

The Mediating Role of Patient Satisfaction in the Effect of Perceived Corporate Image on Patient Loyalty

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Corporate image, patient satisfaction, and patient loyalty have become crucial for the survival of private hospitals in the fiercely competitive environment. This study aimed to determine the mediating role of patient satisfaction in the effect of perceived corporate image on patient loyalty.

Methods: The study was conducted in the Marmara Region, Türkiye, between June 15, 2021 and October 15, 2021. The study data were collected from individuals aged 18 and over who resided in the Marmara Region, Türkiye, and received services from private hospitals in 2021. The study data were collected by online survey.

Results: The study results showed that perceived corporate image has a positive effect on patient satisfaction. Furthermore, both perceived corporate image and patient satisfaction have a positive effect on patient loyalty. Lastly, patient satisfaction has a mediating role in the effect of perceived corporate image on patient loyalty.

Conclusion: Both the perceived corporate image and patient satisfaction are determinants of patient loyalty. In the light of the study results, efforts are recommended to increase the positive perceived corporate image and patient satisfaction.

Keywords: Corporate Image, Patient Satisfaction, Patient Loyalty, Hospital

Algılanan Kurumsal İmajın Hasta Sadakatine Etkisinde Hasta Memnuniyetinin Aracılık Rolü

ÖZET

Amaç: Yoğun rekabet ortamında özel hastanelerin varlığını sürdürebilmesi için kurumsal imaj, hasta memnuniyeti ve hasta sadakati konuları çok önemli hale gelmiştir. Bu çalışma ile algılanan kurumsal imajın hasta sadakatine etkisinde hasta memnuniyetinin aracılık rolünün belirlenmesi amaçlanmıştır.

Yöntem: Araştırma 15 Haziran 2021 – 15 Ekim 2021 tarihleri arasında Marmara Bölgesi, Türkiye’de gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma verileri Türkiye’de Marmara Bölgesi’nde ikamet eden ve 2021 yılı içerisinde özel hastanelerden hizmet almış 18 yaş veya üzeri bireylerden toplanmıştır. Araştırma verileri online anket yöntemi ile toplanmıştır.

Bulgular: Araştırma sonuçlarına göre kurumsal imaj algısının hasta memnuniyetini pozitif etkilediği belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca hem kurumsal imaj algısının hem de hasta memnuniyetinin hasta sadakatini pozitif etkilediği belirlenmiştir. Son olarak algılanan kurumsal imajın hasta sadakatine etkisinde hasta memnuniyetinin aracılık rolünün olduğu belirlenmiştir.

Sonuç: Araştırmanın sonuçları hem algılanan kurumsal imajın hem de hasta memnuniyetinin hasta sadakatinin bir belirleyicisi olduğunu göstermektedir. Araştırma sonuçları çerçevesinde olumlu kurumsal imaj algısının ve hasta memnuniyetinin artırılmasına yönelik çalışmaların yapılması önerilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kurumsal İmaj, Hasta Memnuniyeti, Hasta Sadakati, Hastane

Due to many reasons, including increased competition in the business world, technological advancements, changes in the market structure, diversification of demands and expectations of consumers, etc., consumer- and community-oriented work has become a must for today's organisations to be able to survive. Significant changes and developments are taking place in the healthcare industry. Hospitals have become forced to carry out consumer- and community-oriented operations to survive because of the changes in the provision of the healthcare services, the community's raised awareness of health, changing requirements and expectations, etc. (1). This situation has made matters such as corporate image, patient satisfaction, and patient loyalty important for hospitals.

