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Determining Patient Satisfaction and Well-being in Dental Healthcare: Expanding Theoretical Models through Grounded-Theory Methods

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Understanding dental patient satisfaction and ultimately well-being is important for dental service providers to craft the best type of service experience. This is important not only for the providers' benefit of having long-term satisfied customers but also for facilitating the most beneficial type of care for the patient's well-being. It's previously been found that patient dissatisfaction leads to patients changing dental practices (Newsome & Wright, 1999) and 46% of dentists surveyed believed they lost patients from their practices because they were dissatisfied (O'Shea, Corah, & Ayer, 1986). There has been a great deal of research in understanding customer satisfaction within the marketing literature (Bagozzi et al., 1992; Cronin et al., 2000; Fornell et al., 1996, Parasuraman et al., 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1993) as well as work in patient satisfaction within the healthcare context (Butler et al., 1996; Naidu, 2009; Linder-Pelz, 1982; Tucker & Adams, 2001; Ware et al., 1978). It is important to examine satisfaction within healthcare separately as medical care is a credence type of good (Butler et al. 1996) and there are different types of ways individuals evaluate satisfaction based on the complexities of the service.

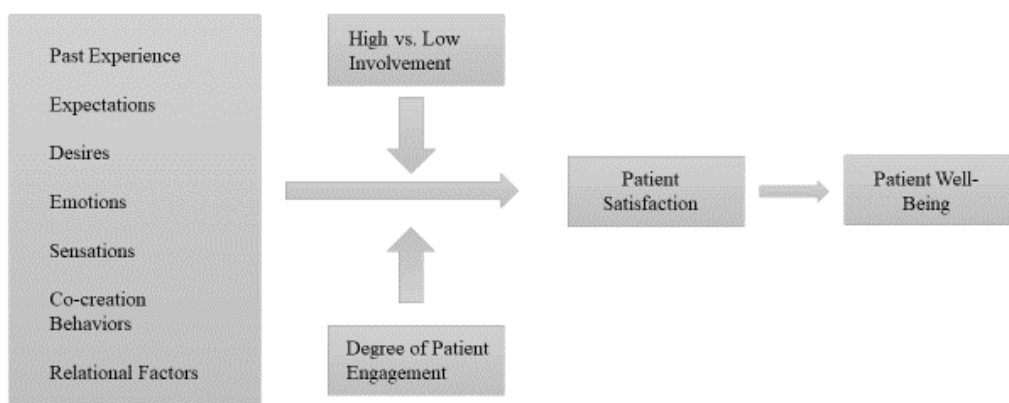
More specifically, it is imperative to evaluate satisfaction within dental services as this is an even more unique context than overarching medical care. Dental services are a specialized type of care that not everyone has access to due to various insurance coverage and costs, despite research findings that show that solid dental health is linked to overall healthfulness such as decreased heart disease (DeStefano et al., 1993). Additionally, patients have varied responses to receiving dental care from enjoyment to downright debilitating fear. Dental care is also more time-consuming with more high-touch interactions than other healthcare services (Chang & Chang, 2013). Thus, satisfaction in this context should be examined separately. While there is research within the dental and healthcare journals on dental patient satisfaction, none have examined this from a marketing point of view. We examine patient satisfaction and well-being in dental healthcare by using both grounded theory and deductive methods (also called "abductive" Saldana, 2016) and build off of extant models of customer satisfaction from the marketing literature.

We conducted a review of the literature on customer and patient satisfaction as well as a qualitative study, which consists of one 16-person focus group and 9 in-depth interviews concerning patients' experiences, feelings, thoughts, and overall satisfaction with dental healthcare. We find that patient satisfaction and well-being outcomes in dental healthcare are impacted by the following: experience, expectations, desires, emotions, sensations, co-creation behaviors, relational factors, level of involvement, and patient-level of engagement.

THEORETICAL MODEL

The below theoretical model is offered based on an iterative analysis of the literature and the qualitative findings. We found that well-being is impacted by satisfaction, which is impacted by the following antecedents: past experiences, expectations, desires, emotions, sensations, co-creation behaviors, relational behaviors, which then may be moderated by the level of involvement and patient engagement.

Figure 1
Theoretical Model
Patient Satisfaction and Well-being in Dental Healthcare



DISCUSSION

Through a mix of grounded theory and deductive methods (called abductive qualitative research by Saldana 2016), we developed a theoretical model of dental patient satisfaction and well-being as influenced by antecedents and moderators. A patient's experience with dental care will impact their current satisfaction and well-being – if in the past they had a difficult time with dental care they will bring those emotions and thoughts in with them to their current provider. Additionally, their expectations and desires will also impact their satisfaction, which is consistent with the expectancy-disconfirmation models of satisfaction (Bagozzi et al., 1992; Cronin et al., 2000; Fornell et al., 1996; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1993). Emotions and sensations will further play a role – highly anxious patients may be less satisfied through the entire

experience and may end up being less satisfied overall if their anxiety levels are not managed. However, some participants reported feelings of relief post-dental service after feeling anxious and these same individuals also reported that they were ultimately more highly satisfied. Thus, it's not just the emotion but the emotional journey of the dental service.

Keywords: *Dental healthcare, Patient satisfaction, Patient well-being, Grounded theory, Qualitative research, Healthcare services*

References are available upon request

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Kristina Harrison is a Professor of Marketing at the School of Marketing at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, MS. Her doctorate in Marketing is from Old Dominion University (2019). Dr. Harrison has published at numerous conferences as well as in a handful of journals including *Journal of Business Research* and the *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*. Her research interests include Cross-Cultural Consumer Behavior, Public Policy related to consumer well-being, Sales ethics, and Corporate Social Responsibility.