

# A Strategic Social Media Approach to Enhance Brand Recognition in the University Dental Hospital

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## Article information

### Article history:

Received: November 23<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Revised: January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Accepted: February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026

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International Journal of Nursing and  
Health Services (IJNHS), Volume 9,  
Issue 1, February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2026  
DOI: 10.35654/ijnhs.v9i1.904  
E-ISSN: 2654-6310

## Abstract

**Background:** The brand awareness level of the Dental and Oral Teaching Hospital (RSGM-P) at University X remains low, as indicated by the predominance of patients referred by student initiatives (90%) and limited walk-in visits (10%). This may result from the underutilization of social media, low customer engagement, and insufficient electronic word of mouth (eWOM). **Objective:** This study aims to analyze the effects of social media activities and customer engagement on brand awareness, with eWOM as a mediating variable. **Method:** A quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design was employed, involving 205 non-student Instagram followers of RSGM-P. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) via LISREL. **Results:** The findings reveal that social media activity and eWOM significantly influence brand awareness, while customer engagement has no direct effect. However, customer engagement positively influences eWOM, which in turn mediates its effect on brand awareness. Managerial implications emphasize the need for enhanced content strategies, influencer collaboration, and online reputation management. **Recommendation:** It is recommended that RSGM-P optimize SEO-friendly educational content, strengthen user interactions, and encourage patient reviews as part of brand trust-building efforts. This study contributes to the strategic understanding of digital media utilization in marketing for university-based hospitals.

**Keywords:** social media activities, customer engagement, electronic word of mouth, brand awareness.



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## INTRODUCTION

In today's digital ecosystem, social media has become one of the most influential platforms for shaping consumer perceptions, purchasing decisions, and brand relationships. As organizations increasingly rely on social media to reach and engage their audiences, understanding how online activities translate into brand-related outcomes has become a strategic priority. Brand awareness, in particular, is a foundational element of brand equity and a key determinant of consumer behavior, influencing consideration, preference, and loyalty (1). For service institutions—including healthcare and educational service providers—establishing strong brand awareness through social media is essential to maintaining competitiveness and attracting new users.

Social media activities, such as content posting, interactive features, and visual storytelling, have been shown to enhance brand visibility and cognitive recognition (2). However, the effectiveness of these activities depends not only on the frequency or quality of content but also on the extent to which audiences actively engage with the brand. Customer engagement—manifested through likes, comments, shares, participation, and emotional connection—plays a central role in shaping how individuals interpret and internalize brand messages (3). Highly engaged audiences are more likely to form stronger brand associations, trust, and loyalty.

Although previous studies have examined the direct effects of social media activities and customer engagement on brand awareness, findings remain inconsistent. Some researchers highlight that active engagement significantly boosts brand awareness (4), while others argue that engagement alone does not fully explain variations in awareness unless mediated by user-generated behaviors, such as electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (5). eWOM—voluntary online communication where users share experiences, recommendations, or evaluations—has emerged as a powerful force shaping brand perceptions. Consumers often trust peer-

generated information more than official brand communications, making eWOM a critical pathway through which engagement can influence awareness.

However, despite its importance, limited studies have explored eWOM as a mediating mechanism linking social media activities and customer engagement to brand awareness, particularly in the context of public service institutions such as university clinics and community-oriented organizations. Most existing research focuses on commercial brands, leaving a gap in understanding how these dynamics operate in non-profit, education-based, or healthcare service settings. Moreover, the majority of prior studies examine single direct effects rather than an integrated model that captures both direct and indirect pathways.

Given these gaps, the present study aims to analyze the effects of social media activities and customer engagement on brand awareness, with eWOM as a mediating variable. This research contributes to the literature by offering a more comprehensive model that explains how online interactions translate into brand-level outcomes. The findings are expected to provide strategic insights for institutions seeking to optimize their social media presence and strengthen brand awareness through audience engagement and peer-driven communication.

