



ACTIVATING MARKETING WORD-OF-MOUTH BASED IN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT OF HEALTH SERVICE AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE OPINIONS OF A SAMPLE OF PRIVATE HOSPITAL CUSTOMERS IN BABYLON GOVERNORATE

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 22 nd March 2023 Accepted: 23 rd April 2023 Published: 24 th May 2023	The study aims to determine the effect of word-of-mouth marketing in activating the physical and social environment of service. A sample of (158) patients in private hospitals in Babil Governorate was selected to conduct the study. The study is based on a main hypothesis that (the word-of-mouth marketing practiced by patients can be activated through the effectiveness of the physical and social environment of the service). Empirical measures from previous studies were used to verify these hypotheses. A set of statistical tools were used to analyze and process the data through the simple correlation matrix, simple regression analysis, and the structural modeling equation to test the hypotheses of the study. The study reached a set of conclusions, the most important of which was (there is a positive and important impact of the physical and social environment of the service in disseminating and enhancing word-of-mouth marketing by the customer). In the light of the conclusions, a set of recommendations were formulated, the most important of which was the management of hospitals, increasing attention to the physical environment in the hospital, including elevators, a garage, and a resting place to enhance customer satisfaction in an oral way that contributes to enhancing the hospital's reputation.

Keywords: Word of Mouth Marketing, physical and social environment of the service, service encounter

INTRODUCTION.

1.1 The research problem

The problem of the study: Contemporary marketing research indicates that customer satisfaction is no longer a sufficient goal as it was before. A contemporary strategy that enables it to influence the customer's decisions on the one hand, and to face competition.

Service industries, including the raging industry on the other hand. It is controversial that some private health services suffer from the dilemma of similarity in the nature of the services they provide to the target market, which reduces the space for excellence and limits their ability to compete. Studies have presented a lot of marketing solutions that enable hospitals to overcome this dilemma, as the issue of the effectiveness of the physical and social environment of service is one of the topics in the field of service and interactive marketing, which has a reflection on patients' behavior and their relationship with the hospital. Therefore, the

effectiveness of the physical and social environment of the service is considered one of the critical determinants that greatly affect the patients' response to the hospital. The problem of the current study lies in the question: "Can word-of-mouth marketing be activated through the effectiveness of the physical and social environment of the health service?" Accordingly, some sub-questions can be presented, as follows:-

- 1-What is the level of the study sample's awareness of the physical environment in the hospital ?
- 2-What is the level of awareness of the study sample of the effectiveness of the social environment in the hospital?
- 3-Does the effectiveness of the physical environment in the hospital influence the activation of word-of-mouth marketing by the client?
- 4-Is there a tendency by the hospital's customers (patients) to enhance the hospital's reputation through word-of-mouth marketing?
- 5-Does the effectiveness of the social environment in



the hospital influence the activation of word-of-mouth marketing by the client?

1.2 Importance of Research

The current study occupies a special importance in the light of the following

1-Increased interest in the private health services sector, which is a complement and a basic alternative to the services provided by the government sector, in an attempt to fill the large deficit in this field, especially with the increasing demand clearly with the increase in population and the inability of the general government sector to fill the deficit.

2-The study dealt with research and analysis of the relationship and impact between two modern variables, which are among the variables that represent modern topics in the field of marketing thought, and this gives them special importance.

3-This study is also a contribution to supplementing the Iraqi library for the purpose of increasing marketing knowledge in the field of study variables.

1.3 Research Objectives: The research aims to achieve the following:

1-Determine the level of awareness of the study sample of the effectiveness of the physical environment in the hospital.

2-Determining the study sample's level of awareness of the effectiveness of the hospital's social environment.

3-Analysis of customer orientation (hospital patients) to enhance the hospital's reputation through word-

of-mouth marketing.

4-Verifying the correlation and influence relationship between the effectiveness of the physical and social environment of the service in activating word-of-mouth marketing.

