



## USER PERCEPTION OF HOSPITAL SERVICES IN SALTILLO, COAHUILA MEXICO

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### Summary:

In the field of healthcare, perceived quality is considered to be a key factor for the efficiency of hospitals in resolving patient problems.

In this work, the SERVQUAL tool (1988) is applied to evaluate the perceptions of service quality in a healthcare environment and delve into the issue of measuring the perception of patients in the main hospitals in the city of Saltillo, Coahuila. It is a quantitative, descriptive and correlational study using correspondence factor analysis to develop perceptual maps that reveal the competitive positions perceived by users.

The results show us the differential attributes for the target market, concluding that the Hospital del Niño is the best evaluated public hospital and the Centro Hospitalario la Concepción as the best of the private hospitals. Conclusions from the study and the ways in which the results can be used to improve the competitive position of the hospitals evaluated are presented.

**Keywords:** Health Marketing, Service Quality, Hospitals.

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## PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS USUARIOS SOBRE LOS SERVICIOS HOSPITALARIOS EN SALTILLO, COAHUILA MÉXICO

### Resumen

En el ámbito de la sanidad, se considera que la calidad percibida es un factor clave para la eficiencia de los hospitales en la resolución de problemas de pacientes. En este trabajo se aplica la herramienta SERVQUAL (1988) para evaluar las percepciones de la calidad del servicio en un entorno sanitario y ahondar en el tema de la medición de la percepción de los pacientes de los principales hospitales en la ciudad de Saltillo, Coahuila. Es un estudio cuantitativo, descriptivo y correlacional utilizando el análisis factorial de correspondencias para elaborar mapas perceptivos que revelen las posiciones competitivas percibidas por los usuarios. Los resultados nos muestran los atributos diferenciales para el mercado objetivo, concluyendo que el Hospital del Niño es el nosocomio público mejor evaluado y el Centro Hospitalario la Concepción como el mejor de los hospitales privados. Se exponen conclusiones del estudio y las formas en que los resultados pueden utilizarse para mejorar la posición competitiva de los hospitales evaluados.

**Palabras clave:** Mercadotecnia Sanitaria, Calidad del Servicio, Hospitales.

## PERCEPÇÃO DO USUÁRIO SOBRE SERVIÇOS HOSPITALARES EM SALTILLO, COAHUILA MÉXICO

### Resumo:

Na área da saúde, a qualidade percebida é considerada um fator chave para a eficiência dos hospitais na resolução dos problemas dos pacientes.

Neste trabalho, aplica-se a ferramenta SERVQUAL (1988) para avaliar as percepções da qualidade do serviço em um ambiente de saúde e aprofunda-se na questão de medir a percepção dos pacientes nos principais hospitais da cidade de Saltillo, Coahuila. Trata-se de um estudo quantitativo, descritivo e correlacional que utiliza análise fatorial de correspondência para desenvolver mapas perceptivos que revelam as posições competitivas percebidas pelos usuários.

Os resultados nos mostram os atributos diferenciais para o mercado alvo, concluindo que o Hospital del Niño é o hospital público melhor avaliado e o Centro Hospitalario la Concepción como o melhor dos hospitais privados. São apresentadas as conclusões do estudo e as formas pelas quais os resultados podem ser utilizados para melhorar a posição competitiva dos hospitais avaliados.

**Palavras chave:** Marketing em Saúde, Qualidade de Serviços, Hospitais.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Healthcare marketing is considered an effective tool for delivering health services to consumers. Priego Álvarez (2015) points out that the new paradigm in administration, which views health organizations as service companies, posits that health organizations should adopt a business approach to achieve their objectives with efficiency, quality, and equity.

Additionally, if a hospital is defined as a company, it should be considered a service company (Abad Alfonso, Pérez Zulueta, & González Laucirica, 2013). The management of intangibles in hospital organizations is currently gaining more importance due to the development of new technologies, the emergence of new private hospital groups, and the growing interest of researchers in the health area.

According to the World Health Organization, a hospital is an integral part of a social medical institution whose function is to provide complex preventive and curative medical services to the community, while outpatient care reaches patients at their homes (Álvarez Heredia & Faizal GeaGea, 2013).

Moreover, the Royal Spanish Academy (2021) states that a hospital is an institution aimed at diagnosing and treating patients and is regularly dedicated to teaching and research. The word hospital combines the words hotel and hospitality (2022).

