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A RESEARCH ON PROLIFICACY OF NEW MEDIA IMPLEMENTATIONS OF HOSPITALS' PR DEPARTMENTS IN TURKEY

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to expose communication activities, image creating and reputation building performances of public relations (PR) departments at the Turkish hospitals in terms of both public relations authorities of those organizations and their customers' perception. On top of that, this study is also supposed to look into new communication developments and applications, which have been put into practice as PR activities at the hospitals, whether increase PR departments' efforts to meet and/or exceed quality perception of customers. Thus a research, which consists of two steps, has been realized. In the first phase of the research a survey of 55 questions applied on randomly chosen 1113 customers, who were getting service, at 89 different hospitals from 8 big cities of Turkey including Istanbul, İzmir, Sakarya, Bursa, Izmit, Yalova and Eskisehir, Tekirdag. Secondly, structured face to face interviews have been done with public relations specialists of these hospitals. One of the findings of the research is that increase in customers' perception of the hospital's quality services and reputation is associated with the public relations department.

Keywords: Public Relations, Brand Reputation, CRM.

TÜRKİYE'DEKİ HASTANELERİN HALKLA İLİŞKİLER BÖLÜMLERİNİN YENİ MEDYA UYGULAMALARININ VERİMLİLİĞİ ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'deki hastanelerin müşterileri ve halkla ilişkiler bölümlerinin yöneticilerinin bakış açılarından ilgili hastanelerin imaj ve itibar yaratıcı iletişim etkinliklerini ortaya koymaktır.

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Ayrıca söz konusu hastanelerde iletişim ile ilgili uygulamaya konan yaklaşımları ve halkla ilişkiler aktivitelerini araştırarak, bu uygulamaların ve çabaların müşterilerin kalite beklentilerini karşılamakta ve hatta geçmekte yeterli olup olmadığını ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu nedenle iki aşamalı bir araştırma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Birinci aşamada, 55 sorudan oluşan bir anket İstanbul, İzmir, Sakarya, Bursa, İzmit, Yalova, Eskişehir ve Tekirdağ illerinde yer alan, toplam 89 hastanede hizmet almakta olan ve rastgele seçilmiş 1113 müşteriye uygulanmıştır. İkinci aşamada ise, bu hastanelerin halkla ilişkiler bölümlerinin uzmanları ile yapılandırılmış yüzü yüze röportaj yöntemiyle görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmanın bulgularından birisi, hastanelerin artan kalite ve itibar algısının müşterilerce halkla ilişkiler bölümleriyle ilişkilendirilmesidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Halkla İlişkiler, Marka İtibarı, Müşteri İlişkileri Yönetimi.

I. INTRODUCTION

Developments in communication technologies have caused to evolve traditional ways through which companies get in touch with their customers as well as getting feedback from them. Before advent of internet and virtual environment in which social media operates, contacting with audiences relatively restricted with a few alternatives. On the other hand, getting audience feedback was quite difficult, not cost effective and time-consuming back then. It was beyond belief to stay in touch with and being able to listen to them at all times. As soon as internet has come into our lives, it has been embraced passionately by all users as it provides users interact with friends at all times as a consequence of web 2.0. Then, an opportunity has come true for the organizations, which have been seeking for the best ways to reach out customers and listen to them as to ameliorate goods and services provided and even company policies as quick as possible as to meet and satisfy their needs, if only information that is gathered managed and put into practice strategically. Sutcu and Erdal (2014) state the importance of information management; in order to abstain damage of information pollution in terms of misperception of stakeholders, constant controlling, observing and commenting of information, what we call information communication management, is vital for the organizations as advent of internet and technological developments have made the information to be moved and spread worldwide in seconds[1]. Therefore, virtual communication environment provides institutions with endless opportunities in terms of proactive public relations through real time communication. Having done that it'd be much easier to develop strategies to make a difference to establish and maintain a good brand image and reputation in target audiences' perception especially in certain sectors where competition is quite tough like private hospital sector.

New communication environments and information communication technology (ICT) have many opportunities for companies' customer relations management applications to make a difference in competition among rivals as listening and responding to customers realizing two ways communication of information traffic between an organization and its audiences. In the information age that we are in, the way that information is managed has also changed. As a result of ICT devices, broad-band connection and wide spread use of smart phones information

