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THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE MARKETING ACTIVITIES OF MEDICAL INSTITUTIONS ¹

ВПЛИВ COVID-19 НА МАРКЕТИНГОВУ ДІЯЛЬНІСТЬ МЕДИЧНИХ ЗАКЛАДІВ

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The article is devoted to topical issues of the COVID-19 impact on the marketing activities of medical institutions. Attention is paid to the analysis of the main innovations in medical marketing that arose in response to the challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic. The authors paid attention to the maintenance of pages in social networks, setting up targeted advertising, developing health care websites, partnerships between medical institutions, virtual help of doctors and others. Using the example of the medical center, the introduction of new marketing trends into the work of the medical institution is described (digitization, upgrade of pages in social networks, implementation of online patient appointments, maintenance of expert accounts, online appointment). The advantages of introducing such innovations into the activities of medical institutions and the prospects for their improvement have been studied.

Keywords: marketing activity, pandemic, covid-19, marketing strategy, regional system of medical institutions.

Стаття присвячена актуальним питанням впливу COVID-19 на маркетингову діяльність медичних закладів. Пріділено увагу аналізу основних інновацій у сфері медичного маркетингу, які виникли у відповідь на виклики, спричинені пандемією коронавірусу. Проаналізовано зміни пріоритетів суспільства, а також досліджені способи адаптації маркетингової діяльності суб'єктів господарювання в секторі охорони здоров'я. Визначені детермінанти мікро- та макросередовища медичних закладів, що значною мірою впливають на функціонування таких закладів в умовах викликів різного характеру, зокрема в умовах епідемій. Проведено аналіз конкурентоспроможності окремого медичного закладу периферійного регіону України. Автори запропонували інноваційний варіант матриці Маслоу, який за своєю сутністю більше зводиться до безпечної поведінки та фізіологічних потреб споживача. Автори приділили увагу особливостям ведення сторінок у соціальних мережах, налаштуванню таргетованої реклами, розвитку сайтів охорони здоров'я, партнерству між медичними закладами, віртуальній допомозі лікарів та іншим важливим параметрам маркетингової діяльності. Для публікацій у соцмережах було обрано три основні взаємопов'язані теми: COVID-19, лікарня, лабораторія. За результатами проведеного дослідження були розроблені рекомендації щодо вдосконалення маркетингової діяльності приватного медичного центру в умовах пандемії. Авторами розроблено медіа-план популяризації комплексного обстеження організму людини після перенесеної коронавірусної хвороби. На прикладі медичного

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центру описано впровадження нових маркетингових трендів у роботу медичного закладу (цифровізація, оновлення сторінок у соціальних мережах, впровадження онлайн-запису пацієнтів, ведення експертних акаунтів). Результати оцінювали шляхом моніторингу кількості записів пацієнтів. Доведено ефективність впровадження маркетингових інновацій у діяльність цих суб'єктів господарювання в умовах пандемічних викликів. Досліджено переваги впровадження таких інновацій у діяльність медичних закладів та перспективи їх удосконалення.

Ключові слова: маркетингова діяльність, пандемія, COVID-19, маркетингова стратегія, регіональна система медичних закладів.

Problem statement. The relevance of the work's topic lies in the need to adapt medical institutions' marketing activities to the conditions of the pandemic, because it has affected many sectors worldwide. The disease has caused many deaths on a global scale, which has led to an understanding of the need to develop and implement preventive measures, including quarantine measures. In addition, the disease prompted the closure of many businesses, resulting in the collapse of economies worldwide and the loss of jobs [1]. Most organizations have developed innovative strategies during the pandemic to support their business [2]. For example, almost all stores have started actively using online platforms to promote their products and allow customers to order them at their convenient time from home. Healthcare businesses have also developed marketing strategies to ensure that customers have access to their services, which are often vital [3]. Most healthcare companies have invested time and money in media plans for online activities that have gained relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature review. The study of various aspects of marketing in the sphere of medical institutions has been given attention in several scientific works. In [4], the authors prove the need to use digital tools to promote medical services, which helps expand business in this area. They proceed from the fact that such tools make it possible to attract new patients, promote the opinion of high-quality medical services in society, and stimulate existing customers to recommend a particular medical institution. The main goal of the study [5] was to highlight the role of quality marketing content in the promotion of medical services on the example of specific medical institutions in the peripheral region of Ukraine. The authors [6] call direct marketing an effective way of communicating with clients of medical institutions, which makes it possible to reach the institution's target audience, and examine its various tools in terms of effectiveness, the possibility of targeted interaction, resource consumption, etc. In work [7], the author summarizes the arguments and

