



The Effect of Word of Mouth Marketing on the Purchase Behavior Via Brand Image and Perceived Quality

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ABSTRACT

In terms of businesses in today's world, the most important way of sustainability is through a good sense of quality and a brand image. Especially when the uncertainties about the service to be offered in the service sector are excessive, people can postpone the decision stage as long as they are not confident. For a service that they do not already have experience, the customers choose the way to prefer perceived quality perception and businesses with high brand image with the help of word of mouth marketing. In this study, it is aimed to determine whether word of mouth marketing has effect on the purchasing behavior via brand image and perceived quality. In order to collect the data in the study, scales which consists of 23 items, 89 for Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient word of mouth marketing, 80 for brand image, 92 for perceived quality, developed by Goyette vd (2010), Ural and Perk (2012) and Pappu, Qvester ve Cooksey (2006) was used. As a result of the analyzes made, it has been found out that word of mouth marketing activities develop faster on the institutions which had high perceived quality and brand image before, and on the purchasing behaviors of the individuals.

INTRODUCTION

Today, with technological developments, individuals are exposed to a lot of information or messages every day, and it is difficult to distinguish between institutions that produce similar products or services. Particularly when it comes to service, the individual is having difficulty in the stage of deciding. The perceived quality and brand image created by those who previously bought the product or service constitutes the most important factors affecting the purchasing preferences of potential customers. The recent competitive success is achieved by being closer to the customer and establishing a healthy communication with them. Customers prefer the brand image-intensive businesses that can best meet their needs and wants, understand the questions and produce early solutions.

Businesses that are aware of this, have an individual interaction with the customers and take a hint about what to do with them. In an ever-increasing competitive environment, organizations will be able to communicate more closely with customers in order to be able to sustain their assets and to do so with the right marketing communications. People who demand service through word-of-mouth marketing realize purchasing by obtaining the most important information they trust, which reduces their ambiguity.

1. CONCEPT OF WORD OF MOUTH MARKETİNG

In today's increasingly competitive world, it has become possible to reach every individual through various electronic mass media, but the importance of communication with word of mouth marketing has never changed and even this traditional communication type has become even more important. Rather than researching or experimenting with the product for which they do not have information about the consumer, they may be able to access information that they can use for their work through daily word of mouth communication (Ellison and Fudenberg, 1995, p. 114).

Word of mouth marketing is the most customer-focused form of communication in all forms of communication. The consumer decides who to talk to and what to ask (Silverman, 2007, p. 47). Word of mouth marketing is expressed in the form of verbal communication between two or more consumers who are not engaged in a commercial, brand, product or service (Woodside and Delozier, 1976, p. 13). Richins describes word of mouth marketing as an exchange of voluntary information between consumers about an organization, product, or consumer's experience of this product. This voluntary information exchange is a powerful source of information that organizations can use for their own benefits (Richins, 198, p. 69). In the context of marketing; it is seen as transmitting products or services, activities of profit-oriented or non-profitable organization to any other person from any other person than the sales personnel (Gulmez, 2008, p. 318). Communication is also a science of art, which provides mutual benefits between the customer - the customer and the customer - the marketer. (Sernovitz, 2007, p. 2). Word of mouth marketing is a form of personal communication between the buyer and the sender and can be seen as a personal influence process that can change the behavior or attitudes of the buyer (Sweeney et al., 2008, pp. 344-345).

2. BRAND IMAGE AND PERCEIVED QUALİTY

A brand can be defined as a combination of name, term, sign, symbol, design, shape, or all of them to describe a product or distinguish a product from rivals (Odabası and Oyman, 2007, p. 360). While the brand (Ozdemir, 2008, p. 114), can also be thought of as the sum of the perceptions and feelings of consumers related to a product, on the other side while consumers buy a product carries the aim of "differentiation" (Ar, 2007, p. 5).

