Employee videos on Instagram for hospital recruitment – a theoretical approach

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Abstract:

The research addresses the pressing shortage of skilled healthcare professionals in German hospitals and explores the strategic use of Instagram recruiting videos to attract physicians. By integrating media richness theory and the SMCR communication model, this theoretical approach highlights the potential of employee-generated video content to create authentic and impactful recruitment campaigns. Key variables such as perceived similarity, framing effects, message structure, and communication frequency are examined through a multi-phase experimental design, targeting medical students at Greifswald University Hospital. Preliminary findings suggest that relatable, well-crafted video messages featuring credible, attractive physicians can enhance viewer engagement, improve the hospital's image, and increase recruitment success. Future research will refine these insights to optimize digital healthcare recruitment strategies, addressing this critical workforce challenge.

Keywords: *recruiting video, Instagram, hospital*

Track: *Digital Marketing & Social Media*

1. Introduction

The German healthcare industry faces a growing challenge: a significant shortage of skilled workers in hospitals (WHO, 2022). This shortage is driven by a complex interplay of factors, including an increasing demand for healthcare services, aging workforce, and high turnover rates due to stress (Van Merode, Groot, and Somers, 2024). The consequences are far-reaching, e.g. affecting patient care, operational efficiency, and employee morale.

Innovative strategies are needed to attract and recruit skilled healthcare workers in order to ensure the sustainability and resilience of the German healthcare system. Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, offer a unique and underutilized opportunity in this regard. As a visually-driven platform with over 33.8 million active users in Germany (Statista, 2024), Instagram has proven effective in engaging diverse audience. Videos on Instagram can be accessed on multiple devices, at any time, and are viewed by people across different age groups. Therefore, recruiting videos may offer a fast and cost-effective approach for personnel recruitment in hospitals (Ellington et al., 2022). Employee-generated video content, showcasing for example the work environment, team dynamics, and meaningful impact of healthcare roles, can serve as a powerful recruitment tool. Such videos provide authentic insights into hospital culture and the rewards of healthcare careers in a specific institution.

This paper theoretically explores how strategically crafted employee videos on Instagram can be used to mitigate the skilled labor shortage of physicians in German hospitals. Based on these considerations, several surveys will be conducted in the future. By comparing different settings of persona-, message-, and frequency-attributes and staged versus real-world examples, we aim to uncover practical solutions within Instagram to the pressing issue of skilled labor shortage of physicians in German hospitals.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Instagram videos

Social media platforms have revolutionized communication in the digital age by creating new opportunities for professional engagement and outreach. Instagram, as one of these platforms, can be characterized as a powerful audio-visual tool. Initially users connected via personal shared photos, videos and stories. Today Instagram is also used for marketing and professional networking (Gross & Wangenheim, 2022). Particularly videos, in the form of reels and stories, offer the ability to humanize institutions, personalize messages, convey

information, connect with audience, and foster relationships (Li, Grutman, Rabinowitz, and Clifton, 2023). Also, the healthcare sector, including the recruitment of physicians, has realized the potential of videos on Instagram (Farsi, 2021). The platform's popularity among younger demographics, including medical professionals in training, positions it as an effective channel in modern healthcare recruitment. Isolated recruitment campaigns of showcasing job opportunities and highlighting the workplace culture in German hospitals are already harnessed to recruit doctors, e.g. University Medicine Tübingen (YouTube, 2024).

According to media richness theory, media can be categorized as either rich or poor (Daft & Lengel, 1984 & 1986). Rich media, like videos, transmits more cues simultaneously, e.g. verbal cues, as words, and nonverbal cues, as facial expression, than poor media, e.g. text, and therefore can be considered as more effective. In line with this, marketing practitioners report higher ROI from videos compared to other content formats, and shift their focus towards social media video marketing (HubSpot, 2024).

Also, a look at social media users and usage underlines the dominance of video content. Its consumption time has increased over time. For example, the "Time spent watching video on Instagram is up more than 80 % year over year […]" (Instagram, 2017). In addition, the interaction rate is much higher for videos than other forms of content. For example, "Videos are shared an average of 89.5 times more than other content […]" (Kinsta, 2018).

