A RESEARCH ON EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICES OF HOSPITALS' PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENTS IN TURKEY

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to reveal performance level of public relations departments at the hospitals in terms of customer satisfaction and effectiveness of social media practices in Turkey. Besides, this study is also supposed to exert how effective technological developments and new communication applications have been adapted to public relations practices by the health sector and how this adaptation perceived by target audiences. Therefore a research, which consists of two steps, has been carried out. In the first phase of the research a survey of 46 questions applied on randomly chosen 594 patients at 184 different hospitals from five big cities of Turkey, which are Istanbul, Ankara, Sakarya, Bursa and Izmit. Secondly, structured face to face interviews have been done with public relations specialists of these hospitals. We have found that patients' awareness about hospital web site and social media usage is low. They actually demand service quality and better CRM (Customer Relationship Management) in terms of face to face communication at hospitals.

Keywords: *Public Relations, Social Media, Brand Reputation*

TÜRKİYE'DEKİ HASTANELERİN HALKLA İLİŞKİLER BÖLÜMLERİNİN SOSYAL MEDYA UYGULAMALARININ ETKİNLİĞİ ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, müşteri memnuniyeti ve sosyal medya pratiklerinin etkinliği bakımından Türkiye'de hastanelerdeki halkla ilişkiler bölümlerinin performans düzeylerini ortaya koymaktır. Aynı zamanda bu çalışma ile sağlık sektörünün teknolojik gelişmeleri ve yeni iletişim uygulamalarını ne kadar etkin bir biçimde halkla ilişkiler uygulamalarına adapte ettiklerini ve bu adaptasyonların hedef kitleler tarafından nasıl algılandığı ortaya çıkarılacaktır. Bundan dolayı iki aşamalı bir araştırma gerçekleştirilmiştir. İlk aşamada Türkiye'nin 5 büyük şehrindeki (İstanbul, Ankara, Sakarya, Bursa ve İzmit) 184 hastaneden rastgele seçilen 594 hastaya 46 sorudan oluşan bir anket uygulanmıştır. İkinci olarak, bu hastanelerdeki halkla ilişkiler uzmanlarıyla yapılandırılmış yüz yüze görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmamızın sonuçlarına göre, hastaneler ile hastalar arasında iyi bir iletişimin tesis edilmesi, hastanelerin hastalar gözünde kalite ve itibar algısını artırmaktadır. Hastanelerin web sitelerinden faydalanmaları söz konusu bu kalite ve itibar algısına olumlu yönde katkı sağlamaktadır. Bunun yanı sıra, hastaların hastane web sitelerinden haberdar olma düzeyleri ve sosyal medya kullanım oranları düşüktür. Hastalar, servis kalitesi ve yüz yüze iletişimi destekleyecek daha iyi müşteri ilişikileri yönetimi uygulamaları arzulamaktadırlar.

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INTRODUCTION

The flow of information from various environments in the age of information society makes disinformation an important communication obstacle, from which companies are to abstain, owing to maintain perception of good quality and brand reputation. Information & communication technologies (ICTs) have become a strategic management tool for companies in the efforts of understanding and to be understood well by target audiences. The more ICTs are steered strategically, the more the companies make difference to their rivals in rigorous competition environment of the epoch, as in the case of health sector.

In a recent event during the Worldwide Developers Conference in San Francisco, Cal. on June 2, 2014, Apple announced that it is entering into the fitness tracking space with a new Health app and a service called HealthKit coming to iOS8 software which is used on mobile devices. This Health app will track "everything from monitoring your activity level, to your weight, to chronic medical conditions like blood pressure and diabetes." And it will be possible for users to log information like blood pressure within the app. Apple will work with MayoClinic. HealthKit would then alert the MayoClinic app about whether or not the results are in the normal range and even contact medical professionals. (Kelly, 2014). This development is very critical and represents the trend ICTs heading to.

In order to realize an effective ICT management the role of public relations is crucial for the companies in each sector in establishing good relations with its internal customers, target audience and public in general. Together with information age and globalization, competition that corporations face, has been tougher and tougher. So does creating and maintaining corporate image and reputation. There are certain components which build corporate reputation. According to ORSA, corporate reputation model is as it is seen in Figure 1 (ORSA, Kadıbeşegil, 2009: 143). Reference to this model, it is vital to establish an immaculate communication between stake holders of the corporation in order to realize the model. Deloitte argues in its report that access to sustainable and quality service in health services depends on transparency of public policies, dialog between stake holders and predictability of changes in regulations (Deloitte, 2012: 2). So, internet, virtual environments and social media together with strategic ICT management provides endless opportunities to corporations in achieving seamless dialog between stake holders.

Today, mobile technologies and social media serve the most practical ways to communicate with the society. The mobile technology penetration is very high worldwide. Social media, especially, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter reach more than one billion active users and this number is rising every day.

Health data are inherently inert and it is difficult to analyze historical data about a patient or an epidemic. Mobile technologies, data-mining tools and social media can be used together to move these data into action by visualizing, clustering and communicating.

These are key actions for successful corporate reputation as all major hospitals and hospital chains offer similar basic health services. Technological innovations like Apple's HealthKit will bring a competitive edge for them. Those hospitals, which are more inno-

vative and open to technology, will have an advantage over others (Figure 1: 104).

Özüpek states that level of acknowledgement of target audiences is especially important to create a good company image (Özüpek; 2013: 101). So, need for effective public relations practices to inform target audiences are required more than ever before in reaching strategic corporate targets.

As advent of internet and technological developments have made the information to be moved and spread worldwide in seconds, which has engendered the necessity of controlling and observing information, what we call information communication management, constantly in order to refrain damage of information pollution in terms of misperception of stakeholders. In that sense, social media offers endless opportunities in terms of proactive public relations through real time communication to institutions from each sector.

