

ARTICLE

Exploring the Impact of Marketing Strategies and Promotional Tactics on Consumer Behaviour in the Healthcare Sector, South Africa

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Abstract

Marketing strategies have been recognised as pivotal in shaping consumer behaviour and facilitating organisational success, particularly within the healthcare sector, where decision-making processes are inherently complex. This study examined the interplay between marketing strategies, focusing on promotional tactics, and consumer behaviour in healthcare. Guided by the conceptual framework of Ćostar and Ristanović, it investigated the influence of the 4 Ps (product, price, place, promotion) on healthcare consumer decisions. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study interrogated the efficacy of promotional tools such as discounts, coupons, and exclusive offers. Results demonstrated that while promotional strategies can effectively enhance brand engagement and stimulate short-term sales, overemphasising these tactics erodes long-term brand equity and financial viability.

Furthermore, the study highlighted significant challenges intrinsic to healthcare marketing, including multifaceted stakeholder dynamics, restricted information access, and systemic complexity, which collectively constrain consumer agency. The findings underscore healthcare organisations' need to balance immediate promotional gains against sustained innovation-driven growth. Consequently, the study advocates integrating service innovation, refining outsourcing models, and strategically aligning promotional activities with broader organisational objectives to reconcile profitability with sustainable innovation.

Keywords: Marketing Strategies; Consumer Behaviour; Healthcare; Promotional Strategies; Service Innovation; Organisational Performance; Healthcare Marketing

1. INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving healthcare landscape, effective marketing strategies are essential for aligning consumer preferences, organisational objectives, and competitive positioning [1]. Among these strategies, promotional initiatives drive short-term sales and foster consumer engagement [2]. These initiatives include traditional methods, such as price discounts and coupon distribution, and contemporary approaches, such as loyalty programs and experiential marketing campaigns [3]. While promotional strategies effectively generate immediate consumer responses, their long-term impact on brand perception, customer loyalty, and financial sustainability remains an ongoing debate [4]. Despite extensive discussions on promotional tactics, limited research has examined their integration with broader strategic imperatives within the healthcare sector, such as service innovation.

Concurrently, innovation is a critical driver of competitiveness and growth in healthcare [5]. From advancements in medical technology to novel service delivery models, innovation shapes healthcare organisations' ability to differentiate themselves in a dynamic market [6]. The growing focus on patient-centred care and digital transformation highlights the importance of healthcare organisations embracing innovative solutions [7]. However, a significant challenge remains in aligning short-term promotional strategies with the long-term objectives of innovation and organisational sustainability. Balancing

immediate revenue generation with strategic innovation requires careful planning, especially in a landscape influenced by shifting consumer behaviours, regulatory constraints, and rapid technological advancements [8]. Despite recognising these challenges, there remains a gap in understanding how promotional strategies and innovation initiatives can be effectively integrated to maximise both short-term engagement and long-term value creation [9].

The fast-paced advancements in technology and digital transformation require a flexible, data-driven marketing strategy to improve consumer engagement and deliver measurable results [10]. Healthcare marketers must leverage consumer segmentation, personalised messaging, and data analytics to design targeted promotional campaigns that effectively reach specific audience segments [11]. Simultaneously, fostering a culture of innovation enables organisations to create differentiated value propositions, enhance competitive advantage, and drive sustainable growth [12]. Notwithstanding the expanding corpus of study, there remains an insufficiency of thorough investigation into the correlation between promotional techniques and innovation in the healthcare sector. This study investigated the strategic integration of promotional campaigns with innovation-driven tactics by healthcare organisations to ensure long-term sustainability, promote patient involvement, and enhance market positioning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Promotional strategies in healthcare marketing have become essential tools for organisations striving to enhance their competitive edge and influence consumer behaviour. Effective promotional methods, such as price discounts, coupons, and exclusive offers, are widely acknowledged for driving immediate sales and market share [13,3]. Research suggests that while these strategies can offer short-term gains, there are concerns about their long-term impact on brand equity and organisational sustainability [14]. In healthcare, the challenge lies in the complexity of consumer decision-making, where choices are not solely influenced by individual preferences but also by factors like medical service providers, insurance policies, and affordability [15,16]. Low health literacy and limited transparency further confound consumer behaviour in healthcare, preventing consumers from making informed decisions [12,16].

