



The Impact of Hospital Advertising on Patient Choices: Views from Health Service Users

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Abstract: This study aims to determine the attitudes of healthcare users toward the advertising activities conducted by private hospitals, as well as the role of these advertisements in hospital selection. Data were gathered through a questionnaire administered to individuals who sought services at a private hospital in Istanbul. A total of 360 responses were analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 21.0 program. The findings indicate that over 70% of participants believe that hospital advertisements provide useful information, offering insights into the qualifications of the hospital and the services it provides, thereby helping patients make more informed choices. However, the two main negative aspects of advertisements identified by participants are that they are often misleading and not sufficiently reliable. Overall, the study suggests that people generally hold positive opinions about private hospital advertisements.

Keywords: Advertising, Health Service, Hospitals, Hospital Selection

1. Introduction

The nature of healthcare needs, the determinants of these needs, and the priorities in health services have become increasingly critical topics. Issues such as access to health information, advancements in health technology, rising healthcare costs, demographic shifts, and changes in social and economic life have brought about significant transformations. The commercialization of health, seen through the lens of neo-liberal policies, has transformed being healthy from a birthright into a commodified service or product, accessible and consumable for a better quality of life. Turancı and Bulut (2016) noted that this commercialization is evident in the private healthcare sector. However, scientific studies and international experiences suggest that healthcare cannot be fully managed under free market conditions due to its unique nature. Unlike other goods and services, healthcare often requires specific regulations, especially in marketing practices like advertising, to address issues such as information asymmetric and the critical nature of the services provided.

Montefiori (2008) argued that healthcare users might not accurately assess the quality of advertised services without additional information. Conversely, Kim and Diwas (2019) found that patients could be positively influenced by hospital advertisements. Although legal regulations in Türkiye impose restrictions on advertising in healthcare, there is a growing trend of utilizing marketing tools, including promotional and informational activities. Elrod and Fortenberry (2020) highlighted that while healthcare advertising was previously viewed negatively and heavily restricted, it is now considered a vital communication tool in healthcare delivery. Similarly, Temel and Akıncı (2016) observed that the competitive market and global changes have led to increased acceptance and use of healthcare marketing.

Health services are provided in an increasingly competitive environment due to factors such as rising costs, technological advancements, the pursuit of a better quality of life, and the expanding role of the private sector. To succeed in this competitive market, health service providers strive to offer diverse and high-quality services, provide advantages in price, time, and location, and build a strong image. One of the most effective tools in achieving this is marketing. Berkowitz (2022) defined marketing as the planning and execution of pricing, promotion, and distribution processes for ideas, goods, or services to

meet individual or organizational objectives, emphasizing the growing importance of consumer satisfaction. Healthcare marketing involves understanding the needs and desires of potential patients to meet their healthcare needs to the highest standards (Radu et al., 2017). Key marketing activities include promotional and informational activities and advertising. Although legal regulations often restrict advertising in healthcare services, these activities are effectively implemented as "advertising" in practice.

In Türkiye, studies on healthcare advertising have primarily focused on legal regulations (Motur and Tatlı, 2021; Erbay and Yalçın, 2018; Ağırbaş et al., 2011). These studies reveal that advertisements are a commonly used marketing tool, especially among private hospitals, beauty centers, and aesthetic clinics. Erbay and Yalçın's (2018) analysis of Advertising Board decisions between 2013 and 2017 showed a rising trend in health-related advertising penalties, with most advertisements appearing online, in brochures, and newspapers. However, there is limited information on the specific advertising tools used by private hospitals. For example, Temel and Akıncı (2016) listed posters, advertisements, brochures, and educational activities as common advertising tools in Türkiye. Ekiyor and Tengilimoğlu (2014) explored the relationship between advertising freedom and the effectiveness of various advertising mediums in the health sector, noting that 21.5% of participants relied on the internet and social media, 9.3% on traditional advertisements, and 12% on promotional brochures for information about health services and products. Notably, 67.9% of participants believed that advertising restrictions in the health sector should be relaxed in a controlled manner, while 12.4% supported a complete removal of these bans. Güney and Selvi (2017) examined healthcare users' attitudes toward private hospital advertisements, finding that negative attitudes increased with the education level of participants. Yağar and Soysal (2017) concluded that factors such as technology, accessibility, and staff competence were more influential than promotional activities in shaping hospital preferences. Despite the growing importance of these findings, there is still a limited number of studies focusing specifically on healthcare users' attitudes. Given the increasing number of private health service providers and the rise in service utilization, particularly in a large, populous city like Istanbul, understanding user attitudes towards private hospital advertisements is crucial. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring three main questions: "What positive or negative attitudes do healthcare users have about the advertising activities of private hospitals?", "What factors influence the choice of hospitals where healthcare users receive services?", and "Which promotional activities of hospitals are most effective from the perspective of healthcare users?" This study seeks to provide insights into the impact of promotional activities on hospital selection and their contribution to the overall goals of these activities.