However, the situation at the Dental and Oral Teaching Hospital of University X reflects a gap between this potential and the actual circumstances observed. Based on interviews with the registration department, 90% of patients were sourced through the initiative of student practitioners, while only 10% came independently. This data illustrates a low level of brand awareness of the teaching dental hospital (RSGM-P) among the general public, likely due to the misconception that its services are exclusively available to members of the university community. This condition not only diminishes the institution's appeal to the public but also hinders service operations, reduces the volume of potential patients, and limits clinical learning opportunities for students.

Furthermore, an analysis of social media presence and online reviews reinforces this issue. As of November 20, 2024, only 43 Google reviews had been posted regarding RSGM-P University X since its establishment in 2002, indicating minimal utilization of social media as a tool for building brand awareness. Among these reviews, approximately 45% contained negative feedback, primarily related to prolonged waiting times, unclear service pathways, and insufficient information regarding schedules and specialist availability. Moreover, there appears to be no visible response effort from the hospital toward these reviews, indicating the absence of a digital reputation management strategy through online word-of-mouth (WOM) channels.

This condition is further exacerbated by the institution's weak communication activity on social media. As of November 20, 2024, the official Instagram account of RSGM-P had only 3,113 followers and 250 posts since its inception in 2018. However, user interaction was notably limited, evidenced by the low number of comments, likes, and audience inquiries. This indicates a low level of customer engagement, which indirectly contributes to weak brand awareness and a diminished public perception of institutional competence. Additionally, the public demonstrates skepticism regarding the quality of services provided by teaching hospitals. An analysis of public conversations on social media using the keyword "RSGM" reveals recurring negative narratives, such as concerns about being used as learning subjects by students, long waiting experiences, and perceptions of unprofessionalism.

No research has yet examined this variable in teaching hospitals; studies have only been conducted in the tourism sector (6) and aviation, but without the mediation of e-WOM and additional variables such as brand resonance (7).

## **METHOD**

### **Design**

The type of research used is quantitative research with a cross-sectional approach. This design allows researchers to examine the

prevalence of certain characteristics, behaviors, or conditions within a population, as well as to identify associations between independent and dependent variables

### **Sample, sample size, & sampling technique**

This study involved 205 respondents and employed a non-probability purposive sampling technique. The population consisted of Instagram followers of RSGM-P University X who met the following criteria: aged over 18 years, had followed the account for more than one month, and were not students of RSGM-P University. The purpose of this research was to examine the effect of social media activity (X1) and customer engagement (X2) on brand awareness (Y), with electronic word of mouth (Z) as a mediating variable at RSGM-P X. Data collection was carried out in January 2024.

### **Data collection process**

The questionnaire used as the research instrument employed a 1-4 Likert scale, where 4 meant strongly agree, 3 meant agree, 2 meant disagree, and 1 meant strongly disagree. The questionnaire used for the social media activity variable, with dimensions of entertainment, interaction, and advertisement, was adapted from previous study (8). Customer engagement was measured using the questionnaire from Hollebeek et al., 2014). e-Word of Mouth, the communicator dimension uses the questionnaire from Goyette et al (4). Due to the limitations of indicators in previous literature, the brand awareness variable uses a questionnaire (9) that has been slightly modified to align with the research direction regarding hospitals. Data obtained from respondents will undergo pretest validity and reliability testing using SPSS. Data analysis is descriptive statistical using the three-box method, followed by validity measurement using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Validity testing in this study is conducted with the criterion that factor loadings must be greater than 0.50. Reliability testing will use Cronbach's alpha measurement technique, with results considered valid if the value exceeds 0.7. Reliability measurement will be conducted by

calculating the Construct Reliability (CR) and Variance Extracted (AVE) values. Further analysis was conducted using path analysis with the Structural Equation Modelling method, which is a multivariate technique combining factor analysis and regression to test the relationships between variables in a model. This method integrates CFA analysis with path analysis to form a comprehensive statistical method. The data distribution was then examined using the Goodness of Fit (GOF) test with Lisrel software