counter-arguments in the framework of the scientific discussion regarding the expediency of using such marketing tools as social media and HR marketing in the field of functioning of medical institutions, using a set of quantitative and qualitative marketing studies on the example of providers of medical services in the countries of the European region. The authors in [8] emphasize that during the COVID-19 pandemic, different countries adopted various strategies to respond to challenges in the socio-economic environment caused by the spread of the coronavirus. Also, these strategies differed in the marketing tools they used. In [9], the authors define the peculiarities of the application of marketing in medicine, in particular the marketing mix, significantly expanding the theoretical basis for future scientific, practical and theoretical developments. The subject of research in [10] is the process of checking the readiness of medical institutions to implement the principles of CRM and strategic marketing planning in conditions of uncertainty. In addition, the authors consider modern approaches to implementing innovative services and the peculiarities of medical marketing for adjusting incentive programs in health care institutions. In [11], the authors emphasize the growth of competition in the sector of private hospitals. They substantiate their reasoning regarding effective ways of attracting customers, building their trust, and, as a result, loyalty. A study of the multivariate relationships between content marketing and these characteristics was conducted for the private hospital sector.

Setting objectives. The authors set a goal to investigate the theoretical aspects of marketing activities of medical institutions in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, analyze modern trends and approaches in the use of marketing tools. The medical center "Med-Soyuz", which serves the population of the Sumy region, was chosen as the object of analysis. According to the study results, the authors aim to formulate recommendations for improving marketing activities of the medical center under quarantine conditions and to develop an indicative media plan.

Results. It is no secret that the purchasing behavior of consumers is influenced by both objective and subjective factors. The pandemic has become one of the situational driving factors in the choice of goods by consumers in recent years. The increase in the number of patients with COVID-19 in Ukraine (Table 1) and its consequences affected not only the attitude to one's health, to each other and values in general, but also to purchasing behavior [12].

During the pandemic, the consumer is more inclined to order goods or services online, reduces discretionary spending, focuses on his own safety, prefers local brands and is quite selective when buying. Digital technologies have become an integral part of life, because they have made it possible to have fun, do sports, study and work online. Accordingly, the demand for programs that provide conference communication (Zoom, Hangouts Meet, etc.) has grown significantly.

These developments led to several innovative strategies that were ill-conceived or not sufficiently successful. While the pandemic has created so much chaos, it has been an eye-opener for many companies. This led to the design and development of several creative and promotional activities to support the sustainability of the business. One of the main reasons for this change was the increased desire of customers to have their desired products delivered to their homes. Thus, medical enterprises have also developed strategies in the same direction to keep up with the new trend. These new measures can be long-term strategies which can continue to be used even after the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the development of innovative measures by medi-

cal enterprises for their sustainability. One of the most significant measures used in the health-care market are social media platforms [1]. According to recent data, social media use has increased significantly during COVID-19 due to people working from home and spending a significant amount online and on social media [14]. Therefore, medical businesses have sought this as a marketing option and created social media accounts to make it easier for customers to contact medical businesses and inquire about products and services [15]. In addition, customers can order multiple goods and services and have them delivered to their homes via social media platforms. This initiative was imperative given that people were encouraged to reduce unnecessary movement and physical interaction with other people, increasing their chances of contracting the virus [16]. Thus, through social networks, medical enterprises have created new marketing innovations.

