The Mediating Role of Patient Distrust in the Impact of Corporate Image on Recommendation Intention

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of corporate image on recommendation intention and the mediating role of patient distrust in relation to this effect. **Materials and Methods:** The study was conducted with 330 patients receiving healthcare services from a Training and Research Hospital in April 2017. The data was collected through face-to-face interviews with the patients. The corporate image scale, the recommendation intention scale, the patient distrust scale and an introductory information form were used as the data collection tools. Descriptive statistical methods, exploratory factor analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis and the Process Macro regression analysis for SPSS developed by Hayes were used in order to determine the mediating role and the data analysis. The analyses were made at a 95% confidence interval. **Results:** The results of the study show there to be a negative correlation between patient distrust and recommendation intention as well as corporate image while demonstrating a positive correlation between corporate image and recommendation intention. Another important result to be drawn from this study is that corporate image has a positive effect on recommendation intention and that patient distrust plays a negative role in this effect. **Conclusion:** Healthcare institutions attach importance to the recommendation intention of its patients and they need to devote efforts to improve them in order to position their corporate image in the patients' minds successfully. In the meantime, determining and minimizing the factors leading to distrust among patients is crucial.

Keywords: Healthcare Services, Patients, Trust, Intention, Marketing.

Kurumsal İmajın Tavsiye Niyeti Üzerindeki Etkisinde Hasta Güvensizliğinin Aracı Rolü

ÖZ

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı, kurumsal imajın tavsiye niyeti üzerindeki etkisini ve bu etkideki hasta güvensizliğinin aracı rolünü belirlemektir. **Gereç ve Yöntem:** Araştırma, Nisan 2017'de bir Eğitim ve Araştırma Hastanesi'nden sağlık hizmeti alan 330 hasta ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler hastalarla yüz yüze görüşülerek toplanmıştır. Veri toplama araçları olarak kurumsal imaj ölçeği, tavsiye niyeti ölçeği, hasta güvensizlik ölçeği ve tanıtıcı bilgi formu kullanılmıştır. Verilerin analizinde tanımlayıcı istatistiksel yöntemler, keşfedici faktör analizi, güvenirlik analizi, korelasyon analizi ve aracı rolü belirlemek için ise Hayes tarafından geliştirilen SPSS Process Makro regresyon analizi kullanılmıştır. Analizler %95 güven aralığında yapılmıştır. **Bulgular:** Çalışmanın bulgularına göre, kurumsal imaj ile tavsiye niyeti arasında pozitif bir korelasyon varken, hasta güvensizliği ile kurumsal imaj ve tavsiye niyeti arasında negatif bir korelasyon olduğu gözlenmektedir. Bu çalışmadan çıkarılacak bir diğer önemli bulgu ise, kurumsal imajın tavsiye niyeti üzerinde olumlu bir etkiye sahip olduğu ve bu etkide hasta güvensizliğinin olumsuz bir rol oynadığıdır. **Sonuç:** Sağlık kuruluşları, kurumsal imajlarını hastaların zihinlerinde başarılı bir şekilde konumlandırmak için hastalarının tavsiye etme niyetine önem vermeli ve bunları geliştirmeye yönelik çaba harcamalıdır. Bununla birlikte hastaların güvensizlik duymalarına sebep olan faktörler belirlenmelidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sağlık Hizmetleri, Hastalar, Güven, Niyet, Pazarlama.

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INTRODUCTION

The healthcare sector is one of the most important service industries in Turkey. With the "Transformation in Health" programme initiated in 2002, both public and private institutions have been growing consistently. There were 1156 hospitals in Turkey then and this number rose to 1538 in 2019. Similarly, the bed capacity in hospitals rose from 164,471 in 2002 to 237,504 in 2019 (tuik.gov.tr). Likewise, while the total healthcare expenditure accounted for around TL 19 billion (approx. USD 12 billion) in 2002, it reached around TL 201 billion (approx. USD 34 billion) as of 2019 (tuik.gov.tr). The increase in the number of institutions active in the sector and the development of the resources allocated to the sector have resulted in strong competition between hospitals. Therefore, creating a positive corporate image is the most important effort devoted by hospitals in a competitive context in order to obtain a competitive advantage

Creating a corporate image is possible through the proper recognition of the institution in question by its target audience with positive impressions among them (Ashraf et al., 2018). The potential preference for a certain healthcare institution by patients is significantly influenced by the development of a positive corporate image. At the same time, a positive image also affects variables such as patient satisfaction, patient loyalty, service quality and (favourable and unfavourable) behavioural intention (Rahman et al., 2018; Wu, 2011).