moves so quickly among the users. Therefore information, whether it has a good or bad image effect, needs to be steered momentarily as it is the most valuable component for a strategic success. In an organization it is public relations (PR) department's responsibility to put into practice through innovative practices. Sutcu and Erdal states that disinformation, from which the companies should refrain, is a vital hurdle in information age as information flow so rapidly from various sources as to keep perception of good quality and brand reputation. In this respect, it is important for the companies in effort to understand and to be understood by their customers through strategic management tool of information communication technology (ICT). The more the ICT is managed strategically, the more the firms succeed to make difference to their competitors in contentious competition environments of the sectors. PR is supposed to get the most out of new technological communication related developments, as foundation of PR is to establish and maintain immaculate communication with target audiences. 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. They also argue that as users share their thoughts over the internet with each other, digital communication networks have become new venues for "word of mouth (WOM)" [2].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Health spending is something an individual can't refrain from it. A person somehow gets treated time to time during his or her life. It is also related with age. The older a person, the more he or she is to spend on health. According to Deloitte's global health sector outlook report, sector's expansion will depend on reducing increasing costs and treatment advancements. Also consumer wealth and growing population drives the demand for health care services. Regarding benefit level, chronic diseases and aging societies are forcing health payers in making decisions. In the year of 2015 Deloitte projects four trends will impact stakeholders along the global health care value chain; integrating to market forces, cost, regulations, compliance, transformation and digital innovation [3].

According to another Deloitte's report of healthcare industry in Turkey, which was published in January 2014, per capita spending for healthcare was 186 USD in 2002, 707 USD in 2012 and expected to be almost USD 912 in 2017. Number of the private hospitals grew at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14.8% and number of the private hospital beds grew at a CAGR of 23.6% from 2002 to 2012 unlike Ministry of Health hospitals increased at a CAGR of 1.5% and 6.2% respectively. 37% of the hospitals are private in Turkey. Private hospitals chose to concentrate on western region of Turkey for investing. As a result, acquisitions and mergers surpassed USD 1.4 Billion between 2009 and 2012 in Turkey [4]. The findings of Deloitte indicates almost 281% increase over 10 years in per capita health spending, which explains

why this sector is promising and has been growing attracting many investors in Turkey. As a result, competition between hospital brands to attract customers has been getting tougher and tougher with new mergers and acquisitions. Making difference in competition and establish an exquisite brand is a matter of effective administration, which requires putting into practice technologically underpinned innovative approaches to meet and exceed savvy customer expectations in the information age.

In the communication age internet has become an information source for the individuals, who seek solutions for their health problems. According to Dr. Ceylan, who is public health manager of Mugla City of Turkey, some patients go online trying to find cure or diagnose themselves and apply the solutions to their illnesses. Having done that patients evaluate their illnesses on their own, which causes e-patients. He also warns the patients that they need to stay away the blogs where some patients share their illnesses related experiences [5]. In this respect, Health Care web sites play an important role in finding quality information [6]. So, it would not be wrong to infer that as virtual information sources taken quite seriously by the audiences, it might be the same for any information in health sector regarding service quality, which effects the brand image and reputation.

Considering high competition in every sector quality is so vital for all organizations to gain repeat customers. According to Turkey's health sector report of Deloitte published in June 2012, as a result of changing demographics and economic conditions in general for a sustainable and ideal health system has three components (figure 1). So, it can be inferred that quality is especially important for health organizations.

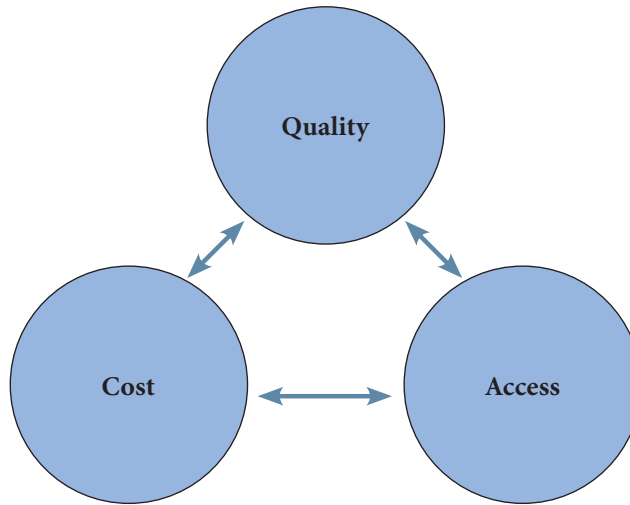


Figure 1. Three Main Dimensions of An Ideal Health System

Kaynak: Deloitte: 2012:1[7]

According to National Association of Health Services Public Relations Officers (NASH-PRO) every health service company needs to be good public relations operations just as it needs to be good at other strategic and operational departments such as financial management, marketing and quality control. Besides, Complexity of health service communications and the need for a planned way of supporting and improving them is recognized by public relations. Sir John Harvey-Johns, management guru, argues that an effective company chairman spends his or her time on public relations and strategic planning [8]. It is also worth to mention that PR department's importance especially at health sector is higher than most of the sectors considering audiences, who are patients. They are different than other types of customers in terms of situations they are in and feelings they have. Tengilimoglu argues that because of patients' psychological and physical situation, their expectations are so different. Patients and their relatives and/or families most of the time are anxious, skittish and scared, tense and stressful, which increase the importance of PR departments at the hospitals [9].