Paid advertising has also proven to be an effective marketing strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Paid advertising through popular sites covers many consumers [17]. Popular sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube are used by millions of people around the world. Using these platforms to advertise various health products, services and information effectively reaches a large number of people. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) uses these frequently visited sites to provide information on preventive measures for COVID-19 and recently used them to inform the public about a vaccine being developed [18]. Also, other companies use these paid ads to promote their products and end up attracting huge numbers of customers. Hence, paid advertising has had a positive impact on the medical

Table 1

**Indicators of the incidence of COVID-19 in Ukraine and its consequences in 2020
(formed based on [13])**

Month of 2020	The number of persons during the corresponding month:			Mortality rate, %	The average daily growth rate of active patients, %
	fell ill	died	recovered		
March-April	10,861	272	1,685	13.9	7.8
May	13,151	446	8,723	4.9	1.4
June	31,847	727	11,998	5.7	2.0
July	39,209	973	29,002	3.2	2.3
August	84,094	1,632	31,405	4.9	2.7
September	128,934	2,561	67,231	3.7	2.1
October	266,506	4,745	101,516	4.5	2.3

business and hence has provided stability for the companies.

The development of responsive health websites has been used extensively during the COVID-19 pandemic to share information related to disease and drug awareness. The speedy delivery of services also created much traction during the COVID-19 pandemic, as people relied on most services to get them home in the shortest possible time. These fast and responsive business modules have managed to get a significant result in the market. Most healthcare companies have continued and adapted this business model to keep up with this demand. They have developed responsive sites to provide their customers with healthcare services and products in a short time, increasing loyalty and reliability. They wanted their customers to always look to them to deliver the services they needed. Therefore, creating a responsive healthcare website was an important innovation during COVID-19 to ensure a positive customer base.

Branding and advertising styles have also changed during COVID-19 to make customers aware of the variety of services offered by healthcare businesses. With most people confined to their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare businesses have had to develop innovative strategies to promote their brands.

This change has created a need for partnerships between healthcare businesses and other companies. For example, we have seen several healthcare companies indirectly promote themselves on products such as cereal boxes or milk cartons, which are commonly used by the average household and can reach a wide range of customers. In addition, quality and exceptional medical services enhance the brand of the business. Thus, healthcare enterprises have improved service delivery to create a positive brand for themselves and improve the perception of their companies. Branding innovations have helped medical companies grow and kept them afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Healthcare businesses have never been big fans of product promotions or discounts. However, we have seen several healthcare companies create promotions to attract more customers during the pandemic. Promotions and discounts are considered one of the most valuable assets for a sustainable business. Most current and former customers often recommend a good medical product and service provider to other potential customers, hence word of mouth. Medical enterprises attract customers who seek their services

by offering special offers or discounts on various services and products [19].

In addition, medical businesses use virtual doctors to promote themselves. These physician specialists represent physicians, hospitals, or medical practices via phone calls or email. Their duty as representatives is to refer doctors or medics of any specialty. These physician referrals are essential to increasing the number of patients or customers for many healthcare businesses. Recently, many virtual doctors have been recruited to refer medical businesses to patients and potential customers to expand their business. By referring patients to these healthcare facilities, these companies could meet their customers' needs, which in turn ensured the stability and growth of their businesses. Therefore, hiring physician relations specialists or physician relations managers has helped many healthcare businesses stay relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has forced companies worldwide to change many of their marketing plans and tactics overnight, as trade shows, conferences and events have been canceled for almost everyone. Healthcare marketers were in a state of crisis, but webinars provided a new tactical opportunity. All you need to do now is act fast and develop your webinar plan to replace the money you've been getting from sources that are no longer viable. All scientific medical activities were transferred to an online format for continuing medical education in the form of webinars after the declaration of a pandemic by COVID-19. The response of most medical specialties to the rapid and unexpected shift from traditional face-to-face meetings to webinars was incredible, as webinars were a great alternative for future discussions and recommendations.

