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Original Article

### Impact of Digital Communication in Enhancing Patient Satisfaction in Public Hospitals in Kenya: A Systematic Literature Review

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Digital communication technologies are transforming healthcare delivery in low-resource settings. In Kenya, tools such as Short Message Service (SMS) and mobile health (mHealth) platforms are being increasingly utilised to enhance communication, patient engagement, and service delivery in public hospitals. This study examined the types of digital communication tools used in Kenya's public health system, their impact on patient satisfaction, and service outcomes. A systematic literature review that included ten studies conducted between 2017 and 2024 was undertaken. Data were analysed thematically to identify patterns in technology use, challenges, and patient-centred outcomes. SMS-based and interactive two-way messaging systems were the most common tools. They enhanced appointment adherence, treatment follow-up, and patient engagement while improving communication efficiency and satisfaction. Two-way interactions strengthened provider–patient relationships by enabling timely responses to patients' concerns. However, challenges such as poor network coverage, limited access to mobile devices, and inadequate staff training hindered full implementation. Digital communication tools, particularly SMS and mHealth platforms, have significantly improved patient satisfaction and healthcare delivery in Kenya. Addressing infrastructural and literacy barriers will be essential for sustaining equitable, efficient, and patient-centred digital healthcare systems.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Globally, there has been a significant growth in the use of technology across almost all sectors of the economy. The healthcare sector has jumped into the trend through the adoption of various technologies, including artificial intelligence, as a means to enhance efficiency and services (Al Kuwaiti *et al.*, 2023). The adoption and integration of technology in these various sectors of the economy comes with the promise of potential improvement, access, operational efficiency and cost reduction. Moreover, studies observe that automation has helped in streamlining various processes in the organisational context (Begert *et al.*, 2020). In the healthcare context, the adoption and integration of information technology comes with the promise of enhanced quality care, effective patient data management, improved monitoring, reduced reliance on analogue data management, and overall support for better patient care (Asif & Khan, 2024; Bingham *et al.*, 2021; Gartz & O'Rourke, 2021). These benefits of technology in healthcare have seen a significant growth in the adoption of these technologies across the world.

Global studies have lauded the use of technology in promoting wellness. Bingham *et al.* (2021) A study on telehealth technology and medication adherence has reported that the use of these technologies has enhanced the medication adherence of patients, ultimately leading to better outcomes. These assertion is further bolstered by the study by Tierney *et al.* (2023) that observed the importance of the technology in promoting continuity of care, especially among patients with diabetes and hypertension, indicating that these technologies enabled effective care and coordination of these patients, often providing them with the much-

needed care, reducing the risk of further complications and emergency room visits. Besides, studies on tele-monitoring have also confirmed that technology has been vital in monitoring patients' vital signs, especially cardiovascular symptoms such as heartbeats (Kokkonen *et al.*, 2024). These technologies allow a two-way communication between the physician and the patient, helping the physician gather important data that is invaluable in making decisions relating to treatment and care of the patient.

In the United Kingdom, the National Health Service has come up with technologies and a portal that allow patients with diabetes to get information while also following up on treatment (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 2022). These technologies have helped regions such as Greater Manchester manage chronic diseases while also enhancing the satisfaction of patients. In the African continent, the use and adoption of the technology are still in their nascent stages. The digitalisation of healthcare in the continent has mainly focused on financing, often leaving out the concept of patient satisfaction (Awosiku *et al.*, 2025). Moreover, across the continent, the healthcare sector does not seem to prioritise the adoption of technology, a phenomenon attributed to the limited resources that are often directed to the provision of care rather than infrastructural development in the regional context.

The adoption and integration of technology in the Kenyan context remains in its nascent stage. Currently, the most popular technologies include e-consultation, e-pharmacy, and telemedicine in general (Munyaka *et al.*, 2024; Odwe *et al.*, 2023). The available body of research on e-consultation in Kenya has shown there is a positive and significant correlation between the variable, indicating that e-

consultation has significantly improved service delivery in these healthcare facilities (Munyaka *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, considering the significant mobile phone penetration in the country, the country has reported a growth in mobile health (mhealth) services that use Short Messaging Services (SMS) when reaching out to the patients (Sowon *et al.*, 2022). Nonetheless, despite these advancements in technology in the healthcare context, there remain significant gaps in the literature relating to patient satisfaction with the current technology, thus calling for the need for a study to be conducted to fill in these gaps.