Corporate image is defined as "stakeholders' beliefs, perceptions, feelings and attitudes towards an organisation" (2). Representing the picture of an organisation in the minds of audiences or stakeholders, the corporate image is what comes to the minds of the audience or stakeholders when they see or hear the name or logo of the organisation (3). The corporate image is the result of the interaction of the organisation with the audiences or stakeholders (4). The audiences or stakeholders of an organisation make assessments based on a variety of information about the organisation. Therefore, the image of a corporation may vary across audiences or stakeholders. In other words, one segment of society has a positive opinion about an organisation, while another segment may have a negative opinion about it (5). There are several factors affecting the formation of a corporate image. For hospitals they include the name, logo, architecture, and general hygiene of the hospital as well as the level of difficulty to get information from the hospital, how it handles complaints, the news in the press, the appearance and attire of its staff, the quality of the staff's communication with the patients, whether novel methods of diagnosis and treatment are used, waiting times, the adequacy of the medical equipment and devices, the quality of the services rendered, the attention paid to patient privacy and patients' rights, the information of the community about health-related issues, environmental awareness, etc. (6). The corporate image provides benefits to organisations in many aspects, including achieving a competitive advantage and profitability, increasing sales, interrelating positive relationships with the community and stakeholders, attracting investors and financial institutions, and ensuring employee satisfaction, consumer satisfaction, and loyalty. Therefore, it is very important for organisations to make efforts to create a positive image and maintain and manage it (7).

Patient satisfaction is another crucial issue for hospitals. Patient satisfaction is defined as "patient perception that the expectations have been met or exceeded" (8). Patient satisfaction involves subjective evaluations by the patients about the services provided to them (9). Patients make evaluations on whether the services provided to them by a healthcare organisation meet their demands and expectations after they receive services from them. As a result of these evaluations, patient satisfaction is achieved if the services received have met the demands and expectations of patients. However, if the services received have not met their demands and expectations, patient dissatisfaction occurs (8). There are several factors affecting patient satisfaction. These include the age, sex, educational background, social security, income status, demands, and expectations of the patient as well as the type of their disease, the care taken and the information given in the diagnosis and treatment process, attention paid to their privacy, the length of time taken for their diagnosis and treatment, attitudes and behaviours of the staff, etc. Likewise, factors such as quality of the healthcare service offered, equipment and technology of the organisation, cleanliness, physical appearance, and comfort of the organisation, and waiting times also affect patient satisfaction (10,11). Patient satisfaction provides substantial benefits for both patients and healthcare organisations. Satisfied patients pay regard to the advice given by the physician, comply with the treatment, have increased trust in the organisation, choose the same organisation again in case of need, and express positive opinions about the organisation to the people around them. Patient satisfaction helps healthcare organisations gain a competitive advantage, reduce costs, and increase profitability (12,13,14).

Patient loyalty is another important issue for hospitals. Patient loyalty is the deep commitment of patients to choose the same healthcare organisation again when they need, even if they have better alternatives (15,16). Loyal patients prefer the same hospital when needed, give positive opinions and advice about the hospital to the people around them, and resist going to other hospitals. Therefore, loyal patients are crucial for hospitals (8,17). Loyal patients reduces the marketing costs of hospitals and loss of patients and helps to establish long-term relationships with patients (18, 19). Patient loyalty is affected by factors such as corporate image, service quality, patient satisfaction, etc. (16, 20).

This study aimed to determine the mediating role of patient satisfaction in the effect of perceived corporate image on patient loyalty. Below are the study hypotheses developed on the basis of the objective and conceptual framework of the study.

H₁: Perceived corporate image has a positive effect on patient satisfaction.

H₂: Perceived corporate image has a positive effect on patient loyalty.

H₃: Patient satisfaction has a positive effect on patient loyalty.

H₄: Patient satisfaction has a mediating role in the effect of perceived corporate image on patient loyalty.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted in the Marmara Region, Türkiye, between June 15, 2021 and October 15, 2021. The study data were collected by online survey.

Samples

The study sample consisted of individuals aged 18 and over who resided in the Marmara Region and received services from private hospitals in 2021. Within the scope of the study 395 survey forms were collected.