The intricacies of health insurance, provider networks, and plan options create an environment where consumers often struggle to navigate the available choices. Understanding the underlying drivers of consumer behaviour in healthcare requires a comprehensive view of the stakeholders involved, including insurers, medical professionals, and employers [17]. Healthcare marketers must address these challenges through innovative promotional tactics that simplify decision-making and increase transparency.

The role of promotional strategies in healthcare extends beyond immediate sales objectives, impacting long-term brand loyalty and consumer trust [1,18]. Healthcare organisations must balance traditional promotional methods with digital innovations to offer personalised engagement and foster sustained relationships. Digital promotions, for instance, allow healthcare providers to engage with patients more personally, offering tailored incentives to encourage healthy behaviours and improve patient adherence to treatment [2]. Furthermore, multi-channel campaigns integrating traditional and digital media are increasingly important for ensuring broad reach and consistent messaging across diverse consumer segments [19]. The evolving landscape of healthcare marketing underscores the importance of adaptability in promotional strategies. As consumer expectations and technological capabilities shift, organisations must continually reassess their promotional approaches to remain competitive. This requires leveraging digital platforms for real-time engagement, personalisation, and multi-channel campaigns, ensuring that promotional messages resonate with targeted audiences [10]. Understanding the interplay between promotional tactics, innovation, and consumer behaviour is essential for healthcare organisations seeking to optimise their marketing efforts and drive both short-term and long-term success in a dynamic market environment.

3. METHODS

This study adopted an empirical literature review methodology to examine how promotional strategies and innovation contribute to organisational success in healthcare marketing [20,21]. A

systematic search strategy was employed to identify and synthesise relevant literature published between 2013 and 2024, ensuring the inclusion of foundational theories and emerging trends, especially in digital transformation, patient engagement technologies, and innovation adoption. Systematic reviews are essential for evidence-based decision-making but require rigorous appraisal using established guidelines like the Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement and tools such as the A Measurement Tool to Assess Systematic Reviews (AMSTAR) to ensure validity, minimise bias, and improve reliability [22].

The search was conducted across PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar using a combination of keywords and Boolean operators such as:

- *“healthcare marketing” AND “promotional strategies”*
- *“digital health” AND “organisational success”*
- *“patient engagement” AND “healthcare innovation”*
- *“healthcare marketing in South Africa” OR “developing countries”*

Inclusion criteria were:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, and conference papers published between 2013 and 2024.
- Research directly related to healthcare marketing, promotional strategies, digital innovation, or organisational effectiveness.
- English-language publications with full-text availability.
- Studies relevant to global and regional healthcare contexts, with attention to developing economies, including South Africa.

Exclusion criteria included:

- Articles not published in English or inaccessible in full text.
- Non-peer-reviewed content is unavailable unless it is from credible grey literature sources (e.g., WHO, Council for Medical Schemes Industry and annual reports, Medical schemes annual reports).
- Unless deemed theoretically foundational, studies older than 11 years (i.e., pre-2013).
- Research focused on clinical or pharmaceutical interventions unrelated to marketing or innovation.

All selected articles were subjected to a three-step review process: title and abstract screening, full-text review, and quality appraisal using a modified version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist. This helped ensure methodological soundness and relevance to the research questions. Data were extracted and analysed thematically to identify key patterns, conceptual frameworks, and evidence gaps across the literature [23]. A three-phase review process was used:

1. Title and abstract screening to assess initial relevance.
2. A full-text review was conducted to confirm eligibility based on inclusion/exclusion criteria.
3. Quality appraisal, using a modified version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist ensured methodological rigour and thematic relevance.

The final analysis included 45 articles, with publication dates ranging from 2013 to 2024. Of these, approximately 60% were published between 2019 and 2024, reflecting recent advancements in digital transformation and patient-centred innovation. Thematic synthesis revealed recurring patterns, conceptual frameworks, and underexplored areas, particularly within healthcare systems of low—and middle-income countries (LMICs).

4. OVERVIEW OF MARKETING STRATEGIES AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Marketing strategies are essential for advertising goods or services, and the promotional plan is a critical component in this process [24,3]. The conceptual model formulated by Ćostar and Ristanović [25] provides insight into the intricate relationship between marketing strategies and consumer behaviour.