### Statement of Problem

Kenya has witnessed a significant growth in the use of digital technologies, thanks to the over 100% penetration of mobile technology services. These technologies have been observed in various sectors, including healthcare, where mhealth, e-consultation, telemedicine, and e-pharmacy services are widely being used and deployed. Despite these advancements, there remains limited research on the experiences of patients with these technologies, calling for the need for a study to help in understanding the role of digital communication in enhancing patient satisfaction.

### Aim and Objective

The current study shall seek to understand how the use of digital communication has enhanced patient satisfaction in Kenya.

### Research Questions

Specifically, the study will address two primary objectives:

- What types of digital communication tools are currently being used or promoted in public health systems in low-resource settings?
- How do digital communication strategies affect patient satisfaction and overall health service delivery outcomes?

## METHODS

The current study adopted a systematic literature review design to rigorously address the two research questions: What types of digital communication tools are currently being used or promoted in public health systems in low-resource settings? How do digital communication strategies affect patient satisfaction and overall health service delivery outcomes? Considering the limited peer-reviewed study on the phenomenon of interest as reported by Njoroge *et al.* (2017), the review will incorporate grey literature.

### Search Strategy

The researcher sought articles from 5 peer-reviewed journal databases: PubMed, Embase, EBSCO, MEDLINE, and Web of Science. The study used keywords from the research questions: “patient satisfaction, “digital communication, “mHealth,” and “Digital communication tools,” mobile, mobile phone, mobile telephon\*, innovation, “cell phone, “text message, “SMS, voice call.” The key author selected these terms from previous publication including the study by Sowon *et al.* (2022) on mobile health, to ensure the completeness of the search. The researcher ran the searches on Google Scholar to capture all the relevant articles.

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study developed a comprehensive set of inclusion and exclusion criteria. The materials that were eligible for inclusion included journal articles, conference proceedings, and publications by government and international organisations. The researcher ensured that all the articles had full texts available. All the studies and resources had to be in English or Swahili, as these languages were understood by the researchers. Moreover, the study had no year limitation as the subject matter was relatively new in the country.

### Screening Process

Based on the search strategy, the study was able to identify 500 citations from both reviewed and non-

peer-reviewed sources. Following a full review, the researcher included 10 studies that featured the aspects of patient satisfaction in the healthcare context.

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Author	Title	Technology Name	Outcomes
Wachira & Kandiri (2024)	Enhancing Service Delivery in the Public Sector by Leveraging Digital Transformation: A Case of Kiambu Level Five Hospital	SMS and Email	The adoption of technology-enhanced communication and customer satisfaction has resulted in greater patient retention in the healthcare facility
Harrington <i>et al.</i> (2019)	An mHealth SMS Intervention on Postpartum Contraceptive Use Among Women and Couples in Kenya: A Randomised Controlled Trial	mHealth, SMS	Improved uptake of contraception among women and couples. Two-way communication between the nurse and patient resulted in greater patient satisfaction.
Jones <i>et al.</i> (2020)	A Short Message Service (SMS) increases postpartum care-seeking behaviour and uptake of family planning of mothers in peri-urban public facilities in Kenya.	SMS	Reduced the risk of mortality, improved patient care-seeking, and overall satisfaction among mothers in peri-urban facilities
Luseka (2018) (Grey)	An Evaluation of Toto-health Mobile Phone Platform on Maternal and Child Health Care in Kenya	Toto-Health Mobile	Patients were unsatisfied with the inconsistency of the platform.
van der Kop <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Effect of an interactive text-messaging service on patient retention during the first year of HIV care in Kenya (WelTel Retain): an open-label, randomised parallel-group study	Weltel	Improved patient satisfaction and retention in HIV treatment in Kenya
Kinuthia <i>et al.</i> (2021)	SMS messaging to improve retention and viral suppression in prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission (PMTCT) programs in Kenya: A 3-arm randomised clinical trial	Interactive SMS	2-way nurse interactions were responsive and made the patients more satisfied, as their issues and concerns were addressed in the clinical setting
Fairbanks <i>et al.</i> (2018)	You Will Know That Despite Being HIV Positive You Are Not Alone: Qualitative Study to Inform Content of a Text Messaging Intervention to Improve Prevention of Mother-to-Child HIV Transmission	SMS	Text messages and messages of encouragement improved the provider-patient relationship while also improving the satisfaction of the patients with the care offered.
Gibson <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Mobile phone-delivered reminders and incentives to improve childhood	SMS + incentives	The use of mobile phone-delivered reminders and