Behavioural intentions were divided into two sections - favourable and unfavourable - in the study conducted by Zeithaml et al (1996). Favourable behavioural intentions include purchasing the same product again, the willingness to pay more, the intention to opt for the same hospital again, recommendation intention and loyalty (Mekoth et al., 2011). Unfavourable behavioural intentions encompass complaints, negative word-of-mouth and changing the service (Uzel & Tuna, 2014). The recommendation intention, one of the favourable behavioural intentions, can be defined as the referral of a business providing a product or service by customers to their friends, relatives or other potential customers (Arlı, 2012). In other words, it can be described as the suggestions made by patients to current and potential patients concerning the service given by the healthcare institution. Thus, it is vital for healthcare institutions to improve their services, to create a positive image among patients and to convince them to spread positive word-of-mouth to potential patients.

Another crucial factor influencing the reputation and recommendation of healthcare institutions is trust. Trust consists of the expectations of the patients from healthcare systems concerning their recovery. These expectations include accurate diagnosis, the right treatment, concern for the patient's health and clear explanations (TN & Kutty, 2015). Furthermore, as trust is a relational conceçt, it is more likely for the patients to rely on the opinions of their family and friends while opting for a healthcare institution. For this reason, creating trust between the patients and healthcare

providers in the healthcare service sector might influence the recommendation of healthcare provider in the patients positively (Jorina, 2013). Contrary to this, the negative impact of the distrust among patients is also thought to harm the recommendation intention (Hu et al., 2017).

The present study examines the effect of corporate image perception among patients getting services from the public healthcare institutions on recommendation intention, as well as the mediating role played by patient distrust in the context of this effect. The following hypotheses were developed within the scope of the study.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Corporate image

Corporate image is the perception of a brand retained in the memory of the client, reflecting their general impression (Wu, 2011). As for the hospital's corporate image, it can be defined as the sum of the thoughts, beliefs and impressions of the patients regarding the healthcare institution (Bayın, 2013). This image is not absolute as it is related to the corporate image of other hospitals (Wu, 2011). Generally, hospital image is created through the personal treatment experiences of patients and their observations. Therefore, a positive hospital image is built upon the trust of the patient in the treatment and their experience of the hospital. This might foster patient behaviour such as choosing the same hospital again, recommendation intention and loyalty (Lin & Lu, 2010). According to Ayhan & Canöz (2006), the most important factor affecting hospital preference is the development of a successful positive image at a rate of 45.1%. In the same study, a hospital in question having a reputable and good image within society and employing well-known doctors is considered to be the most significant value in terms of the corporate image of the hospital. For this reason, healthcare institutions need to respond to changing patient expectations while constantly improving their service provision processes and corporate image

Recommendation intention

It is becoming increasingly crucial for hospitals and service providers that recommendation intention or word-of-mouth denotes the informal communication between the client and other individuals regarding the evaluation of a product or service (Anderson, 1998). This concept can be defined as the positive opinion of patients about the healthcare institution, healthcare services or their physician as expressed to their family members and other individuals around them as a result of their satisfaction with the service or the service provider, their loyalty and their trust (Durmuş, 2017).

In order to increase revenue and to maintain a stable patient supply, the priorities for healthcare institutions is to minimise negative rumours about themselves while encouraging positive opinions (Jorina, 2013). Furthermore, the opinions exchanged between patients can be heard by other patients and their relatives as well. This might create advantages and disadvantages so far as the corporate image among patients is concerned. It is argued that there is a positive correlation between

corporate image and recommendation intention (Lin Lu, 2010). For this reason, creating a positive corporate image is expected to play a crucial role in the intention of the patients to recommend a healthcare institution or service provider.