In the planning process of strategic ICTs, effective image creation for a brand and/or for a company starts with defining a corporate identity, which reflects all the cultural values of the company. Regenthal argues that, corporate image is engendered through the effects of corporate identity on its employees, target audiences and the public (Regenthal qtd. in Okay, 2005: 245). Then those values need to be conveyed to stakeholders effectively. Kadıbeşegil asserts that one of the main problems of company CEOs' is not to be able to express themselves as companies to the public effectively (Kadıbeşegil, 2009). Besides, corporate image and reputation is hard to gain, but also so easy to lose. Therefore, among the company and its stakeholders seamless ICTs need to be established and then maintained constantly. Having done that, messages and feedbacks go to their receivers mutually eliminating entropy and misunderstandings. It also prevents some problems before they become potential crisis.

As foundation of public relations is to establish and maintain immaculate communication with target audiences, it is one of the professions that are supposed to get the most out of new technological communication related developments. As a typical example of service sector, health sector is expected to utilize advantages of new communication environments in every possible way putting into practice creative approaches in understating and being understood by its customers as to serve them quality services, through which the target of creating respectable brand equity can be achieved.

In this study health sector has been taken to the focus to measure through a research how effective the developments in public relations practices are used in hospitals. To be more precise, how digital PR efforts of hospitals are perceived by their patients (customers) and where hospitals see themselves in utilizing digital PR practices.

New information resources and fast spreading of information in information age that we are in have changed the patterns of competition putting the information management to the first place among priorities for companies in terms of making a difference in target audience's perception and protect them from misunderstandings as a result of information pollution. Besides, advent of internet and new digital communication practices has

evolved professions, ways of doing business and its processes for almost all sectors. It is now much easier to find out what the people, who get service from a company, talk about the experience they had social network sites. So, we can say that digital communication networks have become new venues for 'word of mouth (WOM)' as users share their thoughts over the internet with each other. Liang and Scammon assert that e-WOM is an important tool to figure out target audiences' opinion for hospitals especially about when to see a doctor and how to choose a doctor. Their findings from a research suggest that support seekers with relatively unimportant health problems, who wish to find out whether to see a doctor, get approval most of the time form support providers on the internet through social network sites. They argue that according to their data from the research with the help of e-WOM suggestions, people may increase their visits to doctors, who provide their patients with caring (Liang & Scammon, 2011: 329). Those findings urge health providers to pay serious attention to social networks to realize an effective ICTs management.

Many research have been conducted about the relationship between ICTs and public health delivery. Raghupathi and Wu cite from World Health Organization (WHO) that there are two key roles for ICTs in public health delivery (Raghupathi & Wu, 2011: 102): (1) organizing and disseminating health information to health workers and the population at large; (2) educating the public about prevention.

One of the most important components of ICTs is a visual message in building corporate identity, through which a positive image for a brand can be created. Alkibay argues that strategic usage of visual identity could support an organization's existence in a community and it is an advantage against competitors (Alkibay et al., 2008: 135). As virtual environments mediated communication is based on "screen to face communication," screen based appearance for organizations needs to be built carefully in realizing strategic ICT management. Berry argues that brand is a promise to the customers about what kind of services they get when choosing that brand for a service. There are two ways to feed the brand equity; the presented brand constitutes organization-controlled communication activities like websites, advertising, uniforms etc., which builds brand awareness through conveying desired branding message and external brand communication like word of mouth and publicity, which creates brand awareness and meaning but not necessarily with the way, which is desired (Berry qtd. in Berry & Seltman, 2007: 200). External brand communication developments are less likely to influence the brand comparing presented bad efforts as they reach to wider audiences and they are prepared to strengthen the brand. Although customers' actual experiences are less controllable comparing to presented brand, a wise management strategy could be to invest in realizing good experiences for the customers as the message the hospital delivers to its audiences formally is easier to control than how it interacts with them. Brand awareness and brand meaning have different degree of influences on the target audiences. As brand awareness could not prevent a potential customer to choose an alternative one, brand meaning has a stronger impact on them. They argue that three things are vital for creating brand equity: Being defensive as well as offensive, turning customers into

marketers, appreciating the organizational values (Berry & Seltman, 2007: 208).As we all know meeting and exceeding the perception of quality services in the eyes of customers can only be realized through paying attention to their expectations. According to Hutchison and Onofrio, hospitals, which are thought to have lower level of service quality in general, try to close the perception difference considering the ones, which are thought to have the best quality of service, in the eyes of the public by focusing on employing experienced doctors, specialty or gaining high ranking as more and more patients have being paying attention to those criteria in choosing hospitals, where they get treated (Hutchison & Onofrio, 2010: 10). More hospitals pay attention to that, more perception of their image increases for their costumers and the public in general. As a result, their reputation is also develops in target audiences' point of view, through which brand equity for hospitals is constituted. According to a research done on hospital image by Kimet all, any relation in Figure 2 (105), feeds hospital image, apart from brand loyalty to brand equity (Kim et al., 2008: 77).

Karaköse asserts that building of reputation is a long process, but losing it is much easier and shorter in time. The more reputation is paid attention, the more profit comes along. Quality services feed reputation directly, which provides trust for all the environment of a company. Besides, once reputation is gathered, messages are easier to convey to target audiences (Karaköse; 2012). So, in the epoch of information society, as knowledge is spread around so fast, all information sources are needed to be managed immaculately to refrain any kind of disinformation, which may damage the company image and reputation accordingly. Therefore, hospitals should act and take the advantage of technology and the internet utilizing social media tools, which provide endless opportunities through creative approaches in reaching target audiences, to realize a successful ICTs management.

Certain unique communication strategies are needed to develop to be a step ahead in competition with the rivals. Having done that it will be much easier and quicker to react feedbacks coming from customers. The more communication is effective between the hospital and its customers, through which reflections are gained in meeting expectations, the more it is easier to reach targeted level of brand image and in the long run the reputation.

Health sector has been reorganized around the world through neo-liberal regularities in early 1980s. It has been being subsidized ever since 1981 in Turkey, because of which the numbers of private hospitals have increased considerably. Health sector was regulated with the constitution of 1982 in terms of state hospitals to provide services through private hospitals in Turkey (Işık, 2011: 71).