Author	Title	Technology Name	Outcomes
	immunisation coverage and timeliness in Kenya (M-SIMU): a cluster randomised controlled trial		incentives improved the rates of immunisation and the overall satisfaction of the parents and caregivers.
Asiki <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Effectiveness of mobile phone text messages sent as reminders for self-monitoring of blood pressures and blood glucose at home among low-income patients in Kenya: an open-label randomised controlled trial	SMS	Use of the messages increased adherence and patient satisfaction.
Chuchu <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Effect of Phone Text Message Reminders on Compliance with Rabies Post-Exposure Prophylaxis following Dog Bites in Rural Kenya	SMS	The use of SMS increased the compliance with rabies post-exposure prophylaxis and enhanced the patient satisfaction in the rural setting.
Pintye <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Two-Way Short Message Service (SMS) Communication May Increase Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis Continuation and Adherence Among Pregnant and Postpartum Women in Kenya	Two-way messaging service	Two way-sms and messaging services improved patient satisfaction and continuation with the PREP treatments.

## DISCUSSION

### Types of Digital Communication Tools Used in Low-Resource Public Health Systems

Across the studies, the Short Message Service (SMS) platform emerged as the most widely used digital communication tool. Its affordability, simplicity, and broad accessibility make it particularly suitable for low-resource and rural health settings. For example, Jones *et al.* (2020) and Harrington *et al.* (2019) found that SMS reminders and two-way communication improved postpartum care-seeking behaviour and contraceptive uptake among women and couples in Kenya. Similarly, Fairbanks *et al.* (2018) showed that encouraging SMS messages strengthened the patient-provider relationship, improving trust and satisfaction among HIV-positive mothers.

Beyond one-way communication, interactive or two-way messaging systems are even more effective. In the WelTel Retain study by van der Kop *et al.* (2018) and the trial by Kinuthia *et al.*

(2021), two-way SMS communication significantly improved retention in HIV care, as patients were able to communicate their challenges directly to healthcare providers and receive timely responses. Pintye *et al.* (2020) also found that two-way SMS interventions enhanced adherence to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) among pregnant and postpartum women by providing consistent, personalised support.

Other digital tools include mHealth platforms and hybrid systems that combine multiple communication channels. Luseka (2018) evaluated the Toto-Health Mobile platform, designed to improve maternal and child health outcomes through text-based reminders and guidance, though the platform suffered from inconsistencies that reduced patient satisfaction. Gibson *et al.* (2017) tested the M-SIMU system, which integrated SMS reminders with incentives, resulting in increased immunisation coverage and timeliness. Meanwhile, Wachira & Kanduri (2024) demonstrated that combining SMS and email in Kiambu Level Five



Hospital streamlined communication, improved customer satisfaction, and enhanced patient retention. Together, these findings indicate that mobile phone-based digital tools, particularly SMS and mHealth systems, have become central to public health communication strategies in Kenya's public hospitals.