In Mexico, the history of the first hospitals dates back to Hernán Cortés, as mentioned by De Micheli (2005), including the Hospital of the Immaculate Conception and the Hospital of San Lázaro. The Hospital of the Immaculate Conception, founded in 1524 and now known as the Hospital of Jesus Nazarene, was essentially a sanatorium for the poor. Between 1536 and 1540, the Hospital of the Conception and Santa Marta was built in Pátzcuaro by the decision of Don Vasco de Quiroga. The creation of the health system in Mexico began in the early 20th century, with the establishment of the Superior Health Council and the Department of Health in 1917, to address emergencies arising during the Mexican Revolution. Today, the Ministry of Health is responsible for implementing

public health policies (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2022).

In recent times, there has been an increase in the number of hospitals with the growing role of the private sector. In the state of Coahuila de Zaragoza alone, there are twenty public hospitals, thirteen private hospitals, and thirteen health centers (2018). In 2021, there were a total of 4,995 hospitals registered in Mexico (Statista, 2021). It is worth noting that this competition drives users to expect higher quality medical services and compels hospitals to think about how to effectively solve patients' health problems. The future hospital model must use total quality management (Álvarez Heredia y Faizal GeaGea, 2013).

In this regard, hospital management requires understanding the needs and desires of users as a strategy to retain them. The competition among hospitals to attract patients is no longer limited to the functional attributes of the services provided but is also related to the perception of healthcare services (Górska-Warsewicz, 2022).

Without a doubt, hospitals are keen to be perceived not only favorably but as the best in their area. Through understanding their users, they can act more confidently to achieve their goals (Sánchez-García, 2011). These ideas set the stage for the following study, which poses the following questions: Which hospital in Saltillo, Coahuila, is rated the highest by respondents? Which hospital has the most areas for improvement? Are there similarities between hospitals? What are the common attributes among hospitals? What attributes position each hospital? And which hospital is closest to the users' ideal?

The document is organized as follows. First, a literature review on the topic and its support for strategic marketing decisions is presented. Second, the data and empirical study are detailed. Third, factor analysis is used to determine the main perceptual dimensions users employ to evaluate healthcare organizations. Fourth, perceptual maps are constructed. These maps use the factor scores of the hospitals and the analysis results to show the perceived competitive positions of the hospitals and their attributes. Fifth, the study's

conclusions are presented, along with ways the results can be used to improve the competitive position of the evaluated hospitals.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

There are various studies that use the Servqual scale (1988) to evaluate user satisfaction, with authors agreeing that consumers do not view quality as a unidimensional concept. In other words, customers' evaluation of quality is based on the perception of several factors.

Marwan Dhani (2018) indicates that to position patients' perceptions, it is necessary to create a perceptual map, which is a graphical technique used by researchers to visualize respondents' perceptions, typically in two dimensions. Ford, Honeycutt, & Hoffman (2015) argue that a hospital's market position is derived from a set of individual perceptions about how the hospital is viewed in relation to its competitors, asserting that a hospital with a superior market position has achieved a differential advantage over its competitors.

The results of positioning studies provide hospitals with valuable information about their customers and competition. Administrators can use this information to determine action programs such as improving customer relationships, enhancing current market engagement, and identifying opportunities to attract new market segments.

Authors also demonstrate that loyalty to hospitals is determined, among other things, by patient satisfaction with the quality of the services received (Meesala & Paul, 2018) (Anbori, Ghani, Yadav, & Daher, 2010) (Hajikhani, Tabibi, & Riahi, 2016) , customer relationship management (Hajikhani, Tabibi, & Riahi, 2016) hospital staff (Unal, Akbolat, & Amarat, 2018) and relational marketing (Afifi & Amini, 2018) cited by Górska-Warsewicz (2022).

Regarding brand image studies related to the quality of services provided by hospitals, there is a study conducted at Esa Unggul University in Jakarta, Indonesia, where Meiling Ondangy and Rahmat Syah (2018) demonstrated that hospital image can be a significant intervening variable between the marketing mix and patient loyalty. Similarly, Cham, Cheng, Low,

and Cheok (2021) also confirm that brand image influences the quality of medical services and has a positive impact on behavioral intentions, satisfaction, and perceived value.