## RESULT

### Characteristic of respondents

Data for this study were collected using a questionnaire distributed to 205 respondents, all of whom were Instagram followers of RSGM-P University X. The inclusion criteria were verified through screening questions: respondents were not students of the university, had followed the Instagram account for more than one month, and had seen content posted by RSGM-P. If any of these conditions were not met, the respondent was excluded from the survey. Consequently, all respondents included in the analysis met the inclusion criteria and completed the questionnaire in full. Based on the respondent demographic distribution, the majority were female (79.51%) and unmarried (80.48%). Most respondents held a bachelor's to doctoral degree (n = 184), and the dominant age range was 18–30 years (n = 182), which was targeted based on the assumption that this age group is highly active on social media.

**Table 1. Characteristic of respondents**

Characteristic of respondents	n	%
Gender		
Male	163	79.51
Female	42	20.49
Status		
Unmarried	165	80.48
Married	40	19.52
Education level		
Bachelor-Doctoral	184	89.76
High school to diploma	21	10.24
Age group		

18-30 years	182	88.78
>30 years	23	11.22

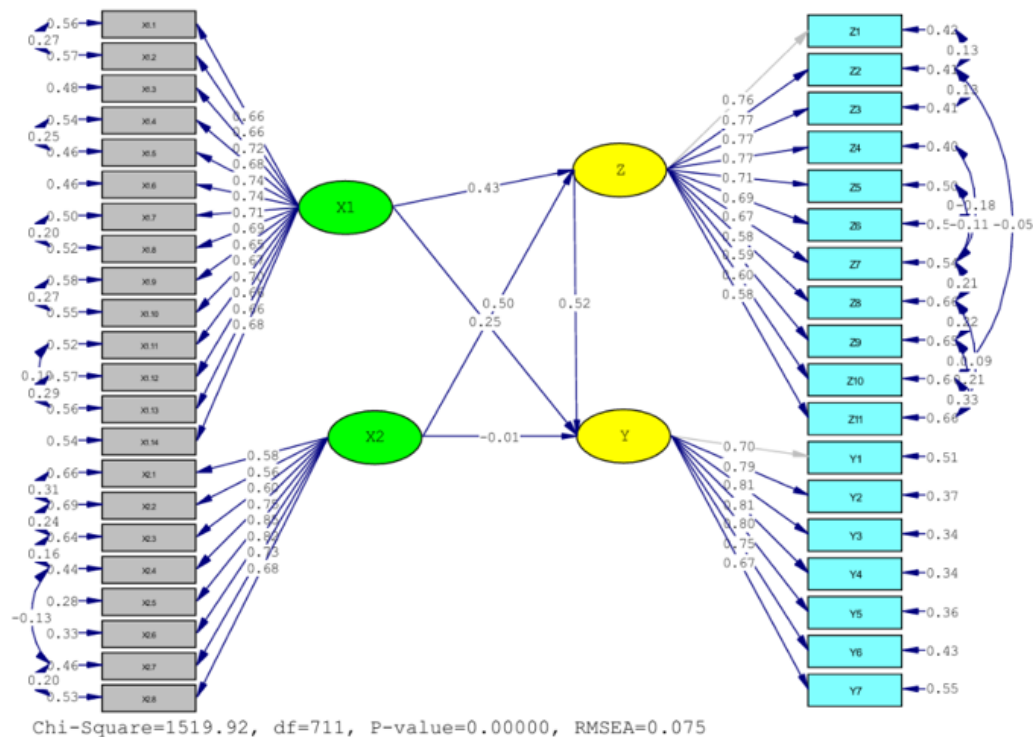
### Structural Equation Modelling

The analysis results show that customer conversations and reviews on online media (eWOM) are the strongest factors driving brand awareness, contributing more than any other factor. Official social media activity has also been shown to have a positive impact, although not as significant as eWOM. Meanwhile, direct customer interaction with the brand (customer engagement) has a very small and insignificant impact on brand awareness. Overall, the combination of these three factors accounts for nearly half (49%) of the changes in brand awareness levels. This means that marketing strategies should prioritize strengthening eWOM and social media activities to optimize brand awareness growth.