1.1. Hospitals and promotional activities in Türkiye

Private hospitals in Türkiye are defined by the Law on Private Hospitals as "health hostels, other than state hospitals and hospitals operated by private administrations and municipalities, established to treat patients through hospitalization or to care for individuals who are newly ill under sanitary conditions and provide childbirth assistance until they regain their strength (2219 Sayılı Hususi Hastaneler Kanunu, 1933). The Regulation on Private Hospitals states that private hospitals, owned by natural persons and private legal entities—excluding those operated by the State, provincial special administrations, municipalities, universities, and other public legal entities—are required to provide outpatient and inpatient examination, diagnosis, and treatment services in one or more specialties continuously and regularly for twenty-four hours, provided they meet the building, service, and personnel standards specified in the Regulation (Özel Hastaneler Yönetmeliği, 2002).

Over the past two decades, the private sector's involvement in health service delivery has significantly expanded, becoming one of Türkiye's fastest-growing service sectors. According to the 2022 Yearbook of Health Statistics published by the Ministry of Health General Directorate of Health Information Systems, the number of private hospitals increased by 111%, from 271 in 2002 to 572 in 2022. Likewise,

the number of hospital beds in private hospitals rose by 345%, from 12,387 in 2002 to 55,069 in 2022. Private hospitals accounted for 37% of all hospitals in Türkiye and 21% of the total number of patient beds. In 2022, the number of physician consultations per capita in private hospitals was 0.9. Of the admissions to secondary and tertiary health care providers, 16% occurred in private hospitals. These data highlight the growing role of private hospitals in the provision of health services in Türkiye. In 2022, there were also 290 private polyclinics and 579 private medical centers providing health services. In the realm of oral and dental health, there were 4,083 private enterprises at the institutional level and 17,724 at the unit level (Sağlık Bakanlığı, 2024).

Advertising serves as a market tool to achieve profitability for the supplier of a product or service while also providing information to consumers. However, because health information often includes clinical details that are not easily understood by the general public, incorrect, biased, or incomplete information can have serious, sometimes irreversible, consequences for individuals' health. Therefore, advertising activities in health services are distinguished from those in other goods and services sectors, considering the definition of health as a birthright and the unique characteristics of health services. According to the Regulation on Advertising, Commercial Advertising, and Unfair Commercial Practices, advertising includes any marketing communication conducted by advertisers in any medium to promote the sale or rental of goods or services or to inform or persuade the target audience (Ticari Reklam ve Haksız Ticari Uygulamalar Yönetmeliği, 2015). The promotional activities that hospitals in Türkiye can undertake are outlined in the Regulation on Private Hospitals. According to this regulation, private hospitals can engage in information and promotional activities aimed at protecting and improving health. However, they are prohibited from including misleading, exaggerated, scientifically unproven information intended to generate demand. Private hospitals must comply with general advertising regulations and specific health service regulations to protect service users from misleading, incorrect, panic-inducing, or exploitative practices, to fulfil their ethical responsibilities towards other health institutions, and to prevent unfair competition (Gürdin, 2017; Özel Hastaneler Yönetmeliği 2002). Accordingly, the scope of promotional activities in health services is limited to providing information and informing the public.

2. Method

2.1. Aim of the study

This study is a cross-sectional, descriptive study. The aim of the study is to determine the opinions of people who applied to an outpatient department of a private hospital serving in Istanbul about the advertising activities applied by private hospitals, what they are affected by when choosing the hospital where they will receive services and what promotional activities they think are most effective for private hospitals.

2.2. Universe and sample

The study data were collected by questionnaire from people who applied to an outpatient department of a private hospital serving in Istanbul in the period of January-February 2022. The average monthly admissions for this private hospital in the first three months of 2021 was determined as 4493. In line with this information, the sample size required for the study was calculated as 354 for 5% error and 95% confidence interval. In the study, the following formula was used to determine the sample size (Sümbüloğlu and Sümbüloğlu 1997). Considering the possibility of errors and deficiencies in the questionnaires, more questionnaires were administered, and 360 questionnaire data were analyzed.

$$n = [N * t^{2*} (p*q)] / [d^{2*}(N-1) + t^{2*} (p*q)]$$

n: Number of individuals to be sampled

N: Number of individuals in the universe

p: Probability of occurrence of the examined event

q: Probability of non-occurrence of the examined event

t: Theoretical value of the t table at the detected error level

d= Deviation level desired to be made according to the frequency of occurrence of the event