Durmaz, Çavuşoğlu, S., & Özer, Ö (2018) also empirically demonstrated that brand image has effects on customer loyalty. In public hospitals, it is important to note that brand value is essential in the public sector because it can enhance credibility, trust, and public loyalty towards the government (Sun, Bang, & Sun, 2020) Furthermore, despite the importance of the public health sector, it has been criticized for experiencing lower customer satisfaction due to a lack of understanding of customer needs from a marketing perspective.

According to Natalya Angela and Bawono Adisasmito (2019) the availability of hospital services has increased the competition among hospitals to attract customers. Hospitals must consider how to maintain patient loyalty to stay in the market. One of the factors influencing brand loyalty is the provider's reputation.

Similarly, Şantaş, Kar, Kahraman, & Kurşun (2016) agree that competition makes the management of consumer perceptions of healthcare services increasingly important. For consumers to prefer healthcare services, managers need to determine how the perception of healthcare organizations is formed. In their study, they analyze the perception of users of private hospitals across five dimensions: staff behavior, service quality, physical facilities, reputation, and costs to the consumer. Using perceptual maps, they conclude that private hospitals are perceived as expensive but superior in-service quality, staff behavior, reputation, and physical facilities, while public hospitals are seen as in the worst position.

## **3. METHODOLOGY:**

To explore the competitive position observed by users of twelve hospitals, an empirical study was conducted using correspondence analysis and perceptual mapping.

Correspondence Analysis is equivalent to Principal Component Analysis but with qualitative variables. Perceptual or perceptive maps, according to Marwan Dhani (2018) are a graphical tool used by researchers

to visualize respondents' perceptions, typically in two dimensions.

It is worth noting that, according to the characteristics of the health institutions, the analysis was divided into private and public hospitals. Additionally, the questionnaire design included validated scales (Parasuraman, 1988) ( Priego Álvarez, 2015) where responses were indicated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, resulting in 600 valid surveys with a response rate of 95%. Therefore, the perceived quality of the hospitals was measured by the dimensions underlying the construct according to the Servqual scale.

#### 4. RESULTS:

Regarding the sample profile, it showed that their ages range from 25 to 75 years. 54% of the respondents were women, while 44% were men; additionally, 40% have a bachelor's degree, 32% have completed upper secondary education, 24% have completed middle school, and 4% have primary education. The majority, 65%, reported being married, while singles constituted 28%. 22% are students, 46% are employed, and 32% are homemakers.

In Table 1, it can be seen that the highest score after the ideal brand is held by Hospital del Niño with 25.64, followed by Hospital del IMSS with 23.550.

In terms of brand reputation, the Hospital del Niño is the best positioned with an excellent rating of 4.98. For the attribute Warmth in Care, it also received the highest rating of 4.79. The Hospital General is in second place with 3.97, followed by the Hospital IMSS with 3.75. The worst rated in this category is the Clínica Hospital del Magisterio with a score of 2.10. Regarding facilities and equipment, both the Hospital del Niño and the Clínica del Magisterio scored the highest with 4.00. The third factor is Fast and Efficient Care, where the Hospital IMSS is the best positioned with a score of 3.10, and the lowest rated is the Hospital ISSSTE with a score of 2.70. For Competent Staff, participants rated all public hospitals highly, with the lowest rating going to the Clínica Hospital del Magisterio at 4.70. Concerning prices, the least affordable cost perceived was that of the Hospital Universitario, with a rating of 1.97.

**Tabla 1**

#### *Rating of Public Hospitals*

Correspondence Table

HOSPITALS	PUBLIC ATTRIBUTES						
	Reputation	Facilities and Equipment	Fast and Efficient Care	Competent Staff	Warmth in Care	Affordable Costs	Active Margin
Hospital General Saltillo	3.970	2.800	2.880	4.900	3.980	3.960	22.490
Hospital del Niño	4.980	4.000	2.890	5.000	4.790	3.980	25.640
Hospital Universitario	2.800	1.970	2.880	5.000	2.970	1.970	17.590
Clínica Hospital del Magisterio	2.100	4.000	2.890	4.700	3.970	2.300	19.960
Hospital ISSSTE	2.500	3.200	2.700	4.800	3.500	4.900	21.600
Hospital IMSS	3.750	3.500	3.100	4.900	3.500	4.800	23.550
Hospital Ideal	5.000	5.000	5.000	5.000	5.000	5.000	30.000
Margen activo	25.100	24.470	22.340	34.300	27.710	26.910	160.830

Source: Own elaboration based on data obtained from SPSS vr.23

Table 2 shows that the result is significant at .000<sup>a</sup>, which allows us to affirm that there is a relationship between the attributes and the dimensions. The information explained by the two dimensions is shown in the cumulative inertia, where the two dimensions explain 75.7%. This is sufficient information to consider the correspondence matrix analysis.