### Hypothesis testing of variables

Structural equation modeling was employed to test the eight proposed hypotheses. The results indicate that seven of the eight hypotheses were supported by the data. Table X summarizes the path coefficients, t-values, and coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) for each relationship.

H6 also demonstrated a strong and significant relationship ( $\beta = 0.51$ ;  $t = 4.20$ ), supported by an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.22. H7 was accepted as well, indicating a moderate but statistically significant influence ( $\beta = 0.23$ ;  $t = 3.70$ ), with 17% of the variance explained by the model. Finally, H8 was supported ( $\beta = 0.24$ ;  $t = 3.74$ ), with an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.26, indicating that the predictor significantly contributes to explaining the dependent variable. Overall, the findings suggest that most constructs in the proposed model exert meaningful and statistically significant effects. Only one pathway (H4) failed to demonstrate significance, indicating that this relationship may require further theoretical refinement or exploration using alternative model specifications



**Table 2. Result of hypothesis**

Hypothesis	Coef.	T-Value	R <sup>2</sup>
Social media activities, customer engagement, and e-wom on brand awareness simultaneously			.49
Social media activities on e-wom	.25	7.01	.50
customer engagement on e-wom	.45	6.31	.43
Social media activities on brand awareness	.01	.13	.01
Customer engagement on brand awareness	.47	2.85	.25
e-wom on brand awareness	.51	4.20	.52
Social media activities on brand awareness with e-wom as mediator	.23	3.70	.22
Customer engagement on brand awareness with e-wom as mediator	.24	3.74	.26

## DISCUSSION

### The Effect of Social Media Activities, Customer Engagement, and Electronic word of Mouth on Brand Awareness

The results of the study indicate that the three independent variables together significantly influence brand awareness. This study supports previous research which states that the results reveal that social media interaction, electronic word-of-mouth promotion, and trends are key elements that directly influence consumer brand engagement, thereby strengthening brand awareness and brand knowledge (10). In consistent with previous study (11) found that customer engagement, eWOM, and one of the social media elements-entertainment and trendiness-increase brand awareness and

purchase intent in a study conducted in China.

In the context of RSGMP, these results confirm that low brand awareness is not only caused by minimal social media activity but also by the lack of strategies that can trigger patient engagement and encourage positive online reviews. Given the misconception that RSGMP services are only for internal university use and the weak public trust in educational hospitals, strategies integrating social media management, patient engagement enhancement, and eWOM management are essential.

RSGMP needs to design a digital campaign that combines service education, active interaction with patients, and encouragement of positive testimonial sharing. This approach is expected to improve the institution's image, address negative stigma, and enhance competitiveness compared to private clinics and hospitals.

### **The Effect of Social Media Activities on Brand Awareness**

Increased social media activity correlates positively with increased brand awareness. This means that the more optimally social media activity is managed, the higher the level of brand awareness among consumers. This study supports previous research (12) which agrees that marketing through social media has proven to be very successful in increasing brand awareness. Another study mentioned (13) that social media enables two-way communication: between companies and customers, as well as among customers themselves. This interaction helps build a community around a brand, and when accompanied by positive messages, it can enhance brand awareness and reputation. This is also supported by previous research (8,14). For RSGMP, these findings are relevant given that the current use of social media is still minimal and unstructured. By increasing high-quality content, such as dental health education, promotion of flagship services, and publication of student activities, brand

awareness can be enhanced without relying on other variables. This strategy can also address the misconception that services are only for internal communities.

Practically, consistent and strategic social media management will be an efficient step to expand information reach, build a positive image, and attract new patients.