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The study is based on a main hypothesis: "Word-of-mouth marketing can be activated depending on the effectiveness of the physical and social environment of the health service." A group of main hypotheses branch out from this hypothesis, as follows:

1-There is a discrepancy in the level of awareness of the study sample of the effectiveness of the physical environment in the hospital

2-There is a discrepancy in the study sample's level of awareness of the effectiveness of the hospital's social environment

3-There is a discrepancy in the tendency of the hospital's clients (patients) to enhance the hospital's reputation through word-of-mouth marketing

4-The client's awareness of the effectiveness of the physical environment in the hospital can stimulate word-of-mouth marketing to the client

5-The customer's awareness of the effectiveness of the social environment in the hospital can activate Word-of-mouth marketing for the customer, and in light of the main hypothesis and what emerged from it, the hypothesis scheme can be framed as shown in Figure (1)

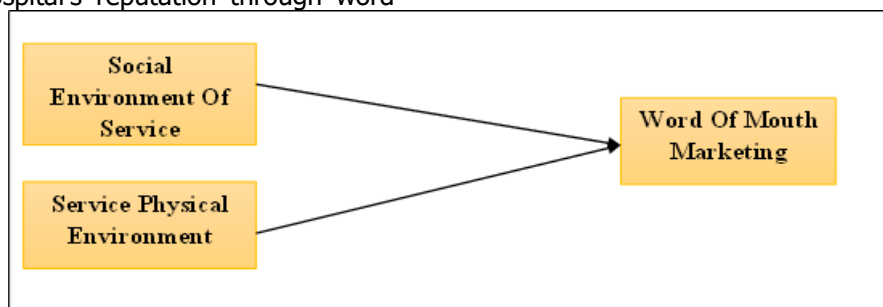


Figure (1) The Research hypothesis

1.5 Used Statistical Methods

In its field aspect, the study relied on a number of statistical tools to analyze data such as arithmetic averages, Cronbach alpha coefficient). The program (SPSS vr 25) and the program (Amos VR 25) were also used.

1.6 Measurement Tool

The study's measurement tool consists of two main variables, in addition to the demographic data part of the respondents.

1.7 Study Population And Sample

The private hospitals in Babylon governorate represented a community for the study, which are (4) hospitals, as shown in the table. A random

sample was selected from the clients (patients) of these hospitals during the visits in which the researcher was able to reach the hospital. The sample consisted of (160) patients, all of whom were valid for analysis. Except for two forms for Al-Hayat Hospital.

The Theoretical Aspect Of The Study

First: Word-of-Mouth Marketing (Concept and Importance)

In recent years, many researchers have insisted on the importance of word-of-mouth marketing as an essential component of integrated marketing communications, and consider it an important research issue. Higie, that word-of-mouth marketing



is a market information dissemination mechanism through which customers' opinions regarding organizations, specific products/services, and consumer experiences are communicated through informal person-to-person interactions. It is, according to (Hsu, 2016:20), a means of verbal communication, informal, that is perceived by non-commercial parties.

Therefore, (Eisingerich, 122:2015) stresses that word-of-mouth marketing is the process of talking about brands, products, or services that takes place between receivers and communication devices without real business intent. Accordingly, employing and exploiting the effect of word-of-mouth marketing (Lai & Babin, 2009:984) represents a more effective marketing approach than the application of traditional marketing. Word-of-mouth marketing is defined as "positive or negative feedback as a result of a service that the customer used and transferred to another person" (Sweeny, 2017: 346). That is, it is a personal communication about a particular brand's product/service between buyers and groups such as friends, family members, and business partners. (Hsu, 2016:22) stresses the role of the essential role of word-of-mouth marketing as marketing communications in promoting the brand and spreading it among other customers in a very fast way by transferring it between one person to another through multiple media or even personal, and this is what also makes it take a potential negative rather than a positive character. exclusively. Word-of-mouth marketing is an influential element in the customer's perception of the quality of the service or the brand, despite the difficulty of controlling it, due to the independence of the individual transmitting the word. (Abubakar, 2017:348) (Sween 2017:842) Thus, it has a great ability to shape customer expectations about the service, because it carries a certain weight as a source of information, and is perceived by the recipient as a source of unbiased evaluation (Dolen et al, 2014:440). Fortunately, word-of-mouth marketing represents an important source for gathering information about the services of the two parties to the exchange, and its importance varies according to the experience and expertise of the service provider and customers, due to the difficulty that customers face in evaluating the services before the purchase process and because they experience the service directly (Magnus & Rosengren, 2018:165).