**Table 2**

#### *Summary of Public Hospitals* Summary

Dimension	Eigenvalue	Inertia	Chi-square	Sig.	Proportion of Inertia		Confidence for Eigenvalue	
					Explained	Accumulated	Standard Deviation	Correlation
1	.104	.011			.400	.400	.074	.015
2	.083	.007			.357	.757	.037	
3	.079	.006			.232	.989		
4	.052	.003			.001	.990		
5	.017	.000			.010	1.000		
Total		.027	4.324	.000a	1.000	1.000		

a. 30 degrees of freedom

Source: Own elaboration based on data obtained from SPSS vr.23

Regarding Table 3, the analysis of private hospitals in Saltillo shows that after the Ideal Brand, the highest score is for Centro Hospitalario La Concepción with a value of 24.07, followed by Clínica Santa Teresa with 23.35, and very close behind is Hospital Christus Muguerza with 23.080.

In terms of the Brand Reputation attribute, Hospital Christus Muguerza has the highest score with a rating of 4.98, followed by Centro Hospitalario La Concepción with a rating of 4.70, while Clínica Santa Elena receives 3.15, in contrast to Human Hospital with the lowest rating of 2.00. Regarding Facilities and Equipment, Centro Hospitalario La Concepción has the highest rating of 4.60. For the attribute of Quick and Effective Care, Clínica Santa Teresa and Human Hospital both obtained a value of 4.20. Concerning Competent Staff, Hospital Christus Muguerza received a perfect rating of 5.00, and this attribute generally received high scores across all hospitals. In the Warmth of Care attribute, Clínica Santa Teresa is the best positioned with a score of 4.50. For Pricing, the most accessible cost is at Human Hospital with a rating of 4.40, followed by Clínica Santa Teresa with 4.30, while Hospital Christus Muguerza is perceived as the most expensive with a rating of 1.00.

**Table 3**

*Score of Private Hospitals*

Correspondence Table

ATTRIBUTES
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HOSPITAL	Reputation	Facilities and Equipment	Quick and Effective Care	Competent Staff	Warmth of Care	Affordable Costs	Active Margin
Hospital Center La Concepción	4.700	4.600	3.700	4.870	4.100	2.100	24.070
Christus Muguerza Hospital	4.980	4.000	3.900	5.000	4.200	1.000	23.080
Santa Teresa Clinic	2.800	2.800	4.200	4.750	4.500	4.300	23.350
La Rosita Hospital	2.000	2.800	4.100	4.800	4.300	4.100	22.100
Santa Elena Clinic	3.000	3.000	4.000	4.900	3.900	2.200	21.000
Human Hospital	2.000	2.000	4.200	4.700	4.100	4.400	21.400
Ideal Hospital	5.000	5.000	5.000	5.000	5.000	5.000	30.000
Active Margin	24.480	24.200	29.100	34.020	30.100	23.100	165.000

Source: Own elaboration based on data obtained from SPSS vr.23

The initial analysis of Table 4 shows that the result is significant at .000, confirming that, as in the case of Private Hospitals, there is a relationship between the attributes and the dimensions. It is observed that the two dimensions explain 97.9% of the information according to the Cumulative Inertia/Variance Proportion data.