This model highlights the impact of various factors, including the 4 Ps of marketing, product, pricing, distribution, and promotion on consumer decision-making processes.

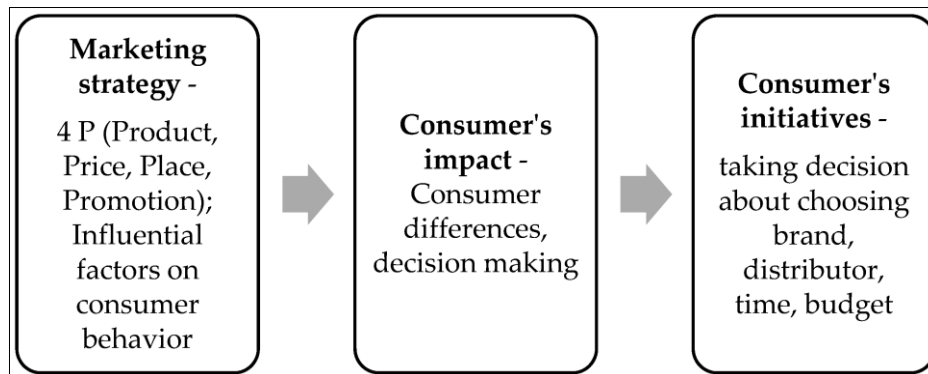


Figure 1. Conceptual model on the relationship marketing strategies and consumer behaviour. Source: Adapted from Ćostar and Ristanović [25]

Šostar and Ristanović highlight that while marketing strategies significantly influence brand selection, consumer decision-making in health insurance becomes more complex due to the involvement of various stakeholders [15]. Factors such as healthcare providers, funding sources, and regional service availability complicate understanding how marketing affects consumer choices [16,12]. Additionally, limited access to information and the complexities of the healthcare system make it challenging for consumers to make well-informed decisions. Organisations must leverage effective marketing strategies to stay competitive in this rapidly evolving healthcare landscape [26]. Promotional strategy and innovation are crucial in shaping consumer behaviour and driving organisational success [5]. A comprehensive understanding of the impact of various strategies is essential for effectively adapting to emerging trends and fostering sustainable growth [1,27].

4.1. The Role of Promotional Strategies in Marketing

Promotional strategies play a crucial role within the comprehensive framework of marketing strategies, representing a subset focused on stimulating consumer interest and driving sales [28]. These strategies are instrumental in shaping consumer behaviour and generating immediate sales and market share results. A plethora of research underscores the effectiveness of promotional strategies in achieving marketing objectives. Price discounts, for instance, have been extensively studied and proven to influence consumer purchasing decisions positively [14,29]. Likewise, coupon distribution has been demonstrated to motivate consumers to experiment with novel products or services by providing concrete discounts [3]. Exclusive promotions, distinguished by time-limited offers or distinctive bargains, create urgency and exclusivity, motivating customers to take immediate action [30]. Despite the demonstrated effectiveness of promotional strategies, ongoing debates persist regarding their preference for alternative marketing approaches. Critics argue that while promotional tactics may yield immediate sales results, they could potentially undermine long-term brand equity and profitability [14]. They raise concerns about the sustainability of a business model overly reliant on discounts and promotions. However, proponents of promotional strategies highlight their ability to capture consumer attention in today's competitive marketplace and drive short-term revenue growth [3]. They argue that promotional activities are essential components of a comprehensive marketing mix, working synergistically with other elements to achieve overall marketing objectives.



Figure 2. Promotional marketing strategies. Source: Adapted from Aghighi [31].

4.2. Factors Affecting Marketing Strategies and Consumer Behaviour

Consumer decision-making in healthcare is complicated by the involvement of multiple stakeholders and difficulties accessing key information. Unlike other sectors, healthcare choices often require input from medical providers, insurance companies, employers, and regulatory bodies, which limits consumer autonomy in selecting health products [16,12]. Consumers face challenges in obtaining accurate and transparent information about healthcare products, coverage options, and associated costs, making it difficult to make informed decisions [17,16]. This lack of clarity is further compounded by the complexity of healthcare policies, coverage terms, and provider networks, which can overwhelm individuals, especially those with low health insurance literacy [32,33].

