
THE IMPACT OF HEALTHCARE ADVERTISING ON CONSUMERS REGARDING THE CHOICE OF PRIVATE HOSPITALS IN DUBAI

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Abstract

This study sets out to review and contribute to the writings on healthcare advertising. In order to do so, the research's main purpose is to depict aspects such as, how individuals in Dubai perceive healthcare advertising and advertising done by private hospitals. This will help marketers understand how these perceptions will further impact consumers' choices of hospitals, as their main healthcare facilities in Dubai. Moreover, the study is sought to address several points such as healthcare delivery systems in Dubai and respective characteristics, economic expansion, and nonetheless brief examination of advertising implications in this industry. Also, a few concepts on marketing and communications, as well as some advertising theories are portrayed. Besides this, a more detailed literature review explores the beginnings of healthcare and hospital advertising and tracks consumers' input toward hospital advertising throughout time. The study's literature review also depicts the ethics and moral principles that surround healthcare advertising. In this way, the study approaches some points that with time have improved healthcare providers' image and nevertheless changed their marketing practices and services into more sophisticated ones.

Keywords: healthcare advertising; healthcare industry; private healthcare system; satisfaction; consumer choice

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1. Introduction

This study deals with various features related to healthcare advertising but the main debates are as follows: the influence of hospital advertising on consumers in Dubai, how they perceive healthcare and hospital advertising, and how these perceptions affect their choices of hospitals, as their main healthcare facilities (Radu et al., 2022).

As a starting point, the introductory chapter introduces the private healthcare system in Dubai and explores advertising functions and expenditures in recent years. Moreover, a few concepts of marketing-communications and advertising theories are explored in order to better overlook advertising utility in the healthcare industry. Following this, the general purpose of the study, together with the main objectives, is argued in detail.

Healthcare in Dubai is regulated by three main authorities: The Ministry of Health (MOH), the Department of Health and Medical Services (DOHMS), and Dubai Healthcare City (DHCC). These will control around seven hundred companies within the healthcare market and will comprise hospitals, pharmaceuticals, clinics, etc. Moreover, according to the United Arab Emirates Healthcare and Pharmaceutical report, United Arab Emirates has been once more time rated as the most attractive market within the Middle East due to the opportunities it puts forward.

Through the rise of Dubai Healthcare City, Dubai seems to aim at establishing a center of excellence within the Middle East (Arabian Business, November 2007). Boston University Hospital, Harvard University Hospital, The City Hospital, and German Heart Centre are some of the many players entering the market, therefore today's patients have a wide range of private healthcare services to choose from. Dubai Healthcare City is expected to contribute to the city's economic development by becoming a local nucleus for specialized healthcare, a hub for health education as well as dedicated study. It will not only supply care to the patients in the region but at the same time will create benefits for medical tourism. Dubai Healthcare City is specially designed to accommodate not only excellent medical facilities, but it will also be an opportunity "crossroad" for private investments and insurance providers. Consequently, this will create an increasingly competitive landscape for the healthcare providers in the region which in turn will have to focus more on their marketing strategies as well as marketing tools in order to maintain or gain market share. The expenditure on healthcare is continuing to increase, but according to law, each of Dubai's residents or visitors will be provided with a health insurance scheme. This will explain more why the advertising expenditures on insurance and real estate accounted for 32 percent of total spending.

The population demographic of the UAE is different from that of other countries as 80% of the population consists of expatriates. The United Arab Emirates with this wide demographic ex-pat population is home to a large number of different cultures and nationalities which makes it difficult to understand their behaviour. In order to be persuasive, advertising practitioners should consider on what consumers are like and what makes them react to different advertisements.

2. Literature Review

Throughout time a considerable number of organizations have directed their attention toward marketing communications. Trying to attract their targeted consumers, competition became stronger. Marketing and communications play a significant role in any organization's success. Marketing communication's purpose is to make the organization and its product well known to the public as well as to keep clients alert about the organization (Engdahl, 2006; Iyer, Sobermann & Villas-Boas, 2005). Nonetheless, the same strategy should be used by organizations when handling internal communications (Toplicianu & Tabîrca, 2012).

Marketing communication is also seen as an essential factor in the process of creating trust among an organization's customers. Most of the time, organizations around the world will recognize two types of marketing communication: internal and external. External marketing communications will eventually use and send messages that will get to the audience and will afterward persuade its buying behaviour (Dahlqvist & Linde, 2002).