Patient distrust

In healthcare, trust is defined as the patient's confidence in the healthcare institutions, people employed in the healthcare service sector or the healthcare system as a whole while needing care in a vulnerable state (Van der Schee, 2016). The development of trust in healthcare services facilitates communication between the patient and the healthcare professionals. There are a plethora of studies in the academic literature concerning trust in the healthcare sector. Based on these studies, in order to strengthen relationships based on trust in healthcare (Østergaard, 2015), the service provider must use its authority to protect the patient, show empathy, provide high-quality healthcare service and maintain cooperation between the healthcare services. Patients with high trust in the healthcare system with strong trust-based relationships inform other people that they know about the positive and negative aspects of the healthcare services that they receive (Entwistle & Quick, 2006). Distrust leads to the exact opposite scenario. It is described relating to a lack of confidence, with distrust

originating from negative beliefs due to the actions made by the trustee against the common interests and to the detriment of the trustor (Rose et al., 2004). Distrust "has a negative and pervasive impact" on health-seeking behaviour (Katapodi et al., 2010). Tucker et al. (2014) claims that the distrust between patients and physicians in China has become prevalent and that patients display negative behaviour towards physicians. Furthermore, there are other studies alleging that the negative impact of the distrust among patients harms their recommendation intention (Hu et al., 2017). Based on the discussion provided above, the following hypotheses are put forward:

H_1: There is a relationship between corporate image, recommendation intention and patient distrust.

H_2: Corporate image affects recommendation intention.

H_3: Patient distrust has a mediating role in the impact of corporate image on recommendation intention.

The conceptual model shown in Figure 1 was developed within the scope of the study to determine the impact of corporate image on recommendation intention and the mediating role of patient mistrust in relation to this impact.
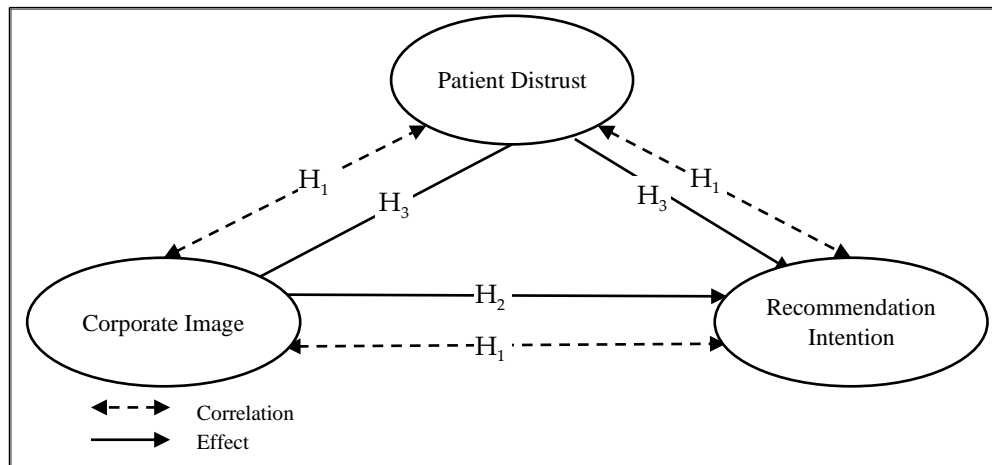

Figure 1. Research model.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Sample and data collection

The purpose of the study is to determine the effect of corporate image on recommendation intention and the mediating role of patient distrust in this effect. The study was conducted in April 2017 with 330 outpatients receiving healthcare services from Sakarya Training and Research Hospital. The data was collected through face-to-face interviews with the patients; 54.2% of the participants were female while 45.8% were male. So far as the civil status of the participants is concerned, 52.4% are single while 46.7% are married. The age average of the participants was 35.74±15.04 and 52.9% of them were between 18 and 34 years old. As for the usage frequency of the healthcare services per year, 26.7% of

the patients solicit the services of healthcare institutions 7 times or more while 11.8% of the patients solicit 5-6 times, 32.7% 3-4 times and 27.6% 1-2 times.

Measuring instruments

Corporate image scale: This scale was developed by Karaosmanoğlu (2006) and adapted to the healthcare sector by Bayın (2013). Consisting of a single dimension and 3 statements, the scale includes questions concerning the patient's impressions about the hospital, their opinion on the impressions of other people and their thoughts on the comparison of the hospital in question with other hospitals.

Recommendation Intention Scale: Developed by Zeithaml et al. (1996), the scale was adapted to the healthcare sector by Serenko (2011). The adaptation of

the scale in Turkish was made by Durmuş (2017). The scale consists of a single dimension and 3 statements on talking positively about the hospital to people soliciting the services of said hospital, recommending the hospital in question to people looking for a hospital to get healthcare services from and recommending the services of the hospital to friends and relatives needing healthcare services.