### **Impact of Digital Communication Strategies on Patient Satisfaction and Health Service Delivery Outcomes**

The reviewed studies strongly suggest that digital communication strategies positively influence both patient satisfaction and the quality of health service delivery. Across different interventions, digital communication improved access to information, strengthened patient-provider relationships, and enhanced treatment adherence. For instance, Wachira & Kanduri (2024) observed that adopting SMS and email communication improved service delivery efficiency, leading to greater patient satisfaction and retention. Similarly, Asiki *et al.* (2023) and Chuchu *et al.* (2023) reported that SMS reminders increased adherence to blood pressure, blood glucose monitoring, and rabies post-exposure prophylaxis, respectively. Improved adherence not only benefits individual patients but also contributes to broader public health outcomes such as reduced morbidity and mortality.

Interactive digital systems have also proven to enhance patient empowerment and engagement. Two-way SMS interventions, as highlighted in Kinuthia *et al.* (2021) and Pintye *et al.* (2020), allowed patients to voice concerns, receive emotional support, and develop a stronger sense of trust in the healthcare system. This responsiveness translated into higher satisfaction levels and better retention in care programs, especially in HIV treatment and maternal health services.

From a service delivery perspective, digital communication has streamlined follow-up processes, reduced missed appointments, and improved care coordination. Gibson *et al.* (2017)

found that SMS reminders and incentives improved immunisation rates and timeliness, demonstrating the effectiveness of digital tools in improving operational efficiency. Moreover, Fairbanks *et al.* (2018) emphasised that motivational and educational messages helped reduce stigma and reinforced the continuity of care among HIV-positive mothers, thus contributing to psychosocial well-being alongside clinical outcomes. Overall, digital communication strategies have contributed to enhanced patient satisfaction, improved adherence to treatment, better health outcomes, and more efficient service delivery. These benefits underscore the potential of digital transformation as a cornerstone of equitable healthcare access and patient-centred care in low-resource settings.

### **CONCLUSION**

The findings from this study demonstrate that digital communication technologies have become a major force in enhancing patient satisfaction and improving service delivery in Kenya's public hospitals. With the rapid expansion of mobile phone access and the gradual adoption of information technology in healthcare, digital tools such as Short Message Service (SMS), interactive messaging systems, and mobile health (mHealth) platforms are transforming how patients and providers communicate, share information, and engage in care. SMS-based communication has emerged as the most widely used and effective tool for reaching patients, particularly in low-resource and rural settings. These systems have significantly improved how patients adhere to treatment, attend scheduled appointments, and engage with healthcare providers. SMS reminders and two-way communication channels have been shown to enhance care-seeking behaviours, encourage follow-up visits, and strengthen the overall patient experience. In addition to improving access to healthcare information, SMS platforms have helped overcome geographic and logistical barriers that traditionally limited service delivery in remote areas.

Interactive and two-way communication tools have been particularly powerful in building trust and improving patient engagement. By allowing patients to respond, ask questions, and express concerns, these systems foster a sense of partnership and inclusion in the care process. Patients who receive personalised and timely responses from healthcare providers are more likely to feel valued, respected, and supported. This emotional connection and open communication not only improve satisfaction levels but also contribute to better adherence to medical advice, treatment continuation, and long-term health outcomes. Beyond direct patient communication, digital tools have enhanced the efficiency and responsiveness of healthcare systems. The integration of SMS and email platforms has helped hospitals streamline communication, coordinate care, and improve operational efficiency. Automated reminders and digital follow-ups reduce waiting times, minimise missed appointments, and ensure continuity of care. In turn, these efficiencies lead to better utilisation of healthcare resources and higher levels of patient trust and loyalty.

Digital communication has also strengthened the provider–patient relationship, particularly in programs dealing with chronic illnesses and preventive care. Patients receiving consistent digital updates and motivational messages experience reduced anxiety and a stronger sense of security about their health. This demonstrates how technology, when used effectively, can extend the reach of healthcare professionals and foster a more supportive and interactive environment even outside traditional clinical settings. Overall, digital communication has become an essential pillar of patient-centred care in Kenya's public hospitals. It has improved access to information, strengthened patient engagement, and enhanced overall satisfaction with health services. By bridging the gap between providers and patients, digital tools have made healthcare more accessible, efficient, and responsive. Continued investment in digital health infrastructure and training will ensure that

these innovations deliver lasting benefits, promoting a more connected, equitable, and effective healthcare system across the country.

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