III. AIM AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the research is to find out the effectiveness of public relations practices in terms of the customers and/or patients at the hospitals in Turkey. Besides, how new communication technologies are applied in public relations departments as to make difference in serving customers and planning a head as to realize proactive public relations at the hospitals and whether they are facilitated the life and getting service for customers. The research has two phases: Surveys have been applied on patients and face to face structured interviews have been carried out with public relations authorities of the hospitals.

The following questions were examined in the research:

RQ1: Is there an association between patient's communication with the hospital through ICT devices and patient's quality and reputation perception of the hospital?

RQ2: Is there an association between patient's communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications and importance of PR department in the hospital?

RQ3: Is there an association between patient's communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications and patient's level of general satisfaction from the hospital?

RQ4: Is there a difference between those who are aware of the occupation of the PR department in the hospital and who are not in terms of the patient's communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications?

RQ5: Is there an association between patient's quality and reputation perception of the hospital and communicating with the patient as to facilitate to get service in the hospital?

RQ6: Is there an association between patient's quality and reputation perception of hospital and importance of PR department in the hospital?

RQ7: Is there a difference between those who utilize PR department each time they come to the hospital who do not in terms of the patient's quality and reputation perception of the hospital?

RQ8: Is there an association between communicating with the patient as to facilitate to get service in the hospital and importance of PR department in the hospital?

RQ9: Is there an association between communicating with the patient as to facilitate to get service in the hospital and patient's level of general satisfaction from the hospital?

RQ10: Is there an association between importance of PR department in the hospital and patient's level of general satisfaction from the hospital?

RQ11: Is there a difference between those who utilize PR department each time they come to the hospital and who do not in terms of importance of PR department in the hospital?

III.1. Significance of The Research

Creating positive images, though which brand reputation is constituted in audience perception has become an important issue to make a difference between rivals in tough competition environments in almost all sectors as a result of savvy customers in information age. It is public relations department, which is responsible to create a positive perception among audience listening them to reform services provided and expressing the reasons of an organization's existence through. Sutcu and Erdal state that PR departments are also responsible from corporate identity and corporate communication activities. Maintaining a positive image in the eyes of the audience builds a respected brand and the company reputation in the long run [10].

Health sector has become an important and a huge one over the years in Turkey. Turkish people have met with many new health brands to choose from. Deloit's report published in June 2012 indicates that there are 489 private hospitals, 62 university hospitals and 843 state hospitals in Turkey in 2010. Health expenditure has risen to 65.775 Billion USD in 2010, which is five times as much considering 13.061 Billion in 2000.

III.2. Methodology of The Research

The research was planned as a continuity of the one realized in 2013 and the results of it were published in 2014 by Istanbul University Communications Faculty Journal. Preparation of the research started in October 2014. The hospital list of Ministry of Health of Turkey was used to define the hospitals, at which patients were applied surveys. Those hospitals were randomly chosen. Some specified hospitals have not accepted to participate in the research so, some other hospitals were added to the research instead.

Research team of 110 PR & Advertising undergraduate students have gone through a detailed training on activity planning, time management, face to face deep interview, question asking techniques in November 2014 to accomplish a seamless research and accurate 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 do the survey and interviews, they were instructed about how to communicate with project leader, who was reachable 7/24 through mobile phone, social media applications and e-mail as an instant problem solver, if they come across any problem. A project blog page was prepared and assigned for easy communication and document sharing for an immaculate research operation. Number of participants, students and cities they travel to make the research is shown in Table 1. Students were grouped as two, three or four people as to incite teamwork.

The two-phased research was performed in December 2014. The first part of it is the survey consists of 50 questions. 27 questions were measured in 5-point Likert scales and other questions were categorical multiple-choice questions. 1113 participants, who came to the hospitals to be treated, were surveyed. In the second phase, face to face structured interviews have been realized with 89 PR officers working in public relations departments of those hospitals.

Table 1. Number of Hospitals, Participants and Pollster Students

City	Number of Hospitals	Number of Participants	Number of Pollster Students
Istanbul	43	420	42
Sakarya	18	390	39
Izmit	18	203	21
Bursa	6	60	4
Eskişehir	1	10	1
İzmir	1	10	1
Yalova	1	10	1
Tekirdag	1	10	1
Total	89	1113	110

III.3. Limitations

The study has certain limitations. It is a snapshot in time kind of study. One of the main research related restriction is that there are not adequate statistical researches done on public relations in health sector especially in Turkey. The other one is that private hospitals are located mainly in big cities of Turkey as the cost of being treated at them is relatively expensive for an individual considering an average household income. That can be thought to be valid limitation for a better inclusion of individuals and representation of the cities.