A research, which has been carried out in health sector among randomly chosen 60 private hospitals located in cities of Ankara, Antalya Bolu, Çankırı, Eskişehir, İstanbul, İzmir, Kayseri and Samsun of Turkey, in 2010 revealed that operational effectiveness of public relations departments of the hospitals and its perception on their customers. The research had two steps. In first part of the research, a survey has been applied on PR de-

partment specialists and then a survey was applied to 1000 participants. The findings of the research as follows (Işık, 2011): 74% of the hospitals have a PR department. 38% of those PR departments are directly connected to the hospitals managers. Only one person is employed in 40% of the PR departments. 80% of the PR departments' employees are women. 68% of PR department employees have a university degree. 52% of PR departments have a budget. 35% of PR departments plan their activities on monthly bases. The main idea of having a PR department at the hospitals is customer satisfaction by 61%. The main channel for PR departments to get customers' feedbacks and complaints is feedback boxes by %36. The word of hospital has a positive impact on 54% of the participants. The first think that comes to the mind of 47% participants is quality service in terms of speed and effectiveness. 59% of the participants stated that private hospitals are needed. 59% of the participants agreed that the more new private hospitals are opened, the more their service quality increase. %49 of the participants think that the hospitals have not been equipped with modern equipment. 55% of the participants believe that the hospitals provide quality service. 52% of the participants were stated that hospitals employees do not pay enough attention and do not smile enough to them. 63% of the participants stated that having a PR department, the hospitals try to increase quality service. 63% of the participants stated that when they have problem they try to find someone to talk to.

According to Tengilimoglu and his colleagues, the literature review shows that there is no direct relationship between consumer satisfaction and the work of the public relations departments. "Since the reputation and image of hospital is identified as a major consideration in hospital choice, attention needs to be given to creation of a positive image by improved public relation activities [...] such as improving the behaviors and attitude of personnel in the facility." They suggest that public relations activities should use media outlets to enhance the not reputation and image of hospital in the public (Tengilimoglu et al., 2007: 29, 30).

Similarly, in a research done at a private university hospital in Istanbul, Turkey, Kirdar suggests that if the number of visits of the patients increase, the perceived image of the hospital accrues more positively (Kirdar, 2007: 51)

AIM AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of the research is to apprehend effectiveness of public relations departments of the hospitals in perception of their customers and how much technological developments have been adapted to PR operations in communicating with target audiences. The research has two phases: Surveys have been applied on patients and face to face structured interviews have been carried out with public relations specialist of the hospitals.

The primary aim of our study is to measure institutional effectiveness of the hospitals and how successful they have been to adapt themselves and their customers to the new developments and applications in the sector. As a result of this research it will be revealed that whether those hospitals have been utilizing the sectorial technological

developments through proactive public relations consequence of providing better service to the customers and to enhance their awareness in the sector as to establish and increase brand reputation. It will also be exerted how much aforementioned criteria have been turned to advantages for the hospitals as to succeed to be different from the opponents in creating loyal customers.

The following questions were examined in the research:

RQ1: Is there an association between benefiting from hospital's web site and quality and reputation perception of hospital?

RQ2: Is there a difference between those who are aware of existence of PR department and who are not in terms of benefiting from the web site of the hospital?

RQ3: Is there a difference between those who are aware of hospital's existence on social media and who are not in terms of utilization of hospital's web site?

RQ4: Is there an association between education and quality and reputation perception of the hospital?

RQ5: Is there an association between quality and reputation perception of hospital and level of general satisfaction from hospital?

RQ6: Is there an association between quality and reputation perception of hospital and contacting with patients constantly with intention of CRM?

RQ7: Is there an association between quality and reputation perception of hospital and providing regular health communication between patients and the hospital?

RQ8: Is there an association between quality and reputation perception of hospital and providing regular health communication between patients and the hospital?

RQ9: Is there an association between quality and reputation perception of hospital and patients' expectation of face to face service?

RQ10: Is there a difference between those who are aware of PR department's responsibilities in the hospital and who are not in terms of perception of quality and reputation about the hospital?

RQ11: Is there a difference between those who are utilizing from PR department whenever come to the hospital and who are not in terms of perception of quality and reputation about the hospital?

RQ12: Is there a difference between those who are aware of hospital's existence in social media and who are not in terms of perception of quality and reputation about hospital?

RQ13:Is there an association between importance of PR department at hospital and level of general satisfaction from hospital?

RQ14: Is there a difference between those who are aware of existence of PR department in the hospital and who are not in terms of general satisfaction level?

RQ15: Is there a difference between those who are aware of hospital's existence in social media and who are not in terms of level of general satisfaction from hospital?

RQ16: Is there an association between education level and contacting with patients constantly with intention of CRM?

RQ17: Is there a difference between different occupations patients have in terms of providing constant health communication between patients and hospital?

Significance of the Research

Public relations is considered to be an important component for each company as to establish interactive communication to tell its target audience why a company exist and in return finding out the expectations of the costumers. Besides, PR departments are also crucial for corporate communication and identity works, which creates and shores up the image of the company in the eyes of stake holders. Fulfilling positive image constantly and successfully constitutes the respected brand and company reputation in the long run, which is especially essential owing to make a difference from rivals in each sector to overcome competition.

There are several researches about PR practices in health sector. For example, Cho questions the types of power PR practitioners in health sector believe they have in media relations and finds that they believe to have expert power in media relations (Cho, 2006: 571). Kim et al. in their research paper questions Brand equity issue in hospital marketing area. They suggest that "hospitals can be successful in creating image and positive brand equity if they can manage their customer relationships well" (Kim et al., 2007: 75).