At present advertising does not only encourage the economy and supports organizations to increase their business, but also influences people's lifestyles and beliefs. People worldwide are exposed to a huge number of commercials. Advertising is defined as "any paid form of promotion and presentation of ideas, and advertisements are seen as any cost-effective way to disseminate messages, whether to build brand preference for major companies or to educate people "(Kotler, 2002).

According to Zanot (1981), researchers have investigated consumer attitudes toward advertising for many decades. Throughout time, marketers and scholars have reached the conclusion that in order for advertising to be effective, they had to be aware of how the message is met by the consumer. Therefore they tried to come up with a series of theories and models to make the process easier. Hence, advertising is not only the final message sent to the public but also the outcome of very profound strategies. In reaching their goals through advertising marketing communication professionals should understand the various behavioural steps that consumers go through and accordingly create a message that will cover all the expectations.

AIDA, DAGMAR, or Hierarchy-of-effects model, are a few of the advertising theories and models that have been used during the times and were created to portray and give a better view of how consumers may react to specific advertising. They all consider various levels that consumers have to go through when exposed to different advertisements.

AIDA model is seen as highly persuasive and is said to often unconsciously affect our thinking (Butterfield, 1997). DAGMAR focuses on the levels of understanding that a customer must have for the organization and how can the results of an advertising campaign could be measured (Belch & Belch, 1995). Lavidge and Steiners Hierarchy-of-

effects model is created to show the process, or steps, that an advertiser assumes customers pass through in the actual purchasing process (Barry & Howard, 1990).

However, according to Jobber (2004), it is quite hard to create a theory on how effective or appreciated advertising is. As mentioned above all the theories and models used throughout time by marketing professionals were and still are used for the same purpose, getting to know detailed as possible the consumers' responses toward advertising.

Public disbelief of advertising must be considered, as it will further lead to slowing down advertising credibility and eventually will reduce marketplace efficiencies (Nelson, 1974). Pollay and Mittal (1993) argued that significant levels of distrust and scepticism will have a negative impact on advertising professions which in return will trigger higher advertising spending and much more diverse creativity to reach the same goals. The same stats advise that advertising is seen as confusing, misleading, and deceptive, and these characteristics will not only impact the personal utility of advertising as an information source but at the same time might nurture frequent and general cynicism at various levels and industries (Grigorescu, 2018).

Dedicated literature informs that the need for hospitals to advertise their services was first and formally recognized in 1977, by the American Hospital Association (Berkowitz and Flexner, 1981). Andaleeb (1994), stated that a new era in hospital and medical advertising evolved once the Supreme Court (Bates and O'Steen vs. The State of Arizona) granted lawyers the right to advertise, and consequently the American Hospital Association modified their guiding rules. Healthcare advertising and hospital advertising were expected to expand as it has a more flexible regulatory framework. Terry Paul in "Misconceptions and Recommendations on Hospital Advertising " (1989) argues that in the early '80s hospital marketing was considered "a new discovery " by the hospital's executives and most of the time their initial response to marketing was to launch advertising campaigns to patients. Due to the fact that most of the hospitals' directors/managers had very less experience in this field, the general belief was that marketing and advertising were equally the same. Therefore, at that time hospitals spent large amounts of money on advertising that did not really follow well-designed strategies and objectives and led to little response (Grigorescu et al., 2019).

If in the early '80s hospital advertising was a very new concept and sometimes was considered very inappropriate for hospitals to use this marketing activity throughout time consumer perceptions have changed and nowadays advertising and service marketing became the median (Professional Research Consultants, INC). As stated by Carabello (2003) it is very common nowadays for people to see the amount of hospitals advertisements or physician advertisements, shown on television, or the spam e-mail that they receive with physicians' information; along to these ones should be mentioned all the yellow pages advertisements or the billboards promoting or advertising on the different hospital services or practitioners (Grigorescu & Bradley, 2019).

Various professionals that deal with hospitals advertising consider that nowadays there is a strong tendency towards providing as much information as possible about health topics; moreover, there is a strong trend towards advertising educational information on health-related topics, healthy lifestyles, and illness prevention. They agree on the fact that most of the media channels, television, magazines, and newspapers, will have at least one segment focused on presenting health information issues (Gillette, 2000). Focusing advertising activities on health information will, in turn, help hospitals promote their packages and this will finally lead to better-informed patients about facilities. In this way, they will choose facilities that best suit their needs (Gillette, 2000).