Some pollsters have had to change the hospitals chosen for them as almost 15% of those hospitals refused to participate the research. Though most of the pollsters have tried to their best as they were trained, they have had some difficulties to interview PR departments' executives. Some of them simply did not pay attention to pollsters unlike the patients, who were participants of the survey. Therefore only 83 of the hospitals' PR executives were interviewed. Another predicament was survey related. Surveys were found long and technology focused by the participants. So, pollsters went to great length to find participants, who answer the questions thoroughly.

III.4. Findings of The Research

III.4.1. Descriptive Findings

Descriptive statistics about the data are as follows:

About Demography: 83% of the participants are between 17 to 54 years old. Representation of woman and man are almost the same. 38% of the participants are high school or university graduates. 55% of the participants got treated at the same hospital or its branches for at least three times. Apart from the high school or university graduation, which was 70%, demographic indicators are almost the same as last year's research.

About PR Department Awareness: 68% of the participants think that public relations department is needed in the hospitals. Quotient was 75% last year. Need for PR department has decreased by 10% over a year.

Almost 57% of the participants are aware of public relations departments in the hospitals and 53% knows PR department's occupation. Both ratios were 50% in last year's research. Considering last year's research findings we can infer that the more the costumers are educated the more they think PR department is needed. To overcome this hurdle, customers should be informed about PR department's in-house responsibilities elaborately, as 73% of the participants uttered that if they had known the responsibilities of public relations department they would have benefited from it. Ratio was 78% in last year's research. It may also increase PR need perception of the customers.

26% of the participants utilize PR department whenever they come to the hospital. The rate was 18% according to the last year's research finding. It shows more than 30% increase from last year. This means that customers need and are aware of PR Department but rarely benefit from it like last year's research result.

37% of the participants state that they needed to contact PR departments while they were getting service at the hospitals.

49% of the participants say that they heard about the hospital, where they treated, from their friends. Almost 65% of 49% consist of recommendations. It can be inferred that word of mouth (WOM) seems to be a relatively important marketing tool for the hospitals. PR departments should work hard on repeat-customers as to stay in touch with them at all times.

About hospital's reputation and service quality: 67% of the participants have uttered that the reason why they get treated from that hospital is because its quality services. Quotient was 74% last year.

%70 of that participant mark the service quality as 7 or more out of 10.

52% 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. Rate was 34% according to the last year's research results. It'd not be wrong to say that it is a quite important customer relations management (CRM) tool for hospitals' PR departments in efforts to create repeat-customers.

56% of the participants have stated that the reason why they come to the specific hospital is because the hospital fulfills its social responsibilities. Ratio was 49% last year, which has risen by 15%.

53% of the participants have stated that the reason why they get treated from that hospital is because of the hospitals' high reputation in the perception of the society in general. The figure was slightly higher last year.

63% of the participants have said that the reason why they get service from that hospital is because the knowledge level of its doctors. Rate was 72% in last year's research.

80% of the participants would prefer if they were asked about the quality of the service they got from the hospital. The conspicuous reasons why participants chose the hospitals they were in as follows: hospital is near my home or work by 25%, a friend suggested me by 32%, hospital has a good image by 18%.

61% of the participants are happy with the service they get from hospitals in return of the money they pay. Ratio was %69 in last year's results. Indicates almost 15% decrease.

70% of the participants think that the hospital has adequate number of staff.

Only 35% of the participants state that they get same quality of service from the other branches of the hospital they are treated.

67% of the participants want to come back to the same hospital to be treated again. Quotient was 71% last year. It indicates more than 5% decrease.

67% of the participants have stated that they recommend the hospital they get service to their friends. Rate was 69% in the research carried out last year. The figure was dropped by 2%

67% of the participants want to come back to the same hospital to be treated again. Last year ratio was 71%. Shows 4% decrease.

About social media: As almost last year's research result, 42% of the participants are aware that the hospitals they visited are on the social media. 60% of the participants follow the social media. Rate was 64% last year.

Only 27% of the participants follow the developments through social media about the hospitals they get service from. It was 29% in last year's research.

34% of the participants benefit from the hospital related information through its web site. Rate was 47% last year.

42% of the participants benefit the hospitals' web sites as to get information about the doctors. It was 47% last year.

45% of the participants get information from hospitals' web sites about the services they provide. It was 55% last year.

Only 25% of the participants utilize the rendezvous systems in the web sites. It was found as 30% last year. %53 of the participants state that they do not offer an alternative when they do not get a rendezvous from the system.

