Comparative Study of Branding in Iranian Public Hospitals and Some other Public Hospitals in Selected Countries

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Applying branding models by health sectors of other countries, leads to delivering quality products and services tailored to customer needs. The objective was a comparative study of branding in Iranian public hospitals and some other public hospitals in selected countries. In this descriptive-comparative study, hospitals that have implemented successful branding were selected from Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, China, Ireland, South Korea and South Africa. A similar public hospital in Iran was also entered in this study. To collect data of hospitals under study, papers, and dissertations of electronic databases i.e. NHS, WHO and reports of selected hospitals were utilized. Collected data were summarized and classified based on the variables of the study and compared and analyzed in comparative tables. Each of the hospitals under study has taken some measures such as organization’s competitive position, branding strategies, established brand and relationship with customers and has utilized the results to attract more patients and reduce the health expenditures; While Iran has limited experience in using this model in public hospitals. With regard to actions taken in selected hospitals to extend the branding, using their experiences in Iran, drafting, and adoption of policies and guidelines in this regard due to Iran’s local conditions are highly recommended.

Keywords: Hospital Brand, Branding, Public Hospitals

In today’s competitive world all organizations such as health care organizations are paying greater attention to providing products and services with unique quality and in compliance with customers’ needs. In fact, in order to survive, organizations must inevitably adapt themselves with global situations and market utility¹. Growing health care expenses, less control over selection, lower service quality and patient satisfaction and big changes in health culture and healthcare system are among the challenges hospitals face in Iran. Therefore, it is necessary for them to revise the ways services are provided and modify their business structure in order to adapt with changes. To achieve long term success it is definitely essential to recognize present situation and unique stable condition of hospitals.

More than anything, creating and transferring positive changes, having stable emotional relationships with patients and their families is important. Meanwhile, these challenges are suitable opportunities for hospitals to create a powerful
brand for themselves and attract more customers\textsuperscript{2}.

Most of the non trading organizations and centers like hospitals and health care centers are not positive about marketing and branding and some even say it’s opposed to professional ethics. This is rooted in lack of knowledge about marketing concepts and branding. Hospitals and other health care centers are strongly in need of an effective marketing plan. In contrary, they just analyze target market in final stages of services production. In other words, marketing and brand improvement is not merely advertisement but is meeting customer needs and requirements in an organized way\textsuperscript{3}.

Brand bridges the gap between organization output and fame and customers needs and investors hopes\textsuperscript{4}. Powerful brands help organizations to have independent valuable identity in related market and to be less vulnerable to competitive activities, earn more profit and have more chance of improving their brand\textsuperscript{5}. A powerful brand is a way for reducing customer challenges in choosing service provider\textsuperscript{6}.

Successful hospital brands increases confidence in intangible services and customers can clearly imagine and recognize their services. Also a high level of special brand value increases the level of customer satisfaction, repeated visits and level of loyalty\textsuperscript{7}.

In recent years distinguishing service philosophy in health care services is rapidly turning into the last wave of change. In this regard, service systems like hospitals especially private hospitals around the world; have taken effective steps in implementing this kind of thinking. The goal of using and implementing this philosophy is patient attraction, satisfaction and confidence. In Iran public hospitals pay less attention to branding. Recognizing successful experiences of public hospital around the world can open the door to laying the ground for branding in public hospitals. Thus the present study aims at conducting an adaptive study of branding variables in public hospitals in selective countries.

**Research Method**

This study is a practical research which is conducted in adaptive-descriptive way. Data was gathered through library research about how hospital branding has been done in different public hospitals around the world. Therefore, the study population includes public hospitals which have been branding. Researchers picked 8 public hospitals from 8 countries using experts and specialists advice. The hospitals include: York hospital from London, Alberta children’s hospital from Canada, Fiona Stanley Hospital from Australia, Middlemore Hospital fromN, Xuzhou Central Hospital from China, Cork University Hospital from Ireland, Seoul National University Hospital from South Korea, Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital from South Africa. Then effective factors on branding their hospitals were compared with each other and similar case of ShahidHashemiNezhad hospital in Tehran.

