THE INFLUENCE OF WORD OF MOUTH AND SOCIAL MEDIA ON PATIENTS' INTENTION TO VISIT, MEDIATED BY TRUST: A STUDY OF MEDICAL CHECK-UP SERVICES AT XYZ HOSPITAL SEMARANG

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Abstrak

Globalization and the expansion of free trade have affected hospitals in Indonesia. In the digital era, hospitals face intense competition, especially in preventive services such as medical check-ups (MCUs). Word of mouth (WOM) and social media have become the main communication tools influencing patient decisions. However, patient trust in hospitals plays an important role as a mediator of the influence of WOM and social media on visit interest. This research analyzes the influence of WOM and social media on patient interest, with trust as a mediating variable. Data show a trend of increasing interest in MCU services after the COVID-19 pandemic. The research results are expected to contribute to marketing communication strategies for healthcare services based on trust and digital engagement. The purpose of this research is to determine the influence of WOM and social media on interest in visiting the MCU service at XYZ Hospital Semarang, with trust as a mediating factor. This is an explanatory quantitative study using a survey design. The sampling technique in this research uses purposive sampling with at least 129 respondents who meet the research criteria. Data were processed using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method. The research results show that WOM, social media, and trust significantly influence patients' visit interest; WOM and social media significantly influence trust. Trust significantly mediates the influence of WOM on patients' visit interest, and trust significantly mediates the influence of social media on patients' visit interest.

Kata Kunci: Word of Mouth, Social Media, Intention To Visit, Medical Check Up, Hospital, Trust

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and the expansion of free trade have had a significant impact on various industrial sectors in Indonesia, including the healthcare sector. Hospitals, as essential components of the healthcare service system, no longer function solely as social institutions but have undergone a transformation into business entities that consider socio-economic aspects holistically. This change marks a paradigm shift in hospital management—from a service-oriented model to entities that compete within a dynamic service industry landscape.

In an increasingly competitive business environment, the success of an institution is not solely determined by the business strategies it implements but also heavily depends on the quality of its human resources. In Indonesia, the healthcare service industry has shown rapid growth in recent years. This is evidenced by the increasing number of hospitals, clinics, and healthcare centers, ranging from those with basic facilities to those with modern ones (Kurniawati, 2024).

Along with advances in information technology, the healthcare industry has also undergone a transformation, particularly in

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terms of communication and interaction with patients. Competition among hospitals, especially in preventive services such as medical check-ups (MCUs), has become increasingly intense. Healthcare institutions are required not only to provide high-quality services but also to establish effective communication through various digital channels. In this context, word of mouth (WOM) and social media have become important instruments that play a strategic role in shaping public perception and influencing prospective patients' decision-making.

WOM, as a form of interpersonal communication, has long been recognized as the most trusted method of promotion, including in healthcare services. Recommendations from close acquaintances often become a key factor in choosing healthcare facilities. Meanwhile, social media provides a new space for patients to share their experiences widely and instantly. Reviews or testimonials circulating on social media can significantly shape an institution's image, both positively and negatively. Therefore, hospitals need to develop marketing strategies that align with the dynamic needs and digital behavior of the public (Girsang et al., 2024; Ramadhanty et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, the power of word of mouth (WOM) and social media in influencing patient decisions is highly affected by the level of trust prospective patients have in the hospital. Trust is a psychological factor that acts as a mediator in the relationship between information exposure and behavioral intention, particularly in healthcare services that involve individual safety and comfort. Without sufficient trust, even positive information does not necessarily lead to a decision to visit.

In this context, trust is understood as the patient's confidence in the hospital's integrity, competence, and good intentions in providing services safely, transparently, and professionally. Trust not only plays a role in shaping positive perceptions but also serves as a reinforcing mechanism that strengthens the influence of communication strategies on visit intention. As noted by Lee and Yoon (2018), in healthcare services, trust functions as a key mediating variable between digital marketing strategies and visit intention. Consumers tend to trust institutions that demonstrate consistency in information, positive testimonials, and a good online reputation—all of which contribute to building trust, which ultimately strengthens the intention to visit.