Characteristics of the participants of the study, 58.5% (n=231) were female and 41.5% (n=164) were male and 22% (n=87) had a high school or lower degree, 29.6% (n=117) an associate degree, 38.5% (n=152) an undergraduate degree, and 9.9% (n=39) a graduate degree. While 52.7% of the participants (n=208) were single, 47.3% of them (n=187) were married. The average age of the participants was 31.65±10.47.

Measures

The data was collected by using a survey form that consisted of four sections. The first section contained questions to identify the demographic characteristics of the participants. Information on other measurement tools that used in the study is given below:

- Corporate Image Scale: The scale was developed by Derin and Demirel (21). The scale consists of one dimension and seven statements. Analyses showed that the level of reliability of the scale is high ($\alpha=0.894$).

- Patient Satisfaction Scale: The scale was developed by Chang et al. (22). The validity and reliability of the Turkish version of the scale was confirmed by Durmuş and Akbolat (23). The scale consists of one dimension and four statements. Analyses showed that the level of reliability of the scale is high ($\alpha=0.905$).

- Patient Loyalty Scale: The scale was developed by Tosyalı et al. (24). The scale consists of one dimension and seven statements. Analyses showed that the level of reliability of the scale is high ($\alpha=0.884$).

The statements in the scales were measured by 5-point Likert-type scale options (1= strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Data Analysis

The statistical software SPSS 22.0 and Process Macro v4.0 were used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were calculated, and correlation and effect analyses were performed. The results of the data analyses were considered to be within a confidence interval of 95% with a significance level of 5%.

RESULTS

Based on the results of the analysis presented in Table 1, there was a positive correlation between perceived corporate image and patient satisfaction ($r= 0.788$). In addition, there were positive correlations between both perceived corporate image and patient loyalty ($r= 0.712$) and patient satisfaction and patient loyalty ($r= 0.782$).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2
1. Perceived Corporate Image	4.074	0.481		
2. Patient Satisfaction	4.075	0.542	0.788*	
3. Patient Loyalty	3.989	0.528	0.712*	0.782*
* $p<0.01$				

As shown by the results of the analysis given in Table 2, perceived corporate image has a positive effect on patient satisfaction ($\beta=0.889$, $p=0.000$). Moreover, both perceived corporate image ($\beta= 0.280$, $p=0.000$) and patient satisfaction ($\beta= 0.566$, $p=0.000$) have a positive effect on patient loyalty. Based on these results, hypotheses H₁, H₂, and H₃ were confirmed.

Effect	β	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	0.453	0.144	3.156	0.002	0.171	0.736
PCI→PS	0.889	0.035	25.393	0.000	0.820	0.958
Effect	β	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	0.544	0.139	3.905	0.000	0.270	0.817
PCI→PL	0.280	0.054	5.138	0.000	0.173	0.387
PS→PL	0.566	0.048	11.719	0.000	0.471	0.661

PCI: Perceived Corporate Image, PS: Patient Satisfaction, PL: Patient Loyalty

As shown by the results of the analysis given in Table 3, patient satisfaction has a mediating role in the effect of perceived corporate image on patient loyalty ($\beta = 0.503$) and further increases the positive effect of perceived corporate image on patient loyalty ($\beta = 0.783$, $p = 0.000$). Based on this result, hypothesis H4 was confirmed.

Effect	β	S.E.	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	
Direct Effect	PCI→PL	0.280	0.054	5.138	0.000	0.173	0.387
Indirect Effect	PCI→PS→PL	0.503	0.053			0.389	0.599
Total Effect	PCI→PL	0.783	0.039	20.129	0.000	0.706	0.859