59% of the participants reach the contact information of the hospitals from their web sites. It was found as 69% last year.

33% of the participants gain information about various illnesses from hospitals' web sites. It was 38% last year.

51% of the participants prefer to receive all electronic services through smart phones. It was found as 54% last year.

54% 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. It was 57% in last year's research results.

Only 26% of the participants have got help or contacted the hospitals over the social media.

About the information patients get from hospital:

Just like last year's research finding, only 30% stated that even if they would not come to the hospital they are constantly contacted by the hospital. 68% of the participants stated that they'd be pleased if they had been contacted in this respect.

Only 29% of the participants are constantly kept posted about any kind of organizations or developments related the hospitals through communication tools. Ratio was 31% last year.

82% of the participants prefer someone to welcome them when they come to the hospital to guide them to where they are heading. Rate was 93% in last year's research.

Almost like last year's findings, only 19% of the participants trust the information about illnesses they gain via internet.

Only 17% of the participants attend weekly illness briefs organized by the hospitals. The rate was 4% in last year's research results. 43% states that they wish to be informed about those illness briefs. It can be extrapolated that customers are not informed well about those briefs.

31% of the participants have uttered that having left the hospitals their opinions were asked about the quality of the services they got from the hospitals. The ratio was 39% in last year's research.

43% of the participants think that hospitals' web sites are easy to use or user-friendly. The ratio was 50% in last year's research results.

III.4.2. 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 ($p=0.000$).

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: Patient's Communication With The Hospital Through ICT Devices and Applications	Q30 I get doctors related information through the hospital's web site.	,807	,868	8,09	15,22
	Q29 I utilize the hospital's web site.	,798			
	Q31 I get service information through hospital's web site	,794			
	Q34 I reach contact information of the hospital through web site	,680			
	Q50 I find the hospital's web site easy to use.	,670			
	Q28 I follow the social media to get the hospital related information.	,654			
	Q35 I get information on various illness through the hospital's web site.	,648			
	Q40 I prefer to get all services through my smart phone when I come to the hospital.	,450			
	Q43 How much do you trust the illness related information you gained apart from the hospital web sites?	,329			

Factor Name	Item	Component*	Cronbach's Alpha	Eigen-values	Total Variance Explained
Factor 2: Patient's Quality and Reputation Perception of Hospital	Q19 I prefer this hospital as its reputation is high in society.	,730	,727	2,88	11,22
	Q20 I prefer this hospital as it fulfills its social responsibilities towards the society.	,701			
	Q24 I prefer the hospital as its personnel's' attention toward me more than my expectations.	,626			
	Q55 I recommend this hospital to my friends.	,601			
	Q54 I prefer to be treated at this hospital again	,578			
	Q22 I prefer this hospital as its doctors are talented.	,546			
	Q38 Evaluating the service out of 10 my point is.	,531			
	Q12 It is easy for me to find someone at this hospital when I want to ask something.	,439			
	Q21 I prefer this hospital as it has quality services.	,321			

Factor Name	Item	Component*	Cronbach's Alpha	Eigenvalues	Total Variance Explained
Factor 3: Communicating With The Patients as to Facilitate to Get Service in The Hospital	Q36 I prefer to be welcomed and guided each time I come to the hospital.	,740	,591	1,89	8,32
	Q27 I'd prefer to be asked what kind of service I wish to get.	,606			
	Q49 I prefer hospital's related activities to be published as video over its web site.	,483			
	Q25 I prefer my basic health information to be sent to this hospital over the internet.	,446			
	Q32 I benefit appointment system of the hospital on the web site.	,433			
Factor 4: Importance of PR Department in The Hospital	Q8 I had known the responsibilities of PR department I'd have benefited more.	,662	,560	1,35	6,22
	Q7 I think that PR departments are necessary at the hospitals.	,604			
	Q14 Being communicated by the hospital makes me happy even I do not come to this hospital	,591			
Factor 5: Patient's Attendance to Health Related Info Conferences	Q48 I wish to be informed about weekly illness briefs organized by the hospital.	,717	,510	1,28	5,15
	Q47 I attempt weekly illness briefs organized by the hospital.	,676			

Factor Name	Item	Component*	Cronbach's Alpha	Eigen-values	Total Variance Explained
Factor 6: Level of General Satisfaction From The Hospital	Q26 I get the same quality of the eservice from other branch of this hospital.	,721	,573	1,16	2,70
	Q44 I'm happy with the services I get in return to what I paid.	,622			
Factor 7: Patient's Frequency of Getting Service From The Hospital	Q11 How many times have you come to this hospital or its branches?	,784	,-552	1,01	4,36
	Q41 When was the last time that you got service from an hospital?	,739			
Overall			,854		

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

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:

Factor 1: The Patient's communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications.