### **The Effect of Social Media Activities on Electronic Word of Mouth**

Increased social media activity correlates positively with an increase in eWOM. This means that the more optimal the management of social media activity, the greater the intensity of information dissemination and brand recommendations by consumers online. This study supports previous research stating the impact of the social characteristics of consumers' use of social media on eWOM, showing that social media is not only a platform for information dissemination but also creates social value that supports the sustainability of digital and non-digital interactions (8). The opportunities and challenges in the social media era are explained, and this study emphasizes that social media has expanded the reach of eWOM. This is also supported by previous research (13).

For RSGMP, increasing eWOM through social media is crucial to changing the current negative information flow regarding waiting times, cost transparency, and service quality. Creative and responsive social media activities can encourage patients to share positive experiences, thereby improving the clinic's reputation in the public eye.

Implicitly, RSGMP should encourage patients to provide positive reviews online, either through direct testimonials or interactive features on social media platforms.

### **The Effect of Customer Engagement on Brand Awareness**

Increased customer engagement does not have a significant effect on brand awareness. This indicates that the intensity of customer interaction with the brand, in the

context of this study, does not contribute significantly to increased brand awareness. A previous study (3), suggest that customer engagement can enhance brand awareness. However, this study aligns with a study (15), which found that customer engagement enhances brand awareness through sharing information about the brand via word-of-mouth. In line with the findings of Moisescu et al. (16), involvement in online brand communities plays a crucial role in driving electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) activities, which in turn strengthen brand awareness and brand image. This involvement can take the form of active or passive interactions, where consumers who frequently view or interact with brand content are more likely to discuss the brand online.

However, in the context of this study, the hypothesis that customer engagement directly influences brand awareness was rejected. This can be explained by the reality on the ground, particularly on the RSGM-P University X social media platform, which shows low levels of active engagement. Most Instagram followers act as silent followers, consuming content without interacting through likes, comments, or sharing information.

Although the hospital is quite active in publishing informative content, follower interaction remains low, possibly because the content is not yet fully relevant to the audience's needs or is not visually and communicatively appealing. Thus, this passive engagement is not yet strong enough to form significant brand recall or brand recognition in the minds of the public.

### **The Effect of Customer Engagement on Electronic Word of Mouth**

Increased customer engagement is positively correlated with an increase in eWOM. This means that the greater the customer engagement, the higher the intensity of online information dissemination and brand recommendations. This study does not support this research. This study is in line with previous studies that show a positive

relationship between customer engagement and electronic word of mouth (eWOM). A study explains that engagement with eWOM reflects users' tendency to receive and disseminate information to their networks (17). Another study outlined that the affective and behavioral dimensions of customer engagement positively correlate with the behavior of seeking and sharing eWOM, while cognitive engagement only influences the dissemination of eWOM (18). This indicates that the emotional and tangible aspects of customers more strongly drive eWOM activities. Two studies emphasize that eWOM can be strengthened by building active customer engagement. This strategy is important for creating positive online reviews (19-20). A similar point with a study explained that positive experiences can enhance user engagement with eWOM (21).

For RSGMP, higher patient engagement has the potential to trigger the spread of positive information related to services and treatment experiences. Currently, engagement remains low due to a lack of personal and interactive approaches. Therefore, strengthening engagement through personal communication, post-service follow-ups, and patient education is crucial.

### **The Effect of Electronic Word of Mouth on Brand Awareness**

An increase in eWOM is positively correlated with an increase in brand awareness. This means that the more positive reviews and recommendations that circulate online, the higher the level of brand awareness among consumers. This study supports previous research stating that brand awareness is positively influenced by e-WOM (8) noted that e-WOM has a significant effect on trust and brand awareness. This aligns with other studies presented by (22-25). For RSGMP, eWOM is an important channel for expanding brand exposure, especially since hospitals are currently facing image challenges due to negative perceptions. Increasing positive reviews on digital

platforms can be a strategy to restore trust and increase visit interest.