2.2 General communication model

In order to come up with a configuration plan for an effective video recruitment on Instagram, an underlying framework of a general communication model has to be identified. The source-message-channel-receiver (SMCR) model by Berlo (1960) enriches the components of the linear communication model by Shannon-Weaver (1949) and the feedback loop by Schramm (1954). A source uses a transmitter to translate a message into a signal, which is then sent through a channel and translated back by a receiver until it reaches its destination. In addition, Schramm (1954) offers the possibility of a feedback message, which is decoded by the original source. For the purpose of this study, the source is represented by a hospital employee, responsible for recruitment, who translates the recruitment-proposal into a signal in the form of a video on Instagram, which in turn is viewed by potential healthcare trainees. Feedback on Instagram can be given in form of liking, sharing and comments. Following the additions of Berlo (1960), skills, attitudes, knowledge, and social culture influence the encoding of the information. This model stresses the importance of congruence between the contexts of the source and the receiver for an effective communication (Taylor, 1962). As far as the message is

concerned, its code, content, treatment, elements and structure are relevant. In the context of Instagram videos, code stands for the language or symbols used, content translates to the messages that should be delivered, while treatment describes how the message is presented, e.g. tonality, sound effects, and imagery. Finally, the element of structure implies the temporal arrangement of elements in the video. Therefore, by aligning the SMCR model with the capabilities of Instagram, German hospitals may create highly targeted, impactful recruitment campaigns to attract physicians.

2.3 Recruitment video on Instagram

Based on this descriptive and general communication-model a framework for an effective communication in the context of video-recruitment on Instagram is proposed. The source is represented by a central person visible and hearable in the video, as specified in the SMCR approach. According to media richness theory, the audiovisual presence of one or multiple persons can make the communication more effective, compared to video formats where no person is visible and/or hearable, e.g. documentaries, or silent films. Therefore, the study focuses on the former one. For simplicity reasons videos with more than one central person are excluded at this point. In line with the models of Schramm (1954) and Berlo (1960), the second component is incorporated by the message, a video with different content and design aspects. In order to minimize parasitic inductions due to distractions (Shannon-Weaver, 1949) a time-dimension of frequency, as third and final component, is added. Frequency is the rate at which messages with the same intent are delivered over a particular period of time. For example, a viewer of the first recruiting video is retargeted to view a second video in the following days. External factors, as the channel, receiver, and their potential feedback, are excluded from the proposed model at this point.

2.3.1 Person

Selecting the right person/ actor for a recruitment video on Instagram involves leveraging psychological principles, such as the similarity bias, to maximize the engagement and message effectiveness. The theoretical standpoint of similarity bias suggests that individuals tend to favor others similar to them, e.g. in business or recruitment decisions (Franke, Gruber, Harhoff, and Henkel, 2006; Jackson et al., 1991). Therefore, a recruitment video targeting doctors, featuring individuals with relatable professional and personal traits, such as practicing physicians of similar age or specialty can enhance perceived credibility and foster a sense of identification. While similarity has many facets, e.g. education, socioeconomic background, or religion, only

a few of them are unavoidably visible in short interactions, like age and sex. Therefore, we propose that:

H1: Hospital recruitment via videos on Instagram is more effective when the central person in the video is perceived as similar by the viewer

H2: The Instagram viewer's presumption of similarity with the actor is determined by resemblances of sex and perceived age/ professional experience.

Besides similarity, other aspects derived from the physician should also be incorporated, e.g. the image of the company represented in the video. Different streams of research suggest a reciprocal effect of the perception and evaluation of an employee onto the image of the company (Thorndike, 1920; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1988; Hatch & Schultz, 2003). A physician in a video on Instagram serves as a brand ambassador. It is widely assumed that her/ his demeanor, professionalism, and relatability reflect the culture and values of the hospital at which she/ he is employed. When Instagram viewers form positive impressions of the featured employee, such as finding her/ him competent, approachable, or inspiring, these impressions can be generalized to the hospital, fostering an image of a supportive and attractive workplace. Contrary, a poorly presented or unengaging doctor might lead to negative attributions about the hospital, such as a lack of alignment with viewer expectations. This transfer of perception underscores the importance of strategically selecting physicians to authentically represent the hospital's ethos in social media content.

H3: The perception of the physician in an Instagram recruiting video is deputed to the image of the represented hospital.

The perceived attractiveness of a doctor can disproportionately influence the overall evaluation of their professional competence, a phenomenon explained by the halo effect, where one positive trait overshadows others (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Rougier & Houwer, 2023).