Factor 2: Patient's quality and reputation perception of the hospital

Factor 3: Communicating with the patient as to facilitate to get service in the hospital

Factor 4: Importance of PR department in the hospital

Factor 5: Patient's attendance to health related info conferences

Factor 6: Patient's level of general satisfaction from the hospital

Factor 7: Patient's frequency of getting service from the hospital

Factor 7 has not been taken into account as its Cronbach's Alpha values is 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 factor 7 is very low. Therefore, it has been excluded from the analyses.

III.4.3. 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.

III.4.4. Factor 1: The Patient's Communication With The Hospital Through ICT Devices and Applications

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) negative correlation ($r=-0.252$) between "Patient's communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications" and "Age", which indicates that the more customers are younger, the more the patients communicate with the hospital through ICT devices and applications.

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.396$) between "Patient's communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications" and "Patient's quality and reputation perception of the hospital", which indicates that more customers communicate with the hospital through ICT devices and applications, higher the quality and reputation perception of the hospital (RQ1).

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.248$) between "Patient's communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications" and "Communicating with the patient as to facilitate to get service in the hospital", which shows that the more patient's communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications is increased, the higher the success of facilitating for them to get service in the hospital.

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.317$) between "Patient's communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications" and "Importance of PR department in the hospital", which indicates that the more patient's communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications is incited, the more the importance of PR department in the hospital in customer's perception increases (RQ2).

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.302$) between "Patient's communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications" and "Patient's attendance to health related info conferences", which states that the more the customer attends to health related info conferences, the more the customer communicates with the hospital.

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.273$) between "Patient's communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications" and "Patient's level of general satisfaction from the hospital", which indicates that more the patient communicates with the hospital through ICT devices and applications, more the patient's level of general satisfaction from the hospital increases (RQ3).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of “Patient’s communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications”. Answers given by those, who are aware of existence of PR department in the hospitals, are closer to definitely agree (646.07), while answers given by those, who are not aware of existence of PR department in the hospitals, are closer to definitely disagree (438,46) in terms of the patient’s communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications ($p= 0.000$).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of “Patient’s communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications”. Answers given by those, who are aware of the occupation of the PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely agree (668.40), while answers given by those, who are not aware of the occupation of the PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely disagree (415.60) in terms of the patient’s communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications ($p= 0.000$) (RQ4).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of “Patient’s communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications”. Answers given by those, who utilize PR department each time they come to the hospital, are closer to definitely agree (643.53), while answers given by those, who do not utilize PR department each time they come to the hospital, are closer to definitely disagree (520.79) in terms of the patient’s communication with the hospital through ICT devices and applications ($p= 0.000$).

III.4.5. Factor 2: Patient’s Quality and Reputation Perception of The Hospital

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.304$) between “Patient’s quality and reputation perception of the hospital” and “Communicating with the patient as to facilitate to get service in the hospital”, which indicates that the more the hospital communicate with the patient as to facilitate to get service in the hospital, more quality and reputation perception of hospital arise in customer’s perception (RQ5).

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.318$) between “Patient’s quality and reputation perception of hospital” and “Importance of PR department in the hospital”, which indicates that more customers’ quality and reputation perception of the hospital increases, more they think that PR department is important in hospitals (RQ6).

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.115$) between “Patient’s quality and reputation perception of hospital” and “Patient’s attendance to health related info conferences”, which indicates that the more the customers attend to health related info conferences in the hospital, more their perception of quality and reputation of the hospital accrues.

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.465$) between “Patient’s quality and reputation perception of hospital” and “Patient’s level of general satisfaction from hospital”, which indicates that the more the customers’ level of general satisfaction from the hospital increases, more their quality and reputation perception of the hospital increases.

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of “Patient’s quality and reputation perception of the hospital”. Answers given by those, who are aware of existence of PR department in the hospitals, are closer to definitely agree (614.79), while answers given by those, who are not aware of existence of PR department in the hospitals, are closer to definitely disagree (479.28) in terms of the patient’s quality and reputation perception of the hospital ($p= 0.000$).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of “Patient’s quality and reputation perception of the hospital”. Answers given by those, who are aware of the occupation of the PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely agree (609.33), while answers given by those, who are not aware of the occupation of the PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely disagree (483.18) in terms of the patient’s quality and reputation perception of the hospital ($p= 0.000$).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of “Patient’s quality and reputation perception of the hospital”. Answers given by those, who utilize PR department each time they come to the hospital, are closer to definitely agree (600.01), while answers given by those, who do not utilize PR department each time they come to the hospital, are closer to definitely disagree (536.27) in terms of the patient’s quality and reputation perception of the hospital ($p= 0.002$) (RQ7).