New marketing strategies developed during the COVID-19 pandemic have significantly impacted healthcare systems. One of the most important impacts of recent innovations is increasing public involvement in various aspects of health care [20]. People can now search for information and post queries on social media platforms and various internet sites. All these online platforms and social networks have significantly increased the interaction between healthcare systems and customers [1]. In addition, through social media and website platforms, health systems can inform the public about various medical advances made by health systems. As a result of these new marketing strategies, the general public has been successfully involved in many medical aspects, opening the way for people to

discover new things about the healthcare sector.

Strategic marketing innovations have revolutionized the way business is done. Online marketplaces have increased comparatively during the COVID-19 pandemic as people order goods and services from various online platforms. This aspect has created value for customers and businesses as people no longer need to visit pharmacies and other healthcare businesses physically. In addition, healthcare businesses place paid advertisements through websites and build their brands through social media platforms. Thus, the online business market has grown significantly and revolutionized the way of doing business.

In addition, healthcare enterprises have digitized their inventory and functions [21]. This factor has made it easy to track and document companies' information. People are now adapting to using websites to order products, services and communicate with medical practitioners.

New marketing strategies have increased the customer base for local medical businesses. Popular websites are accessible from anywhere in the world, creating an effective advertising platform. We now attract customers from communities. These healthcare businesses have also gone global and attracted customers from other countries through social media platforms and websites. Even local enterprises have reached the international level. In addition, these marketing strategies ensured equal competition for companies to promote their products.

Let's consider marketing activities during the quarantine period using the example of the analysis of the Med-Soyuz medical center. The marketing activity of the medical center "Med-Soyuz" is based on the study of both the external and internal environment of the medical institution, purposeful actions of the enterprise to study the internal and external environment of the functioning of the medical institution, the organization of quality management, which contributes to the effective provision of knowledge about the needs and requests of recipients medical services.

The "7R" concept is the basis of the marketing complex of the medical center. Let's consider the components of the concept in more detail:

1) Product – the product is a medical service. Conventionally, they can be divided into several subcategories: outpatient consultations of specialists; laboratory studies; inpatient surgical and therapeutic care; diagnostic examinations; rehabilitation measures.

"Med-Soyuz" has its own logo, corporate style, which includes: corporate colors, signboard, forms, website design, etc. The medical center adheres to the style both in internal communication in the hospital itself and in communication with patients at external contact points [22]. All services of the medical center are aimed at solving human health problems. The main task is to return the patient to his usual life as quickly and qualitatively as possible;

2) Price – the purchase of medical services belongs to the category of impulse purchases, because of this the cycle of making a purchase decision is quite specific. The medical center has implemented and is actively developing a broad service program with the aim of improving the quality of service and, as a result, increasing the number of patients through recommendations;

3) Promotion – Med-Soyuz promotion channels can be divided into online and offline:

1) offline channels include the following:

- printed articles in local publications;
- interviews and stories about the medical center on the city's TV channels;
- printed products about hospital services;

2) online channels include the following:

- maintenance and promotion of pages in social networks Facebook, Instagram and Tik-Tok;

- "Med-Soyuz" website (including SEO promotion and contextual advertising);

4) Place (place) – "Med-Soyuz" provides services exclusively on the territory of the institution or at the place of the emergency call. During the visit, both consultations and manipulative actions or the collection of patient tests can be carried out. If a disease requiring surgical treatment is detected during such a consultation, the patient will be referred to Med-Soyuz for hospitalization;

5) People (people) are people of different age categories with an average or high income level who, at their own discretion, are patients of this medical center;

6) Process – at Med-Soyuz, the consumer is closely related to receiving the service. It is involved in the process of obtaining it during the entire period of service provision;

7) Physical Evidence (material and physical evidence) – the medical center values the health of each person, monitors the qualifications of doctors, ensures daily cleaning of the premises and disinfection as needed, seminars and meetings are held in each of the departments. The management of "Med-Soyuz" spends a large part of the budget on the purchase of

new innovative equipment, training of doctors, modernization of offices and maintaining the status of the union of the best doctors.

