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# INFORMATION SOURCES AND RECOMMENDATION CHANNELS INFLUENCING PATIENTS' CHOICES OF WOMEN'S PHYSIOTHERAPY CLINICS: A CASE STUDY OF THE OSTEOKOBIETA CLINIC

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## Abstract

**Background and Objectives:** When choosing a healthcare provider, female patients rely on a variety of information sources and recommendation channels. With ongoing digitalisation, online reviews and educational content on social media are becoming increasingly important. This study aimed to analyse sources of information about the private *Osteo Kobieta* clinic in Gdynia, and identify factors influencing patients' choices of women's physiotherapy services.

**Study Design and Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted from January to June 2025 during the registration of the patients' first visit. A paper-based survey was completed by 550 women aged 23–70 years. The questionnaire addressed information sources (friend recommendations, physician referrals, online reviews, social media) and assessed the perceived credibility of each channel using a five-point Likert scale.

**Results:** The most common information source was recommendations from friends (49%), followed by gynaecologist referrals (23%). Google Maps reviews were important (12%), especially among younger patients. Social media content played a supporting role, with over half of respondents declaring that it builds trust in the clinic. The credibility ratings were noted for physician referrals (mean rating 4.7/5) and friend recommendations (4.5/5).

**Practical Implications:** The findings highlight the need to combine relationship marketing based on personal and physician referrals with a professional digital presence. Educational content on social media enhances transparency, the credibility of services, and the authority of specialists.

**Conclusions and Summary:** The study confirms that personal and physician recommendations are key drivers of patients' decisions, while digital sources play a complementary role

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in strengthening confidence and supporting the choice of healthcare providers. The results provide a basis for further analysis of the role of social media content in healthcare marketing and its impact on patients' decision-making across age groups.

**Keywords:** recommendations, information sources, healthcare marketing, physiotherapy services, patient confidence, social media

**JEL Classification:** I11, M31, M37

**Type of Article:** research article, case study

## 1. Introduction

The contemporary market of health services is becoming increasingly competitive, and women, when choosing a healthcare facility, now base their decisions not only on the range of available treatments, but also on the quality of relationships, the accessibility of information, and the credibility of recommendation sources (Krzemińska, 2020). This change is especially visible in the area of services dedicated to women, where physiotherapy is gaining importance in prevention and treatment, and in improving the quality of life of patients. Growing health awareness among women, as well as greater openness to specialised forms of therapy, means that the choice of a particular facility has become a multi-dimensional decision – encompassing both medical and reputational aspects. Healthcare services marketing increasingly emphasises the importance of patient trust and loyalty. While in the traditional model the main source of recommendations was the opinion of a specialist physician or someone from one's close circle, nowadays, online reviews and educational content published by facilities on social media are playing an ever larger role. Studies indicate that ratings published on platforms such as Google Maps or Facebook are important factors influencing consumer decisions, including in the health sector (Chen et al., 2021; Tse et al., 2024). Patients treat such factors as a supplement to expert knowledge and personal experiences of friends, creating a complex system of information sources in which relational elements coexist with digital ones. A specific characteristic of the medical sector is that decisions about choosing a provider involve a high level of risk and uncertainty. Therefore, recommendations – both direct (from friends, physicians) and indirect (online reviews) – become a critical determinant of trust. Trust in healthcare services, defined as the belief in the provider's competence and reliability, plays a fundamental role because it conditions not only the decision to undertake treatment at a given facility, but also the continuation of care and adherence to therapeutic recommendations (Ferreira et al., 2023; Han et al., 2021).

