

MSc Consumer Marketing Thesis Assignment

Patient Activation Marketing for Medical Devices: Optimizing Consumer Journey Entry Points for Ankle-Foot Orthosis Treatment

Company Background

Rezolve Medical is a Dutch medical technology startup that has developed "Rise," an innovative ankle-foot orthosis (AFO) designed to treat drop foot conditions. Unlike traditional rigid AFOs, Rise features a flexible, lightweight (<200g), and discrete design that maintains natural ankle movement while providing necessary support. The device addresses many limitations of conventional AFOs including discomfort, stiffness, and aesthetic concerns.

Business Challenge

Rezolve Medical faces a significant market access challenge despite having a superior product. The traditional medical device sales model relies on a referral pathway: patients must first visit rehabilitation doctors or neurologists, receive a diagnosis, get referred to orthotic clinics, and then trial different AFO options. This creates a bottleneck as many potential patients with (partial) drop foot never enter this healthcare journey, either because:

1. They are unaware their condition is treatable
2. They have negative associations with traditional AFOs
3. They don't recognize their symptoms as requiring medical intervention
4. They have tried traditional AFOs previously and abandoned treatment

The hypothesis is that many patients who could benefit from Rise are never given the opportunity to discover it, limiting business growth despite product superiority.

Research Objectives

Primary Research Question: "What consumer marketing strategies can most effectively activate patients with drop foot conditions to proactively enter the medical referral pathway and seek treatment at orthotic clinics offering innovative AFO solutions?"

Secondary Research Questions:

1. What are the primary barriers preventing patients with drop foot symptoms from seeking medical intervention?
2. How do patients with drop foot conditions currently recognize, interpret, and act upon their symptoms?

3. What motivational factors and communication messages most effectively drive health-seeking behavior in this patient population?
4. What channels and touchpoints can most effectively reach and influence these patient segments before they enter traditional healthcare pathways?
5. How can marketing communications address misconceptions about AFO treatments while educating about innovative alternatives?

Target Consumer Segments

1. **Undiagnosed/Untreated Patients:** Individuals with mild to partial drop foot who have not sought medical treatment, either unaware of their condition or believing it untreatable
2. **Treatment Abandoners:** Patients who previously tried traditional AFOs but discontinued use due to negative experiences (discomfort, aesthetics, lifestyle limitations)

Research Approach

The student will have significant autonomy in designing the research methodology to best address the research questions. The approach should be primarily qualitative and focused on generating insights that can be directly translated into consumer marketing strategies.

Available Resources for Research:

- Access to anonymized customer and patient data (subject to individual consent)
- Network of medical professionals including rehabilitation doctors, neurologists, and orthotists
- Existing patients who have used Rise AFOs (with consent for interviews)
- Healthcare partners and orthotic clinics in Rezolve Medical's network
- Company insights on current market challenges and customer feedback
- Access to relevant industry reports and competitive intelligence

Research Design Considerations: The student should propose and justify their chosen methodology, considering:

- How to best understand patient behavior and decision-making processes
- Methods for exploring barriers to healthcare engagement
- Approaches to identify effective marketing activation points

- Ways to validate insights and marketing recommendations
- Techniques for ensuring findings can be translated into actionable campaigns

Research Flexibility: Students are encouraged to propose innovative research approaches that may combine traditional consumer research methods with healthcare-specific methodologies. The emphasis should be on generating deep consumer insights that inform marketing strategy rather than following a predetermined research path.

Theoretical Framework

The research should integrate relevant consumer marketing and health behavior theories, such as:

- Health Belief Model and Theory of Planned Behavior
- Consumer Journey Mapping and Experience Design
- Digital Health Marketing and Patient Engagement Models
- Social Cognitive Theory in Healthcare Settings
- Consumer Information Processing in Medical Decision-Making

Expected Deliverables

1. **Consumer Insights Report:** Comprehensive analysis of patient barriers, motivations, and current journey patterns
2. **Patient Activation Strategy:** Evidence-based framework for consumer marketing to drive healthcare engagement
3. **Campaign Recommendations:** Specific marketing tactics, messaging, and channel strategies with implementation guidance
4. **Measurement Framework:** KPIs and evaluation methods for campaign effectiveness
5. **Scalability Analysis:** Recommendations for adapting strategies to DACH, Nordic, and UK markets

Academic and Business Impact

Academic Contribution:

- Advances understanding of consumer marketing in healthcare technology adoption
- Explores patient activation as a marketing strategy in medical device markets
- Contributes to literature on consumer journey optimization in regulated industries

Business Value:

- Provides actionable insights to overcome current growth limitations
- Develops replicable marketing approach for international expansion
- Creates sustainable competitive advantage through improved market access

Data Access and Ethical Considerations

- Access to anonymized patient data and customer insights (subject to individual consent)
- Interviews with medical professionals in Rezolve Medical's partner network
- Patient interviews facilitated through medical partners (with appropriate ethical approvals)
- All research to comply with GDPR and medical research ethics requirements

Success Criteria

The thesis will be considered successful if it produces:

1. Clear, actionable insights into patient activation strategies
2. Evidence-based recommendations that can be immediately implemented
3. Scalable marketing framework applicable beyond the Dutch market
4. Measurable approach to campaign effectiveness and ROI
5. Academic rigor meeting UvA Consumer Marketing program standards

Timeline and Resources

- **Duration:** 6 months (standard MSc thesis timeline)
- **Company Support:** Regular supervision meetings, access to internal data and networks
- **Research Budget:** Modest budget available for interview incentives and research materials
- **Academic Supervision:** UvA faculty member specializing in consumer marketing or health marketing

Supervisor Requirements

Ideal academic supervisor would have expertise in:

- Consumer marketing strategy and campaign development

- Healthcare marketing or patient behavior
- Qualitative research methodologies
- Digital marketing and customer journey optimization

This thesis opportunity offers a unique chance to work on a real-world marketing challenge with immediate business impact while contributing to academic knowledge in an underexplored area of consumer marketing.