Allen (2001), in a study regarding New Jersey female consumer beliefs toward hospital advertising, states that advertisements in the print media, main newspapers, were reviewed for a period of three months and the findings accounted for a number of 32 various hospital advertisements. Several of these advertisements provided information about oncology or cardiac packages and overviews of hospital services. Others featured community events with recognized community leaders about half of the ads supported images of doctors or photos of patients.

Miller (1996), argues that the general and continuous expansion of the healthcare industry, as well as the trend of mergers and acquisitions, have led to more severe competitive situations. According to Solomon (1990), healthcare administrators have begun to pay more attention to marketing efforts and marketing strategies. In their fight against competitors, hospital administrators attached more importance to advertising and expected that this activity would have played a greater role in the hospital's pursuit of gaining market share and profit.

In terms of the amount of money invested in marketing hospitals and the healthcare system, most studies have shown an increase in the budget allocated to these marketing efforts. Lipowicz (1997) argues that advertising spending will continue to increase, thus forcing hospitals to be more efficient in the fight against new competitors. The findings of Bell and Vitaska (1992) showed that, from an economic point of view, both specialists and users agreed that advertising generated higher hospital fees so that larger hospitals would make more profit than smaller ones.

Worldwide, advertising themes vary with the hospital and hospital market. Therefore, some hospitals or healthcare providers present the latest innovations and health technologies, while others could focus on their services or make public their organization's assessment for procedures or performance. This could be translated as a result of the consumer's need to learn more and more about certain hospital services in advertisements (Bell and Vitaska, 1992). However, research conducted by Veterans Affairs Medical Center at White River Junction, Vermont, and Dartmouth Medical School, showed that 122 advertisements designed to attract patients involved an emotional model that highlighted feelings of fear, hope, or anxiety about a health risk. The content of these advertisements would expose either cardiovascular, cancerous, or orthopaedic problems, others promoted cosmetic procedures. Few others seemed to

promote the financial interests of medical centers before the needs of patients. More than a quarter of these ads promoted technology slogans, thus creating a misconception that the latest technology would always be better and, in addition, the omission to highlight the costs or potential damages to patients. The findings of the research explained how these advertisements somehow inoculated a need in the minds of consumers, thus accelerating the interest in services in an inappropriate way and perhaps forcing patients to cope with unnecessary risks (Pharos/Winter 2007). Over time the trends changed, and the consumer had more options when choosing a hospital, rather than the traditional way when the doctor used to decide the most convenient place to hospitalize the patient.

The healthcare industry around the world is particularly different from all other industries in its relationship with consumers. Hekmat and Heischmidt (1991, in Moser 2008) relate that over time, the perceptions of most health experts and regulatory bodies have been quite mixed towards advertising, but these attitudes have appeared quite positive when reported to consumers.

The healthcare industry compared to any other industry that uses advertising as a strategic marketing tool is not without the opinions of consumers towards this activity, whether these opinions are mixed, positive, or negative. It is claimed that health-related advertising is viewed with even more scepticism than all other types of advertising. Moser (2008) in its comparative study on consumer studies on the advertising of doctors' services showed that almost 25 % of the sample studied in 1984 agreed that advertising by doctors was more misleading than other forms of advertising and that 20.7 % of the sample in 2006 agreed to the same.

From another perspective, marketers, and hospitals need to know that advertising is subject to ethics and principles, and they should take this into account when organizing their campaigns and creating the messages to be channeled to the public. In agreement with Weber, health advertising is the main thing and the standard ethics are to promote health and high-quality services at no time should health advertising create values or impressions that are likely to cause suffering or harm to the public and, at the same time, direct people to bad health decisions.

However, over time, health advertising has faced a long list of allegations that have stood against general ethical principles. Some of these were, the persuasions of materialism and consumption, support for the purchase of unnecessary products, taking advantage of children and other vulnerable people, and controlling behaviour through hidden meanings (HealthCare Advertising and Ethics Ways of Seeing a Moral Problem, 2004). The same source said that health advertising should be evaluated from four different moral perspectives, such as results, natural law, norms, and virtues. Weber (2001) argues that good health advertising should promote accurate expectations, present accurate and understandable information, and avoid promoting harmful values and images.

Therefore, effective communication programs in the field of health marketing should first research the real needs of the individual and then encourage the promotion of services and products to meet these needs (Hall, 2000).

Following the above discussions, more information will be added to support the purpose of the study.

