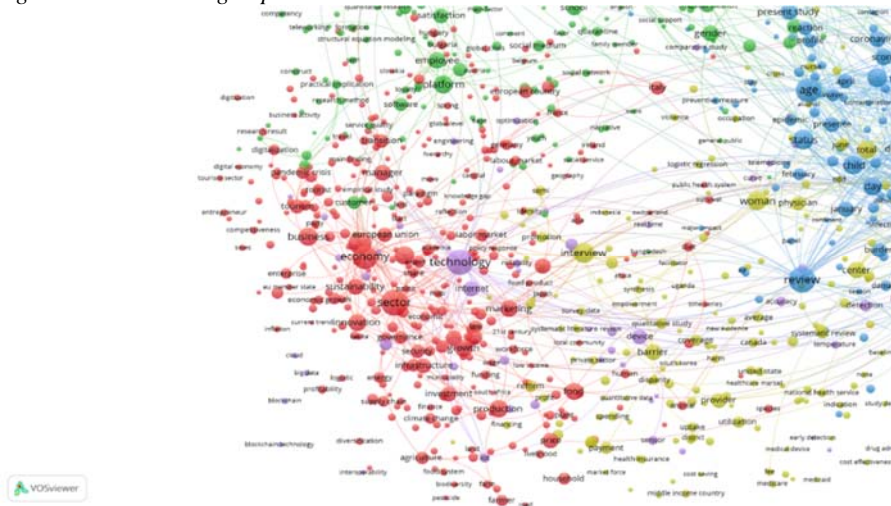
As can be seen in figure 6, the processing of the information extracted from the Web of Science platform concentrates a series of information around key words that highlight the main themes addressed in the analysed period.

According to the Software Manual, each node in the map generated by the application represents a keyword. We mention some specific elements related to the size of the node shows how many times the keyword appears; the connection between the nodes indicates the co-occurrence of the keywords - appearing together in several situations in different studies; link width indicates co-occurrence between keywords or they appear together; the larger the node, the higher the occurrence of the keyword, and the thicker the connection between nodes, the higher the occurrence of concurrency

between nodes. Each area represents a cluster, where the nodes and links in that cluster can be used to explain their coverage, the topics - nodes and the relationships/links between topics) that appear under that theme. (Moisă, Ivan, 2021).

Cluster no. 1 – we call him *Analysis by sector* presents a series of information related to the sectors affected by the pandemic. The entire economic life, from the analysis by sectors - economy, tourism, export, infrastructure, investments, finance, production - to concepts such as economic growth has been strongly affected by the spread of this virus. Moreover, the effects were quite pressing on all sectors. As also appreciated in the EU reports, the COVID-19 pandemic has produced a major shock to the economies of the European Union and the whole world, having serious socioeconomic consequences. Despite the swift and comprehensive political response at both Union and national level, it was soon noticed that in 2020 the EU economy was going to face a recession of historic proportions (European Commission, 2020)

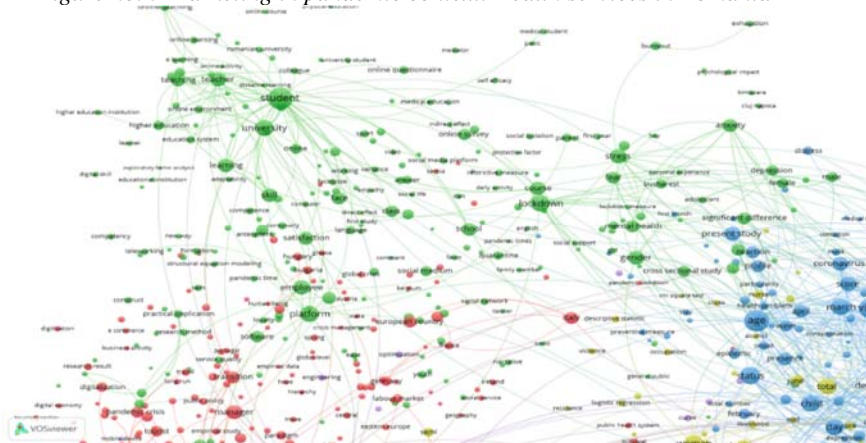
Figure no. 2 Marketing in pandemic context. Health services in Romania



Source: Own processing

Cluster number 2 – *Consumers of health services* is centered around terms related to emotional involvement, as well as the perception of all the participants from the academic environment of those who are trying to find solutions to the crisis. Terms such as university, research, student, online study platforms, as well as other means of information promotion are observed. The psychological impact felt in the academic environment also brings with it a series of consequences.