2.3. Data Collection tool and features

A questionnaire consisting of 3 sections was used as a research tool. The first part of the questionnaire consists of thirteen questions: eight questions on the demographic and socio-economic information of the participants, four questions on their health insurance status, frequency of admission to health institutions and chronic disease status. In the second part, the questions used in the Empirical Analysis of Consumers' Attitudes towards Hospital Advertising published by Horece E. Johns and H. Ronald Moser (1989) and aimed to determine consumers' attitudes towards hospital advertising were used. In the third part, there are two multiple-choice questions about the factors that influence the choice of hospital (12 option and the other option) and what are the most effective promotional activities of hospitals (7 options and other options). Two multiple-choice questions were developed by researchers based on a review of studies in the literature (Ekiyor and Tengilimoğlu, 2014; Güleç 2017; Güney and Selvi, 2017; Tongil and Diwas, 2019; Yağar and Soysal, 2017; Zerenler and Öğüt 2007).

2.4. Analysis of data

While evaluating the findings obtained in the study, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) for Windows 21.0 program was used for statistical analysis. As a result of the reliability analysis of the questionnaire questions used in the study, the Cronba alpha value was obtained as 0.648, which is considered to be quite reliable. The normal distribution status of the data was evaluated according to the flatness and skewness indicators -1.5 to +1.5 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). While evaluating the study data, descriptive statistics and parametric and non-parametric tests were applied to determine the differences between the groups according to the normality condition.

Participants' demographic characteristics, socio-economic characteristics and opinions about private hospital advertisements were summarized in tabular form with descriptive indicators including number and percentage. Participants' opinions on private hospital advertisements were compared according to their demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The factors that the participants consider when choosing the hospital which they will receive services from and the promotional activities that they think are effective for private hospitals are presented with numbers and percentages.

3. Results

51.9% of the participants were women, 43.1% were between the ages of 26-30, and 61.4% were undergraduate graduates. Of the participants, 58.9% reported having children in their household, and 38.6% stated that three people lived together in the same household. Additionally, 47.5% of the participants identified as workers, while 51.1% indicated that their monthly income was sufficient. 28.6% of participants had private health insurance. 220 participants (61.1%) stated that the number of applications to health service providers (family medicine, public hospital and private hospital, etc.) and private health service provider (private hospital, polyclinic, etc.) in the last year was two or less. The share of those who stated that they did not have a chronic disease was 62.2% (Table 1).

Table 1*Identifying Information About Participants*

Gender	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Working status	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Female	187	51.9	Not working	36	10.0
Male	173	48.1	civil servant	68	18.9
Age	n	%	worker	171	47.5
18-25	109	30.3	self-employed	85	23.6
26-30	155	43.1	Monthly income ...	n	%
31<	96	26.7	sufficient	184	51.1
Education	n	%	insufficient	176	48.9
Primary	8	2.2	Health Insurance	n	%
high school	47	13.1	the universal health insurance (UHC)	231	64.2
Associate degree	84	23.3	private health insurance	103	28.6
Bachelor's degree	221	61.4	no health insurance	26	7.2
Number of people living together	n	%	Number of applications to the health care provider¹	n	%
alone	43	11.9	two and less	220	61.1
2 people	103	28.6	three to five times	99	27.5
3 people	139	38.6	six and more	41	11.4
4 people	75	20.8	Number of referrals to a private health care provider	n	%
Are there children in the household?	n	%	two and less	220	61.1
yes	212	58.9	three to five times	99	27.5
no	148	41.1	six and more	41	11.4
			Do you have a chronic illness?	n	%
			yes	136	37.8
			no	224	62.2

Notes: 1: The number of applications to health service providers such as family medicine, public hospital and private hospital etc. peryear

2: Number of applications to private health service providers such as private hospitals, polyclinics, etc. peryear

In the study, the participants' participation in the positive statements about the advertisements made by the hospitals was questioned. 60% of the participants stated that it was appropriate for hospitals to advertise and 48.33% said that they would like to see more advertising by hospitals. 91.67% of the participants stated that they would use the services of the hospitals that advertised. 76.39% of the participants stated that useful information was provided to the public through advertisements made by hospitals; 76.1% believe that advertising by hospitals is a useful tool to inform potential patients about services and specialities. 261 respondents (72.50%) agreed that advertising made the public more aware of the qualities of hospitals; 283 (78.61%) agreed that advertisements made by participating hospitals helped patients make better choices. The share of those who agreed with the opinion that "Advertising will improve the quality of hospital services in the future" is 76.39%; The share of those who agree that when advertising is given, prices will decrease due to more competition is 74.72% (Table 2).