Health sector has developed considerably in Turkey over the past decade. Many small private hospitals and big hospital groups have been founded and health sector has become an enormous sector in such a short while with many new brands. According to the report of health sector of Turkey, which was prepared and published by Deloitte in June 2012, number of the private hospitals in Turkey has risen to 489, university hospitals to 62 in 2010 from respectively 261 and 42 in 2000. Nonetheless, number of state hospitals has decreased to 843 in 2010 from 861 in 2000. Total health expenditure of Turkey has gone up to 65.775 Billion USD in 2010 from 13.061 Billion in 2000 (Deloitte, 2012: 13-29).

According to the same report of Deloitte, ideal health sector in Turkey has three components, which were stated in Figure 3 (105).

Methodology of The Research

Preparation of the research started in October 2013. Hospitals, at which patients were applied surveys, were randomly chosen from the hospital list of Ministry of Health of Turkey. Instead of 20% of the hospitals that did not accept to participate in the research, some other hospitals were included in the research. Before surveys and interviews were started, research team, which consists of 52 public relations & advertising undergraduate students, were rigorously trained during October and November 2013 on face to face interview, question asking techniques, activity planning and time management to reach

immaculate results. During the training, students reviewed each question of the survey and interview question list as to make sure they understand them thoroughly. Before students travel to the cities to visit hospitals, where they dothe survey and interviews, they were instructed about how to communicate with project leader, who was reachable 7/24 through mobile phone and e-mail as a problem solver, if they come across any problem. A project mail group was opened on Yahoo groups for easy communication and document sharing and seamless operation. Number of the students and the cities they travel to make the research is shown in Table 1 (106). Students were grouped as two or three people as to instigate team work.

The research, which has two phases, was done in December 2013. The first part of it is the survey consists of 46 questions. 29 questions were measured in 5-point Likert scales. Five questions were open-ended. Other questions were categorical multiple-choice questions. 594 participants, who came to the hospitals to be treated, were surveyed. In the second phase, face to face structured interviews have been realized with 51 PR officers working in public relations departments of those hospitals.

Surveys have been applied on 364 participants from Istanbul, 98 participants from Sakarya, 96 participants from Izmit, 24 participants from Bursa, 12 participants from Ankara. The number of hospitals in these cities where survey took place are as follows: 151 hospitals from Istanbul, 15 hospitals from Izmit, 11 hospitals from Sakarya, 5 hospitals from Bursa and 2 hospitals from Ankara (Table 1: 106).

Limitations

Our study has certain limitations. First, we acknowledge that our study is a snapshot in time. One of the main restrictions we encountered is research related. There are not enough statistical researches done on public relations in health sector. The other one is that private hospitals are located mainly in big cities of Turkey as private health sector is relatively new in Turkey, which can also be accepted to be a limitation for a larger coverage.

Besides, it was quite hard for the pollsters to contact with PR departments' executives of the hospitals to do the interviews and surveys. PR departments' officers at the hospitals were usually reluctant to share information with the students. Therefore only 51 hospitals' PR officers and/or executives have been convinced to participate the research.

As well as interviewed PR department officers, some patients were not knowledgeable enough to answer some technology related questions. Consequently, pollsters were forced themselves to find younger and technology-friendly patients to get answers to the questions. On the other hand, as Raghupathi and Wu depict, there is an inherent potential positive relation between ICTs and the public health delivery (Raghupathi & Wu, 2011: 103). People tend to welcome technological improvements in health related issues.

FINDINGS

Descriptive Findings

Descriptive statistics about the data are as follows:

About Demography: 83% of the participants are between 17 to 50 years old. Representation of woman and man are almost the same. 70% of the participants are high school or university graduates. 81% of the participants got treated at a hospital over the past three months.

About PR Department Awareness: 75% of the participants think that public relations department is needed in the hospitals. Almost 50% of the participants are aware of public relations departments in the hospitals and their occupations. 78% of the participants uttered that if they had known the responsibilities of public relations department they would have benefited from it. Only 18% of the participants utilize PR department whenever they come to the hospital. This means that they need and aware of PR Department but rarely benefit from it.

About Hospital's Reputation and Service Quality: 55% of the participants have asserted that the reason why they get treated from that hospital is because of the hospitals' the high reputation in the perception of the society in general. 72% of the participants have said that the reason why they get service from that hospital is because the knowledge level of its doctors. 65% of the participants have asserted that the reason why they get service from that hospital is because of the extreme attention that the hospital health personnel pay to them. Only 34% of the participants have stated that the reason why they get service from the other hospitals of the same hospital group that they get service from is the extreme attention that the hospital health staff pay to them. 89% of the participants would prefer if they were asked about the quality of the service they got from the hospital. 49% of the participants have stated that the reason why they come to the specific hospital is because the hospital fulfills its social responsibilities. 74% of the participants have uttered that the reason why they get treated from that hospital is because its quality services. The conspicuous reasons why participants chose the hospitals they were in as follows: hospital is near my home or work by 33%, a friend suggested me by 27%, hospital has a good image by 25%. 69% of the participants are happy with the service they get from hospitals in return of the money they pay. 71% of the participants want to come back to the same hospital to be treated again. 69% of the participants have stated that they recommend the hospital they get service to their friends. 39% of the participants said that they have no complaints about the hospitals they were treated while 17% complained about crowd. 71% of the participants want to come back to the same hospital to be treated again.

About Social Media: 41% of the participants are aware that the hospitals they visited are on the social media. 64% of the participants follow the social media. Only 29% of the participants follow the developments through social media about the hospitals they get service from. 47% of the participants benefit from the hospital related information

through its web site. 47% of the participants benefit the hospitals' web sites as to get information about the doctors.55% of the participants get information from hospitals' web sites about the services they provide. Only 30% of the participants utilize the appointment systems in the web sites. 69% of the participants reach the contact information of the hospitals from their web sites. 38% of the participants gain information about various illnesses from hospitals' web sites. 54% of the participants prefer to receive all electronic services through smart phones. 57% of the participants prefer to see on the internet the video version of doctors' aspects and other sort of information that are published over the internet.