5. THE PROMOTIONAL MIX AND ITS COMPONENTS

Promotional strategies involve strategic activities designed to achieve specific marketing objectives. These actions are essential for organisations to engage with their intended audience efficiently and influence desired customer behaviours. The process of advertising tactics often consists of many important elements.

5.1. Identifying Target Markets

Before launching promotional campaigns, marketers must segment the market to identify groups of consumers with similar needs, preferences, and behaviours [34]. Segmentation enables firms to concentrate their promotional efforts on the most relevant target groups, enhancing their initiatives' efficacy.

5.2. Selecting Promotional Tools and Channels

Once target markets are identified, marketers must choose the most appropriate promotional tools and channels to effectively reach and engage with these audiences. This could include advertising (e.g., television, radio, print, digital), personal selling, sales promotion (e.g., discounts, coupons, contests), public relations, and direct marketing [19]. The selection of promotional tools depends on various factors, including the nature of the product or service, the characteristics of the target audience, and the budget available for the campaign.

5.3. Allocation of Resources

Marketers need to allocate resources effectively across various promotional activities to maximise the impact of their campaigns while staying within budget constraints. This involves determining the appropriate mix of promotional tools and channels and allocating financial and human resources accordingly [34]. Strategic resource allocation ensures that promotional efforts are deployed efficiently to achieve desired marketing objectives.

5.4. Evaluating Campaign Effectiveness

To evaluate the success of promotional strategies, marketers track key performance indicators (KPIs) such as sales revenue, brand awareness, customer engagement, and return on investment (ROI) [35,30]. These metrics help marketers assess the effectiveness of their campaigns and make data-driven decisions for future improvements. As Belch and Belch [13] described, the promotional mix involves a combination of tools such as advertising, sales promotions, personal selling, public relations, and direct marketing, which are designed to influence consumer behaviour and perceptions. Each component plays a distinct role: while advertising helps build broad brand awareness, personal selling allows for direct, personalised interactions to address individual customer needs [29,30]. Recent studies also highlight the growing importance of digital engagement metrics and social media analytics as crucial for evaluating campaign reach and consumer sentiment in real-time [25,36].

5.5. Adaptability and Versatility of Promotional Strategies

Promotional strategies are versatile tools that can be adapted to suit product characteristics, target demographics, and the dynamic market landscape [37]. As marketing evolves, the integration of digital channels has significantly enhanced their effectiveness. Digital promotions, in particular, enable businesses to engage highly segmented audiences through online platforms and social media [10]. These platforms facilitate personalised incentives, where data-driven insights allow businesses to create tailored promotional offers that influence consumer behaviour [11]. Targeting specific audiences with relevant messages enhances engagement and ultimately improves campaign performance and commercial success [2]. Promotional strategies in healthcare, such as digital promotions, personalised incentives, multi-channel campaigns, real-time engagement, and integrated marketing campaigns, are key to effectively engaging patients and promoting health services. Digital promotions leverage online platforms to raise awareness and interact with patients, while personalised incentives encourage healthy behaviours and treatment adherence. Multi-channel campaigns reach diverse audiences through various media, and real-time engagement enhances patient support and satisfaction. Integrated marketing campaigns ensure consistent messaging across all touchpoints. These strategies, detailed in Table 1, highlight their importance in healthcare marketing [10,11,2,19].

Table 1. Key Aspects of Promotional Strategies in Healthcare

Aspect of Promotional Strategy	Description	Application to Healthcare
Digital Promotions	Using online platforms and social media for personalised engagement.	Healthcare organisations can raise awareness and engage patients through digital channels.
Personalised Incentives	Customising offers based on customer behaviour.	Providers can encourage healthy behaviours with incentives like gym discounts or wellness rewards.
Multi-channel Campaigns	Using both traditional and digital media.	Healthcare organisations can engage diverse audiences through a mix of media.
Real-time Engagement	Instant interaction via social media or live chat.	Healthcare providers can enhance patient support and satisfaction through real-time communication.
Integrated Marketing Campaigns	Coordinating efforts across multiple channels.	Providers can deliver consistent health messaging through a variety of media.