In the study, the participants' participation in the negative statements about the advertisements made by the hospitals was questioned. 55% of respondents neither agree nor disagree with the idea that when

hospitals advertise, costs are passed on to patients at higher prices, and 30.28% agree with this statement. However, the share of those who think that advertisements made by hospitals are more deceptive than other forms of advertising is 63.61%, while 20.83% disagree. 57.50% of respondents agreed with the statement that advertising by hospitals will only benefit quacks and incompetents; the share of those who did not participate was 36.94%. The share of those who think that the advertisements made by hospitals reduce the reliability and reputation of their services is 63.89%, and the share of those who do not agree with this opinion is 36.11%. However, 217 (60.28%) respondents expressed suspicion of advertising hospitals. 102 respondents (28.33%) responded that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement that they are suspicious of advertising hospitals. 78.89% agree that you can trust what a friend says about hospitals much more than an ad. However, the share of those who agreed with the statement "I would like to see more advertising by hospitals" is 48.33%; the share of those who do not participate is 38.61% (Table 2).

85.83% of the participants agree that it is better to choose a reputable hospital than a hospital that offers the lowest price. 78.06% of the participants think that it is good to prefer the hospitals that offer the lowest prices for routine procedures (Table 2).

Table 2 Opinions

Distribution of Respondents' Opinions Regarding Hospital Advertising and Its Effects

	strongly disagree		disagree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Agree		absolutely agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
It is convenient for hospitals to advertise.	0	0.00	85	23.61	59	16.39	216	60.00	0	0.00
I'd like to see more advertising done by hospitals.	0	0.00	139	38.61	47	13.06	174	48.33	0	0.00
I use the services of advertising hospitals (if necessary).	0	0.00	27	7.50	3	0.83	330	91.67	0	0.00
Useful information is provided to the public through advertisements made by hospitals.	0	0.00	85	23.61	0	0.00	275	76.39	0	0.00
Advertising will improve the quality of hospital services in the future.	0	0.00	85	23.61	0	0.00	275	76.39	0	0.00
Advertising by hospitals is a useful tool to inform potential patients about services and specialities.	0	0.00	65	18.06	20	5.56	274	76.11	1	0.28
Advertising helps people make smarter choices between hospitals.	0	0.00	44	12.22	33	9.17	283	78.61	0	0.00
Advertising makes the public more aware of the qualities of hospitals.	0	0.00	87	24.17	12	3.33	261	72.50	0	0.00
When hospitals advertise. prices go down due to more competition.	0	0.00	47	13.06	44	12.22	269	74.72	0	0.00
When hospitals advertise. the costs are passed on to patients at higher prices.	0	0.00	53	14.72	198	55.00	109	30.28	0	0.00
Advertising by hospitals would benefit only quacks and incompetents.	1	0.28	133	36.94	19	5.28	207	57.50	0	0.00
Advertising by hospitals is more deceptive than other forms of advertising.	0	0.00	75	20.83	55	15.28	229	63.61	1	0.28
Often you can trust what a friend tells you about hospitals much more than advertising	0	0.00	12	3.33	64	17.78	284	78.89	0	0.00
I would be suspicious of hospitals that advertise.	0	0.00	41	11.39	102	28.33	217	60.28	0	0.00
It is good to opt for hospitals that offer the lowest price for routine services.	0	0	4	1.1	74	20.6	281	78.1	1	0.3
It is better to opt for a reputable hospital than to opt for a hospital that offers the lowest price.	0	0	33	9.2	18	5.0	309	85.8	0	0

Table 3 shows the statistical differences in opinions regarding advertisements made by private hospitals based on the situation of living with a child. In other words, individuals who do not live with a child believe that advertisements made by private hospitals provide useful information (3.76 ± 0.66), improve quality (3.76 ± 0.66), and reduce prices (3.89 ± 0.38). They had a higher level of participation in positive statements such as (3.66 ± 0.69) and would like to see more advertising given (3.32 ± 0.90). However, they also agreed with the statement that advertising by private hospitals was more deceptive at a higher level (3.56 ± 0.78). Participants living with a child had a lower overall level of agreement with positive statements about private hospitals' advertising but had a higher level of participation (3.93 ± 0.35) for the statement that they would attend the services of these hospitals when necessary.

In Table 3, there are expressions that differ statistically significantly according to whether they find their income sufficient. Participants who did not find their income sufficient had a higher level of participation in positive statements such as that it was appropriate for hospitals to advertise (3.53 ± 0.68), that this advertising provided useful information to patients (3.78 ± 0.62), that advertising would improve quality (3.78 ± 0.62). However, they also participated in the statement that prices will fall with advertising in a higher straight (3.73 ± 0.59). On the other hand, they had a high level of agreement with the statements; "a friend's recommendation is more reliable than advertising" (3.73 ± 0.59) and "advertising only benefits only quacks and incompetents" (3.36 ± 0.90) and "I am suspicious of hospitals that advertise." (3.57 ± 0.60). Respondents who said they found their income sufficient agreed higher (3.39 ± 0.61) that advertising would lead to higher prices but said they would see more advertising (3.79 ± 0.58) and that advertising was useful for informing potential patients about services and specialities (3.72 ± 0.63) were also higher in participation in the statements. However, they stated more frequently that they would use the services of hospitals that advertise when necessary (3.85 ± 0.38).