The digital context is conducive to the development of modern forms of communication with patients. Medical profiles on social media serve educational, informational, and image-building functions. An example is the Osteo Kobieta clinic in

Gdynia – a specialised facility offering physiotherapy for women, whose mission is a holistic approach to patients' health. In addition to direct services, the clinic actively builds its presence in the digital space by publishing educational content on, for example, urogynaecological physiotherapy, birth preparation, postpartum rehabilitation, and women's health at various life stages. In this way, it responds to the needs of patients who seek reliable information and confirmation of service quality even before the first visit. Previous studies in the area of healthcare marketing emphasise that a clinic's online image, other patients' testimonials, and gynaecologists' recommendations are factors that significantly strengthen trust and influence consumer decisions (Pawelec, 2022; Smarżewska, 2020). However, relatively few empirical analyses focus on women's physiotherapy services, which are developing dynamically in Poland and, at the same time, require special communication sensitivity and personalisation. The Osteo Kobieta clinic provides an interesting case study that allows an examination of which information sources patients consider most important, how their level of trust in various communication channels is shaped, and which factors ultimately translate into the decision to choose the facility.

The aim of this article is to analyse the information sources about the Osteo Kobieta clinic and to identify the determinants of building patient trust in women's physiotherapy services. The study addresses three questions: (1) which information channels are dominant, (2) whether there are age differences in the use of digital channels, and (3) what role personal recommendations and educational content play in the decision-making process. The article contributes to the discussion on the importance of relationship marketing and digital communication in the health sector, while simultaneously providing practical guidance for managers of medical facilities.

## 2. Literature Review

Research on healthcare services marketing shows that patient trust is a key factor in the choice of a medical facility and the subsequent cooperation with staff (Ferreira et al., 2023). Opinions and recommendations play a special role here – both in traditional form (referrals from friends and physicians) and digital form (reviews on online platforms). The development of information technology has made online reviews a significant source of knowledge for patients seeking confirmation of service quality (Han et al., 2021; Saifee et al., 2020). Fang et al. (2022) found that both technical and functional aspects of online service quality influence patients' choices of a physician, and that this effect is moderated by the intensity of market competition. Prior findings suggest that online evaluations – both positive and negative – can significantly shape patient preferences and ultimately influence which healthcare provider patients decide to trust (Han et al., 2024; Chen T. et al., 2022). At the same time, it has been observed that the authenticity and consistency of online opinions are often comparatively evaluated by patients against personal

recommendations (Ramasubramanian et al., 2022; Zitek et al., 2023). International studies also indicate that Google and Yelp ratings can influence perceptions of hospital quality on a macro scale, as evidenced by analyses conducted in Canada (Tse et al., 2024). In the literature on digital communication in healthcare, the importance of educational content published by medical facilities on social media is also emphasised. Such content is seen not only as a form of promotion, but above all as an element that builds credibility and trust (Chen J. et al., 2021; Qin et al., 2022). In the case of physiotherapy for women, where special sensitivity and professionalism are necessary, educational content can reinforce the decision to use a clinic's services (Chen J. et al., 2021; Qin et al., 2022). National analyses in Poland show that the development of digital technologies contributes to improving the quality of medical services (Pawełec, 2022). At the same time, the domestic healthcare market is changing rapidly, forcing providers to face increasingly challenging competition (Smarżewska, 2020; Krzemińska, 2020). Experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that medical facilities had to adapt service quality to remote conditions (Gierszewska et al., 2021). Analyses suggest that maintaining high satisfaction with teleconsultations requires efficient communication and proper service organisation (Walczak et al., 2022), which also translates into trust in new, remote forms of patient contact. Studies have also shown that satisfaction with teleconsultations depends on a number of factors, including patient preferences and their experiences with digital forms of care (Chmielewska et al., 2023; Lu et al., 2021). Internationally, it has been noted that levels of patient satisfaction and related trust vary depending on the cultural and organisational context, as highlighted for example by Sebera et al. (2024). Overall, the literature indicates that trust in the health sector is built on a complex combination of traditional and digital factors, whose importance may change depending on the local context and the global situation.

### 3. Research Methodology

The aim of the study was to identify the information sources from which patients learn about the Osteo Kobieta clinic and to evaluate the factors influencing patients' choices and decisions to use the physiotherapy services, with particular emphasis on the role of personal recommendations and digital channels. The study was cross-sectional in design and was conducted during the registration of first visits at the clinic. Data were collected from January to June 2025 on-site, under natural conditions.