3. Materials and Methods

The final aim of the study is to understand how consumers in Dubai perceive healthcare advertising and how these perceptions impact their choices of private hospitals, as main healthcare providers. Effective use of advertising should aid hospitals, and attract and retain patients within this changing and developing environment, such as Dubai. This should be done mostly because consumers nowadays are very concerned about selecting the most appropriate facility that would respond to their needs. It is important to gather satisfying information in order to achieve the above, and to do so the following research questions were formulated:

1. What would be the level of consumer awareness about healthcare advertising?
2. How useful do consumers perceive hospital advertising to inform about the services hospitals have to offer?
3. What factors are considered important and affect the choice of healthcare providers; would advertising be a priority in the consumers' choice or do their options account for other factors considered important (price, doctors, word-of-mouth); do consumers usually see any relation between the services cost and the fact that hospitals advertise them?
4. How do hospitals advertise their services; what would be the most suitable ways to do so? Through what media outlets do consumers come across hospitals' advertisements most of the time?
5. Would there be any difference in response based on socio-demographic criteria and advertising by hospitals?

The research methodology refers to the "specification of procedures for collecting and analyzing the necessary data to help identify or react to a problem or opportunity" (Hawkins and Tull, 1994). In order to do so the following sequence of steps should be emphasized: presentation of a research design, data collection which will further help identify the problem, and finally the goal of the research design is to generate the most accurate information possible (Hawkins and Tull, 1994).

In order to achieve the aim and objectives, this study is ought to collect primary quantitative research as a mean of data collection. The study will utilise a descriptive research design, as the main aim of the study is not to distinguish or to recognize the details and the deeper understanding of consumer's perceptions towards healthcare advertising as a means of persuading them to choose hospitals, nor to change any consumer's behaviour. Therefore, a descriptive approach will be aimed at measuring the

correlations between elements such as the benefit of hospital to advertise, whether hospitals should engage in this kind of marketing activity, whether this is seen as rather misleading and deceptive, whether this would increase the number of people visiting certain facilities, whether consumers will be more informed about health-related issues or about the services they will have found within specific facilities, whether this marketing activity will increase hospitals' prices, or even more if consumers view it as a waste of money. According to Tull and Hawkins (1994, p43) "descriptive research would be a consumer profile study, market-potential study, attitude surveys, media research. Also, it is stated that any source of information can be used in a descriptive study ".

The research instrument for the study is a questionnaire that will be directed to target segments of both males and females, currently users of healthcare providers, regardless of their nationality and age.

Recognition must be given to the instruments used by Hite and Bellizzi (1986) in their study as well as to the instrument used by Bell and Vitaska (1992). These studies provided information and statements that served as the foundation of the questionnaire design for this research. Both studies mentioned above addressed consumer attitudes and differences between these ones and advertising in general and, nevertheless advertising of professional services and physician's services in particular.

For the present study 250 questionnaires were distributed personally to respondents, according to their availability and more precisely as convenient as possible to the interviewer. Moreover, questionnaires were handed out with the specification that participants 'anonymity was assured by asking them not to reveal their names at any time. Out of a total of 250 distributed, 160 questionnaires were returned by the interviewers over the internet. This would mean a total response rate of 64% and a remaining 36% non-response rate. After receiving them, questionnaires were checked and 10 were eliminated as they were returned with missing answers. The results accounted for 150 valid questionnaires which needed to be encoded in order to portray a fairly relevant behavior pattern of Dubai's healthcare consumers.

Questionnaires were used as a means of gathering quantitative data. Unlike interviews or other means of data collection, these are less costly as well as less time-consuming. Other benefits of this means of data collection include: precision, as they do not involve the interpretation of results by a middle person, and increased objectiveness, for the same reason (Statpac, 2008).

The questionnaires are no longer than 21 questions so that the respondents will not lose patience when answering. Moreover, the questions will follow a structured sequence, whereby they will be asked in a certain order as to create interest in the questionnaire, while the demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, and income will be left at the end. The questionnaire will start from more general questions to more specific ones, such as: "What kind of media do you most frequently use?" or "Where do you come across to most of the healthcare advertisements ", respectively: "Would you

rather choose to use a healthcare facility that advertises its services than to one that doesn't? “.