Table 3 shows statistically significant differences according to the working status. Non-study participants had significantly less participation in the statements that hospitals provide healthy information to the public with advertisements, that advertisements will improve quality, and that it is appropriate for hospitals to advertise at a statistically significant level than all other study situations. On the other hand, they showed statistically significantly higher participation in the statement that advertising will lead to a rise in prices. Non-employees showed statistically significantly higher participation in the statement that the advertisements would harm the hospital's credibility and reputation. Often my impression of the hospital is lower as a result of advertising. The level of participation of those who did not work to express was statistically significantly higher than the level of participation of workers. However, workers also showed higher participation than civil servants, and the difference between them is statistically significant. Self-employed people were more likely to participate in the statement that advertisements made by hospitals are more deceptive than other forms of advertising, and they were also statistically significantly lower than all other groups. Civil servants' level of participation in the statements "I will use the services of hospitals that advertise (if necessary)" and "You can generally trust what a friend tells you about hospitals much more than advertising" is statistically significantly higher than the level of participation of self-employed people. The level of workers' participation in the statement "I'd be suspicious of hospitals advertising" is statistically significantly lower than in all other groups.

Table 3*Comparative Analysis of Respondents' Opinions on Hospital Advertising*

Statements on Hospital Advertising	Do you live with a child?/n	Average+ Standard Deviation	Test Statistics	p
Useful information is provided to the public through advertisements made by hospitals.	yes/212	3.37±0.93	4.646**2	p<0.001
	no/148	3.76±0.66		
Advertising will improve the quality of hospital services in the future.	yes/212	3.37±0.93	4.646**2	p<0.001
	no/148	3.76±0.66		
Advertising by hospitals is a useful tool to inform potential patients about services and specialities.	yes/212	3.52±0.85	-2.043**2	0.042
	no/148	3.68±0.67		
	no/148	3.56±0.78		
	yes/212	3.16±0.88		
It is convenient for hospitals to advertise.	no/148	3.66±0.69	-6.144**2	p<0.001
	yes/212	3.35±0.83		
Advertising by hospitals is more deceptive than other forms of advertising.	no/148	3.56±0.78	-2.378**2	0.018
	yes/212	3.16±0.88		
It is convenient for hospitals to advertise.	no/148	3.66±0.69	-6.144**2	p<0.001
	yes/212	3.16±0.88		
I'd like to see more advertising done by hospitals.	yes/212	2.94±0.92	-3.955**2	p<0.001
	no/148	3.32±0.9.		
I use the services of advertising hospitals (if necessary).	yes/212	3.93±0.35	14096.500*1	0.001
	no/148	3.72±0.70		
When hospitals advertise. prices go down due to more competition.	yes/212	3.43±0.81	11281.5**1	p<0.001
	no/148	3.89±0.38		
Useful information is provided to the public through advertisements made by hospitals.	Yes/184	3.28±0.96	-5.898**2	p<0.001
	no/176	3.78±0.62		
When hospitals advertise. the costs are passed on to patients at higher prices.	yes/184	3.39±0.61	7.522**2	p<0.001
	no/176	2.91±0.61		
Advertising will improve the quality of hospital services in the future	yes/184	3.28 0.96	-5.898**2	p<0.001
	no/176	3.78±0.62		
Advertising by hospitals is a useful tool to inform potential patients about services and specialities.	yes/184	3.72±0.63	3.279**2	0.001
	no/176	3.45±0.89		
It is convenient for hospitals to advertise.	yes/184	3.20±0.94	-3.857**2	p<0.001
	no/176	3.53±0.68		
I'd like to see more advertising done by hospitals.	yes/184	3.79±0.58	-4.917**2	p<0.001
	no/176	3.74±0.62		
I use the services of advertising hospitals (if necessary).	yes/184	3.85±0.38	15140.500*1	26 to 0.0
	no/176	3.70±0.51		
Often you can trust what a friend tells you about hospitals much more than advertising.	yes/184	3.51±0.79	14142.000*1	0.003rd
	no/176	3.73±0.59		
I would be suspicious of hospitals that advertise.	yes/184	3.4±0.76	-2.148**2	0.032
	no/176	3.57±0.60		
Advertising by hospitals would benefit only quacks and incompetents.	yes/184	3.05±0.99	-3.102**2	0.002
	no/176	3.36±0.90		
When hospitals advertise. prices go down due to more competition.	yes/212	3.51±0.79	14253.000*1	0.010
	no/148	3.73±0.59		