About the Information Patients Get from Hospital: 65% of the participants find someone to be informed at the hospitals. Only 30% of the participants stated that even if they would not come to the hospital they are constantly contacted by the hospital. Only 31% of the participants are constantly kept posted about any kind of organizations or developments related the hospitals through communication tools. 93% of the participants prefer someone to welcome them when they come to the hospital to guide them to where they are heading to. Only 20% of the participants trust the information about illnesses they gain via internet. Only 4% of the participants attend weekly illness briefs organized by the hospitals. 21% of the participants asserted that they prefer general illnesses related information to be shared on hospitals' websites while 12% of the participants prefer eye and another 12% prefer cold related illnesses. 39% of the participants have uttered that having left the hospitals their opinions were asked about the services they got from the hospitals.

Reliability and Factor Analysis Findings

Initial factor analyses were conducted with reliability tests to identify items to be included in each category. KMO values for the two categories of data were acceptable (KMO: 0,873). The Barlett's tests also showed that the data were suitable for factoring (p=0.000).

As a result of factor analysis we found all factors we have defined at the beginning of the survey. The factors found are as follows (Table 2: 106):

Factor 1: Benefiting from web site of hospital

Factor 2: Quality and reputation perception of hospital

Factor 3: Level of general satisfaction from hospital

Factor 4: Contacting with patients constantly with intention of CRM

Factor 5: Providing regular health communication between patients and hospital

Factor 6: Importance of PR department at hospital

Factor 7: Patients' expectations of face to face communication

Factor 8: Getting information and service apart from hospital currently being treated.

Factor 6, 7 and 8 has not been taken into account as their Cronbach's Alpha values are very low. Reliability value is an indicator of the degree of reaching the same result after repeated measurements. Therefore, reliability analysis is needed. To do that Cronbach's Alpha is computed. If Alpha value is above 0,70, the survey is considered reliable. Although overall Cronbach's Alpha value is high (0,854), Cronbach's Alpha value for factors 6, 7 and 8 is very low. Therefore they have been excluded from the analyses as their Cronbach's Alpha values are very low.

One possible explanation to this might be that for factors 6, 7 and 8, we must refine the survey questions to be reliable. As shown in Table 2, these factors have very low "Total Variance Explained" values.

Inferential Statistics Findings

In this part basic hypothesis tests were conducted. As factors and their underlying survey questions are measured in Likert scale, for correlation analyses Spearman rank correlation coefficients were computed. For test of differences among groups, non-parametric Mann-Whitney U tests and Kuruskal-Wallis H tests were used.

Factor 1: Benefiting from web site of hospital

There is a high significant (p=0,000) positive correlation (r=0,325) between "Benefiting from web site of the hospital" and "Quality and reputation perception of hospital," which indicates that more benefiting from web site of the hospital, higher the quality and reputation perception of hospital.

There is a high significant (p=0,000) positive correlation (r=0,272) between "Benefiting from web site of the hospital" and "Level of general satisfaction from hospital," which indicates that the more benefiting from web site of the hospital, the higher the level of general satisfaction from hospital.

There is a high significant (p=0,000) positive correlation (r=0,292) between "Benefiting from web site of the hospital" and "Contacting with patients constantly with intention of CRM," which indicates that the more benefiting from web site of the hospital, the higher the perception of contacted with patients constantly with intention of CRM.

There is a high significant (p=0,000) negative correlation (r=-0,268) between "Age" and "I utilize information on this hospital's web site," which indicates that the younger the patients, the higher the number of the people, who utilize information on this hospital's web site.

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the question of "Being aware of existence of PR department in the hospital" in terms of "Benefiting from the web site of the hospital." Those, who are aware of existence of PR department in the hospitals, are closer to definitely agree (343,93), while those, who are not aware of existence of PR department in the hospitals are closer to definitely disagree (234,68) in terms of utilization of hospital's web site (p= 0,000).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the question of "Being aware of hospital's existence in social media" in terms of "Benefiting from the web site of the hospital." Those, who are aware of hospital's existence in social media, are closer to definitely agree (395,29), while those, who are not aware of hospital's existence in social media, are closer to definitely disagree (224,50) in terms of utilization of hospital's web site (p= 0,000).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of "Occupation" in terms of "Benefiting from the web site of the hospital." Answers given by those, who belong to the group of civil servant, are the closest to definitely agree (330,54), while answers given by those, who belong to the group of unemployed, are the closest to definitely disagree (268,08) in terms of utilizing web site of the hospital (p= 0,025).

Factor 2: Quality and reputation perception of hospital:

There is a high significant (p=0,002) positive correlation (r=0,128) between "Education" and "Quality and reputation perception of the hospital," which indicates that the more educated the patients, the higher their quality and reputation perception of the hospitals.

There is a high significant (p=0,000) positive correlation (r=0,504) between "Quality and reputation perception of hospital" and "Level of general satisfaction from hospital," which indicates that when level of general satisfaction from hospital increases, so quality and reputation perception of hospital does.

There is a high significant (p=0,000) positive correlation (r=0,352) between "Quality and reputation perception of hospital" and "Contacting with patients constantly with intention of CRM," which indicates that the more efforts for contacting with patients constantly with intention of CRM are felt, the higher the quality and reputation perception of hospital.

There is a high significant (p=0,000) positive correlation (r=0,224) between "Quality and reputation perception of hospital" and "Providing regular health communication between patients and the hospital," which shows that the more providing regular health communication between patients and the hospital, the higher the quality and reputation perception of hospital.

There is a significant (p=0,038) positive correlation (r=0,085) between "Quality and reputation perception of hospital" and "Patients' expectation of face to face service," which shows that the more patients' expectation of face to face service is met, the higher the quality and reputation perception of hospital.

