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Studying Healthcare from a Marketing Perspective

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Studying Healthcare from a Marketing Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Healthcare is becoming an increasingly complex issue and requires more active decision-making from consumers. This monograph outlines a research agenda for studying healthcare issues from a marketing perspective. Marketing scholars and practitioners alike have a unique perspective to help address healthcare challenges, and this monograph provides broad guidance for applying insights ranging from the individual level to the societal level. First, the authors briefly explain several key theories in psychology, economics, and behavioral economics that can be applied to the healthcare landscape. Next, several topics related to changing consumer behaviors related to their own health and help guide practitioners toward healthier relationships with their patients are examined. Emergent topics in healthcare are also considered from an organizational and societal level. Finally, the monograph concludes with guidance for future research

*Authorship is alphabetical.

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and a summary of extant marketing research in the health-care domain. As a companion piece to *A Chronology of Health Care Marketing Research* (Iacobucci, 2019), the goal of this monograph is to help bridge the gap between marketing and healthcare research and practice and to provide a forward-looking, marketing-based perspective to healthcare challenges.

1

Introduction

Health care is an exciting, vibrant arena to study and to understand where changes may be beneficial for individuals and society as a whole. Numerous industries play a direct or supporting role in healthcare. Consumers and organizations have roles in enhancing or diminishing the health status of people worldwide. Healthcare in the U.S. has many strengths, including the long-standing tradition of excellent training of healthcare providers, as well as innovation in treatments, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices. Yet it does not seem a stretch to state that other aspects of health care in the U.S. and globally could stand improvement, and questions arise as to how to do so.¹

We know that marketers can effectively persuade people to engage in various behaviors—it’s what we do. Some behaviors have a positive orientation toward doing something, such as an advertisement or price discount that encourages consumers to buy a featured product. Marketers have also effectively urged consumers to decrease negative behaviors, such as the advertising campaigns since the mid-1960s discouraging smoking, resulting in a significant decline in smoking since the

¹We use “healthcare” as one word to refer to industries or when the term is used as an adjective, and “health care” as two words when referring directly to a consumer-patient receiving care about their health.

1980s. More recent campaigns that discourage certain behaviors remind consumers “Don’t drink and drive” or “Don’t text and drive.” Marketing can be effective in modifying people’s attitudes and behaviors.

We also know that healthcare is becoming more consumer-driven (Hagel and Brown, 2015), thus marketers have a unique opportunity to play an increasingly helpful role in improving the healthcare status and outcomes for people worldwide. In part, due to the fact that consumer-patients² are paying a greater share of their healthcare bills, they may wish to have more input in the available choices. Consumers must select among insurance payers, whether through employer or federal support, and among providers, within or beyond their network coverage. Consumers help each other through word-of-mouth by posting information, suggestions, and reviews of healthcare providing actors, institutions, and products. Some players in the healthcare space may believe the trend toward consumer-driven healthcare is an unfortunate direction. Nevertheless, it indicates that marketers are ideally poised to be effective in enhancing outcomes for both consumer-patients, for better health, as well as healthcare providing organizations, for better financial viability.

Marketing researchers have studied many aspects of healthcare, which we will acknowledge and cite, drawing from the previous healthcare marketing *Foundations and Trends in Marketing* monograph that summarized and organized over 1,000 articles comprising the extant marketing literature on healthcare topics (Iacobucci, 2019). In contrast, the current monograph is more forward-looking, reflecting on issues where marketers could have even more impact, and encouraging marketers in their potential roles in further improving health care.

This monograph is intended to be practical and useful, and with all suggestions and recommendations deriving from solid theory. We intend these topics to be useful for healthcare administrators, providers,

²We use the terms consumers, patients, and consumer-patients interchangeably throughout this presentation. Sometimes the context is more about business, hence the term “consumer” fits better, whereas sometimes the context is more explicitly about health care recipients, hence the term “patient” fits better. Occasionally, the term “consumer-patient” is used to convey the context being one for health care provision (patient) purchased by an actor (consumer).

marketers, and other practitioners in this industry, along with academics who are interested in contributing to healthcare research. To achieve these goals, we begin in Section 2 with a brief description of several relevant and applicable theoretical perspectives. These conceptual frameworks have been applied to many kinds of human behavior, and we will implement them as relevant to healthcare decision-making and consumer behavior. In the sections that follow, we then draw from these concepts because they provide validated grounding in offering suggestions that certain marketing actions should be effective in modifying healthcare behaviors and improving healthcare outcomes. Readers familiar with the theories can proceed directly to Sections 3–6 if they wish, to view the variety of solutions proposed, knowing they are built upon solid theoretical foundations.

Sections 3–6 are organized according to the level of the healthcare phenomena, as depicted in Figure 1.1. In Section 3, we discuss healthcare issues for *individual* consumers, such as their lifestyle choices and how marketers can help shape more beneficial decision-making. In Section 4, we discuss *dyadic* healthcare phenomena, involving the consumers (i.e., patients) together with another actor such as their healthcare provider or other system entities such as their insurance company and payers. In Section 5, we turn to the numerous *organizations* representing the many industries that converge on health care provision and support. In Section 6, we draw back even further for a *societal* perspective regarding health care and welfare more generally. (We certainly acknowledge that many healthcare issues transcend multiple levels, but we inserted the various healthcare issues into the section whose level seemed the most relevant fit.) Section 7 offers conclusions, and the monograph closes with an appendix that presents a brief summary of the marketing research literature on health care.

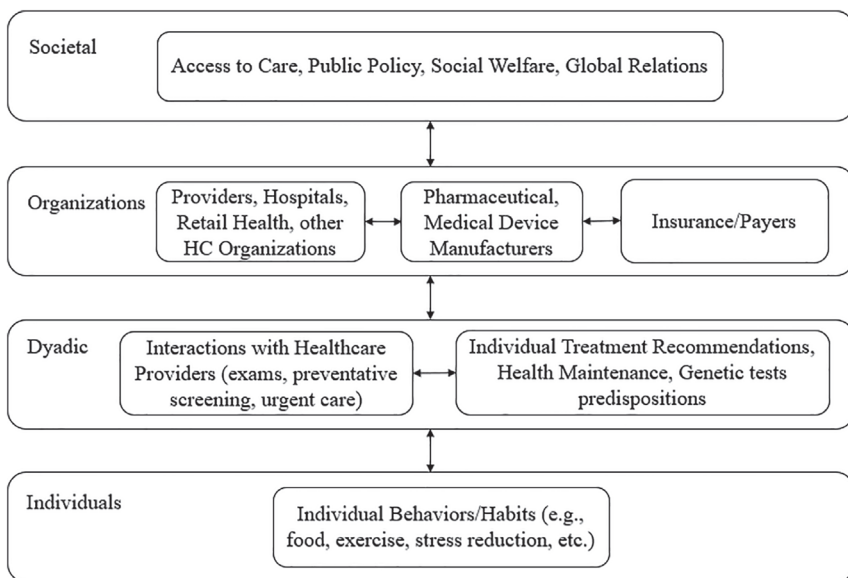


Figure 1.1: Levels of healthcare phenomena prime for marketing scholarship.

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