The image is defined as the impressions that emerge in the buyer's memory in the form of emotions or thoughts revolving around the brand, and these impressions are expressed by the knowledge gained from various sources, by the experiences of other people, or by the person's own experience (Yukselen and Guler, 2009, p. 22).

The brand image concept can be evaluated from different angles. It is interested in evaluating the perception of a brand in the mind of the consumer when buying behavior is examined. While the consumer is satisfied by establishing an emotional connection with the brand, this level of satisfaction improves the brand's differentiation. The brand image is the sum of the emotional and aesthetic positive or negative impression that the product creates in the target market (Ker, 1998, p. 25). For the formation of the brand image, it is absolutely necessary for the consumer to have the experience of purchasing or using the product or service belonging to a mark (Hung, 2005, p. 239).

The brand is a promise of mutual trust and a quality guarantee. The brand establishes relationships between the firm and the firm's customers. A strong brand,

- Can be distinguished
- Creates a profile
- Stands as an element of preference (Perry and Wisnow, 2003, p. 12).

Brand image can vary depending on the difference between expected and perceived quality. The customer satisfaction is achieved when the quality which the customers perceive is higher than expected quality, whereas it shows that a business does not provide satisfaction when the expected quality is higher than perceived quality. Businesses can contribute positively to the brand image with the importance they give to perceived quality and customer satisfaction and also at the same time they can contribute to their the customer portfolio via past experience of the satisfied customers and word of mouth marketing. Through word of mouth marketing, a positive brand image effect can be created in the minds of consumers. For this reason, it is possible with high perceived quality for the brand image to come out to daylight with full potential. Brand image is formed in the minds of consumers in the direction of positive or negative perceptions. Through word of mouth marketing, both conditions are reflected in the buying behaviors of the customers as positive or negative perceived quality by the customers who have experienced the product or service before.

When the dimensions of service quality developed by Parasuraman are examined, the perceived quality, in other words the expected quality, includes the perception of what and how consumers are offered services according to their needs, the past experiences of customers and expectations of them from current service process. (Buttle, 1996, p. 27; Acuner, 2001, p. 2).

Perceived quality is evaluated as an input of the customer satisfaction process. The quality of the product or service takes place before the customer's perception and satisfaction process, and the corporations are expected to produce the product or service at a certain quality. The customer buys the product or service. Highly perceived value and satisfactory products or services continue to positively impact buy-in behaviour through word-of-mouth marketing after people become conscious of the brand image of the corporations.

According to Hung (2005), consumers have an image of that brand with the help of associations in their minds about that brand (Ozdemir, 2005). Most of the connotations related to the brand convey the quality perception that some consumers have perceived previously about the product or service to others through word of mouth marketing. In addition, recent searches reveal that service quality perceptions are related to purchase intention. (Zeithaml et al., 1996; Boulding et al., 1993).

While brand image, one of the most important elements of an effective marketing, can process positive brand perception and brand awareness with the perceived service quality as a whole, this positive situation will be more influential on the consumer through oral marketing.

The elements that make up a brand value are brand name awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand associations. (Aaker, 2009, p. 21). It has been determined that products or services with high brand image are evaluated as more qualified, safe and more preferable by consumers.

Businesses' desire to make a difference among other products in order to survive in market conditions where businesses are dominated by intense competition, reveals the concept of branding. It has been found that there is a positive relationship between the various characteristics of the brand (image of the brand, brand love, brand satisfaction, brand reputation, attitude and behavioral commitment) and trust in the brand (Cabuk ve Orel, 2008, p. 103), and it has also been seen that this situation affects the purchasing decisions of the consumers (Cabuk and Orel, 2008, p. 115).

3. BRAND IMAGE AND THE EFFECT OF WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING ON PURCHASING THROUGH PERCEIVED QUALITY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of word of mouth marketing on consumers' purchasing behaviours through brand image and perceived quality in health institutions operating in the service sector and to try to emphasize brand image and perceived quality effect in oral mind marketing activities of enterprises in the direction of research findings.