(Goyette et al., 2010: 7) indicated that word-of-mouth marketing is sensitive with regard to health organization services, as it is either positive or negative. It is also considered a personal source of information such as family, friends, and other

reference groups, which customers may use to collect information about Services.

I also consider it (Magnus & Rosengren, 2018:166) an important indicator of the success of the organization and its brand, and part of the attitude of customers towards the organization. Rather, it is a measure of marketing assets and customer loyalty to the organization.

Second: The Effectiveness Of The Physical And Social Environment Of The Service

Most researchers in the field of marketing agreed that the service has certain advantages that distinguish it from the nature of the goods, which gives specificity to the service in the process of marketing exchange, in light of which the provider must pay attention to the method of providing the service to achieve success and marketing excellence (Tan, 2018:40, (Raajpoot, 2014:185).

(Mattila, 2016:43) confirms the justification for the trend towards interest in the effectiveness of the service meeting through improving the quality of the environment surrounding the service based on its role in controlling the customer's perception of the quality of service. This is in the light of service characteristics such as incompatibility, heterogeneity, and intangibility (Raajpoot 2014:189). As for the effectiveness of the physical and social environment, it represents "the successful interaction between the service provider and customers that involves direct or indirect communication" (Chao 2016:100), and defines the effectiveness of the physical environment as "the successful, double or bilateral interaction between the service provider and the customer, as (Raajpoot, 2014:190) looked at how the interaction takes place between the two parties regardless of the time and place of this meeting" (Magnus & Rosengren, 2018:160) Accordingly, it can be said that the effectiveness of the physical and social environment is the process of successful interaction between the customer and the banking service provider, whether directly or through the material and human means it provides.

The physical environment of the service is considered the core of any problem related to service marketing, and it greatly affects the quality of service and the customer's purchasing decisions (Dolen et. al, 2014: 442).

(Liljander & Mattsson, 2014:841) confirmed that the process of personal interaction between the customer and the service provider is of great importance because it is the moment through which the customer judges the quality of services. The concept of the physical environment of service has gained great importance in service management studies over the past decade, and marketers have



taken an interest in this issue as it is an important pillar in the success of service delivery (Shao et. al, 2017:60) (Hinkin. 2013:27), (Lemmink & Mattsson 2012:21) also proved in his study that the customer's mental map about the services provided by the organization is portrayed based on the elements of the physical environment to provide the service, which means that it represents a critical element in forming the perceived mental image about the organization and its brand This is what made (Namasivayam & Hinkin, 2013:27) emphasize the importance of interaction with the physical environment in which the meeting takes place between the two parties in evaluating the service during the service encounter. Which stems from the inability to separate service production and consumption.

(Liljander & Mattsson, 2013:105), the customer is an important part of the service production process, which means the need to pay attention to this environment, especially in high-contact services (Lemmink & Mattsson, 2012:22), as it is possible for the customer to be an active consumer and participate in the process Service production, that is, it is part of the service production process in, and not just a result, as it is the focus of the service production process. Many service organizations, such as hospitals, have realized the great benefits that they reap through a suitable physical environment, so they began to pay attention to the general appearance of the hospital in front of patients, providing rooms for patients, secretarial offices, and some other material elements in order to give a good impression to patients around the hospital (Magnus & Rosengren, 2018:162) Studies emphasized the need to pay attention to the physical work environment and what it includes of physical facilities and facilities (Newby & Leonce, 2016:65) (Dietz, & Wiley, 2018:85), as the design of the distinguished hospital building contributes to enhancing the behavior of workers (Dolen et. al 2013: 700), (Bove 2014: 443) that the customer's impression and feeling, negatively or positively, is formed as a result of the service providers' behavior, skills, and capabilities, and this means that it represents an essential element in the process of marketing the service to the customer, and an important means in the success of the health service and improving the image of the hospital