XYZ Hospital in the city of Semarang is one of the healthcare institutions that provides medical check-up services with various facilities and competitive promotional programs. However, the hospital faces challenges in reaching segments of the community that have never used their services. Based on internal data, the trend in the number of MCU patients has shown an increase year by year since 2021, following a decline caused by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Table 1. Trend in the Number of Medical Check-Up Patients at XYZ Hospital Semarang, 2020–2024

Year	Number of MCU Patients	Growth Percentage (%)
2020	1.250	-
2021	1.430	14,4%
2022	1.680	17,5%
2023	1.950	16,1%
2024	2.200	12,8%

Source: MCU Patient Visit Data 2020–2024, XYZ Hospital Semarang

Based on the data (Table 1), the consistent increase from 2021 to 2024 indicates a potential that can continue to be developed, particularly through the optimization of digital marketing strategies based on trust and patient engagement. Therefore, this study is important for empirically examining the influence of word of mouth (WOM) and social media on patients' interest in visiting, with trust as a mediating variable. This research not only has practical value in supporting hospital promotional strategies but also offers a theoretical

contribution to the study of healthcare service marketing in the digital era.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative explanatory approach with a survey design and purposive sampling technique. Respondents were selected based on the following criteria: residents of Semarang City aged 18 years or older who had been exposed to information about Medical Check-Up (MCU) services at Hospital XYZ through WOM or Instagram but had never used the service. These criteria ensure that respondents have no prior experience that could bias their perceptions.

The sample size was calculated using the G*Power 3.1.9.7 application with a priori analysis and an F-test. This study used an effect size of 0.15, a significance level of $\alpha < 0.05$, and a power of 0.95 to reduce the risk of Type II errors and improve the accuracy of the results (Serdar et al., 2021). With four variables (WOM, social media, trust, and interest), a minimum of 129 respondents was obtained. Data collection was conducted through an online questionnaire (Google Form) using a 6-point Likert scale. The study aims to examine the influence of social media and WOM on the intention to visit MCU services, with trust as a mediating variable.

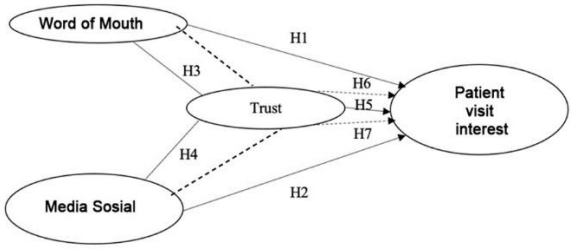
Data Analysis Method

Data analysis employed the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, which is suitable for small to medium sample sizes as well as mediation effect analysis (Hair et al., 2019). The PLS-SEM model includes:

- **Outer model** (measurement model): evaluates construct validity and reliability using loading factor values (> 0.7), AVE (> 0.5), Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha (> 0.7). Discriminant validity is tested using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross loadings.
- **Inner model** (structural model): assesses the relationships between variables through R^2 (> 0.33), Q^2 (> 0), and VIF (< 5). Significance testing is conducted using bootstrapping, with criteria of $t > 1.96$ and $p < 0.05$ (Ringle et al., 2015).

Mediation testing was conducted by comparing the direct and indirect effects of word of mouth (WOM) and social media on interest through trust. In addition, an Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) was carried out to determine managerial priorities in improving consumer perception (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016; Har et al., 2019). Figure 1 illustrates the model used in this study.

Figure 1.
Research Model



This study examines the relationship between the independent variables—word of mouth (WOM) and social media—and the dependent variable, namely patients' interest in visiting medical check-up (MCU) services, with trust serving as the mediating variable.

1. **WOM is a form of interpersonal communication that can influence patients' perceptions of MCU services.** Social media functions as a channel for information and promotion that shapes the hospital's image in the eyes of the public. These two variables are assumed to be capable of building patient trust in the quality and credibility of hospital services.
2. **Trust is positioned as a mediating variable that bridges the influence of WOM and social media on visit**

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intention. High levels of trust are expected to increase the likelihood that patients will utilize the offered MCU services.

3. Understanding this relationship flow enables hospitals to design more targeted and effective communication and marketing strategies to increase the number of patient visits to MCU services.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Outer Model Measurement

The purpose of outer model measurement is to assess the relationship between latent constructs and their corresponding indicators. This assessment includes tests of validity and reliability. Indicator reliability is evaluated through outer loading values, while construct reliability is assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Construct validity is measured using the average variance extracted (AVE), whereas discriminant validity is tested using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), as recommended by Henseler et al. (2015).

Indicator validity is assessed based on outer loading values, where an indicator is considered valid if it has a value above 0.708. Based on the results of processing with the PLS Algorithm, all indicators in this research model have outer loading values above this threshold. Therefore, it can be concluded that all indicators are reliable for use in this study.

Construct reliability testing was conducted by examining the values of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for each variable. According to Hair et al. (2019), a construct is considered reliable if the Cronbach's alpha value is above 0.70 and the composite reliability is below 0.95. The results of the study show that all variables—namely Word of Mouth (WOM), social media, trust, and visit intention—have Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 and composite reliability within the acceptable range. Therefore, the instrument used can be considered accurate and consistent in measuring the variables under study.