Based on the "7R" concept of "Med-Soyuz", one conduct a SWOT analysis of the hospital's strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats (Table 2).

So, based on the results of the SWOT analysis, it can be concluded that the institution is quite competitive, given the number of strengths, the main ones of which can be considered: highly qualified personnel, modern equipment and a wide client base. However, in order to strengthen the position in the market for the provision of medical services, it is necessary to expand the region of service provision, ensure a competitive salary for all staff and increase the working hours of the center. Considering the possibilities, "Med-Soyuz" is a rather promising institution on the city market. Partnerships with equipment manufacturers, training programs for doctors and students, as well as the use of digital technologies will help to work more efficiently

and attract new patients to retain employees. In order to hedge risks caused by threats such as war and pandemic, Med-Soyuz needs to adapt work to a remote format as much as possible if necessary. It is also worth holding meetings with doctors in case of doubts about the diagnosis.

Medical center "Med-Soyuz" has many competitors among the hospitals of the city of Sumy, the list of which includes both private and state institutions. The main competitors of the institution are "Floris", "Medea" and "Eledia", because they have a similar principle of operation and level of service provision.

COVID-19 has made adjustments in all spheres of human life, marketing activity was no exception. The way of life, doing business, and to some extent even the values of the population have changed, and therefore it has become necessary to adapt marketing to the new conditions of existence in the conditions of the pandemic.

Doctor of Economic Sciences Bochko Olena Yuriyivna claimed that in the conditions of

Table 2

SWOT-analysis of the Med-Soyuz medical center

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Investments in clinical equipment – Possibility of online appointment – No queues – Repeat consultation within two days is free – High salary of doctors – Most doctors of the highest qualification category – Modern operating rooms – New renovation – There is a recognizable corporate style – Has its call center – There is a choice of doctors for each specialization – You can get an online consultation – Large client base – There is an own laboratory – Almost all doctors speak English – You can call from abroad in Telegram – High level of patient care – 11 years of successful work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Only one institution in the city, and there are no branches in the region – Limited financial resources – Lack of experience of doctors in conducting certain types of operations – Limited working hours (not around the clock) – Appointment times for some doctors are limited Turnover of middle staff
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Attract qualified doctors and staff – Develop a program for teaching students – Expand service areas – Exchange experience with doctors of other medical institutions – Internship of doctors abroad – Attracting investments for the purchase of equipment or expansion of the facility – Partnership with different groups – Digitization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Salary competition with other hospitals – Increasing unemployment in the city – Pandemic – War – Decommissioning of expensive equipment – Loss of qualified personnel – The appearance of new competitive clinics – A false diagnosis will lead to tragic consequences

the pandemic, modern consumers pay more attention to the primary needs (their health and those around them, loved ones, free access to the satisfaction of basic needs, as well as their financial condition). This common concern will manifest itself in different ways, which also affects consumer behavior. To influence consumer behavior, modern enterprises build a whole system that takes into account various marketing tools.

According to A. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Figure 1), creativity, a satisfaction of spiritual needs (for example, social, satisfaction in social activity, recognition by society, etc.) were the top of consumer needs satisfaction before the coronavirus disease pandemic. During COVID-19, the modern consumer has modernized his own values according to Maslow's matrix, and are reduced more to safe behavior and physiological needs of the consumer. Self-expression is put on the back burner, especially for those who are ill. As a result of the marketing research, in which 186 people were involved, it was found that during the coronavirus disease pandemic, approximately 89% of respondents focused on physiological needs, 11% – on safety, and only 7% on social needs (Figure 2).

The change in needs directly affected the latest trends and approaches in marketing. That is why corrections and innovations were made in

the marketing activity of the Med-Soyuz Medical Center:

1. Digitization.

The pandemic gave an impetus to accelerate the transition to digital. "Med-Soyuz" managed to set up a digital system of information transmission between all links of structural units and service providers as quickly as possible. Doctors in their own office can see the queue of patients and the entire history of complaints, recommendations for treatment and payment for services. Patients can receive test results, appointment date and time reminders by e-mail. In just a couple of clicks, employees at the registry office can book a patient to the right doctor at their leisure. Electronic commerce and document management have also been introduced.