III.4.6. Factor 3: Communicating With The Patient as to Facilitate to Get Service in The Hospital

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.330$) between “Communicating with the patient as to facilitate to get service in the hospital” and “Importance of PR department in the hospital”, which shows that more communicating with the patient as to facilitate to get service in the hospital, more importance of PR department in the hospital in the perception of customers roars (RQ8).

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.110$) between “Communicating with the patient as to facilitate to get service in the hospital” and “Patient’s attendance to health related info conferences”, which points out that more patients attendance to health related info conferences, more they feel they are contacted to facilitate to get service in the hospital.

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.142$) between “Communicating with the patient as to facilitate to get service in the hospital” and “Patient’s level of general

satisfaction from the hospital”, which signifies that more the patient is communicated as to facilitate to get service in the hospital, more the patient’s level of general satisfaction from the hospital ascends (RQ9).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of “Communicating with the patient as to facilitate to get service in the hospital”. Answers given by those, who are aware of the occupation of the PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely agree (568.09), while answers given by those, who are not aware of the occupation of the PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely disagree (530.37) in terms of communicating with the patient as to facilitate to get service in the hospital ($p=0.030$).

III.4.7. Factor 4: Importance of PR Department in The Hospital

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.166$) between “Importance of PR department in the hospital” and “Patient’s attendance to health related info conferences”, which points out that more patients’ attendance to health related info conferences rises, more they think that PR department is important in the hospital.

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.148$) between “Importance of PR department in the hospital” and “Patient’s level of general satisfaction from the hospital”, which signifies that more patients’ level of general satisfaction from the hospital increases, more they think that PR department is important in the hospital (RQ10).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of “Importance of PR department in the hospital”. Answers given by those, who are aware of existence of PR department in the hospitals, are closer to definitely agree (584.25), while answers given by those, who are not aware of existence of PR department in the hospitals, are closer to definitely disagree (519.13) in terms of importance of PR department in the hospital ($p=0.000$).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of “Importance of PR department in the hospital”. Answers given by those, who are aware of the occupation of the PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely agree (603.10), while answers given by those, who are not aware of the occupation of the PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely disagree (490.31) in terms of importance of PR department in the hospital ($p=0.000$).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of “Importance of PR department in the hospital”. Answers given by those, who utilize PR department each time they come to the hospital, are closer to definitely agree (619.79), while answers given by those, who do not utilize PR department each time they come to the hospital, are closer to definitely disagree (529.23) in terms of importance of PR department in the hospital ($p=0.000$) (RQ11).

III.4.8. Factor 5: Patient's Attendance to Health Related Info Conferences

There is a high significant ($p=0.000$) positive correlation ($r=0.168$) between "Patient's attendance to health related info conferences" and "Patient's level of general satisfaction from the hospital", which signifies that the more patients attendance to health related info conferences, more their level of general satisfaction from the hospital increases.

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of "Patient's attendance to health related info conferences". Answers given by those, who are aware of existence of PR department in the hospitals, are closer to definitely agree (595.09), while answers given by those, who are not aware of existence of PR department in the hospitals, are closer to definitely disagree (504.99) in terms of the patient's attendance to health related info conferences ($p= 0.000$).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of "Patient's attendance to health related info conferences". Answers given by those, who are aware of the occupation of the PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely agree (602.77), while answers given by those, who are not aware of the occupation of the PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely disagree (490.69) in terms of the patient's attendance to health related info conferences ($p= 0.000$).

III.4.9. Factor 6: Patient's Level of General Satisfaction from The Hospital

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of "Patient's level of general satisfaction from the hospital". Answers given by those, who are aware of existence of PR department in the hospitals, are closer to definitely agree (597.84), while answers given by those, who are not aware of existence of PR department in the hospitals, are closer to definitely disagree (501.40) in terms of the patient's level of general satisfaction from the hospital ($p= 0.000$).

There is a significant difference between the various answers given to the questions of "Patient's level of general satisfaction from the hospital". Answers given by those, who are aware of the occupation of the PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely agree (590.89), while answers given by those, who are not aware of the occupation of the PR department in the hospital, are closer to definitely disagree (504.28) in terms of the patient's level of general satisfaction from the hospital ($p= 0.000$).

III.4.10. Findings of Interviews With Hospitals' PR Officers

Unlike the research carried out last year, overlooking some difficulties faced, most of the PR officers at the hospitals were willing to participate the research and answer the questions. 83

PR departments out of 89 (%93) took part in the research. The average number of employee, who is employed at hospitals' PR departments, is 4.