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Service providers also expect the recipient's trust, which incentivizes the recipient to recommend the service to other clients for sustained care. Therefore, while providing the service, the direct interaction between the service provider creates positive perceptions of the customer towards the quality of the service provided, and enables proper planning and appropriate guidance regarding the customer's perceptions. Therefore (Dietz, & Wiley, 2018: 84) the service meeting is also considered an appropriate strategy to obtain a recommendation or word-of-mouth marketing. (Newby 2016:62) states that using a patient customer network (CRC) in marketing is critical to gaining an advantage in a highly competitive market.

The Practical Side Of The Study

First: Constructing The Study Scale

The current study consists of two main variables in addition to the personal data part of the respondents. These scales have been designed in the light of previous studies approved in the construction of each variable of the study. The validity and reliability of the measurement tools were tested based on the theoretical foundations that pertain to each of these variables, through testing the validity and reliability of the measurement tools used, which are shown in Table (4)

The values of the Cronbach alpha coefficient ranged between (0.90-0.81), and it is statistically acceptable



in marketing research because its value is greater than (0.75), which indicates that the scale is characterized by internal consistency. As for the composite stability coefficient, the acceptable value

for it is equal to or greater than (0.70). It is noted that all the paragraphs exceeded that amount, which means that the scale is stable and consistent.

Table (4) Alpha Cronbach

Physical Environment Of Service	Alpha Cronbach	Composite stability coefficient	Extracted average variance
Social Environment of Service	0.831	0.922	0.532
Word of Mouth Marketing	0.83	0.840	0.511
Physical Environment Of Service	0.792	0.833	0.572

Second: The Descriptive Statistics Of The Study

The results of the description presented in Table (5) indicate that the sample of respondents is aware of the dimension of the effectiveness of the physical environment of the hospital. The general arithmetic mean for this dimension is (3.17) with a standard

deviation of (89). Provided by the surveyed hospitals, and this is confirmed by paragraph (1), which indicates that the internal environment of the hospital is appropriate for the provision of health care services, as the arithmetic mean was (3.52) with a standard deviation (88).

Table (5) the descriptive statistics of the physical environment variable of the service

symbol	mean	standard deviation
PS1	3.52	0.88
PS2	3	0.86
PS3	3.11	0.89
PS4	3.14	0.99
PS5	3.12	0.85
General Average	3.17	0.89

It is noted from the results of the description in Table (6) that the arithmetic mean of the effectiveness of the social environment in the hospital is (3.1) and with a standard deviation of (67), and this means good dealing with patients by the medical staff and helping them and solving their problems.) with a

standard deviation of (90), and it also indicates the ability of service providers in general to empathize with patients, in addition to indicating that the service provider is characterized by personal honesty and good manners.

Table (6) descriptive statistics for the social environment variable of service

symbol	mean	standard deviation
SS1	3	0.82
SS2	3	0.80
SS3	3.34	0.89
SS4	3.61	0.90
SS5	3.42	0.88
General Average	3.27	0.85

With regard to oral marketing, the sample of patients expressed their satisfaction and satisfaction with the hospitals they deal with, which prompts them to spread positive stories about the hospitals in which they are treated to the customers of other hospitals, and their willingness to urge everyone who asks them for recommendation and guidance to visit the

hospital they deal with. . The arithmetic mean for this variable was (3.16) with a standard deviation (86), which means that patients appreciate the health services provided by the hospital and the health support it provides to them when they are hospitalized. Table (7) shows these results.