**Table 4**

*Results of Private Hospitals*

Summary

Dimension	Eigenvalue	Inertia	Chi-square	Sig.	Proportion of Inertia		Confidence for Eigenvalue	
					Explained	Accumulated	Standard Deviation	Correlation

1	.198	.039	.850	.850	.071	-.112
2	.077	.006	.129	.979	.077	
3	.027	.001	.016	.995		
4	.012	.000	.003	.999		
5	.008	.000	.001	1.000		
Total	.046	7.600	.000	1.000	1.000	

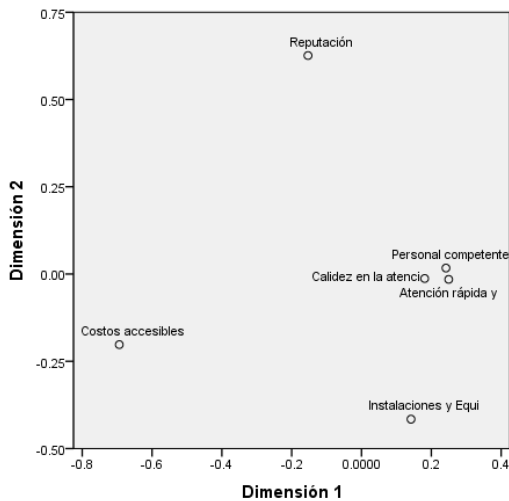
a. 30 degrees of freedom

Source: Own elaboration based on data obtained from SPSS vr.23

In Figure 1, the perceptual map of public hospital attributes, there is a short distance and a strong relationship between the attributes of competent staff, warmth in care, and quick and efficient service. The qualities of facilities and equipment, costs, and reputation are characteristics that appear distant and independent in the perceptual map.

Figure 1

Perceptual Map of Attributes for Public Hospitals



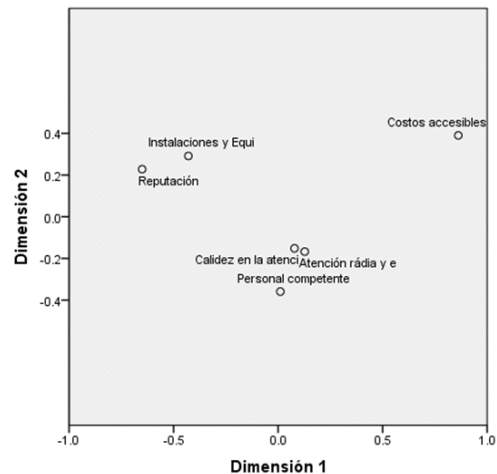
Source: Own elaboration based on data obtained from SPSS vr.23

In the middle part of the perceptual map in Figure 2 for Private Hospitals, attributes such as Warmth in Care, Competent Staff, and Quick and Efficient Attention are observed at close distances, coinciding with the Public

Hospitals attributes in Graph 1. In this case, the qualities of Facilities/Equipment and Reputation are seen as close and independent of Costs on the perceptual map. This indicates that the affordability variable differs from other characteristics because private healthcare services are more expensive than public sector services.

Figure 2

Perceptual Map of Attributes for Private Hospitals



Source: Own elaboration based on data obtained from SPSS vr.23

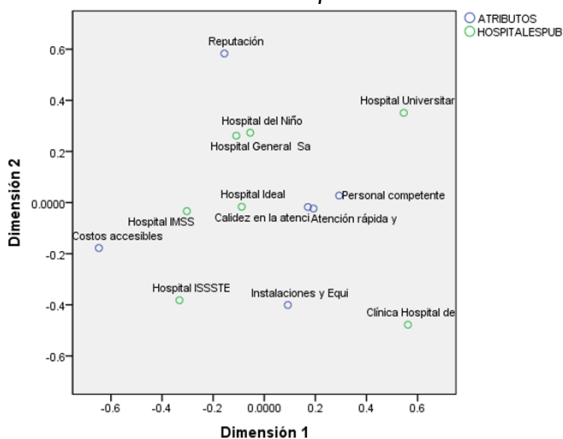
The positioning map or spatial scatter plot in Figure 3 indicates the similarities between hospitals, the common attributes among them, the attributes that position each hospital, and which hospital would be considered ideal.

It is observed that the IMSS Hospital is positioned for its affordable costs. The ISSSTE Hospital is linked to affordable costs and the tangibility of the facilities/equipment as a secondary attribute. On the other hand, the Magisterio Hospital Clinic is noted for the attribute of facilities and equipment. The Children's Hospital and the General Hospital of Saltillo are very close in terms of the attribute of reputation. The University Hospital also has a good reputation and competent staff; however, it is not associated with affordable costs, as it is positioned far from this attribute. Similarly, we can interpret that the Children's Hospital and the General Hospital of Saltillo have similar attributes, whereas the Magisterio Hospital and the University Hospital have different attributes.