The analysis included 550 female patients aged 23–70 years. Three age groups were defined:

- G1: 23–35 years (n = 210; 38.2%)
- G2: 36–46 years (n = 185; 33.6%)
- G3: 47–70 years (n = 155; 28.2%)

A convenience sampling method was used, encompassing all new patients whose first visit was registered during the study period. Questionnaires with missing data on information sources were excluded from the analysis. The questionnaire contained single-choice questions and items assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, concerning: sources of information about the clinic, the level of trust in various communication channels, and the role of educational content published by the facility on social media. For example, patients were asked: "Where did you get information about Osteo Kobieta – a physiotherapy clinic for women in Gdynia?" (available options: recommendation from a friend, recommendation from a gynaecologist, Google Maps reviews, posts/reels on Facebook, posts/reels on Instagram, information from another physiotherapist, other). Basic demographic data were also collected (age in years).

Descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations were employed. To examine the relationship between a patient's age and their choice of information channel, Pearson's  $\chi^2$  test was used. The threshold of statistical significance was set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

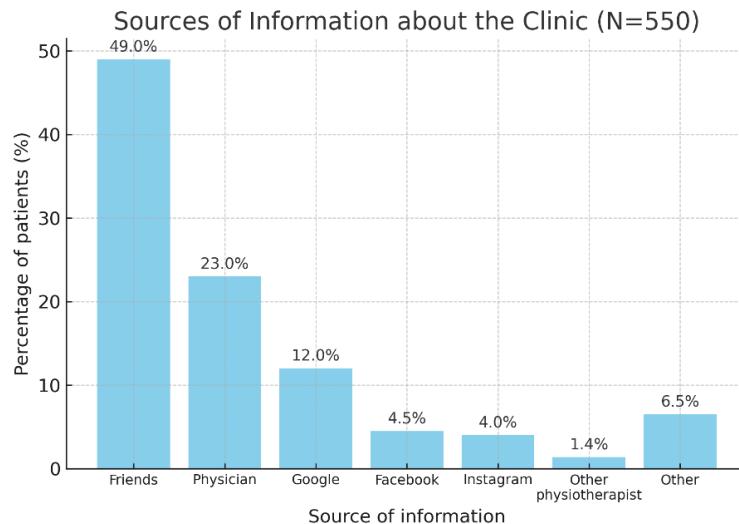
## 4. Results

The most commonly indicated source of information was a recommendation from a friend (49%), followed by a gynaecologist's referral (23%) and Google Maps reviews (12%). Content on social media (Facebook, Instagram) played a smaller role (a total of 8.5%). Table 1 presents the full distribution of responses. Percentages are rounded.

**Table 1.** Sources of information about the Osteo Kobieta clinic (N = 550)

Source of information	Percentage of responses (%)	Count (n)
Recommendation from a friend	49.0%	270
Recommendation from a gynaecologist	23.0%	127
Google Maps reviews	12.0%	66
Facebook posts and reels	4.5%	25
Instagram posts and reels	4.0%	22
Information from a physiotherapist (other clinic)	1.0%	8
Other	6.5%	32

Source: own elaboration.