Data was gathered by searching key words in electronic databases for article and thesis, NHS and WHO websites and reports from selective countries in the field of hospital branding. Data related to Iranian hospital – ShahidHashemiNezhadsubspecialty hospital in Tehran- was gathered through reviewing articles, books, reports, minutes of meetings and conference texts related to the hospital and also through talking to senior officials.

Data was summarized and categorized based on research variables and were compared and analyzed in adaptive tables. Research variables or in other words effective factors on public hospitals branding includes competitive positioning of the organization, branding strategies, brand positioning and customer relationship.

**Findings**

Subject public hospitals have done branding and were successful in this field. According to the studies, mainly in these hospitals objective efforts have been done for improving strong points, outcomes and titles earned by hospital. For example York hospital in England introduced itself as the first rank for the highest reception rate in the region, the best service provider in the region and candidate of many prizes, and also focuses on having skilled doctors and qualified personnel. Another example is Alberta children’s hospital in Canada. This hospital is a brand in city planning and a leading center for providing services in the geographic region\textsuperscript{9} this hospital publishes accurate financial audits and annual reports\textsuperscript{9}. This hospital also has the highest rate of activity in emergency department in the region\textsuperscript{9}. Thus the above mentioned hospitals
Table 1. Summary of adaptive research results of effective components on branding in selective hospitals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective strategy</th>
<th>Brand positioning</th>
<th>Competitive-position of the brand</th>
<th>Branding strategy</th>
<th>The relationship between brand and market and society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National hospital in Asia</td>
<td>The first national hospital in the region</td>
<td>First national hospital on the list of hospitals in Asia</td>
<td>Setting up strategic partnerships and establishing relationships</td>
<td>Implementing patient health records and improving patient services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital in Europe</td>
<td>Highest risk of patient admission due to national healthcare priorities</td>
<td>Leading hospital in terms of patient services and treatment</td>
<td>Developing services through cooperation with local hospitals</td>
<td>Improving relationships based on collaborative partnerships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital in North America</td>
<td>Introductory hospital to the region</td>
<td>Leading hospital by size and service providers</td>
<td>Developing services through cooperation with local hospitals</td>
<td>Establishing clinical trials in hospital in order to develop research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital in South America</td>
<td>Leading hospital by size and service providers</td>
<td>Leading hospital by size and service providers</td>
<td>Developing services through cooperation with local hospitals</td>
<td>Establishing clinical trials in hospital in order to develop research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital in Europe</td>
<td>Leading hospital by size and service providers</td>
<td>Leading hospital by size and service providers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospital in Asia</td>
<td>Leading hospital by size and service providers</td>
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<td>Establishing clinical trials in hospital in order to develop research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital in Africa</td>
<td>Leading hospital by size and service providers</td>
<td>Leading hospital by size and service providers</td>
<td>Developing services through cooperation with local hospitals</td>
<td>Establishing clinical trials in hospital in order to develop research.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- **Strategy:** The relationship between brand and market and society.
- **Positioning:** The competitive position of the brand.
- **Branding:** The branding strategy.
made a move for branding.

Regarding competitive positioning, Seoul National University Hospital from South Korea did a series of actions including doing research with other industries, setting up different health campaigns with other organizations, international partnerships with hospitals around the globe, using modern equipments and moving towards being a smart hospital. Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in South Africa developed AIDS treatment services regarding the need of the region. The hospital cooperates with public sector in the form of public-private partnership and has used charity helps from other organizations for improving different sectors as a way of improving hospital services. Baragwanath has also designed and implemented strategic plans.

Each of the subject hospitals use a strategy for hospital branding like Cork University Hospital in Ireland. Cork University hospital implements these strategies: comprehensive medical and surgery evaluations, providing services with different insurance schemes, reducing risk plan, and advanced infectious control plan as the first active hospital in this field in Ireland. Xuzhou Central Hospital in China has also implemented similar strategies like: providing services with 3 visits policy after clearance in order to develop follow up activities among patients, providing extra services like transfer to hospital, daily care at home and so forth, preparing VIP for special patients like organization managers and famous people, physicians must necessarily provide specialized consultation to active specialized groups in villages through educational programs.