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the question of "Being aware of PR department's responsibilities in the hospital" in terms of "Quality and reputation perception of hospital." Those, who are aware of PR department's responsibilities, are closer to definitely agree (317,02), while those, who are not aware of PR department's responsibilities in the hospital are closer to definitely disagree (265,98) in terms of perception of quality and reputation about the hospital (p= 0,000).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the question of "Utilizing from PR department whenever come to the hospital" in terms of "Perception of quality and reputation of the hospital." Those, who are utilizing from PR department whenever come to the hospital, are closer to definitely agree (317,13), while those, who are not utilizing from PR department whenever come to the hospital, are closer to definitely disagree (283,30) in terms of perception of quality and reputation of the hospital (p= 0,043).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the question of "Being aware of hospital's existence in social media" in terms of "Perception of quality and reputation about hospital." Those, who are aware of hospital's existence in social media, are closer to definitely agree (350,02), while those, who are not aware of hospital's existence in social media, are closer to definitely disagree (255,94) in terms of perception of quality and reputation about hospital (p= 0,000).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the question of "Following the hospital on social media" in terms of "Perception of quality and reputation of hospital." Those, who are followingthe hospital on social media, are closer to definitely agree (304,72), while those, who are not following the hospital on social media, are closer to definitely disagree (272,54) in terms of perception of quality and reputation of hospital (p= 0,017).

Factor 3: Level of general satisfaction from hospital:

There is a significant (p=0,015) positive correlation (r=0,100) between "Importance of PR department at hospital" and "Level of general satisfaction from hospital," which indicates that the more importance of PR department at hospital is realized, the higher the level of general satisfaction from hospital.

There is a significant (p=0,012) positive correlation (r=0,103) between "Patients' expectation of face to face service" and "Level of general satisfaction from hospital," which indicates that the more patients' expectation of face to face service is provided, the higher the level of general satisfaction from hospital.

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the question of "Being aware of existence of PR department in the hospital" in terms of "Level of general satisfaction from hospital." Those, who are aware of existence of PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely agree (317,85), while those, who are not aware of existence of PR department in the hospital are closer to definitely disagree (267,40) in terms of general satisfaction level (p= 0,000).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questionof "Being aware of hospital's existence in social media" in terms of "Level of general satisfaction from hospital." Those, who are aware of hospital's existence in social media, are closer to definitely agree (338,40), while those, who are not aware of hospital's existence in social media, are closer to definitely disagree (263,29) in terms of level of general satisfaction from hospital (p= 0,000).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the question of "After my previous visit my opinion was asked about the services I experienced at the hospital" in terms of "Level of general satisfaction from hospital." Answers given by those, who belong to the group of yes, are the closest to definitely agree (359,29), while answers given by those, who belong to the group of it is my first time at this hospital, are the closest to definitely disagree (244,59) in terms of general satisfaction level of the hospital (p= 0,000).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of "The reason of being treated at this hospital today" and "General satisfaction level of the hospital." Answers given by those, who belong to the group of has a good image, are the closest to definitely agree (361,84), while answers given by those, who belong to the group of close to my home/work, are the closest to definitely disagree (238,68) in terms of general satisfaction level of the hospital (p= 0,000).

Factor 4: Contacting with patients constantly with intention of CRM:

There is a high significant (p=0,002) positive correlation (r=0,127) between "Education Level" and "Contacting with patients constantly with intention of CRM," which indicates that more educated the patients, higher the number of the people, want to be contacted constantly by the hospital with intention of CRM.

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the question of "Being aware of existence of PR department in the hospital" in terms of "Maintaining constant communication with patients through intention of CRM." Those, who are aware of existence of PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely agree (327,19), while those, who are not aware of existence of PR department in the hospital are closer to definitely disagree (256,49) in terms of maintaining constant communication with patients through intention of CRM (p= 0,000).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the question of "Being aware of hospital's existence in social media" in terms of "Maintaining constant communication with patients through intention of CRM." Those, who are aware of hospital's existence in social media, are closer to definitely agree (346,07), while those, who are not aware of hospital's existence in social media, are closer to definitely disagree (258,68) in terms of maintaining constant communication with patients through intention of CRM (p= 0,000).

Factor 5: Providing regular health communication between patients and the hospital:

There is a high significant (p=0,001) positive correlation (r=0,139) between "Education Level" and "Providing regular health communication between patients and the hospital," which indicates that the more educated the patients, the higher the number of the people, who want regular health communication to be provided between patients and the hospital.

There is a high significant (p=0,000) positive correlation (r=0,163) between "Providing regular health communication between patients and the hospital" and "Importance of PR department at hospital," which shows that more providing regular health communication between patients and the hospital, higher importance of PR department at hospital is felt.

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the question of "Being aware of hospital's existence in social media" in terms of "Providing constant health communication between patients and the hospital." Those, who are aware of hospital's existence in social media, are closer to definitely agree (338,77), while those, who are not aware of hospital's existence in social media, are closer to definitely disagree (263,76) in terms of establishing constant health communication between patients and the hospital (p= 0,000).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the question of "Occupation" in terms of"Providing constant health communication between patients and the hospital." Answers given by those, who belong to the group of self-employed, are the closest to definitely agree (332,30), while answers given by those, who belong to the group of unemployed, are the closest to definitely disagree in terms of establishing regular health communication between patients and the hospital (257,88) (p= 0,001).

Findings of Interviews with Hospitals' PR officers:

Generally speaking most of the PR officers at the hospitals were reluctant to answer the questions. Most of the hospitals (18) participated in the research employ 2 people at PR departments. The highest number is 6 people at 2 hospitals.40 officers out of 51 think that they have enough people to work with them at the PR departments.

44 officers out of 51 stated that they take social media seriously. 27 officers out of 51 said that they utilize social media for general publicity activities, while 15 of them use it to introduce doctors to the customers. 38 officers out of 51 stated that they have an employee responsible from social media only. 33 officers out of 51 said that the most popular media is social media in contacting the patients.

36 officers out of 51 stated that they manage corporate identity activities of the hospitals themselves. 48 officers out of 51 said that they have regular meetings with the hospital managers. 34 officers out of 51 said that they regularly measure brand reputation.

23 officers out of 51 declared that they renew publicity materials on monthly bases. 19 officers out of 51 stated that they do not have any PR budget, while 18 officers said that they have a yearly budget and 10 of them have quarterly budgets. 30 officers out of 51 said that the most popular activity that they utilize is events.