Table 3 (Continue)*Comparative Analysis of Respondents' Opinions on Hospital Advertising*

Statements on Hospital Advertising	Working Status/n	Avg±Ss.	Test Statistics	p	
Useful information is provided to the public through advertisements made by hospitals.	not working(A)/36	2.89±1.01	8.045**1	p<0.001	A-B p<0.05 A-C p<0.05 A-D p<0.05
	officer(B)/68	3.56±0.84			
	worker(C)/171	3.60±0.80			
	self-employed(D)/85	3.62±0.79			
When hospitals advertise. the costs are passed on to patients at higher prices.	not working(A)/36	3.69±0.52	11.773**1	p<0.001	A-B p<0.001 A-C p<0.001 A-D p<0.001
	officer(B)/68	3.19±0.55			
	worker(C)/171	3.02±0.62			
	self-employed(D)/85	3.18±0.73			
Advertising will improve the quality of hospital services in the future.	not working(A)/36	2.89±1.01	8.045**1	p<0.001	A-B p<0.05 A-C p<0.05 A-D p<0.05
	officer(B)/68	3.56±0.84			
	worker(C)/171	3.60±0.80			
	self-employed(D)/85	3.62±0.79			
It is convenient for hospitals to advertise.	not working(A)/36	2.78±0.93	6.886**1	p<0.001	A-B p<0.001 A-C p<0.001 A-D p<0.05
	officer(B)/68	3.47±0.84			
	worker(C)/171	3.42±0.80			
	self-employed(D)/85	3.41±0.79			
Advertising by hospitals is more deceptive than other forms of advertising.	not working(A)/36	3.53±0.14	17.563**1	p<0.001	D-A p<0.005 D-B p<0.05 D-C p<0.05
	officer(B)/68	3.91±0.81			
	worker(C)/171	3.43±0.60			
	self-employed(D)/85	3.01±0.91			
Usually my impression of the hospital is lower as a result of advertising.	not working(A)/36	3.28±0.45	4.170*1	0.006	A-C p<0.05
	officer(B)/68	3.53±0.72			
	worker(C)/171	3.60±0.49			
	self-employed(D)/85	3.45±0.52			
I use the services of advertising hospitals (if necessary).	not working(A)/36	3.81±0.62	11.819 ²	0.008	B-D p<0.05
	officer(B)/68	3.97±0.24			
	worker(C)/171	3.80±0.42			
	self-employed(D)/85	3.75±0.43			
Often you can trust what a friend tells you about hospitals much more than advertising.	not working(A)/36	3.92±0.37	11.409**2	0.010	B-D p<0.05
	officer(B)/68	3.74±0.44			
	worker(C)/171	3.44±0.81			
	self-employed(D)/85	3.69±0.66			
I would be suspicious of hospitals that advertise.	not working(A)/36	3.78 ±0.42	6.577**1	p<0.001	C-A p<0.001 C-B p<0.05 C-D p<0.05
	officer(B)/68	3.63±0.71			
	worker(C)/171	3.33±0.77			
	self-employed(D)/85	3.49±0.69			
Advertising makes the public more aware of the qualities of hospitals.	not working(A)/36	3.28 ±0.97	4.264**1	0.006	C-B p<0.05
	officer(B)/68	3.32±0.95			
	worker(C)/171	3.65±0.72			
	self-employed(D)/85	3.36±0.94			
Advertising by hospitals would benefit only quacks and incompetents.	not working(A)/36	3.83 ±0.56	13.133**1	p<0.001	C-A p<0.001 C-D p<0.001
	officer(B)/68	3.55±0.80			
	worker(C)/171	3.06±0.97			
	self-employed(D)/85	2.93±1.00			
When hospitals advertise. prices go down due to more competition.	not working(A)/36	3.92±0.37	22.826**2	p<0.001	C-A p<0.05 C-B p<0.05 C-D p<0.05
	officer(B)/68	3.81±0.47			
	worker(C)/171	3.44±0.81			
	self-employed(D)/85	3.08±1.00			
Advertising by hospitals tends to reduce the credibility and reputation of their services.	not working(A)/36	3.94±0.33	28.883**2	p<0.001	C-B p<0.05 B-A p<0.001 A-D p<0.001 A-C p<0.05
	officer(B)/68	2.97±1.00			
	worker(C)/171	3.36±0.94			

*: p<0.05; **:p<0.001; 1: Mann Whitney U test; 2: T test

Participants were asked to select from the various alternatives listed in the survey and to indicate the three factors that were influential in their decision to receive services from a private hospital, and their

responses were presented in Table 4 with cumulative values. Information according to the results obtained (14.84%); Referral of the hospital by an acquaintance and promotional activities (advertising. etc.) (14.19%); health care price (13.55%); proximity and accessibility to the hospital (13.27%) and modern equipment in the hospital (10.41%) were the most frequently repeated responses. Other factors noted included the physical conditions of the hospital (8.02%), the availability of all kinds of health services and specialists in the hospital (7.93%), the hospital has an SSI agreement (4.61%).