%67 of PR departments think that they have enough number of people to work at the PR departments. %90 PR departments out of 83 stated that hospital top management takes PR department and its activities seriously. %83 of PR departments claimed that as PR departments they heed social media to reach and contact target audiences and for general publicity activities. %72 of PR departments stated that they have at least an expert who is responsible from social media only. %45 of PR departments said that they get professional support from consultants on social media and publicity activities.

Most of the PR departments are satisfied with the support they get. %53 PR departments assert that they constantly measure their corporate reputation. %70 of PR departments have a budget and an activity plan, which they follow and put into practice. The most utilized PR activities are the events by %63 of PR departments, social responsibility activities by %36 of PR departments and sponsorships by 30% of PR departments respectively. The most utilized communication tools are social media by 58% of PR departments, newspapers by 40% of PR departments, magazines by 28% of PR departments, televisions by 18% of PR departments, radio and brochure by 14% of PR departments, and banner by 6% of PR departments respectively.

PR departments also measure the performance of their activities and their departments in general through research methods. 57% of PR departments utilize the surveys the most, 29% of PR departments use face to face interviews and 16% of PR departments utilize observation method. 41% of PR departments stated that they have needed to carry out crisis management techniques to maintain their corporate reputation.

IV. DISCUSSION&CONCLUSION

Comparing the results of the relevant researches done in this field with this research, some differences are worth to be mentioned;

Quality perception ratio of the hospitals by the patients, who get service from the hospitals were 55% in 2011, 74% last year and decreased to %63 in this year's research. Apart from 17%, who are the first comers, only 31% of the participants stated that their opinion were asked about the quality of the services they get from the hospitals after they left. They also claim that the most important reason why they chose the specific hospital to be treated is a friend recommendation by 32%.

67% of the participants want to come back to the same hospital to be treated again and the same amount of the people would recommend the hospitals to their friends. The ratios for the same criteria last year were 71% and 69% respectively.

68% of the participants of the research feel that PR department is needed at the hospitals, which was 75% last year. Exactly the same amount of the people claimed that the reason why they get treated that specific hospital is because its quality services. 57% of the participants are aware that hospitals, where they get service from, have PR departments. The ratio was almost 67% last year. Almost 53% of the people know the responsibilities of PR departments. The ratio was 75% last year.

%72 of the patients claims that they'd benefit the PR department more if only they knew its responsibilities better. This is an important indicator that customers wait there to be informed more about PR departments' facilities, through which more information can be gathered on their expectations. One of the ways to improved it getting in touch with them face to face, but only 26% of them contact PR department whenever they come to the hospitals. The ratio was 18% last year though. This figure seems one of the few positive progresses comparing this year's research findings especially with the last year's one. It can be inferred that PR departments need to be more conspicuous in their face to face and media mediated contacts with the customers. 82% of the patients prefer to find someone to be informed at the hospitals when they come in. The ratio was 65% last year. 65% of the patients state that they easily find someone when they need it. This shows that contact possibility with the customers is available at the hospitals, but PR departments do not seem to be taking the advantage of it.

Another finding, which supports that approach is the ratio of being in touch with the customers at all times is %31. Surprisingly, 68% of the participants wish to be in touched at all times even they do not come to the hospital. It can be said that there is a huge gap to be filled by PR departments, as one of their responsibilities is to build a bridge between the company and its target audiences.

One of the most effective ways to be suggested for PR departments in their efforts to contact with their target audiences is social media as 60% of the participants follow the social media constantly. In contrary only 42% of them know that the specific hospital is on social media but only 23% of the participants asserted that they follow the hospital related developments through social media.

Besides, only 27% of the patients have contacted the hospitals through social media. %57 think that hospitals websites are not user-friendly. %38 of the participants stated that they get illness related information from hospitals' websites. Therefore, apart from face to face communication, social media and websites seem to be unique platforms to fill the lack of communication with the audiences. Taking the advantage of that gives a big opportunity to the hospital, whichever does that, to make a real difference in such a high competitive sector.

Only 35% of the participants think that they get the same quality of service from the other branches of the hospital they get treated at the time of the survey. As the ratio seems to be considerably low, it needs to be ameliorated if the companies want to make a difference in

customers' perception in terms of standardization of the service quality, which is a vital component of the brand equity.

80% of the patients surveyed would prefer to be asked about their opinions on what kind of service they want to get from the hospital they get treated.

Besides, patients, who attend health related information conferences, think that these events facilitate to get service from the hospital. Inviting patients to these events could create perfect opportunities for PR departments to contact them as to ask their opinions. Customers' willingness to participate to determine service variety in the hospital should be turned into an advantage, which is also important to actualize an effective PR operation in order to reform services provided.

Paying real attention to aforementioned topics and to find creative and innovative approaches to them could be the solution to succeed sustainability in competition, which turns good images into reputation in the long run for the brand equity.

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