Patient Distrust Scale: This scale was developed by LaVeist et al. (2009). A validity and reliability analysis of the scale in Turkish was conducted by the researchers. The scale consists of 7 statements (e.g. when hospitals make mistakes, they generally hide their mistakes) and it evaluates the faulty and misleading actions of the hospitals.

A 5-point Likert scale was employed in the present study and the participants were asked to choose the most suitable option for them ranging from 1 to 5. An increase in the number of answers agreeing with the scales of corporate image and recommendation intention is considered to be positive while an increase in the number of answers agreeing with the patient distrust scale is considered to be negative.

Statistical analysis

Firstly, descriptive statistical methods were used for the data analysis. Correlation analysis was conducted in order to determine the internal consistency of the variables. Ultimately, Process Macro model 4 developed by Hayes was employed to determine the mediating role of patient distrust in the impact of corporate image on recommendation intention. The analyses were made at a 95% confidence interval (p=0.05).

Reliability and validity of the measures

As the validity analyses of the scales of corporate image and recommendation intention used in the study had already been conducted, they were not repeated. Only the reliability analysis was conducted within the scope of the study. Exploratory factor analysis and reliability analysis were conducted on the patient distrust scale.

Exploratory factor and Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient were used to determine the validity and reliability of the scales used. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the corporate image scale was calculated as 0.915. The value was calculated as 0.822 for the original scale developed by Karaosmanoğlu (2006) and as 0.824 for the

study by Bayın adapting it to Turkish (2013). This shows that the corporate image scale is reliable.

The Cronbach's Alpha value for the recommendation intention scale was calculated as 0.964. This value was calculated as 0.99 for the original study of the scale adapted to the healthcare sector by Serenko (2011). The adapted study by Durmuş (2017) had a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.96. This shows that the recommendation intention scale is reliable. The values calculated in the study are similar to those of the original study and to the study adapted to Turkish referring to the validity and reliability analyses.

The Cronbach's Alpha value for the patient distrust scale was calculated as 0.831. The original scale developed by LaVeist et al. (2009) had a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.76. The KMO value for the patient distrust was calculated as 0.835 and the Bartlett sphericity test was found to be significant. The total explained variance of the scale was calculated as 50.297. At the end of the factor analysis, the patient distrust scale was gathered under a single dimension as is the case in the original.

Based on the findings given above, it can be said that the scales used within the scope of the study have high reliability. According to the results of the factor analyses, the patient distrust scale is usable.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations Official authorities' permission was obtained to collect data before the survey was implemented. The approval of the Ethics Committee of Sakarya University (Document no. 67 dated 29.03.2017) was also obtained. The participants were informed of the confidentiality and anonymity of the surveys.

RESULTS

Correlation between the independent, dependent and mediating variables

Table 1 shows the relationship between corporate image, patient distrust and recommendation intention. According to the analysis, while a negative moderate correlation occurred between patient distrust and recommendation intention (r=-0.344) as well as patient distrust and corporate image (r=-0.449), there was a positive high correlation (p<0.01) between corporate image and recommendation intention (r=0.801). Based on this, hypothesis H_1 is confirmed.

Table 1. Findings on the correlations between the independent, dependent and mediating variables.

	Recommendation Intention	Patient Distrust
Recommendation Intention	1	
Patient Distrust	-0.344*	1
Corporate Image	0.801*	-0.449*

* Significant correlation at p<0.01 level

Impact of corporate image on recommendation intention and the mediating role of patient distrust in this impact

Tables 2, 3 and 4 show the results of the Process Macro Model 4. The first model showing the impact of corporate image on recommendation intention seems to be statistically significant (F=589.0632; p=0.000). In the

model, corporate image has an impact of 64% when explaining recommendation intention. Furthermore, corporate image can be seen to have a positive effect on recommendation intention (β=0.862). Therefore, it can be said that as corporate image improves, so does recommendation intention.

Table 2. The impact of corporate image on recommendation intention.

	Variables	Regression						Model Summary			
Dependent variable	**RI**	β	S.S.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	R	R²	F	p
Independent variable	**Constant**	0.238	0.118	2.013	0.045	0.005	0.471	0.80	0.64	589.0632	0.000
	CI	0.862	0.036	24.271	0.000	0.792	0.932				

CI=Corporate image, **RI**=Recommendation intention

The second model examines whether corporate image has an impact on patient distrust. Based on the analysis results, the model seems to be significant (F=82.8761; p=0.000). The model demonstrates that corporate image

has a negative impact on patient distrust (β=-0.300). The explained variance in the model (R^2) was calculated as 20%. On the basis of these findings, hypothesis H_2 is confirmed.