Participants were asked to choose among the various alternatives listed in the survey and indicate three of the promotional activities carried out by hospitals that they thought were the most effective. and their answers are presented in Table 4 with cumulative values. According to the evaluations of the participants. the most effective promotional activities were billboard/billboard (26.47%), social platform applications (Instagram, Facebook etc.) (26.19%) and written brochure promotions (22.06%). Other promotional activities were promotion by direct dialling by phone (10.66%), TV advertising (7.63%), free promotional services (checkups. etc.) (5.88%) and social responsibility project work (1.10%).

Table 4

Factors Influencing Private Hospital Selection and the Effectiveness of Promotional Activities: Participants' Perspectives

Factors influencing the choice of a private hospital	n	%
Information	161	14.84
Recommendation of the Hospital by an Acquaintance and promotional activities (advertising etc.)	154	14.19
Healthcare Price	147	13.55
Proximity to Hospital and Accessibility	144	13.27
Modern Equipment in the Hospital	138	12.72
Image of the Hospital	113	10.41
Physical Conditions of the Hospital	87	8.02
Availability of all kinds of health services and specialists in the hospital	86	7.93
The Hospital Has an SSI Agreement	50	4.61
The Hospital Has a Private Insurance Agreement	5	0.46
Sum	108	100.0
	5	0
Promotional activities	n	%
Billboard/Billboard	288	26.47
Social platform applications (instagram, facebook. etc.)	285	26.19
Written Brochure introductions	240	22.06
Promotion by direct dialing by phone	116	10.66
TV Commercial	83	7.63
Free promotional services (checkup etc.)	64	5.88
Social responsibility project work	12	1.10
Sum	108	100.0
	8	0

4. Discussion

This study, conducted in a private hospital in Istanbul, aimed to determine the opinions of people who applied to the outpatient department about the advertisements of private hospitals, which factors they were affected by when choosing a private hospital and what promotional activities they found most effective for private hospitals. We can say that the majority of the participants in this study are people who are educated at the undergraduate level, who work in the status of workers, who receive services under the UHC, who live with at least one child in their household, who do not have a chronic disease and who apply to 2 or fewer health care providers per year. The participants, who placed the reputation of the hospital in the forefront over the price, stated that they would prefer a lower price, especially in routine procedures. It was concluded that the participants, who we can define with these basic features, do not have a negative opinion about the advertising of private hospitals in general and can use the

services of advertising hospitals. Ekiyor and Tengilimoğlu (2014). Güney and Selvi (2017) also stated in their studies that health service users are not against advertising in the health sector.

According to the findings of the study, more than 70% of the participants think that hospitals offer useful information to people through advertisements and that advertisements are informative about the qualifications of the hospital and the services it offers, thus contributing to patients making more accurate choices. In addition, the share of those who think that the advertisements made by hospitals will make a positive contribution to the quality of hospital services and ensure price competition is over 70%. These results show that respondents generally think that hospital advertising has positive effects on information, quality and price. Güney and Selvi (2017) stated in their studies that the participants were in favour of private hospitals advertising as long as they were in compliance with the laws and they found these advertisements introductory, necessary and reminder for patients. They also reported that participants found the advertising informative. As a result, they stated that they thought that private hospital advertisements were necessary and useful for the public because they were informative. Işık also stated in his study that the features of the advertisements, such as providing information about the service, teaching ways to live comfortably, and being funny and entertaining, were liked by the patients or seen as useful (Işık. 2012).

The results of the study show that the participants expressed their opinions about the negative aspects of hospital advertisements, especially that these advertisements are misleading and not reliable enough. Advertisements in the health sector and studies on the penal sanctions applied also support this view. Eşiyok's (2018) study examined the decisions of the Advertising Board in the first six months of 2018 and found that some companies operating in the health sector made advertisements in violation of the rules in the Regulation on Commercial Advertising and Unfair Commercial Practices.

Participants found their friends' recommendations more reliable than hospital advertisements (78.89%) and thought that hospital advertisements were misleading (63.61%). For this reason, they expressed their suspicion about the hospitals that advertised (60.28%). In the study conducted by Yağar and Soysal (2017), the participants showed high participation in the statement, "The fact that my close circle is satisfied and recommends the hospital is effective in my choice of hospital." In this study, it was obtained that hospitals thought that advertising harmed quality and trust. However, it is noteworthy that when asked if they would like to see more hospital advertising, the percentage of negative respondents increased.