In order to collect data in the research, the oral communication marketing scale developed by Goyett et al. (2010), the brand image scale developed by Ural and Perk (2012) and the scales developed by Pappu, Quester and Cooksey (2005) were used.

People who participated in the research have got service from the same hospital in Konya-Meram district at least once; opinions of 256 patients were collected using an individual questionnaire and data analysis was conducted.

3.1 Demographic Findings towards the Research

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of People Involved in Research

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Male	139	54,3	20 yr. & under	27	10,5
Female	117	45,7	21-30 yr.	54	21,1
Total	256	100	31-40 yr.	72	28,1
<i>Education</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Primary Sc.	45	17,6	41-50 yr.	68	26,6
High School	109	42,6	51 and over	35	13,7
Undergraduate	70	27,3	Total	256	100
Postgraduate	32	12,5	<i>Income</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Total	256	100	1000 TL and under	23	9
<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	1001-2000 TL	121	47,3
Student	61	23,8	2001-3000 TL	59	23,1
Officer	59	23,1	3001-4000 TL	15	5,8
Self-employed	73	28,5	4001-5000 TL	20	7,8
Unemployed	63	24,6	5000 TL and over	18	7
Total	256	100	Total	256	100
<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
			Married		
			Single		
			Total	256	100

When the demographic characteristics of the participants were examined, 54.3% of the respondents were women, 56.6% of them were married, and 28.1% of them were between 31-40 years of age. While 28.5% of the participants are freelancers, 23% are officers. It has been stated that the participants with a maximum of 47.3% of the income level are between 1001 and 2000 TL, while at least 7% are between 4001-5000TL. Regarding the educational status, it is seen that 42.6% of the participants have high school education, 27.3% have university education, 17.6% have primary education and 12.5% have graduate education.

3.2 Survey Findings Related to Variables of Word of Mouth Marketing, Perceived Quality, and the Brand Image of the Participants of the Research

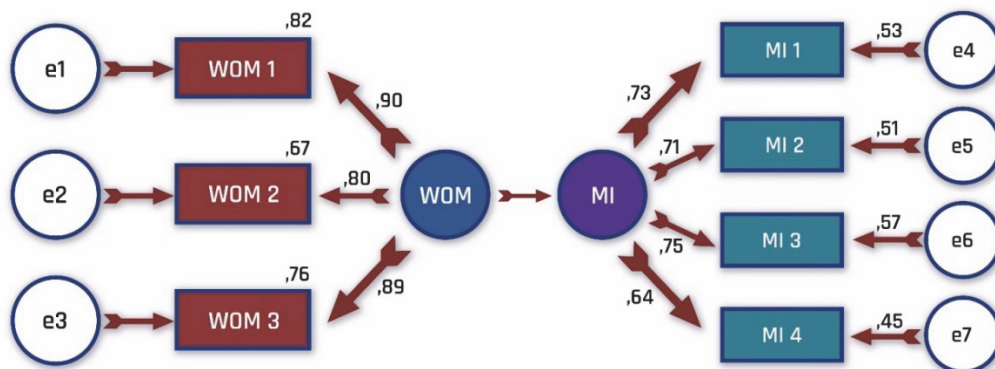
Table 2. Adaptive Value of Scale

	X^2	df	X^2/df	GFI	CFI	RMSEA
AAP Scale	3,672	1	3,672	1	1	0,073
Brand Image Scale	0,876	2	0,438	1	1	0,000
Perceived Quality Scale	2,784	5	1,392	1	1	0,000
Good Adaptive Value			≤ 3	$\geq 0,91$	$\geq 0,96$	$\leq 0,05$
Acceptable Adaptive Value			$\leq 4-5$	0,90-0,86	$\geq 0,93$	0,06-0,08

$p > .05$, X^2 =Chi-Square; df= Degree of Freedom; GFI=Goodness Of Fit; CFI=Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA=Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

In order to test the validity of the scales used in Table 1, one-factor constructions of all variables were verified by confirming factor analysis for all variables by Amos program.