2. Upgrading pages in social networks by involving specialists.

The medical center began to cooperate with SMM managers who are engaged in maintaining and promoting pages in social networks Instagram, Facebook and Tik-Tok. Their responsibilities also include creating promotion strategies, photo and video content, creating value and selling services, filming operations and procedures, adapting trends to the theme of the clinic, informative meetings with doctors, coordinating content with management, creating layouts for advertising and its launching.

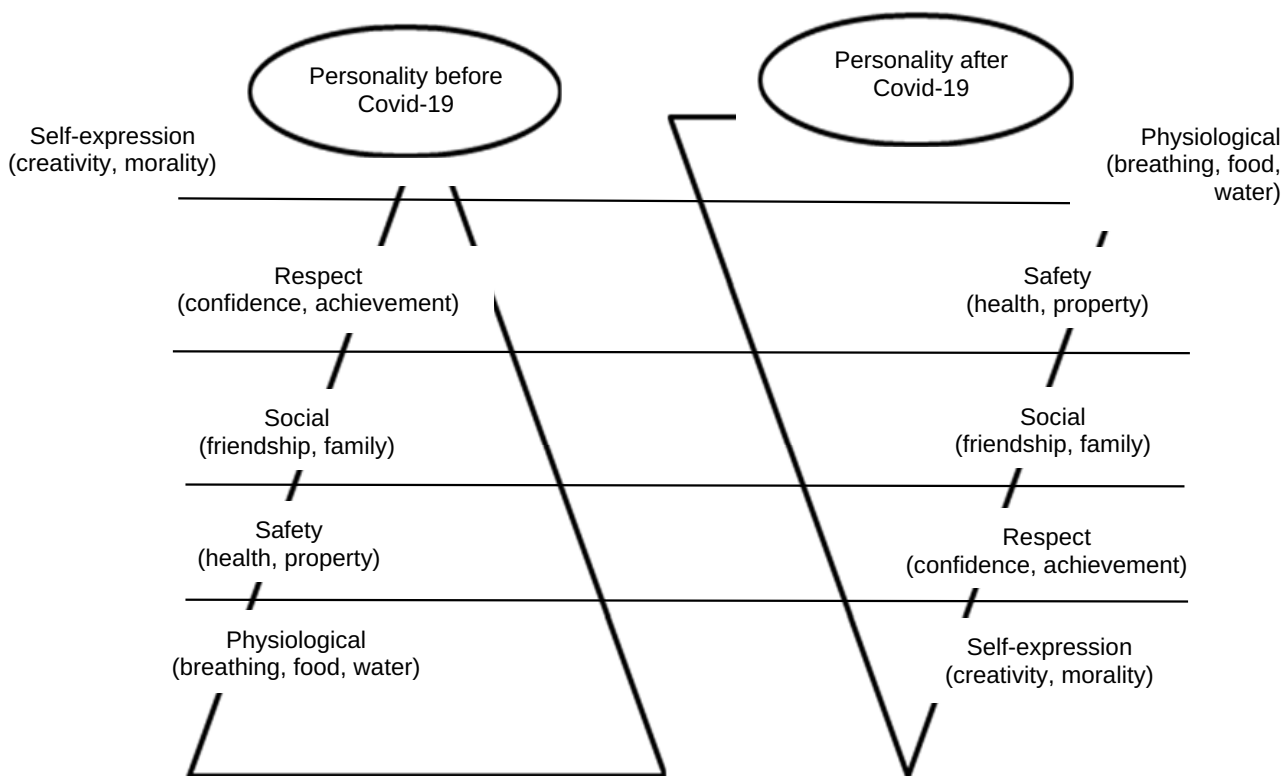


Figure 1. Maslow's hierarchy of needs and during the COVID-19 pandemic

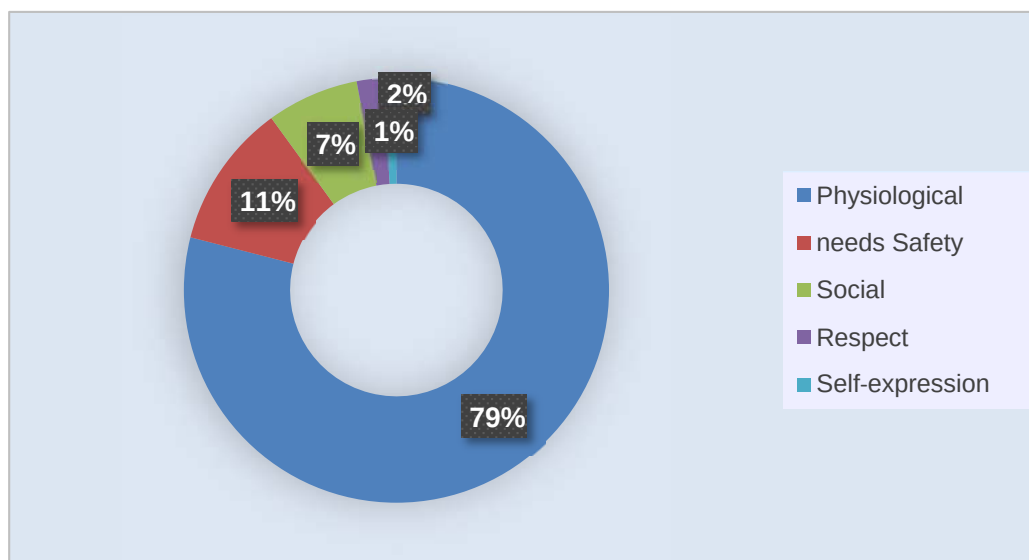


Figure 2. Results of the survey on the priority of needs during the pandemic

Even comparing two posts: one of which was published by Med-Soyuz employees before the quarantine, and the other was published by specialists with whom they began to cooperate as a result of the quarantine, you can track how the indicators of account coverage, interaction with content, actions in the profile have increased, and hence, people's interest in the Med-Soyuz medical center.

Also, based on a survey on the page on the Instagram social network, it was proven that the new visual of the page causes more trust in 42% of followers, aesthetically appeals to 33%, and 25% of people noted that they began to receive more useful information (Figure 3) [23].

3. The implementation of online appointments of patients will reduce the number of contacts with each other, and therefore a person will feel safer with regard to infection with COVID-19 during the trip and the visit to the hospital itself. It also significantly saves time, which is also a significant advantage for a modern person.

4. Maintaining expert accounts is mandatory for Med-Soyuz doctors.

The vector of popularity of categories of influencers has shifted. The categories of healthy lifestyle bloggers and expert accounts of doctors are growing. People will begin to get used to doctors, trust and listen to them, and then, if necessary, turn to the clinic where they work.

5. Links for calls from abroad in Telegram.

To expand the audience of potential customers, a channel was created on the Telegram social network, where a person can call from anywhere in the world. Also, in this way, the institution,

adapting to potential patients, minimizes the cost of money and travel time and ensures direct contact with them.