**Figure 1.** Chart showing the distribution of information sources about the Osteo Kobieta clinic

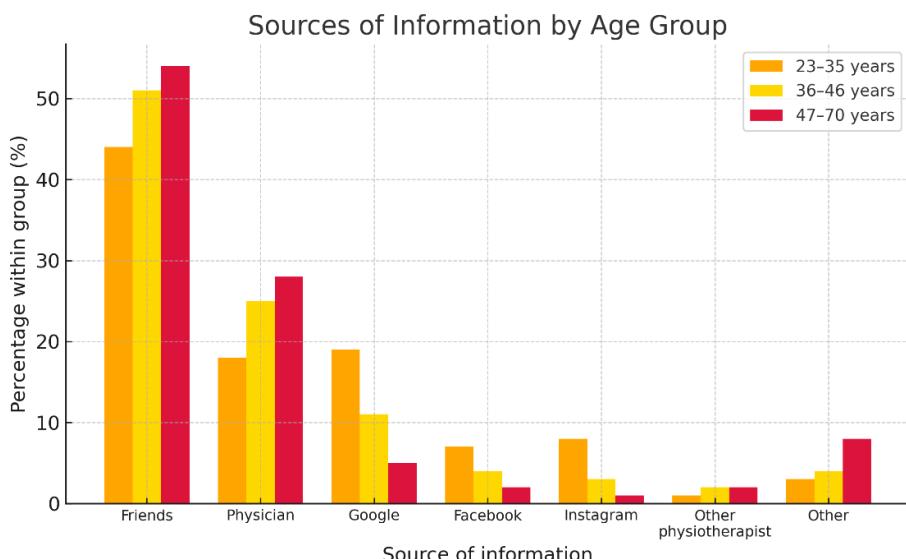
*Source:* own elaboration.

Younger patients more often utilised digital channels (searching for information via Google, social media), whereas older patients relied more on personal and physician recommendations. The presence of differences was confirmed by the  $\chi^2$  analysis ( $p < 0.05$ ). Table 2 shows the share of each information source divided by age group.

**Table 2.** Sources of information about the Osteo Kobieta clinic by age group (percentage within the group)

Source of information	Age group 23–35 years	Age group 36–46 years	Age group 47–70 years
Recommendation from a friend	44%	51%	54%
Recommendation from a gynaecologist	18%	25%	28%
Google Maps reviews	19%	11%	5%
Posts/reels on Facebook	7%	4%	2%
Posts/reels on Instagram	8%	3%	1%
Information from another physiotherapist	1%	2%	2%
Other sources	3%	4%	8%

*Source:* own elaboration.



**Figure 2.** Comparison of information sources across patient age groups (percentage share within age groups)

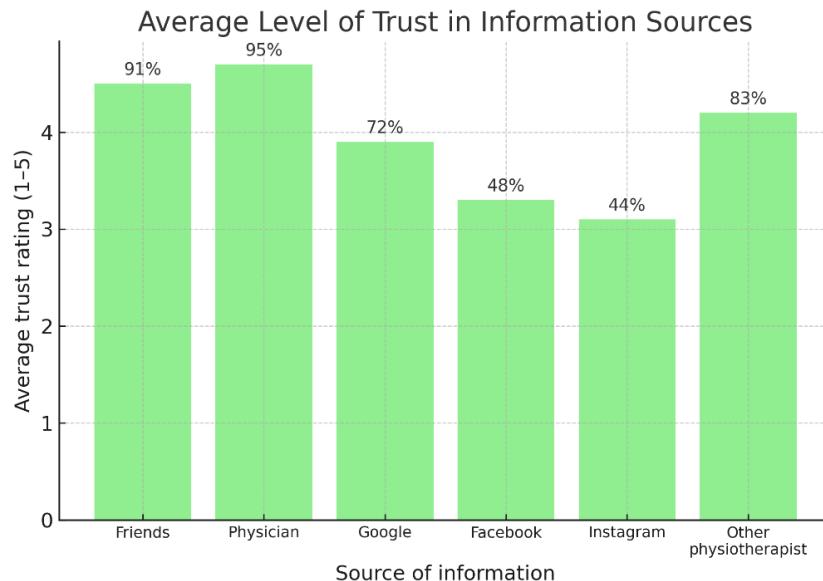
Source: own elaboration.

The highest trust was enjoyed by referrals from gynaecologists (mean rating 4.7/5) and friend recommendations (4.5/5). Google Maps reviews received an average of 3.9, whereas social media content (Facebook, Instagram) scored 3.3 and 3.1, respectively. Table 3 presents the average trust ratings for each communication channel along with medians and the percentage of patients declaring trust (responses “rather trust” or “definitely trust”).