Figure 1: The Mediating Role of Brand Image on Word-of-Mouth Marketing



In Figure 1, the mediating role of brand image on word-of-mouth marketing is evaluated and it is observed that the model's adaptive values are within acceptable limits. In the structural equation model, the independent variable has a meaningful effect on the mediator variable ($p < 0.05$), so it can be said that the brand image is influenced by word-of-mouth marketing.

In Figure 2, the mediating role of perceived quality on word-of-mouth marketing is evaluated and it is found that the model's values are within acceptable limits. In the structural equation model, because the independent variable has a significant effect on the mediator variable ($p < 0.05$), it can be said that perceived quality has a partial effect on word-of-mouth marketing.

Positive word of mouth communication is related to the customer's perception of products and services as good and valuable. In other words, if the service or product performance and the perceived support after the service are satisfied, it is inevitable that positive word of mouth communication is realized. (Derbaix and Vanhammn, 2003, pp. 7-8).

Figure 2 The Mediating Role of Perceived Quality on Word-of-Mouth Marketing

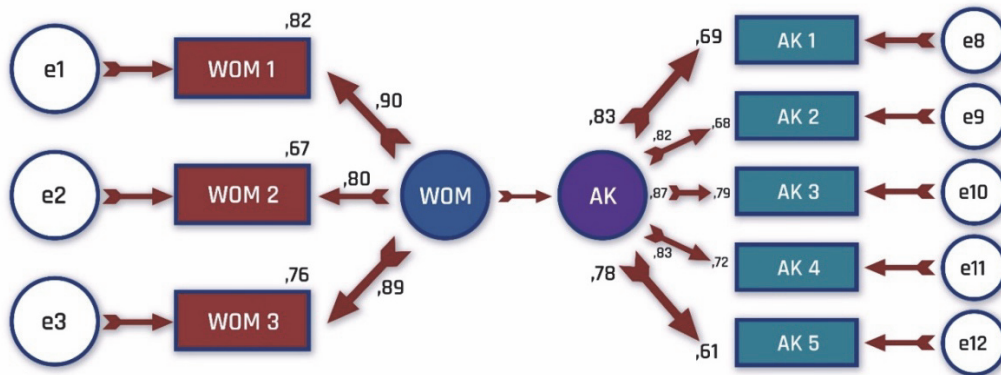
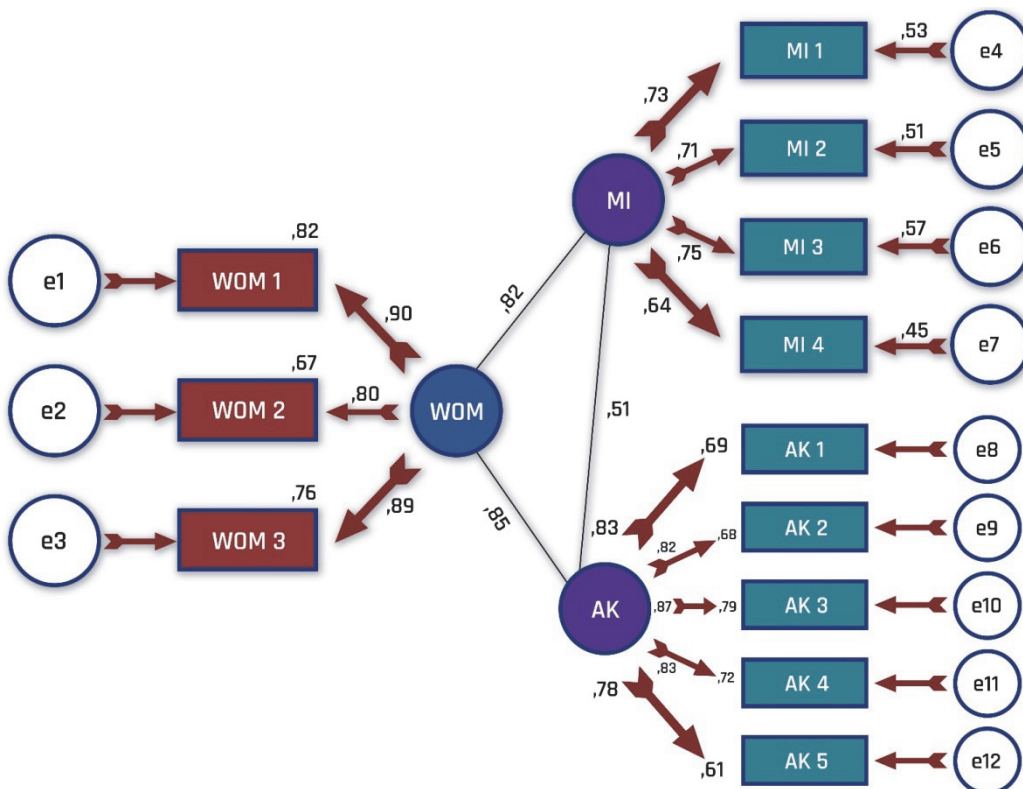