This study explores how do consumers in Dubai perceive healthcare advertising and how do these perceptions impact their choice of private healthcare provider. In order to support the main aim, the subset of questions used in the study is meant to better understand how do consumers feel about : Hospitals' need to advertise to remain in business; whether they would like to see more advertising about hospitals; whether advertising would make them more aware of health issues, doctor's practices and performance; whether they become more secure and make better decisions when selecting their services; whether they rather choose a hospital that advertises its services than one that does not. Other important aspects debated perceptions on advertising importance, along with other factors such as doctors, word-of-mouth, and price.

The socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, nationality, income, education, will be used to find any significant difference in attitudes toward hospitals that advertise.

4. Results

All the data collected from 150 participants through the study's questionnaire was further on encoded in the SPSS program. This was done in order to run statistical tests useful to gather information about the various variables. These statistical tests comprised of Descriptive and Frequencies tables, Cross - Tabulations, Pearson's Correlations etc. Interpretations and recommendations were done upon various tests results.

4.1. Socio - Demographics Variables

In terms of socio-demographics, from the total of 150 respondents, 95 were (63.3 %) males and 55 (36.7 %) were females. Age segment accounted for 14 respondents (9.3%) between 21-30, 57 (38 %) between 31-40 years, 50 (33.3 %) between 41-50 years, and 29 (19.3%) older than 51 years. Nationality variables ranked Arabs from the Middle East on the highest position with 60 respondents or 40% of the total, followed by the Sub – Continent Asians with a total of 55 or 36.7% of respondents, Westerners accounted for a total of 25 respondents or 16.7% and Others summed 10 or 6.7%. The Level of Education levels gathered a total amount of 56 undergraduates (37.3%) and a total of 59 (39.3%) postgraduates; only 35 (23.3%) were high school graduates. Regarding the income of the respondents, the breakdown of the results was as follows: 66 or 44% had an annual income of equal or more than AED 100.000 AED, 50 or 33.3 % placed themselves in the range of equal or more than AED 200000 and 34 or 22.7% ranged themselves equal or more than AED 300.000.

4.2. Importance of advertising

The results of the frequency test regarding the types of media that are most frequently used by the respondents. The numbers above clearly show that when asked which type of media did, they usually use, most of the participants chose Internet as their first option. This would mean 51.3% out of the total. Newspapers account for a 15.3%, whereas Radio is favored by a 14.7% of respondents. Therefore it can be stated that 3 most important media channels are Internet, Newspapers and Radio and these ones account for 81.3% of the total media channels. Television and Magazines summed 18.6% of the total media channels. Along with the test that showed the most frequented media channels, results were extracted regarding the encounter of healthcare information by the public. The results show that most of the healthcare information was reaching the public through outdoor advertising (32%), patient education brochures (23.3%) and television advertising (14.7%). Promotional brochures, magazines advertisements, newspapers, newsletters and direct mail accounted for 30% of the total response.

Upon the results stated above, the following recommendations could be given: hospitals as main healthcare providers should focus on sending their advertising messages via the Internet especially, Radio and forms of printed media, such as Newspapers as these seem to be in their favour; perhaps much advertising is done through other channels such as outdoors advertisements, patient brochures that do not reach very easy the audience and are not directly linked to the media means preferred. Hospitals should help patients gather their healthcare information by advertising through their most frequented media channels.

Mixed differences were found in consumers answers when asked how many times did, they purchased for products after seeing advertised information about certain healthcare products or services. Hence 18.7% confirmed that they Never purchased health products after seeing them advertised, 29.3% stated that they Rarely purchased products. Other 34.7% stated that they Often used information advertised to purchase products and 17.3% did the same Most of The Times.

When asked to give their opinion if hospitals should engage in advertising, 41.3% of the respondents had a positive answer. The same positive reaction towards hospital advertising was extracted from the question regarding the desire of seeing more advertising: "Would You Like to See More Hospital Advertising ". 59.3% stated "yes "for their answers.

The outcome of these descriptive tests supports the study 's final aim, by representing the positive perceptions of individuals about hospitals engaging in advertising to reach their audiences and to ease the choice of health provider. Nevertheless, the figures are emphasizing the fact that people would like to come across hospital advertising more often. The hospitals and marketers should be aware of these perceptions and they should try to facilitate people's access to more hospital and healthcare information through advertising, taking into consideration their preferred media channels.