Convergent validity was assessed through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value. A construct is said to have good convergent validity if its AVE value is ≥ 0.5, indicating that more than 50% of the variance of the indicators can be explained by the construct. Based on the results, all variables in this study have AVE values higher than 0.5, indicating that the constructs in the model possess adequate convergent validity.

Discriminant validity in this study was assessed using the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio), considering that the Fornell-Larcker method is deemed less sensitive in identifying weak discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). HTMT was used to evaluate the extent to which different constructs are truly distinct from one another. The recommended HTMT value should be less than 0.90. Based on the data analysis results, all HTMT values between constructs were below this threshold, indicating that each construct has good discriminant validity and is sufficiently distinguishable from the others.

Inner Model Measurement

The inner model testing in this study was conducted using a one-tailed test with a bootstrapping approach, employing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis. Bootstrapping was chosen to estimate the relationships between latent variables, which were then analyzed through indicators such as Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), R Square (R^2), F Square (f^2), specific indirect effects, and Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA).

First, a multicollinearity test was conducted to examine the relationships among constructs using the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values. Based on the results, all constructs had VIF values below 3—Word of Mouth (1.865), Social Media (1.238), and Trust

(2.142)—indicating no multicollinearity issues and meeting the ideal criteria (VIF < 3) as stated by Hair et al. (2019).

Second, the coefficient of determination test (R^2) showed that the variables Visit Intention and Trust had R^2 values of 0.958 and 0.957, respectively. This means that 96% of the variation in Visit Intention and Trust can be explained by the model, indicating that both models are considered strong (substantial).

Subsequently, an effect size test (f^2) was conducted to evaluate the relative impact of exogenous constructs on the endogenous construct. The results indicated that most relationships had a medium effect size, such as the relationship between Social Media and Visit Intention (0.040), Social Media and Trust (0.166), Trust and Visit Intention (0.241), and Word of Mouth and Visit Intention (0.168). Meanwhile, the relationship between Word of Mouth and Trust showed a very strong effect size (1.579), indicating a significant and substantial influence.

In the direct hypothesis testing, five hypotheses were tested, and the results showed that four were supported, while one was not. Word of Mouth was found to have a significant effect on Visit Intention ($\beta = 0.384$, $p < 0.001$), as well as on Trust ($\beta = 0.747$, $p < 0.001$). In addition, Social Media had a significant effect on Trust ($\beta = 0.243$, $p < 0.001$), and Trust itself had a significant effect on Visit Intention ($\beta = 0.481$, $p < 0.001$). However, the effect of Social Media on Visit Intention was not significant ($\beta = 0.126$, $p = 0.062$), and thus, this hypothesis was not supported.

The analysis of indirect effects indicates that Word of Mouth has a significant influence on Visit Intention through Trust (indirect effect = 0.359, T = 3.839, $p < 0.001$), and Social Media also has an indirect influence on Visit Intention through Trust (indirect effect = 0.117, T = 2.869, $p = 0.004$). These findings underscore the mediating role of Trust in strengthening the influence of Word of Mouth and Social Media on Visit Intention.

An Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) was then used to identify strategic priorities. The results show that the Word of Mouth variable falls into Quadrant I (Keep Up the Good Work), with high importance (0.743) and high performance (73.550), indicating the importance of maintaining the quality of WOM. Meanwhile, Trust falls into Quadrant II (Possible Overkill), with high performance (74.841) but relatively lower importance (0.481), suggesting a possible over-allocation of resources. On the other hand, Social Media falls into Quadrant III (Low Priority), with both low importance (0.243) and low performance (66.724), indicating a need for attention to prevent further decline.

At the indicator level, the Importance-Performance Matrix Analysis (IPMA) also shows that WOM indicators consistently display above-average levels of importance and performance. In contrast, most Social Media indicators fall below the average values for importance (0.086) and performance (69.814), particularly indicators SMM4 (performance: 57.710) and SMM6 (55.534), which should be prioritized for improving digital communication strategies.

Discussion

Based on the data analysis results, the majority of respondents in this study were male (53.1%) and within the age range of 18–27 years (45.4%), followed by those aged 28–37 years (38.5%). Most respondents also had a high school or equivalent educational background (40%). These findings indicate that the younger population plays a dominant role in the context of XYZ Hospital. The age range of most respondents aligns with 2024 data from NapoleonCat, which states that the highest number of Instagram users falls within the 25–34 age group. This provides an important indication that the hospital's communication and promotional strategies need to be tailored to the characteristics of social media users within this age range.