Table (7) descriptive statistics for the Word of Mouth Marketing

symbol	mean	standard deviation
WMM1	3.12	0.98
WMM 2	3.01	0.76
WMM 3	3.52	0.81
WMM 4	3	0.89
General Average	3.16	0.86



Third: Test The Study Hypotheses

The results presented in Table (8) indicate that the correlations between the study variables were good, which means the strength and sobriety of the study model, because the linear correlation coefficients between the study variables were at the level of significance (1%, 5%), which means that there is a significant relationship between study variables, they

did not exceed (60). Which means that there is no problem of multi-linear correlation between the mentioned variables. The correlations contained in Table (8) also confirm the existence of relationships that primarily support the hypotheses of the study regarding the nature of the relationship between those variables. Linearity between the dimensions and variables of the study.

Table 8: Correlation coefficients for the study variables

Variable	Physical Service	Environment	Social Service	Environment	Word of Mouth Marketing
Physical Environment Service	1				
Social Environment Service	0.419		1		
Word of Mouth Marketing	**0.582		0.543**		1

The results of testing the regression hypothesis presented in Table (9) showed a significant dimension effect of the effectiveness of the physical service environment (002.=B = .423, P) and the effectiveness of the social service environment, whose impact was stronger in terms of the beta coefficient (000.=B = .511, P) Among the dimensions of the explanatory or independent variable represented by the effectiveness of the health service environment. The explanatory power of the model in light of the coefficient of interpretation or determination was (543. = R²), which was complete

in its statistical significance (P = 000), and this reflects the amount of variation (54%) that is explained by the effectiveness of the physical and social service environment from the variation of Word-of-mouth marketing that It is practiced by the clients (hospital patients) to polish the image of the hospital in front of its current and potential customers from the social environment in which the patients live. The rest of the variance ratio (46%) is certainly subject to other factors that were not included in the study model, which are outside the scope of the current research.

Table (9) regression and influence relationships between the variables of the study

Hypothesis path	β	t	SE	CR	Sig.	R ²	F	P
service physical environment-----> word of mouth marketing	.423	3.87	.026	4.11	00.2	.543	40.21	.000
social environment of service -----> word of mouth marketing	.511	4.22	.013	3.43	.000			

CONCLUSIONS

1-The existence of an appropriate and effective physical environment in the surveyed hospitals from the point of view of the sample of patients, and this means that the surveyed hospitals provide modern and furnished waiting and reception halls and an effective and healthy physical environment in some aspects.

2-The medical staff and the service provider have high experience in dealing with patients and have excellent talents in providing services. The staff also has the capabilities to deal with problems facing patients and provide appropriate alternatives.

3-Effectiveness The physical environment in the hospital has an impact on patients' response and their decisions. 3. By dealing repeatedly with the same hospital. This means that the hospital's endeavor to improve the physical appearance of buildings or a garage, and to provide a suitable climate in terms of lighting, ventilation or noise

contributes to enhancing patients' attitudes towards customers towards the beneficiary.

4-The presence of individuals working in the health or administrative field in the hospital. 4. They believe in the motto of the customer is always right, and they deal with humanity, and their personal interest in the patient, and their enjoyment of human interaction experiences, can contribute to achieving complete satisfaction for patients and retaining them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations can be made in the light of the study's conclusions, which it is hoped will benefit the study sample hospitals in enhancing their performance, as follows:

1-Work to improve the skills of service providers through the following:

- Planning an integrated training program that contributes to and develops the capabilities of workers in human interaction, and the need to



attract skilled and specialized workers.

- Developing positive attitudes among workers with regard to dealing with patients and applying the concept of empowering workers by notifying the service provider of controlling the performance of his work, and his responsibility for the result of that work in partnership with management on individual and collective performance.

2-Work to improve some aspects of the physical environment of the health service through the following:

- Such as more emphasis on taking the necessary security measures by tightening more protection and preparing plates and publications necessary for the service, so that all the necessary steps for the production of the service are depicted and clarified. The nature of possible interactions between the patient and the medical staff

- Developing personal contacts between hospitals and patients, and opening direct channels 2. To communicate with workers and hospital departments to receive feedback on the level. The services provided by the hospital and its ability to meet the needs of the patients

- Focusing on providing health services that are compatible with high quality and international standards, 3. Then working on developing them to achieve customer loyalty and retain them. Especially regarding. By meeting the basic requirements in the health service such as speed, response, and safety

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