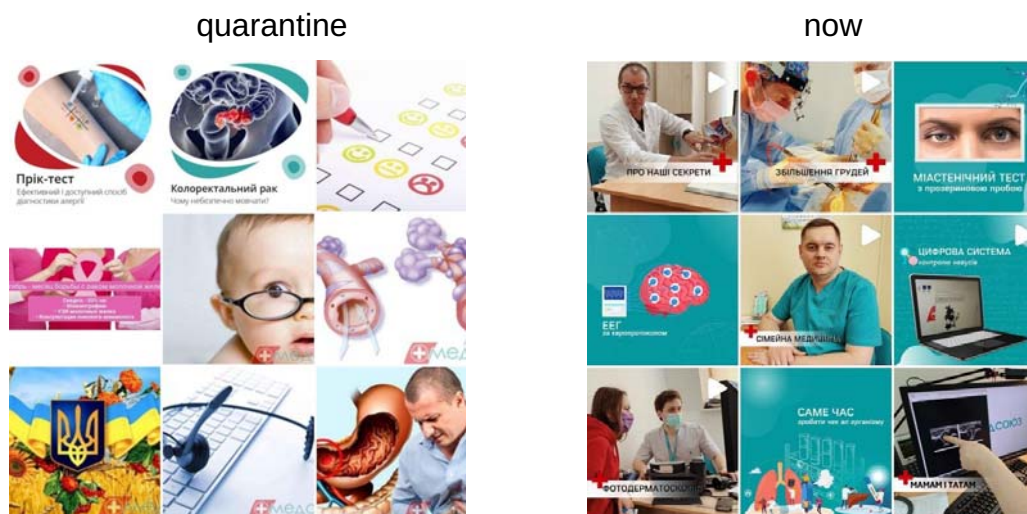
6. Online appointment on the "Med-Soyuz" website.

It is convenient, fast and reduces the load on the call center.

Consequently, in the conditions of the pandemic, the competition of medical institutions increased, and therefore a significant amount of attention began to be paid to the needs of customers. According to the latest trends in marketing and the pandemic, the buying behavior of consumers has undergone significant changes. For example: a consumer chooses a product that best meets his requirements and pays attention to its price. The higher the value of the product, the more thoughtful the decision.

Conclusions. So, the pandemic has made adjustments not only in people's daily lives, but also led to changes in almost every sphere of activity. The modern consumer has modernized his own values according to Maslow's matrix, and is reduced more to safe behavior and physiological needs of the consumer. Having studied the changes in the field of marketing activities of medical institutions on the market of Ukraine, it was possible to identify new trends: maintenance of pages in social networks; setting up targeted advertising; development of adaptive health care websites; partnership between medical enterprises and other companies; development of virtual doctors for advertising; webinars to replace offline conferences and exhibitions. New marketing strategies have

View of the "Med-Soyuz" page on Instagram before



What are the advantages of the new page look in your opinion?

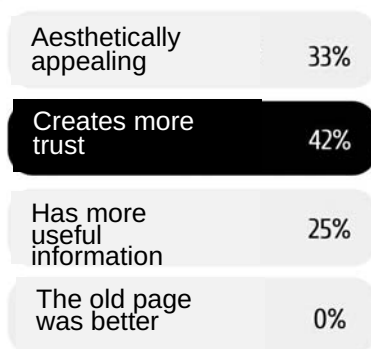


Figure 3. Survey results on the Instagram page

increased the client base for medical enterprises and allowed them to compete effectively in the market, regardless of the coronavirus pandemic and other external factors.

Using the example of the Med-Soyuz medical center, the introduction of new marketing trends into the work of the medical institution is described. The main innovations in the work were: digitization, upgrade of pages in social networks, implementation of online patient appointments, maintenance of expert accounts, links for calls from abroad in Telegram, online appointment. As a result of the conducted research and development of recommendations for improving the marketing activity of the Med-Soyuz medical center in the conditions of the pandemic, a media plan was developed for the promotion of a comprehensive examination of the human body after suffering from the

coronavirus disease for 3 months. During the development of the media plan, external advertising, direct marketing, targeting, SMM and SEO optimization were involved. For posts on social networks, 3 main interrelated topics were chosen: COVID-19, hospital, laboratory. Setting up targeting for concrete posts will increase the audience of the page and probably attract additional patients to the clinic. To reach an audience of an older age and one that is not a frequent user of the Internet, external advertising was developed: leaflets and a banner. SEO optimization will ensure a stable flow of visitors in the long run. The results can be evaluated by monitoring the number of patient records, because "Med-Soyuz" has adapted to digitalization and implemented a digital system of recording, managing appointments and communications.

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