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In hypothesis testing, several important findings were obtained. First, Word of Mouth (WOM) was found to have a significant influence on visit intention, with a p-value of 0.00 (<0.05) and a T-statistic of 3.895 (>1.645). This is consistent with the studies by Hermawan Anton (2017) and Khotimah Ima (2022), which showed that WOM plays an important role in encouraging public interest in visiting. Conversely, social media did not show a significant influence on visit intention. Although the T-statistic (1.867) exceeded the minimum threshold, the p-value (0.062) was higher than 0.05. This finding contradicts the study by Ni Luh Putri (2023), which stated that social media has a positive and significant effect on visit intention.

Furthermore, WOM was found to have a significant effect on trust, with a p-value of 0.00 and a T-statistic of 13.753. This is supported by various studies, such as Park (2017) and Yeh and Choi (2021), which stated that positive WOM helps build strong trust in a service or product. In this context, trust becomes an important element that influences consumers' decisions to access services. Similarly, social media also has a significant influence on trust, with a p-value of 0.00 and a T-statistic of 4.432. This finding is supported by studies from Hajli (2014) and Chen et al. (2021), which showed that social presence and user-generated content on social media can foster strong trust among users toward an institution.

Trust has also been proven to have a significant influence on visit intention (p = 0.00, T-statistic = 3.963). This result supports the findings of Wu et al. (2020), Kim and Ko (2022), and Pratminingsih et al. (2023), who stated that trust can increase consumers' willingness to try or use a service. In this context, trust acts as a buffer against perceived risk and as a driver of interest in accessing hospital services.

In the mediation effect test, trust was found to mediate the influence of word of mouth (WOM) on visit intention (p = 0.00, T-statistic = 3.839). Positive WOM builds trust, which in turn enhances visit intention, as stated by Jalilvand & Samiei (2022), Yeh & Choi (2021), and Chen et al. (2021). Similarly, trust also mediates the relationship between social media and visit intention (p = 0.004, T-statistic = 4.869). This indicates that although social media does not directly influence visit intention, the trust built through interactions on social media can enhance such intention, as noted in studies by Kim and Ko (2022), Hajli (2014), and Wu et al. (2020).

Additional analysis using Importance-Performance Mapping Analysis (IPMA) showed that the average level of importance was 0.489, while the average performance was 71.075. In the IPMA mapping, social media falls into Quadrant III (low priority), which indicates that this aspect has both low importance and low performance. Therefore, although it is not a top priority, social media still needs to be managed to prevent further decline. WOM (word of mouth) is positioned in Quadrant I (high priority), meaning it is important and performs well, and thus should be maintained. Meanwhile, trust falls into Quadrant II (possible overkill), with high performance but relatively low importance. This indicates a potential over-allocation of resources that should be evaluated.

Overall, the strategy to increase visit interest at XYZ Hospital can be focused on strengthening the effective role of social media and building sustainable trust. Although trust and WOM have already shown optimal results, both still need to be monitored to consistently contribute to consumer engagement. With an integrated strategic approach, the hospital can optimize the potential of digital communication while maintaining public trust in the quality of services provided.

CONCLUSION

This study focuses on the influence of word of mouth (WOM) and social media on patients' visit intention, with trust as a mediating

variable, at XYZ Hospital in Semarang. The seven proposed hypotheses were empirically tested using survey data collected from the hospital's patients. Data analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, which effectively addressed the research problems. Based on the analysis results, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. *Word of mouth* has been proven to have a significant effect on patients' visit intention.
2. Social media does not show a significant effect on patients' visit intention.
3. *Word of mouth* has a significant effect on trust.
4. Social media has a significant effect on trust.
5. Trust significantly influences patients' visit intention.
6. Trust serves as a significant mediator in the relationship between word of mouth and patients' visit intention.
7. Trust also significantly mediates the effect of social media on patients' visit intention.

Recommendations

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the scope of the research, which only includes XYZ Hospital Semarang, limits the generalization of the findings to other hospitals and regions. In addition, the data collection process faced a fairly lengthy time constraint because some respondents were not active social media users or were not fully focused when answering the questionnaire. This affected the quality of the data collected, such as incomplete or less reflective responses. Some respondents may also have felt they did not gain direct benefits from their participation, which ultimately lowered their motivation to contribute fully to this study.

As a suggestion for future research, the use of more adaptive and participatory approaches is recommended, such as providing incentives or utilizing digital platforms for questionnaire distribution and completion. This strategy is believed to increase participation rates and accelerate the data collection process. By addressing these limitations, future studies are expected to produce broader and deeper findings. The implications of these results can be utilized by hospital management in formulating more targeted strategies to increase patient visit interest, which in turn supports the achievement of operational performance and the overall financial sustainability of the hospital.

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