4.3. Ranking Different Factors in Order of Importance When Choosing a Hospital

Respondents were asked to order, depending on their importance, a series of factors that would usually influence their decisions when selecting a hospital. These factors were: Doctors Referrals, Advertisements, Price and Word- Of – Mouth. 48% placed Doctors on 1st rank, 30% on 2nd, 16.7% on 3rd and 5.3% on 4th. Depending on how important was considered when choosing a hospital, hospital advertising was ranked: 16,7% opted for 1st rank, 36,7% for 2nd, 34,7% for 3rd an 12% for 4th rank

Pricing was selected as the 1st rank by 30,7% of the respondents, 2nd rank by 24%, 3rd rank summed 22% from the total and 22.7% opted for the 4th rank. One missing value was system missing. Along with the Doctors, Advertisements and Pricing, Word-of Mouth was also ranked amongst the most important factors that influence consumers' choice of healthcare. Word of mouth accounted for 13,3% for 1st rank, 10,7% for 2nd rank, 22% for 3rd rank and 54% for 4th rank.

Moreover, a Descriptive Statistical Test was run in order to highlight how important did the participants perceive all the above factors when choosing their healthcare facility. For this test, variables have been organized by the size of their means. The descriptive Test organized the ranking from the highest average answers to the lowest average answers. The ranking was done from 1 being the most significant to 4 being the least significant. Hence the results emphasized that the most important factor was Doctor's Referrals. In this case the highest mean was considered 1.79. Doctors' mean was 1. 79, Price mean was 2.37 Advertisements mean was 2.42; Being closest to 1, all these means are considered to be the most important. Word of mouth would be the furthest from 1, in this given situation, therefore considered less important. It has long been debated whether or not, nowadays consumers still rely on their doctors' referrals or choice of which hospital to be used or not. The statistical description above clearly shows the fact that, yes, most of the individuals do see doctors as the main factor to consider when choosing the hospitals. However, other factors such as cost or advertising are almost as important as doctors' referrals.

It could also be inferred that although participants have expressed their positive views about hospital advertising or that they would like to see more hospital advertising, they still perceive doctors' referrals and price as more influential in their decision process.

Even though, most of the respondents ranked doctors as the most important factor when choosing a hospital, when asked if hospital advertising would be useful to inform people about doctor's practices and performances, 40% strongly agreed and 38.7% somewhat agreed. A very low number, 13.3% was negative towards this idea.

Positive answers were also given when participants were asked whether hospital advertising would create more awareness of health-related issues. 46.7% somewhat agreed whereas 37.3% strongly agreed

Moreover 39.3% and 34.7% of respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that hospital advertising would give more information regarding different services hospital offer such as equipment, nursing care, and treatment benefits.

It can thus be inferred that in the majority of the cases, people perceived advertising done by hospitals as a useful means of getting information about various health issues, services, and nevertheless about where do doctors work, and how prestigious are they. Hence hospitals should consider this, when choosing to advertise their facility. Consumer's attitudes have changed over the time and they have become more and more sophisticated in the selection of their services, therefore having access to as much information as possible will facilitate their decision-making process and nevertheless will help them opt for what best suits their interests. Hospitals should keep the consumers updated on latest technology in the industry, latest medical treatments and nonetheless notify about the prestige and performances of the specialists on board their facilities. Perhaps informing people about doctors with a long experience in different medical fields or about the ones that have already gained a reputation in the market will benefit both parts, consumer and hospitals.

When asked whether hospital advertising was rather misleading and deceptive, a total of 20% strongly disagreed and 27% somewhat disagree. A high percentage of 34% were undecided. Similar results were gathered when asking whether hospital advertisements are playing on people's emotions; a total 45% of the respondents strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed that hospitals' advertisements are playing on consumers' emotions.

When correlating the above two variables, the results show that most of the respondents that strongly disagreed and somewhat disagreed with the fact that hospitals' advertising would be rather deceptive, were high-school graduates (35 participants). This also shows that the level of scepticism among consumers is considerably higher amongst those with a higher level of education. Participants with undergraduate studies accounted for a total of 22 that somewhat agreed and total agreed, whereas postgraduates accounted for a total of 37 respondents with similar attitudes. However, a total of 34 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this aspect. This will help marketers select carefully the audience to whom they would like to direct their advertisements campaigns; perhaps would be helpful to them to avoid advertising on various aspects that could be viewed with scepticism by consumers with a different level of education.

Amongst other factors considered important when choosing a hospital, price occupied a higher position than advertising, meaning that, 30.7% ranked it as the most important factor. The average highest-ranking states that along with doctors, advertising and word of mouth, price was ranked as the second most influencing aspect when choosing a healthcare facility.