32 officers out of 51 said that they measure effectiveness of the activities they realize through surveys, while 10 of them said that they do not measure at all.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Comparing the results of the research done in this field with our research, which were explained in the section of literature review, there are some important findings. For example;

- Hospitals that have PR departments have gone up from 52% to 63%.

- Patients' complaints on not being paid enough attention by hospitals' employees went down from 52% to 35%.

- Quality perception of hospital by the patients, who get service from the hospitals increased from %55 to %74 between over the three years.

These are improvements we have detected in services of hospitals. According to the general findings of our research is that 71% of the participants want to come back to the same hospital to be treated again. But in contrary 61% of the patients have certain complaints from the hospitals they get treated.

75% of the participants of the research feel that PR department is needed at the hospitals, but almost one third of those people do not realize that hospitals, where they get service from, have PR departments. Besides, almost 25% of the people do not know the responsibilities of PR departments, while only 18% of them contact PR department whenever they come to the hospitals. Therefore PR departments need to be more noticeably active in contacting and acknowledging their patients and/or their target audiences in order to be both more visible and helpful for them. As 65% of the patients prefer to find someone to be informed at the hospitals when they come in, this contact point can be turned into an opportunity to close the awareness gap for PR services.

Hospitals' effort of fulfilling social responsibilities is an important indicator to be chosen by almost the half of the patients to get treated at the specific hospital. So, hospitals also pay attention to increase social responsibility activities to create loyal customers.

Besides, 89% of the patients preferred to be asked about the quality of the service they get from the hospitals. In the efforts of fulfilling that need, social media tools would provide hospitals effective opportunities.

Only 30% of the patients are constantly contacted by the hospitals. Social media as publicity tool and communication source in contacting target audiences has unutilized opportunities as 69% of the participants get informed trough hospitals' web sites, which indicates that most of the patients are technology friendly. But, only 29% of the all patients follow the developments regarding hospitals through social media. As 64 % of the patients follow the social media, there is a large gap to be filled in order to reach and listen to them in realizing quality services. So, social media can be used more by hospitals to increase awareness of PR activities.

So, whichever hospitals become the earliest to increase social media activities in contacting target audience, they will take the advantage of them and make difference in

competition with their rivals. Social media environments seem to have many undiscovered ways of maximizing interactive communication between hospitals and their target audiences. Hence, they have potentials to be critical success factors for health sector.

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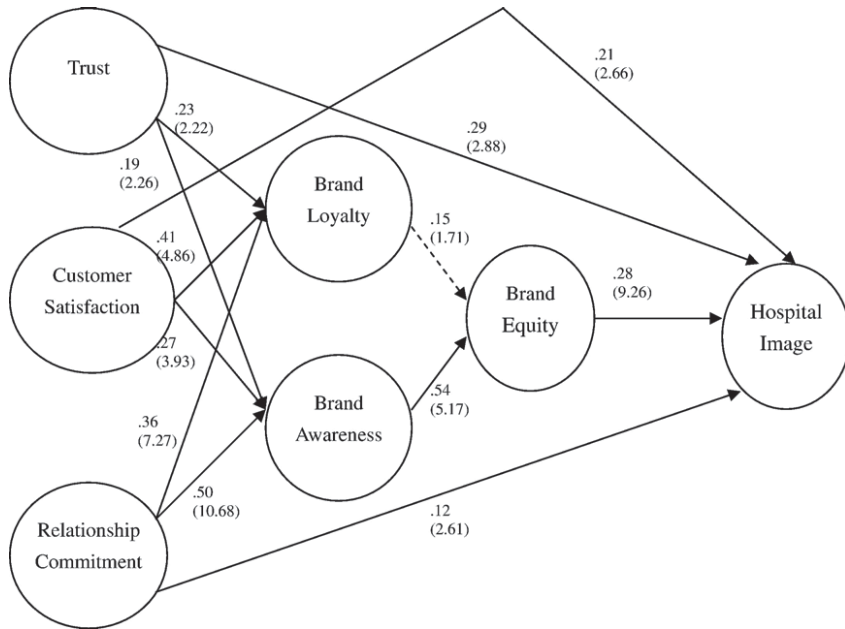
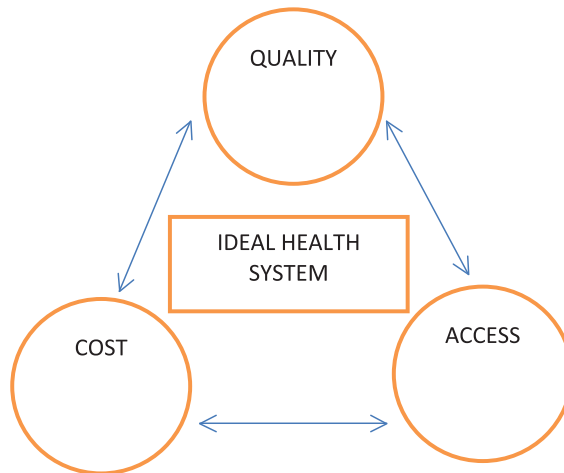**TABLES AND FIGURES**

