

INTERNSHIP REPORT

Title: Increasing Patient Engagement and Footfall in Sankara Eye Foundation Units through Digital Marketing and Referral Networks

Internship Organization: Sankara Eye Foundation India

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Internship Period: 17TH MARCH – 14TH JULY

Course: MBA in Pharmaceutical Management

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1. INTRODUCTION

The healthcare sector in India faces evolving challenges in outreach and patient engagement. The Sankara Eye Foundation India (SEFI), one of the largest providers of free eye care, operates 14 hospitals across the country. Despite its scale, several SEFI units experienced a plateau in patient footfall, particularly in regions where outreach strategies had not evolved with changing consumer behaviours. The internship aimed to tackle this issue by deploying differentiated, location-specific digital and traditional marketing strategies to increase patient engagement and footfall by 20–30% over a six-month period.

2. ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Sankara Eye Foundation India (SEFI) is a not-for-profit, community-focused organization delivering world-class eye care services across India, especially targeting underserved populations. With a mission to eliminate curable blindness, SEFI performs over 630,000 free eye surgeries annually through its pan-India network of 14 hospitals.

SEFI's model blends clinical excellence with community-based outreach, organizing eye screening camps in rural and semi-urban regions and promoting health equity. The organization's "Gift of Vision" initiative reflects its commitment to accessible eye care.

- Problem statement - Several units underperform due to an underutilized digital and traditional footprint, inconsistent patient follow-up, and low brand visibility in key communities.
- Traditional outreach has also lagged; many rural and semi-urban centers have not held regular vision camps or local partnerships, limiting community awareness of SEFI services.
- Moreover, the absence of structured referral networks limits patient inflow. Notably, 74% of patients rely on online reviews when choosing healthcare providers limiting their online discoverability and new patient acquisition potential.

3. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method research design was employed to gather both qualitative and quantitative data.

a. Digital Audit

- Evaluated SEFI's online assets, including SEO, website performance, Google My Business listings, and social media presence.
- Conducted benchmarking against healthcare competitors.

b. Stakeholder Interviews

- Conducted detailed interviews with hospital administrators, doctors, marketing teams, and referral practitioners.

c. Hospital Data Analysis

- Analysed patient footfall data segmented by arrival mode: digital, referral, and walk-in.
- Used Power BI dashboards to model growth projections and performance benchmarks.

d. Pilot Campaigns

- Tested localized campaigns in select units to gather real-time feedback and optimize strategy before broader implementation.

4. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Key Outcomes

- **Digital-first units** (Bangalore, Hyderabad, Indore, Jaipur) are projected to grow footfall by **25%** with strategies like hyperlocal SEO, multilingual content, influencer partnerships, and telemedicine.
- **Traditional-outreach units** (Guntur, Varanasi, Krishnankoil, etc.) are expected to grow by **15–20%**, driven by vision camps, religious collaborations, print ads, and community referrals.

Growth Projections (Selected Units):

Unit	Current Patients	Projected Growth	Estimated Patients
Bangalore	7,913	25%	9,868
Hyderabad	1,221	25%	1,512
Guntur	4,885	20%	6,843
Varanasi	2,808	20%	8,968
Krishnankoil	2,168	15%	3,058

Key Challenges

- Underutilized digital tools (e.g., Google reviews, SEO gaps)
- No formal referral tracking system in many units
- Language barriers and lack of local-language content
- Inconsistent data capture on patient origins

5. CONCLUSION

The internship validated that a **blended outreach model** combining digital strategies in urban units with traditional campaigns in rural areas is optimal for increasing patient engagement at SEFI. By tailoring strategies to regional characteristics and behavior patterns, SEFI can sustainably boost its visibility and impact.

Recommendations:

- Institutionalize referral programs with tracking and incentives
- Expand SEO and multilingual digital campaigns
- Invest in grassroots awareness, especially in low-penetration zones
- Use data analytics to drive ongoing improvements in engagement

6. LEARNINGS DURING INTERNSHIP

- Gained deep understanding of **healthcare marketing dynamics**, including patient behaviour analysis, digital strategy execution, and grassroots outreach.
- Learned to **design and execute regional marketing strategies** using tools like Power BI, Google Business, and social media.
- Developed practical skills in **stakeholder engagement**, campaign planning, and KPI tracking.

- Understood how **local culture, language, and media preferences** shape healthcare access and trust.
- Recognized the importance of **data-driven decision-making** and real-time strategy adaptation in hospital outreach.