Figure no. 3 Marketing in pandemic context. Health services in Romania



Source: Own processing

As could be seen in cluster no. 1, where an increased attention was registered for all sectors of economic activity, within this cluster, attention is directed towards the academic environment with all that is directly derived: social research, digital research, social media platform, e-learning but also terms such as stress, fear, anxiety.

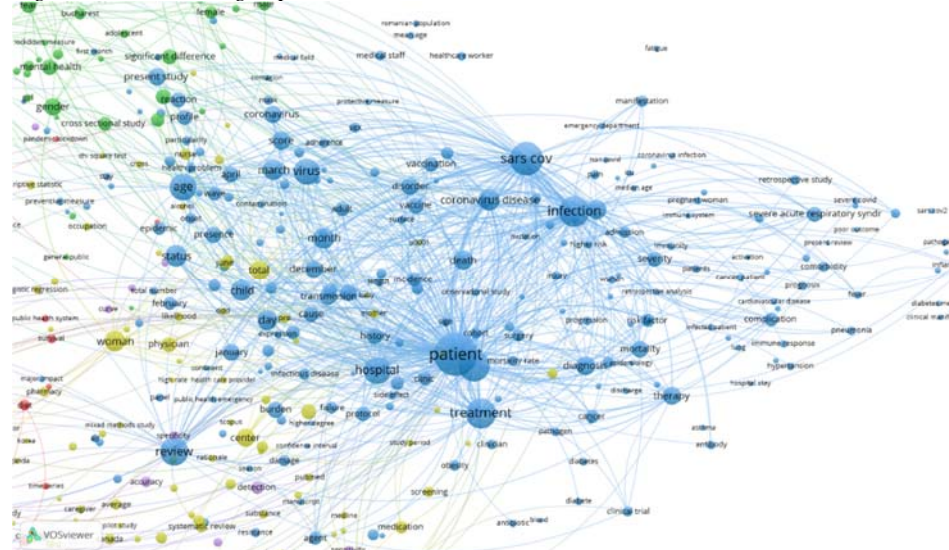
Patient satisfaction regarding the services received in hospitals and at home is an inexhaustible topic in specialized literature, even more so since the human resource - doctors and personnel directly involved in the activity in the health sector is directly affected by the sudden crisis in the system.

Cluster number 3 – The health sector revolves around concepts such as SARS COV 19, infection, patient, hospital, diagnosis, key terms from the health sector. As can be seen in figure 4, the subject of an important share of the total selected sample belongs to the health sector affected by bad conditions.

At the level of the European Commission, a series of measures have been adopted to strengthen the public health sectors and to reduce the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic. The European Union mobilized all the means at its disposal to help Member States coordinate their responses at national level and provided objective information on the spread of COVID-19 and effective efforts to limit its spread. Thus, the RescEU pool was created of medical materials, the first common European stock emergency medical equipment, including protective masks and ventilators, to help member states that were facing a shortage of equipment.

Actions in the health sector were numerous and supported by both the authorities and the private sector. All this was surprised by research that tried to find solutions to reduce the damage at society level.

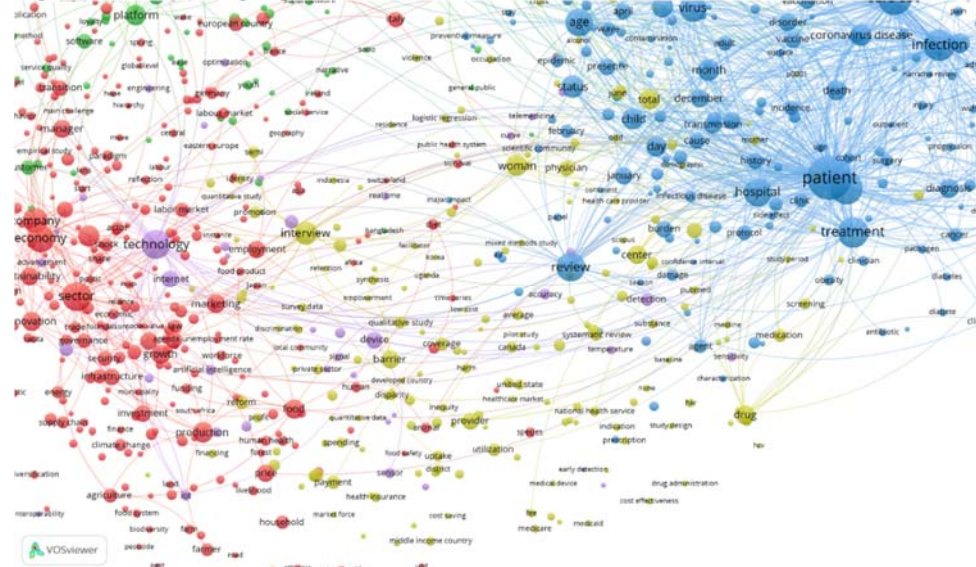
Figure no. 4 Marketing in pandemic context. Health services in Romania