However even if most of the respondents ranked price as essential and influential in their choice, when intersecting the Price importance and whether Advertising would

increase the price of hospital's services, the results showed mixed opinions. Out of the 66 respondents that ranged themselves AED \geq 100.000, 35 strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed that advertising would increase prices of the services, whereas 25 with AED \geq 200.000 and 23 with AED \geq 300.000 shared the same thoughts. Also, it could be easily seen that a total of 31 participants belonging to all three income categories didn't express their attitudes towards these aspects. This could also be translated as follows: although consumers with a lower annual income would be more influenced about hospital' prices, they would not necessarily perceive advertising as an increment of costs for various services. This would also mean that consumers perceive advertising done by hospital, not as a way of covering their services costs. The results show that people see this activity as a form of sending useful information to the audiences that would eventually benefit not only consumers but facilities, by attracting more patients.

It could further on be stated that hospitals should pay attention on the type of messages sent to their audiences, as the test show the participants are price sensitive when it comes to choosing their care provider. Perhaps marketers should include in the advertisements, information related to the payment schemes, such as the insurance companies with which particular hospitals have close relations. This in turn will attract consumer attention and possibly influence their decisions.

4.4. Data Analysis of Important Decision Factors

When relating the two variables above results showed that overall perception of the participants who ranked doctors as the most essential aspect when choosing their facility, did have a fairly negative attitude and they stated that hospital advertising would rather be a waste of money as they would first take into consideration doctor's. A total of 29 participants that placed Doctors' Referrals on the highest position Strongly Agreed and Somewhat Agreed that Advertising by hospitals would rather be a waste of money. A total of 23 participants placed doctors on the second highest position and Somewhat Agreed and Strongly Agreed with the same statement. Also 22 participants who ranked doctors on the 1st place, neither agreed nor disagreed at the same category. 21 respondents ranked Doctors' Referrals as most significant (1st), but also Strongly disagreed that Advertising would be a waste of money. 13 that ranked Doctors Referrals on 2nd most important, Somewhat Disagreed on the same statement.

When asked to state whether or not Advertising by the hospitals would boost the quality of the hospitals in the future, the results were fairly mixed and showed that 24.7% Somewhat Agreed and 22% Strongly Agreed. A total of 25.3% Somewhat Disagreed on the same matter and 12% Strongly Disagreed. Also 16% Neither Agreed nor Disagreed.

When intersecting the two variables, the figures clearly stated that most of the respondent's opinions were combined. Most of the participants with the age between 21-30 agreed or somewhat agreed on this aspect; 33 with age between 31-40 Somewhat Agreed or Strongly Agreed; 27 with age between 41-50 shared a fairly positive attitude; and all the participants over 51 had a quite negative opinion on the same matter, meaning that 29 Strongly Disagreed or Somewhat Disagreed. Also 24 participants within

these group ages, Neither Agreed nor Disagreed that hospital advertising will improve the quality of the hospital 's services. Thus, it could be deduced that younger generation believes that advertising would change the facets of the hospital services in the future. The older the age segment, the larger is the number of Strongly Disagree and Somewhat Disagree answers. In order to support this, the figures show that all 29 participants over 51 years old Strongly Disagreed and Somewhat Disagreed.

By intersecting these variables, it could be deduced that all the age groups would rather choose to visit a facility that advertises its services, rather than going to one that does not. A total of 118 respondents representing all the age segments Strongly Agreed or Somewhat Agreed with this question and only a total of 20 Strongly Disagreed or Somewhat Disagreed.

Depending on their Nationality, consumer's positive perceptions and negative perceptions were almost equally split. For example, 22 Arabs Strongly Disagree and Somewhat Disagreed, that Advertising is misleading and deceptive and 22 Strongly Agreed and Somewhat Agreed on the same matter. Negative perceptions accounted for a total of 57 answers, and positive ones accounted for a total of 59 answers. This would mean that there are no major differences on how different nationalities feel about Hospital Advertising and that the level of disagreement and agreement were present in all of the nationalities. Therefore, marketers should not advertise the hospital 's services judging by the nationality of respondents in Dubai.

5. Conclusions

As previously mentioned, Dubai has been defined as one of the most developed cities in the world and also, one that continues to expand with rapidity and innovation at all economic levels and industries. The Healthcare industry in Dubai has not ceased to expand along with all the other industries and even to outrun them. In such a competitive environment private hospitals and healthcare providers should communicate the most appropriate messages to their target audience, via strategic marketing tools, such as Advertising. This will in turn differentiate them on the market and help them to gain more competitive advantage. Hence, they should focus on recognizing and distinguishing very well on the consumers' behavioural patterns in a changing environment, such as Dubai.