H4: The perceived attractiveness of the doctor in the Instagram recruiting video has a positive effect on her/ his overall evaluation.

2.3.2 Message

The second step comprises the composition of an effective message for the Instagram video. Based on the SMCR model subordinate aspects can be classified into visual-, e.g. person, or background, auditory-, e.g. voice, or verbal message, and structural-, e.g. length, components. There is extensive research on how the framing of a given verbal message manipulates its effectiveness (Kahneman, 2011). For example, a negative frame, e.g. "Women, who don't perform BSE have a decreased chance of finding a tumor in the early disease-stages", can be more effective than a positive frame of the same message, e.g. "Women, who do perform BSE have an increased chance of finding a tumor in the early disease-stages" (Meyerowitz & Chaiken, 1987; Levin, Schneider, and Gaeth, 1998). However, this goal framing has been primarily tested with visual stimuli in the form of texts, not audiovisual ones, as videos. Research suggests that text messages may lead to a deeper processing of a message by the receiver (Craik & Lockhart, 1972).

H5: Established framing effects also apply to recruiting video messages.

H6: Due to diverse processing depth, the framing effectiveness of text messages differs from those of recruiting video messages.

Besides the verbal framing, other auditory, as well as visual, and structural aspects of a recruiting video on Instagram may impact its effectiveness. These assumptions are based on media richness theory (H2), research on depth of processing (H5, H6), and video attention span (Guo & Rubin, 2014).

H7: Visual replication of a verbal message will increase the effectiveness of the recruiting video on Instagram.

H8: The length of a recruiting video has a negative impact on its effectiveness, mediated by the attention of the Instagram viewer.

2.3.3 Frequency

Finally, the communication frequency plays a pivotal role in determining the effectiveness of recruiting videos on social media. Research indicates that repeated exposure to a message can enhance recognition, recall and its persuasiveness. The mere exposure effect exemplifies

the relationship between communication frequency and effectiveness: the repeated perception of something that has been initially assessed as neutral results in a more positive assessment. However, when the initial assessment has been negative the repeated perception will strengthen this aversion (Zajonc, 1968). Furthermore, research substantiates that these effects also occur with subliminal perception (Kahneman, 2011). In the context of the present study, this subliminal perception may apply to a rather passive, second-screen consumption of the Instagram video.

H9: A recruiting video on Instagram is more effective when the message is delivered iteratively, rather than a singular video contact.

H10: The effect of H9 is more pronounced, when the physician in the video stays the same, compared to multiple video contacts featuring different doctors.

3. Method

The pursued study employs a multi-phase survey-based experimental design to investigate how various factors influence the perception and evaluation of recruiting videos for a physician position at the Greifswald University Hospital (UMG). Medicine students from the UMG serve as the participant pool, ensuring relevance to the healthcare recruitment context. Participants complete surveys after each video, evaluating dimensions such as perceived similarity, resemblance of sex and professional experience, image, and attractiveness of the featured physician. In the first phase, participants are exposed to videos featuring an actor portraying a doctor, followed by a second phase with videos showcasing real physicians, with possible recognition effects. In a final phase, the study settings will be expanded to include other healthcare professions. Among others, the manipulated variables include the gender of the depicted doctor, perceived age and work experience, the framing of the video, and differing levels of engagement metrics, as postulated in the hypothesis.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study offer initial theoretical insights into the effectiveness of recruiting videos on Instagram for attracting doctors to hospital positions. However, the research represents only a preliminary step in understanding the complex interplay of factors influencing recruitment via social media. Future studies should explore additional manipulative effects,

such as the authenticity of the depicted physician and the alignment between her/ his presentation and the hospital's values, which are likely to play critical roles in shaping perceptions. Moreover, the potential for distractions inherent to Instagram's dynamic platform underscores the need for controlled laboratory settings in future research to isolate variables and better understand viewer attention and engagement.

Further investigation into cognitive biases, such as authority bias and the halo effect, should also be considered, e.g. featuring highly respected medical professionals might capitalize on authority bias, while emphasizing attractiveness or professionalism could evoke the halo effect. These biases could improve the effectiveness of recruiting strategies.

These considerations represent only a fraction of possibilities for future research, highlighting the need for further examinations to optimize digital recruitment strategies in healthcare.

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