Figure 1: Corporate Reputation Model
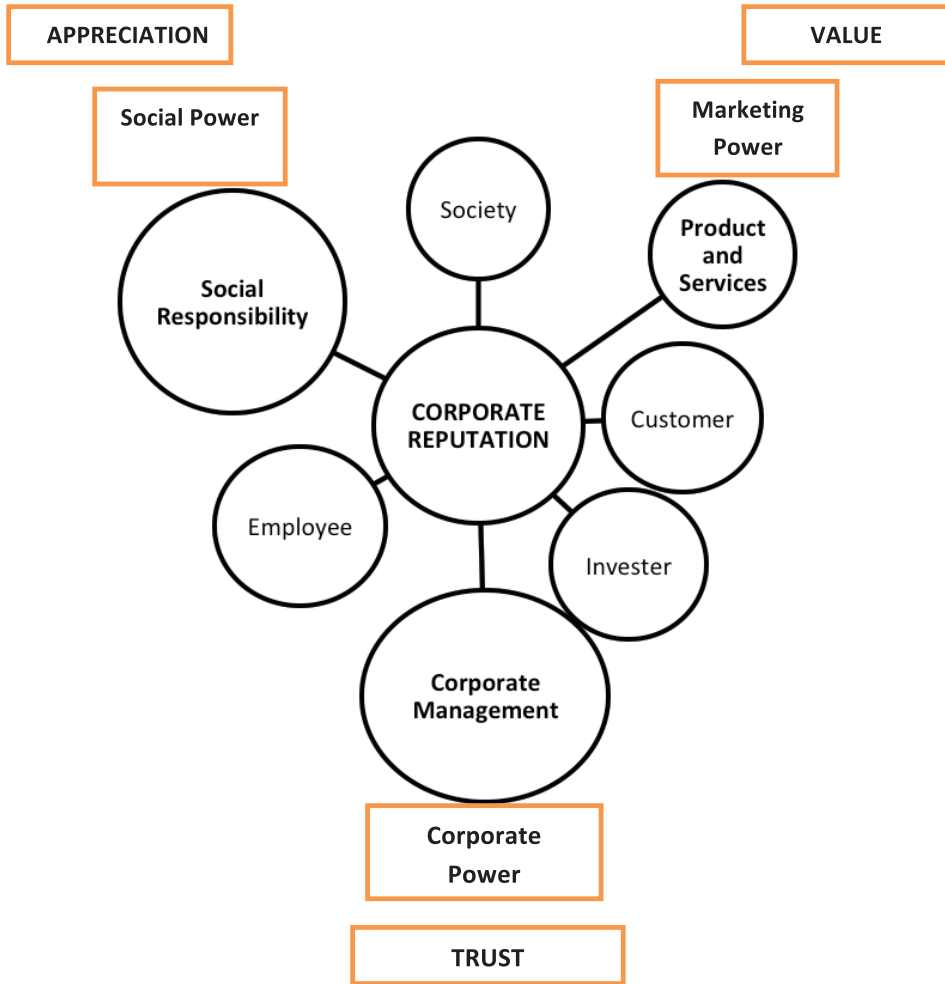
Source: ORSA, Kadıbeşegil; 2009: 143.

Figure 2: Hospital image relationship scheme with their structural equation model coefficients and t-values (in parentheses)

Source: Kim et al., 2008: 77.

Figure 3: Components of Ideal Health System

Source: Deloitte, 2012: 1.

Table 1: Number of Hospitals, Participants and Pollster Students

City	Number of Hospitals	Number of Participants	Number of Pollster Students
Istanbul	151	364	32
Sakarya	11	98	9
Izmit	15	96	7
Bursa	5	24	2
Ankara	2	12	2
Total	**184**	**594**	**52**

Table 2: Rotated Factor Matrix and Cronbach's Alpha Values for Each Factor

Factor Name	Item	Component*	Cronbach's Alpha	Eigenvalues	Total Variance Explained
Factor 1: Benefiting from web site of hospital	Q26 I get service information through hospital's web site	,834			
	Q25 I get doctors related information through the hospital's web site.	,813			
	Q24 I utilize the hospital's web site.	,753			
	Q41 I find the hospital's web site easy to use.	,722			
	Q28 I reach contact information of the hospital through web site	,704	**,871**	**7,00**	**14,92**
	Q29 I get information on various illness through the hospital's web site.	,568			
	Q23 I follow the social media to get the hospital related information.	,560			
	Q40 I prefer hospital's related activities to be published as video over its web site.	,473			

	Q15 I prefer this hospital as its reputation is high in society.	,784			
	Q16 I prefer this hospital as it fulfills its social responsibilities towards the society.	,770			
Factor 2: Quality and reputation perception of hospital	Q17 I prefer this hospital as it has quality services.	,710	**,791**	**2,79**	**10,06**
	Q18 I prefer this hospital as its doctors are talented.	,575			
	Q19 I prefer the hospital as its personnel's' attention toward me more than my expectations.	,475			
	Q10 It is easy for me to find someone at this hospital when I want to ask something.	,449			
Factor 3: Level of general satisfaction from hospital	Q45 I prefer to be treated at this hospital again.	,791	**,781**	**2,03**	**8,78**
	Q46 I recommend this hospital to my friends.	,769			
	Q36 I'm happy with the services I get in return to what I paid.	,676			
Factor 4: Contacting with patients constantly with intention of CRM	Q11 This hospital constantly contacts with me.	,850	**,845**	**1,34**	**6,26**
	Q12 I'm informed by this hospital through various communication tools on developments.	,848			
Factor 5: Providing regular health communication between patients and hospital	Q20 I prefer my basic health information to be sent to this hospital over the internet.	,750	**,584**	**1,24**	**6,03**
	Q32 I prefer to get all services through my smart phone when I come to the hospital.	,738			
Factor 6: Importance of PR department at hospital	Q8 I had known the responsibilities of PR department I'd have benefited more.	,677	0,237	1,15	5,47
	Q5 I think that PR departments are necessary at the hospitals.	,589			
	Q27 I benefit appointment system of the hospital on the web site.	,487			

Factor 7: Patients' expectations of face to face communication	Q30 I prefer to be welcomed and guided each time I come to the hospital.	,732			
	Q22 I'd prefer to be asked what kind of service I wish to get.	,597	-,025	1,07	4,68
	Q39 I attempt weekly illness briefs organized by the hospital.	-,582			
Factor 8: Getting information and service apart from hospital currently being treated	Q35 How much do you trust the illness related information you gained apart from the hospital web sites?	,701			
			,159	1,00	4,57
	Q21 I get the same quality of the eservice from other branch of this hospital.	,456			

Overall		**0,854**

* Notes: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization, Rotation converged in 7 iterations.