Preserving brand positioning among customers and in the market as the effective factor in hospital branding, relates to improving the relationship between brand and customers and market. This has been in focus in conducting research on subject hospitals. Among them Fiona Stanley Hospital in Australia provides patient oriented services. In Fiona Stanley patient feedback paths have been introduced and patient are more satisfied with unique services and environment of the hospital (this hospital is designed in nature). In Middlemore Hospital in New Zealand some healthcare action processes have been designed and free transportation services are available for patients.

Shahid Hashemi Nezhad public hospital as a brand hospital in the specific field of kidney and urinary tracts and Shahid Rajaei hospital in Tehran as the brand hospital in cardiovascular disease have conducted interventions for being distinguished or that is to say branding. For example, Shahid Hashemi Nezhad hospital has introduced gained glories and credits, attracted experienced personnel and famous physicians, officials have visited leading hospitals over the boarders, they have had successful experiences, the hospital has also completed the service providing chain with partnerships of private sector, and prepared a treatment program before admission which continous after the clearance and such acts. So the brand is more valid.

Shahid Rajaei hospital in Tehran has been recognized as one of ten cardiology centers in the world and provides integrative services to patients, develops subspecialty services for children, has created health tourism department and diplomat department for foreigner patients and government officials, doing more than 10 heart implant annually and sending physicians and personnel to national and international scientific events, having modern medical equipments and continuously improve brand services.

Summary of subject hospital actions regarding subject variables are presented in table 1 (adaptive table of subject variables in selective hospitals).

DISCUSSION

Findings of the present research shows that the subject hospitals know the benefits of branding for attracting more patients and increasing credit and fame and consider planned actions for hospital branding. Therefore, they believe in brand positioning and try to increase their market share through brand image positioning. Subject hospitals lay the ground for customer confidence through introducing their skills, strong points and outcomes so that customers choose them relying on concrete measures. Helen et al., reached similar results and emphasized that "strong hospital brands severely increase the need for intangible products and it’s more likely that customers buy their product, visit again or be loyal.
to them. Thus, recently hospital brand image has turned into an important factor for comparing hospitals by customers.

Success of branding projects among public hospitals relies on competitive ability. Hospitals tendency towards offering distinguished quality and according to customers’ needs helps them be superior and valuable among customers. This also increases personality and self-confidence. In subject hospitals in the present study competitive policies have been observed, which are a way of improving the level of performance and service acceptance. Seoul National University also uses international partnership with other countries hospitals as a competitive policy because “change and adaption of services with new circumstances and needs is one of the reasons a brand lives a long life compared with competitors.” Yassin, Nour and Mohammad concluded that competitive activities lead the organization to more profit and chances for developing brand and this confirms the importance of competitive positioning of the brand.

Brand strategy improves the organization brand with recognizing customer favorableness and unique identity for the services and products and this Way brings value for the customer and identity for the organization. Nafisi (1388) stated that most of health care organizations have limited experiences in developed branding strategy. The reason is less knowledge regarding the brand and its role in general organizational strategy. In subject hospitals branding strategies are used for developing services magnitude and improving quality and using innovation. According to Sorayaei and Mehraei, following correct branding strategies, leads to organization positioning in the market. Thus, subject hospitals tried to improve their brand using branding strategies.

Desired relationship of the organization with customer is a solution for long term customer satisfaction it even starts before direct contact with the customer and continues after the contact. In subject hospitals the relationship of the brand with customers is made with electronic media networks and advertisement also having effective behavioral relationship and customer desired services. In their study Kim Kim and Kong suggested that customer relationship is one of the suitable ways for growth and improvement and increasing the value of the brand. To do so Service departments try to make a relationship with customers and make a positive image for them through the effects of services on customers’ perception. Also for increasing loyalty to brand and brand value and in order to meet customers’ needs in hospital service sector, relationship marketing activities can be used to increase customers’ benefits. Sirishia, Babo and Kishor believe that branding in health care system and hospitals relies on patients’ experiences of the hospital and word of mouth marketing. They believe that customers are hospitals ambassadors. Thus, accelerating hospital buildings in India resulted in branding for hospitals and health care system by health care providers.

Having the native situation of our country in mind and considering the actions of selective hospitals in developing hospital branding, using their experiences in Iran and regulating and resolution of policies and principle, it is suggested to look for branding strategy.

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