Figure 3. The Mediating Role of Brand Image and Perceived Quality on Word-of-Mouth Marketing



In Figure 3, the mediating role of brand image and perceived quality on word-of-mouth marketing is evaluated and it is found that the model's adaptive values are within acceptable limits. In the structural equation model, brand image and perceived quality have a significant effect on word-of-mouth marketing due to the fact that the independent variable has significant effect on the mediator variables ($p < 0,05$). The vast majority of customers tell their dissatisfaction to the people around them. If dissatisfaction arises as a result of the service, the customer tells this dissatisfaction to 10 to 20 people. (Kitapçı, 2008, p. 118).

Especially in small cities, this can have a negative impact on business operation and the business image may suffer. This happens often because positive experiences are within expectations and are soon forgotten. Unresolved negativities, however, make people frustrated, disappointed,

and negatively affect word of mouth communication. (Silverman, 2007, p. 44). Especially in the last decade, dissatisfied consumers now share their complaints in complaint web sites that allow them to spread all over the World. These sites are available to other dissatisfied consumers, and they can all unite to create a negative power union for the purchase of the company or product (Tuk, 2008, pp. 16-17).

CONCLUSION

The brand symbolizes the nature of customer perceptions of businesses in any sector (Kim and Kim, 2005). The brand image in health institutions contributes to the establishment of strong and long-term relationships with patients. In hospitals, which is a service sector as it is in all sectors, achieving competitive superiority is now one of the most important goals. It can be considered as an effective factor in increasing the number of patients, demanding no cost such as word-of-mouth marketing, within the scope of large-cost promotional activities to take a step forward for customers. Since the brand image is also related to the perceived quality perceptions of the people, careful attention should be paid to the ambiance elements of the hospital, functionality and sensitivity to customer complaints and taking care of all kinds of behavior that may affect perceived quality.

As a result of these findings, an assessment can be made that patients who are satisfied with the institution and who are affected by the brand image of the institution and the quality of service will loyally mention the brand image and hospital as the best health institution where the best doctors work. Also, patients will encourage other people to go to the same institution when needed. It can be said that patients can communicate easily with other people whom they are in communication. Making the health institution a brand, the company can have a vision of reaching more patients and requesting them when they need, thanks to advertising through word-of-mouth marketing without any expense. According to the results of the research, it is concluded that word-of-mouth marketing affects brand image with 57% alone, 71% with brand image and perceived quality. Given that intense competition is important for businesses in all sectors, companies need to pay more attention to word-of-mouth marketing. The increase in the quality perception will positively contribute to the brand image, while it will create an opportunity to attract more customers to companies with less cost through word-of-mouth marketing at the same time.

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