This study aimed at analysing the perceptions of consumers toward healthcare advertising and how did these perceptions impact on consumer's choices of healthcare provider in Dubai. Dedicated literature and the data collected and interpreted has highlighted on a series of points that helped for a better understanding of the study's final aim.

Both the literature review and the findings in the data analysis talk about the fact that hospitals' advertising has generated positive attitudes amongst the interviewed consumers. After analyzing the data, it could be stated that most consumers in Dubai are predisposed to the information advertised by the hospitals. When asked if hospitals

should engage in advertising to stay in business, 41.3% of the respondents were positive, and 59.3% stated “yes “, when asked if they wanted to come across to more hospital advertising. Best outlets of sending the advertising messages were identified when consumers were asked what type of media channel did, they mostly utilise and where did they come across to most of healthcare and hospital advertisements. Upon their answers, it was deducted that consumers in Dubai are inclined to favour three main media channels: Internet, Radio and Newspapers. Hence it was inferred that Hospital Advertising should be done through Internet, Radio and forms of printed media, such as Newspapers, as these ones accounted for 81.3% of the total media channels mostly utilized by the consumers. Consumers’ desire to see more hospital advertising, is a result of the fact that they believe in this way they gather important information about doctors’ practices and prestige. 40% of the respondents, Strongly Agreed with this statement and 38.7 % Somewhat Agreed. Also respondents agreed that Advertising would inform about the variety of services hospitals’ have to offer. This aspect would also be supported by the literature review. Boscarino and Steiber in 1982, suggested that “consumer no longer shop for a hospital, they shop for specific hospital services “. Nonetheless positive Correlation was depicted between Hospital Advertising as a useful means to inform about the doctors and about the variety of services hospitals have to offer. In support to this, 34% of the respondents confirmed that they “Often “purchase for healthcare advertised products. People affirmed that advertising in this industry is useful to give them valuable information on all these matters. Moreover, consumer’s positive reaction to healthcare advertising is supported by the fact that respectively 46.7 % and 37.3% Somewhat Agreed or Strongly Agreed that hospital advertising makes them more aware of health-related issues. On the other hand, aspects such as Doctor’s Referrals or Price were taken into consideration along with Advertising and Word-Of-Mouth. This was done to portray their level of significance in the consumer’s choice of hospitals. Although Doctor’s Referrals and Price were ranked as the first 2 most important decision factors, Hospital Advertising still accounted for a 3rd rank on consumers’ preferences list. However, it must be stated that those consumers who ranked Doctor’s Referrals on the 1st place, were more prone to believe that Hospital Advertising was a waste of money. In the dedicated literature, it was stated that both specialists and users seemed to have agreed on the fact that advertising generates higher hospital charges. However, the majority of respondents in Dubai appeared to Disagree on this matter, and although they ranked Price as being important in their choice of facility, they did not feel that advertising was increasing the costs hospitals charge.

Moreover, based on socio-demographics criteria some differences were encountered regarding consumer’s perceptions toward Hospital Advertising. Literature has emphasized a couple of aspects regarding the scepticism of consumers toward healthcare advertising. It appears that the respondents with a higher degree of education, in this case Postgraduates and Undergraduates, felt more sceptical about Hospital Advertisements. On the other hand, the ones with a high-school diploma appeared to disapprove that advertising was misleading and deceptive. Therefore, it is

important for marketers to comprehend how consumers react in terms of scepticism, to the messages sent to their consumers. They must be aware of the ethics and morals around hospital advertising in order to create proper messages. Especially with Dubai's healthcare system developing so rapidly, marketers must promote the new facilities in such a way that it won't create scepticism in the mindsets of the consumers and thus won't stop them for "shopping for the new hospitals".

Based on Age Criteria, opinions were relatively mixed. It appeared that older generation did not perceive advertising as a feature that would boost the quality of hospital services in the future. Whereas same findings showed that the younger the age segment was, the more positive reactions were stated toward the same aspect. Nationality did not account for major differences in attitudes toward advertising.

Dubai's healthcare system seems to flourish more and more and to become a model of diversification and development with major investments in education, healthcare, training etc. If marketers and healthcare administrators will bind their efforts, they will succeed in knowing what best suits different consumers' pattern and thus will prove efficient in satisfying their needs.

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