

The Healthcare Sector: It's Not Like Other Services

Healthcare costs in the United States represent a significant proportion of consumer as well as aggregate spending (i.e., GDP). Yet, there is relatively little research that in marketing considers decision making and inferences about service in actual healthcare contexts. We propose that aspects of the decision-making process and subsequent choices in the healthcare sector make it fundamentally different than other consumer services, rendering our existing frameworks inadequate to address healthcare decisions.

Our group—which consists of behavioral researchers from marketing and social psychology as well as behavioral operations management and patient-facing and research-based physicians—will explore the process of choosing physicians, the relationship that unfolds once a provider is chosen, and other unique contexts surrounding this process. Patients are now actively encouraged to choose their healthcare provider as demand-driven healthcare is expected to create competition between providers. We plan to explore key areas where our existing frameworks in marketing are underspecified—including assumptions of transparency in relation to attributes relevant to the decision (e.g., pricing, wait times, etc.), the nature of emotions in the decision making process (e.g., worry, confusion, or even feeling stigmatized from having certain conditions), and the role of demographics (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity) in the choice process.

The goal of our session is to discuss and outline these and other factors to capture where traditional models fail to accommodate the complexity of decision making in this context, and to outline directions for future research based on potential solutions aimed to help consumers to navigate the complexity in healthcare decision making.

Track co-chairs:

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