Source: Own processing

Specialized studies that focus on the qualitative nature of the information are gathered in *cluster no. 4 – Sensitive issues in health*; key terms are equity-inequity, discrimination, women, supply. These subjects, as can be seen in figure 5, represent the sensitive side of the provision of medical services in a situation as difficult as possible for the entire world map.

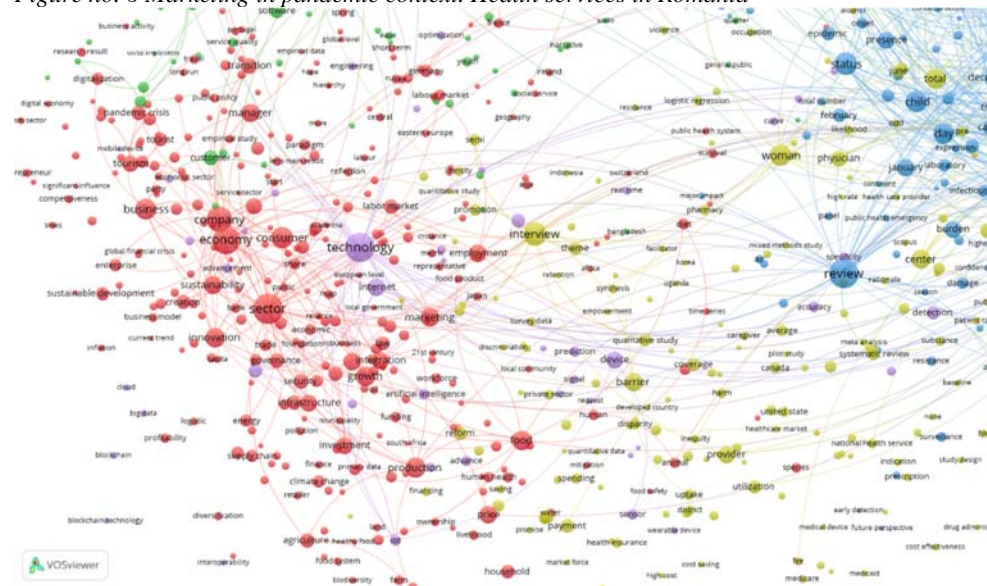
Figure no. 5 Marketing in pandemic context. Health services in Romania



Source: Own processing

Cluster number 5 – The digital component of the research is the smallest group, with a low weight in the total database extracted from the Web of Science Platform. The keywords are technology, device, internet. In the context of the large-scale infection with the SARS COV 19 virus, the entire economic activity has relocated to the online environment. From the effective implementation of the business objects of economic agents to the promotion of information and socialization, online platforms have become the framework location for all important aspects of the life of the individual, the population.

Figure no. 6 Marketing in pandemic context. Health services in Romania



Source: Own processing

5. Conclusions

This study is part of a much larger research that aims to identify the perception of "consumers" of health services on the wide range of information received voluntarily or involuntarily through all communication channels.

The analysis of the extracted information – 4634 publications, articles, specialized journals, with the help of the Vos Viewer application allowed obtaining the 5 clusters. Cluster number 3 brought together almost 40% of the database; the predominant topics were directly related to everything that the medical sector means, from patient status - including aspects related to the identification of the particularities of each situation of providing medical services, to aspects related to diagnosis, treatment and context in which they were registered special situations in hospital units.

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the crucial role of the free and independent media as an essential service that provides citizens with reliable, factually verified information, thus contributing to saving lives.

However, the crisis has also exacerbated the already difficult economic situation in this sector, due to the dramatic decline in advertising revenues, despite the growing audience. The situation is particularly difficult for smaller and vulnerable actors and for local and regional media channels.

The Commission's package of remedial and remedial measures would help address immediate liquidity needs through solvency support and cohesion funding, while strengthening digital investment and sector resilience through InvestEU, Creative Europe and Horizon Europe.

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