Improving its facilities and empathy towards patients can be a viable strategy for the Magisterio Hospital Clinic to approach the profile of the ideal hospital. On the other hand, the University Hospital could focus on having competent staff, warmth in service, and better prices.

It can be deduced that no hospital would achieve the ideal status by merely improving its image and reputation, as the ideal hospital will be the one that provides empathy, warmth in service, and responsibility by offering quick and efficient care. Summarizing based on the results, no public hospital is seen as the ideal or leading hospital, identifying areas for improvement for all public hospitals in Saltillo.

**Figure 3**  
 Perceptual Map of Brand Relationship and Attributes of Public Hospitals

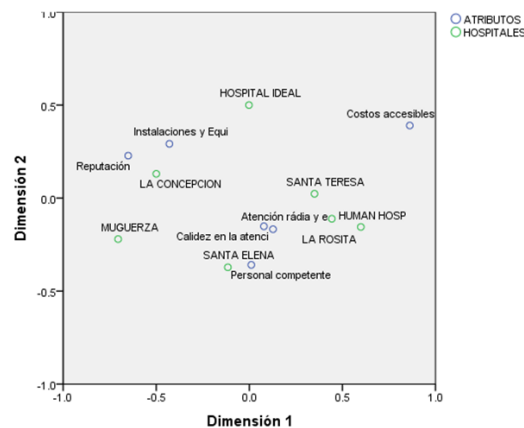


Source: Own elaboration based on data obtained from SPSS vr.2

Finally, in perceptual map 4, it is shown that Hospital la Concepción is recognized for its brand reputation, intangible resources, and is the closest to the ideal hospital position. On the other hand, Clínica Santa Teresa also holds a privileged position, maintaining its place due to the differential advantage of its prices. Clínica Santa Elena stands out for having competent staff and warmth in its care. Hospital Muguierza, with a very good reputation, has characteristics that make it perceived differently from all other options. Clínica Santa Teresa, Human Hospital, and Clínica la Rosita share similar attributes such as quick attention and warmth in care, but they are not perceived as having sufficient equipment and facilities.

Figure 4

Map of Brand Relationship and Attributes of Private Hospitals



Source: Own elaboration based on data obtained from SPSS vr.23

## 5. CONCLUSIONS:

After the Covid-19 pandemic, people have realized the value of their health, creating an opportune moment for healthcare organizations to assess their position with the public to identify their strengths and areas for improvement. This study addresses the established questions, identifying the outstanding attributes of each public and private sector hospital. It was observed that the best-rated public hospital was the Hospital del Niño, while the best-rated private hospital was the Centro Hospitalario La Concepción. It is noteworthy that, despite experts claiming that private health services provide superior care, this study found that a public hospital received a better evaluation. The variable of accessible costs stands out as a differentiating factor, with private healthcare prices being significantly higher than those of the public sector. However, the dimension of tangibility received the lowest rating, highlighting the lack of equipment in health services, suggesting that health institutions should seek resources to address these weaknesses. On the other hand, it is notable that, overall, users gave high ratings to most hospitals, summarizing that the ideal hospital is perceived as one that is empathetic and provides warm care.

It is recommended to continuously monitor the context for designing appropriate strategies that enhance



competitiveness and user preference, given that hospital organizations are subject to constant change: technological development, creation of new medical treatments, emergence of new competitors, among others (Kemp, Jillapalli, & Becerra, 2014). Additionally, target markets often change due to political, economic, or social shifts, so success or failure depends on how well the consumers you aim to serve are understood. This also means knowing where your audience goes for information and healthcare, what they value, what motivates them to act, and who they compare you with.

Some considerations to keep in mind are that patients are increasingly informed and influenced by the opinions of other patients. Therefore, it is recommended to increase the use of technology to provide telemedicine services to this new consumer who demands instant, accessible, personalized, and remote services. The outcome should offer contact points to the public that increase engagement and build trust, thereby improving the hospital's competitive position.

Another suggestion is for hospitals to make greater use of social media to implement communication strategies based on dialogue, participation, and the dissemination of constructive content that enhances their reputation with the target market.

## LIMITATIONS

The limitations of the study include the number of hospitals considered for evaluation, as well as the sample size and the equitable age distribution of the participants.

Academic and Practical Recommendations: Academically, it is recommended to continue analyzing information regarding health institutions, as the supply and demand for healthcare services continue to change over time.

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