**Table 3.** Level of patients’ trust in specific information sources about the clinic (scale 1–5)

Communication channel	Mean rating	Median	Percentage of “I trust” responses (%)
Recommendation from a friend	4.5	5	91%
Recommendation from a gynaecologist	4.7	5	95%
Google Maps reviews	3.9	4	72%
Facebook posts and reels	3.3	3	48%
Instagram posts and reels	3.1	3	44%
Information from another physiotherapist	4.2	4	83%

Source: own elaboration.



**Figure 3.** Average level of patients' trust in selected information sources. The percentages above the bars indicate the proportion of patients declaring trust ("rather trust" or "definitely trust" in the given source)

Source: own elaboration.

Over half of the patients (approximately 55%) indicated that educational and informational content published by the clinic on social media (posts, articles, video reels) builds their trust and positively influences their decision to choose the clinic's services.

## 5. Discussion

The study results confirm that in the case of the Osteo Kobieta clinic, personal and physician recommendations play a crucial role in the patients' decision-making process. The available literature has highlighted the particular importance of trust and authority in healthcare (Ferreira et al., 2023; Han et al., 2021). At the same time, there is a noticeable growing role of digital sources, especially among younger patients, which corresponds with global trends (Chen et al., 2021; Qin et al., 2022). The results also indicate that although social media content is not the primary source guiding decisions, it serves an important supporting function, building the clinic's image and strengthening trust. This confirms the importance of educational communication strategies in the health sector, which in the literature are described as a key element of relationship marketing (Pawełec, 2022; Smarżewska, 2020). It is worth noting that acceptance of digital forms of healthcare is continually increasing. Recent

studies show positive patient experiences with teleconsultations (Chmielewska et al., 2023) and identify factors influencing satisfaction with such remote services (Lu et al., 2021). Moreover, analyses by Gierszewska et al. (2021) and Walczak et al. (2022) indicate that effective communication and efficient organisation are of key importance in building trust in remote services. One might thus assume that building trust through digital channels will also gain importance in the realm of remote physiotherapy care. The results of this study also correspond with observations that a high level of trust in a provider translates into greater patient satisfaction and positive assessments of care quality (Ferreira et al., 2023; Sebera et al., 2024), which is consistent with research on the role of online reviews as indicators of clinical quality (Danish H. Saifee et al., 2020).

Analysing the obtained results, it is important to emphasise that the observed differences in preferred information sources are both generational and cultural in nature. Younger patients are more willing to use online reviews and social media, treating them as a quick way to verify the credibility of services, whereas older patient groups assign greater importance to personal recommendations and the authority of a physician. These tendencies are in line with international studies that point to varied patient expectations regarding service quality and communication channels (Tse et al., 2024; Ramasubramanian et al., 2022; Zitek et al., 2023). In the Polish context, the results confirm that it is extremely important for healthcare providers to compete by creating durable, trust-based relationships with patients and by conducting communication in an open and transparent manner (Krzemińska, 2020). At the same time, as noted by Sebera et al. (2024), levels of patient satisfaction and related trust also depend on social and organisational factors, indicating the need for further comparative analyses encompassing different types of facilities and cultural environments.

## 6. Conclusions

Patients obtain information about the Osteo Kobieta clinic primarily from direct recommendations – from friends and from gynaecologists. These sources enjoy the highest trust, which makes them key in building the facility's reputation. Online reviews, especially on Google Maps, play a significant albeit secondary role in attracting patients. Their influence is particularly noticeable in younger age groups, who are more active in using the internet when making decisions. Educational and informational content published by the clinic on social media is not a decisive factor in the choice of services, but it effectively supports the process of building trust. Over half of the respondents indicate that such content reassures them of the quality of care and the professionalism of the facility. In practice, the management of healthcare facilities should combine traditional relationship strategies (based on referrals and personal recommendations) with an active and professional presence in digital

media. The synergy of offline and online activities allows for building broader patient trust and strengthening loyalty, especially among younger patient groups.

A limitation of this study is its focus on a single medical facility. The results should be considered as a preliminary step towards in-depth analyses – further studies are planned in other centres, which will allow the verification of the observed trends and will contribute to the development of scientific knowledge in this still poorly described area of private medical services, namely physiotherapy for women.

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