The Mediating Effect of eWOM in the Relationship Between Social Media Activities and Brand Awareness Social media activity can indirectly increase brand awareness through increased eWOM. This means that an effective social media strategy can spark positive conversations and reviews in the digital realm, which in turn strengthens brand awareness. This study supports previous research stating that Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) plays a crucial role in mediating the relationship between social media activities and brand awareness (26). eWOM acts as a bridge connecting social media activities whether published by the company (FGC) or users (UGC) with increased brand awareness (27).

In the context of RSGMP, this strategy is highly relevant, as well-managed social media can transform negative perceptions into positive narratives through patient reviews. This dual effect makes social media a strategic tool for improving reputation while increasing public awareness. According to the researchers, it is important for RSGM-P not only to focus on creating content but also to ensure that the content is sufficiently engaging to trigger reactions and sharing by the audience.

### **The Mediating Effect of eWOM in the Relationship Between Customer Engagement and Brand Awareness**

eWOM mediates the relationship between customer engagement and brand awareness with a positive influence. This means that customer engagement can indirectly increase brand awareness through the dissemination of positive information and recommendations on online media. This study supports the findings (15), which found that customer engagement increases brand awareness through the sharing of information about the brand via word-of-mouth. In line with the findings of (16), engagement in online brand communities plays a crucial role in driving electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM)

activities, which in turn strengthen brand awareness and brand image. This engagement can take the form of active or passive interactions, where consumers who frequently view or interact with brand content are more likely to discuss the brand online. However, since the direct influence of customer engagement on brand awareness is not significant, the role of eWOM becomes highly crucial. For RSGMP, this means that every engagement program must be designed in such a way as to encourage patients to share positive experiences online, for example through patient-generated content (user-generated content) or testimonial competitions.

According to researchers, even though the direct relationship is weak, engagement can still increase brand awareness if it generates eWOM. This offers hope that even though engagement currently does not have a direct impact, if managed properly and generates an impact on social media, its impact on public awareness remains significant.

### **CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Social media activities, customer engagement, and eWOM simultaneously have a significant positive effect on brand awareness. Social media activities positively influence both brand awareness and eWOM, while customer engagement significantly affects eWOM but not brand awareness directly. eWOM has a strong and significant effect on brand awareness and mediates the effects of both social media activities and customer engagement. Therefore, strategies to improve brand awareness should focus on enhancing social media activities and customer engagement that stimulate eWOM.

#### **Managerial Implications**

This study identifies the lowest-performing dimensions for each variable: Influencer (social media activity), Cognitive Processing (customer engagement), Communicator (eWOM), and Brand

Recognition (brand awareness). These insights provide strategic direction for improving RSGM-P's digital communication and public perception.

It is recommended that RSGM-P collaborate with alumni, high-achieving students, or health micro-influencers to promote services organically. Cognitive Processing requires more structured and educational content. A reputation management system should be implemented to increase Google reviews and responses. To strengthen brand recognition, content should emphasize that services are open to the public and include visuals showcasing professionalism and service accessibility.

### Recommendation

RSGM-P should leverage its strategic location and the expertise of its educators and clinicians to strengthen brand awareness. Instagram should be optimized with scheduled content (educational, pricing, health tips), SEO-friendly captions, and local hashtags (e.g., #jakartadentist, #dentalcare). Visual content and infographics should clearly highlight service excellence. Content should remain ethical and compliant with healthcare promotion regulations. Enhancing social media responsiveness and online reviews can further strengthen reputation and engagement. Future researchers may consider adding variables such as patient trust or digital service quality and explore qualitative or mixed methods with broader samples for more representative results.

### Acknowledgments

The author extends sincere gratitude and appreciation to Prof. Dr. Endang Ruswanti, SE., MM and Dr. Rokiah Kusumapradja, SKM., MHA for their guidance and direction, as well as all parties who contributed to the completion of this research.

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