The issue of advertising in children and health has also been the subject of many studies as an important topic. In particular, studies on the effect of food product advertisements on children's health. the inclusion of children in advertisements and children in health sector advertisements were carried out (Özdemir. 2020; Bağcı Bossi. 2018). In this study, it was questioned whether the situation of living with a child differed in the evaluations of people about the advertisements of private hospitals. The findings of the study show that people living with a child generally participate in positive statements about advertisements of private hospitals to a lesser extent. It is noteworthy that the statement that they showed the lowest level of participation (2.94 ± 0.92) was that I'd like to see more advertising done by hospitals.

Receiving services from private hospitals is often associated with having private health insurance or the ability to pay, as it requires additional payment. For this reason, the difference between the finding the income level sufficient and the evaluations regarding the advertisements of private hospitals was questioned in the study. The findings of the study show that there are statistically significant differences between the participants' opinions about the advertisements of private hospitals according to whether they find their income levels sufficient. It is noteworthy that people who do not find the level of income sufficient have a higher level of participation in many positive statements about advertisements of private hospitals. It seems that these people think that advertising provides useful information and

improves quality. Although they see it appropriate for private hospitals to advertise, it is another result that they are skeptical about these hospitals. Those who found the income level sufficient stated that they would use the services of the hospitals that advertised when necessary.

Another of the inquiries in the study is the relationship between people's working status and evaluations of private hospital advertisements. It is noteworthy that the opinions of the participants who stated that they did not work had statistically significant differences from the opinions of those who worked as civil servants, workers or self-employed people. It is seen that the participants who stated that they did not work had more negative opinions about the advertisements of private hospitals. Another important result is that the group that has the least participation in the statement that the advertisements of private hospitals are more deceptive than other advertisements is the self-employed people. It was concluded that although civil servants were the group most likely to believe that advertisements of private hospitals were more deceptive, they also agreed at the highest level with the statement that they would use the services of private hospitals when necessary. Another noteworthy fact is that the workers showed the lowest level of participation in the statement, "I would be suspicious of hospitals that advertise." Güney and Selvi (2017) also emphasized in their study that workers had a more positive attitude toward private hospital advertisements.

Karaçor and Arkan (2014) found in their studies that patients did not attach much importance to promotion activities such as price and stated this situation as a situation that should be investigated. Our findings showed that the 3rd most frequently cited reason among the factors affected by the participants in the choice of a private hospital was determined as the service price. Again the participants had the highest participation in routine services by choosing the hospital with the lowest price. In the study conducted by Yağar and Soysal (2017), people showed the highest level of participation in requesting additional fees in the selection of private hospitals.

In this study, participants stated that they were influenced by the advice of an acquaintance or promotional activities (14.19%) when choosing a private hospital. Güleç (2017) also determined in her study that one of the factors affecting people's private hospital preferences was "the recommendation of my close circle and people who have received services" (5.8% and 5th place).

According to the findings obtained, another factor effective in the selection of the hospital (6. Rank) is the image of the hospital (10.40%). In the Ayhan and Canöz (2006) studies, the success and good image of the hospital were determined as the most important selection factor (45.1%). However, in their studies, they have determined that the most effective elements in the image of a good and successful hospital are television and internet promotional materials. Tongil and Diwas (2019) concluded in their study that TV advertising is effective in choosing a hospital. In this study, according to the opinions of the participants, one of the most effective promotional activities for hospitals is TV advertisements.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

In line with the information obtained within the scope of this study, it can be said that the people who receive services from private hospitals generally have positive opinions about private hospital advertisements. In general, people have the opinion that it is appropriate for private hospitals to advertise, but their suspicion of these advertisements, the fact that they find the information they receive from other individuals more reliable and the opinions that the advertisements will harm the credibility and reputation of the hospital are also noteworthy. In line with this information, although individuals do not have a negative perspective on the advertisements of hospitals, the result that they are suspicious is important. In line with all this information, the view is that the advertising activities of the hospitals are frequently used by the service providers and accepted by the service recipients today. But the rules to be followed in the advertising here should be well determined and there should be mechanisms to prevent negativity. However, it is thought that the fact that the participants see private

hospital advertisements as information tool is significant for the Ministry of Health and the institutions and organizations that have a role in health education and literacy. In the focus of informing the public, these institutions and organizations recommend practices such as increasing the information activities for the person and the society, carrying out video, message and reminder activities for the person, and increasing and strengthening the information tools in the family medicine system.

Conducting the research, it became evident that there is a need for a current measurement tool that has proven validity and reliability and is capable of revealing social differences in the attitudes of healthcare service users toward hospital promotional activities. Furthermore, addressing this topic in conjunction with variables such as health literacy and healthcare utilization behavior will contribute to the field's knowledge base.

Limitations

In this study, data were collected through a questionnaire. The findings are representative of the sample analyzed and may not necessarily be generalizable to a broader population

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