PCI: Perceived Corporate Image, PS: Patient Satisfaction, PL: Patient Loyalty

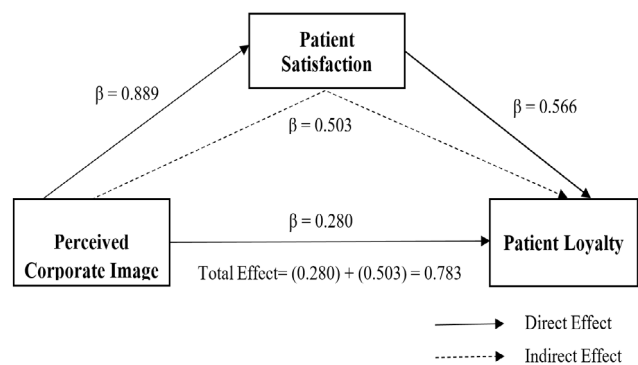


Figure 1. Model Output

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study results show that perceived corporate image has a positive effect on patient satisfaction. This

result is supported by the results of similar studies in the literature (13,19,25). It can be claimed, based on the results of both the present study and those in the literature, that patients' positive perception of corporate image of a hospital where they received services increases their satisfaction. Another result obtained in the present study is that perceived corporate image has a positive effect on patient loyalty. This result is supported by the results of similar studies in the literature (13,16,18). Considering these results, it can be reported that a positively perceived corporate image increases patient loyalty.

It was also concluded from the present study that patient satisfaction has a positive effect on patient loyalty. This is supported by the results of similar studies in the literature (14,17,26,27). Within the framework of both the results of the present study and those of studies in the literature, it can be said that if patients are satisfied with the services provided by a hospital, they might choose that hospital again in future when they need healthcare services, and loyalty to that hospital might be created depending on the level of satisfaction. Lastly, it was established from the results of the present study that patient satisfaction has a mediating role in the effect of the perceived corporate image on patient loyalty. According to these results, the patients' positive perception of the corporate image of a hospital where they received services might affect their satisfaction positively and their satisfaction might indirectly increase the positive effect of the perceived corporate image on patient loyalty.

The results of the present study show that both perceived corporate image and patient satisfaction are determinants of patient loyalty. Achieving patient loyalty is vital for hospitals in the sense that it is difficult and highly costly to gain new patients in the severe competitive environment and with a view to not losing the existing patients (19). In the light of the study results, certain recommendations were made to increase the positively perceived corporate image and patient satisfaction. Hospital management should pay attention to physical conditions, appearances, architecture, decoration, and cleanliness to be able to project a positive corporate image to the community, stakeholders, and patients. In addition, employees should pay attention to their appearance and outfits, communicate positively with their patients and be kind to them. The quality of healthcare services offered, adequate equipment, not-too-long waiting times, and detailed information for patients during treatment must be ensured. The news and posts about the hospital must be followed and releases must be made to the public when needed. Social

responsibility projects and works for the benefit of society must be performed. Lastly, it is recommended that hospital leaders professionally manage corporate image efforts and involve employees.

In order to ensure patient satisfaction, the needs, demands and expectations of the patients should be constantly monitored and taken into consideration. Arrangements must be made to meet the needs, demands, and expectations of patients. The patients' level of satisfaction must be measured and improved as required. The patients must be treated with honesty and transparently. Detailed information must be given to the patients about the healthcare services offered to them, solutions must be created for their complaints, and quality service must be offered. Lastly, all employees of the hospital must assist patients and be kind to them.

This study is important for determining the mediating role of patient satisfaction in the effect of perceived corporate image on patient loyalty with regard to private hospitals. It is considered to be beneficial to conduct similar studies on the subject involving more participants and people who receive services from public hospitals.

Limitations

The study is limited to people who received service from private hospitals in the Marmara Region between June 15, 2021 and October 15, 2021. The low number of participants is another limitation.

DECLARATIONS

Funding

No financial support was received for the study.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethics Approval

Ethical approval that the study was ethically appropriate was obtained with decision number 2021-10/27 on 09.06.2021 from the Medical Research Evaluation Board of Acıbadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar University.

Availability of Data and Material

The dataset of this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Authors Contributions

All authors contributed equally to all parts of the study.

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