Table 3. The impact of corporate image on patient distrust

Dependent variable	**PD**	β	S.S.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	R	R²	F	p
Independent variable	**Constant**	4.199	0.110	38.245	0.000	3.983	4.415	0.45	0.20	82.8761	0.000
	CI	-0.300	0.033	-9.104	0.000	-0.365	-0.235				

CI=Corporate image, **PD**=Patient distrust

Table 4 shows the direct impact of corporate image on recommendation intention and the findings concerning the mediating role of patient distrust in this impact. According to the analysis results, corporate image has a strong positive direct effect on recommendation intention (β=0.872). As a mediator, patient distrust plays a slightly

negative role in this effect (β= -0.010). With reference to this, the total effect of corporate image on recommendation intention is seen to be positive (β: 0.872-0.010=0.862) (p<0.05). On the basis of these findings, hypothesis H_3 is confirmed.

Table 4. The direct effect of corporate image on recommendation intention and its indirect effect with the mediating role of patient distrust

Direct Effect			**Effect**	**S.S.**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**	**t**	**p**
CI		**RI**	0.872	0.040	0.793	0.950	21.902	0.000
Indirect Effect								
CI	**PD**	**RI**	-0.010	0.018	-0.045	0.024		
Total Effect			0.862	0.036	0.792	0.932	24.271	0.000

CI=Corporate image, **PD**=Patient distrust, **RI**=Recommendation intention.

DISCUSSION

The present study was conducted to determine the effect of corporate image on recommendation intention as well as the mediating role of patient distrust in this effect.

The results of the study show a negative correlation between patient distrust and recommendation intention as

well as corporate image while demonstrating a positive correlation between corporate image and recommendation intention. Based on this, developing corporate image will decrease patient distrust while contributing to recommendation intention. In the academic literature on the issue, Power et al. (2008)

found there to be a negative correlation between negative corporate image and trust. Lien et al. (2015) claims that brand image is an important precursor for trust. Furthermore, the study conducted by Cham et al. (2016) demonstrates there to be a correlation between hospital image and recommendation intention as well as behavioral intention. Similarly, Lin and Lu (2010) indicated in their study that there is a correlation between corporate image and recommendation intention. In various studies about the tourism sector, a positive correlation was detected between destination image and recommendation intention (Öztürk & Şahbaz, 2017). Thus, creating a positive corporate image is crucial for both developing the trust of the patient and increasing recommendation intention.

Another important result to be drawn from this study is that corporate image has a positive effect on recommendation intention and that patient distrust plays a negative, although a minimal, role in this effect. In the few studies conducted in the healthcare sector, the results generally indicate that corporate image affects recommendation intention positively. The study by Rahman et al. (2018) alleges that the perception of the corporate image among patients positively influences their behavioural intention. Another study found that distrust among individuals produces a negative effect on their intention (Hu et al., 2017). Conversely, Hwang and Sim (2016) argue that corporate image has a negative impact on the intention of recommending a hospital. In light of these findings, healthcare institutions attach importance to the recommendation intention of their patients and they need to devote efforts to improving them in order to position their corporate image in the patients' minds successfully. In the meantime, determining and minimising the factors leading to distrust among patients is crucial as the study shows that distrust negatively affects recommendation intention and harms, although slightly, corporate image.

Limitations and future research
The scope of the study was limited to Sakarya University Training and Research Hospital. Therefore, the limitation of the study is that the results cannot be generalized to all other hospitals.

The study attempted to determine the impact of corporate image only to explain recommendation intention as well as the presence/absence of the mediating role of patient distrust in this impact. For this reason, it is suggested that future studies examine both favorable and unfavorable behavioural intentions.

CONCLUSION
Patients displaying positive behaviours can benefit positively from healthcare services and thus prefer the healthcare institution or service in question. They can also make recommendations to potential patients and become loyal clients. However, distrust among the patients not only hurts the corporate image of the institution but it might also lead to unfavourable behavioural intentions (complaints, giving up the service etc). Therefore, healthcare institutions are recommended

to foster the development of trust, loyalty and satisfaction among patients which contributes to the minimisation of unfavourable behavioural intentions.

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