Sources: Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Chaffey & Smith, 2013; Chaffey & Smith, 2017; Kotler & Armstrong, 2020 [10,11,2,19].

6. IMPACT ON SERVICE INNOVATION AND ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Promotional strategies possess the potential to act as catalysts for innovation in service delivery, enhancing operational efficiency and enabling the development of differentiated service offerings that improve overall organisational performance [5,38]. Promotions can stimulate creativity and responsiveness by encouraging firms to experiment with novel approaches to consumer engagement and tailor services to shifting market demands. This responsiveness, in turn, can generate competitive advantages through improved efficiency and the introducing of unique services that distinguish a firm within its industry [36].

However, the long-term implications of promotional strategies on innovation and financial sustainability warrant critical scrutiny. While promotions can yield immediate gains in consumer engagement and revenue, overdependence on such tactics may inadvertently undermine sustained innovation efforts and strain profit margins [9]. Empirical evidence suggests that innovation performance is significantly influenced by organisational culture and structure; specifically, psychological safety and collectivism enhance innovation, whereas hierarchical power dynamics may hinder it [39]. This implies that innovation is not merely a product of external incentives like promotions but also internal social and performance management systems.

Moreover, promotional strategies prioritising short-term sales objectives without alignment with long-term strategic goals risk disconnecting between immediate market responsiveness and enduring innovation capacity [4]. Lopez and Oliver [40] underscore the importance of integrating innovation into overall business strategy, noting that such alignment enhances a firm's ability to innovate consistently and remain competitive. When promotional efforts divert financial and human resources away from core

research and development (R&D) activities, they may inadvertently constrain the organisation's innovation trajectory [26]. This concern is echoed by Al Naqbi et al. [18], who found that product and process innovation are among the most significant contributors to long-term firm performance.

Consequently, organisations must strike a strategic balance between leveraging promotions for short-term benefits and investing in innovation for long-term sustainability. This entails developing market-responsive promotional strategies and integrating them into a broader innovation and financial sustainability framework. By maintaining this balance, firms can ensure that short-term marketing initiatives contribute to long-term growth and competitiveness rather than detract from it.

7. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS IN HEALTHCARE INNOVATION AND OUTSOURCING

Research in healthcare innovation highlights significant gaps, particularly in understanding service-oriented innovations, outsourced models, and their intersection. While there is extensive focus on clinical and technological innovations, service-oriented innovations such as patient engagement strategies, telemedicine, and new care delivery models remain underexplored [7,6,41]. Given the growing importance of patient experience and care coordination, more research is needed to explore these service-oriented innovations within healthcare systems. Furthermore, while outsourcing in healthcare is increasingly common, limited research exists on the dynamics of outsourced models [42]. Most existing studies focus on in-house care delivery, leaving a gap in understanding the challenges, best practices, and efficacy of outsourcing in healthcare settings [43]. There is also a need to explore how healthcare organisations integrate innovation within their outsourcing strategies and how service providers introduce innovative solutions [44]. Investigating these intersections will provide valuable insights into improving patient care and organisational performance in the evolving healthcare landscape.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES AND INNOVATION

While promotional strategies and innovation undoubtedly offer the potential for short-term revenue boosts, organisations must exercise caution and carefully evaluate their long-term financial sustainability. Overreliance on promotional tactics can gradually erode profit margins, mainly if discounts are offered too frequently or intensely [9]. Moreover, innovation strategies not aligned with the organisation's strategic direction can harm operational and financial performance [8,6]. Promotional strategies, if not managed judiciously, may result in diminishing returns over time as customers expect discounts or other incentives, potentially leading to brand devaluation [4]. Additionally, excessive promotional activity can distort pricing perceptions among consumers, making it challenging to sustain profitability in the long run [26]. Therefore, organisations must balance leveraging promotions to drive sales in the short term and preserving brand equity and profitability in the long term. Similarly, while innovation is essential for maintaining competitiveness and driving growth, not all innovation initiatives yield positive returns. Innovation efforts must be aligned with the organisation's strategic goals and core competencies to generate sustainable value [45]. Failure to have a well-defined strategic direction when investing in innovation may result in squandering resources and overlooking possibilities to achieve long-term financial goals [8,6]. Therefore, organisations must carefully assess the potential risks and rewards associated with innovation initiatives and ensure they are integrated into broader strategic planning processes to maximise their impact on operational and financial performance.

9. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the influence of marketing strategies, focusing on promotional tactics, on consumer behaviour within the healthcare sector, especially in health insurance markets. It sought to understand how key marketing elements, the 4 Ps: product, pricing, distribution, and promotion, affect consumer decision-making, engagement, and brand loyalty. This study carefully examined existing literature to address gaps in understanding the unique complexities of healthcare marketing, particularly how multiple stakeholders and information asymmetry affect consumer decision-making.

The findings affirm that marketing strategies are pivotal in shaping consumer behaviour in healthcare contexts. This supports the conceptual framework proposed by Šostar and Ristanović [25], which emphasises the interconnected role of the 4 Ps in influencing consumer decisions. Promotional strategies, such as price discounts, exclusive offers, and digital marketing campaigns, emerged as significant drivers of consumer engagement and purchasing decisions, consistent with prior studies [3,10].

However, the study also highlights the added complexity of healthcare marketing, where decisions are not solely individual but often involve multiple stakeholders, including providers, insurers, and policymakers. This complexity is compounded by disparities in access to accurate information, transparency challenges, and generally low health insurance literacy, echoing the observations of Laubscher and Saville [15]. These factors complicate consumer decision-making, limiting the effectiveness of promotional efforts and necessitating tailored strategies.

This research successfully addressed key gaps by analysing how promotional tactics impact consumer behaviour and decision-making within healthcare, an area that has been underexplored in existing literature. The effectiveness of coupon distribution in motivating trial and adoption of healthcare services aligns with Armstrong et al.'s [3] findings on consumer incentives. Furthermore, the study provides novel insights into the growing importance of digital promotions, personalised incentives, and multi-channel campaigns in engaging healthcare consumers, corroborating trends that Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick [10] identified.

Although this study offers valuable insights, some areas still require deeper exploration. Promotional strategies impact consumer behaviour in the short term, but their lasting effects on brand equity, trust, and customer retention, especially in health insurance, are poorly understood.

10. STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study acknowledges limitations inherent in its methodology. The reliance on secondary data and literature review restricts the depth of primary consumer insights, which could provide richer contextual understanding. The exclusive focus on health insurance may also limit the applicability of findings across other healthcare sectors or industries. Furthermore, with increasing digital innovation and regulatory changes, the rapidly evolving landscape of healthcare marketing poses challenges for static analyses, underscoring the need for ongoing research to keep pace with emerging trends. This study confirms the critical role of marketing strategies in healthcare consumer behaviour and advances knowledge by addressing nuanced challenges unique to this sector. It lays a foundation for future research to deepen understanding long-term impacts and socio-cultural influences, ensuring more effective, equitable, and sustainable healthcare marketing practices.

11. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights the pivotal role of marketing strategies in influencing consumer behaviour within the healthcare sector, focusing on the 4 Ps of marketing: product, pricing, distribution, and promotion. The findings emphasise the importance of promotional strategies in shaping consumer engagement and decision-making, including price discounts, exclusive offers, and digital campaigns. However, the complexity of healthcare marketing, driven by multiple stakeholders and challenges such as information disparities, transparency issues, and low health insurance literacy, complicates consumers' ability to make informed choices.

This research contributes to the existing literature by shedding light on the dynamic nature of promotional strategies in the healthcare sector, especially in the face of technological advancements and regulatory changes. It also provides new insights into the effectiveness of digital promotions, personalised incentives, and multi-channel campaigns in fostering consumer loyalty and brand engagement in healthcare settings. However, areas for further exploration remain particularly the long-term impact of promotional strategies on brand equity and customer retention and the influence of socio-cultural factors on healthcare consumer behaviour.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that healthcare providers and marketers enhance transparency, improve health insurance literacy, and tailor promotional strategies to account for cultural and demographic differences. Additionally, future research should focus on exploring the long-term

effects of promotional strategies on consumer trust and loyalty and continue to track evolving marketing trends in healthcare to ensure that strategies remain effective and responsive to changing consumer needs.

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