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The Impact of Hospital Reputation on Patient Loyalty

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Abstract: Many scholars have come to the agreement that customer loyalty gave tremendous effect on companies' business survival. It had been well accepted that reputation included as one of the factors that developed customer loyalty and business successes. Reputation is one of the critical elements of customer's evaluation toward a company's product or service. Customer evaluation shapes perception. Therefore creating good customers' experience of service will create good customer perception. In health care organizations patients' experience of medical service is crucial in shaping positive customer's perception. When the patient didn't have positive experience with the health care service, patients might avoid using the hospital service. Accordingly, in enhancing patient's loyalty, building good hospital reputation becomes compulsory in order to stay competitive in the health care industry. The aimed of this study is to examine the consequence of hospital reputation on patient loyalty. Through the assessment of previous literatures related with reputation and customer loyalty, it is believed that hospital reputation has a strong influence on patients' loyalty.

Keywords: Corporate Reputation, Hospital Reputation, Customer Loyalty, Patient's loyalty

INTRODUCTION

Customers have been a central of attention of all the business and become the mean of every business long life age. Customers are the company's valuable assets that lead to the business success (Abubakar, Mokhtar, & Abdullattef, 2014). Therefore having loyal customer become the highest goal of every businesses due to many benefits given such as positive word of mouth and recommendation (Zeithaml, Berry, &

Parasuraman, 1996), hard to be attracted by competitors offered (So, King, Sparks, Wang, 2013), developing consumer behavioral intention and retention with the company (Davies, Chun, Kamins, 2010).

In healthcare industry, the stiff competition among health care provider, along with the growth of advanced technology and the race in delivering quality service, forced the healthcare provider to be more patients focus oriented (Bilingsley, 2015). Today, patients are offered with many choices of hospital within or outside the country that offered varieties healthcare service and quality care. Therefore, patients' are more likely depend on the credible information that signalling hospital behaviour and quality, such as reputation (Smith, Smith, & Wang, 2010; Walker, 2010). Accordingly, in applying to Fombrun, Gardberg, & Sever (2000) regarding to corporate reputation into hospital reputation, the patients' confidence will be strengthen by the hospital that own good reputation.

Hospital reputation is known as one of the factor that influences patients' loyalty (Johnson, 2014). Reputation in the health care organizations is affected by patient's experience. Patient experience is about the ability of healthcare providers in giving medical service beyond patients' satisfaction. This such condition can be achieved through the continues medical care improvement, focus on fulfilling patient's expectation and need, and delivering personalized medical service (Wolf, Niederhauser, Marshburn, & Lavela, 2014). Accordingly, it has been agreed that in enhancing patient's loyalty, hospital reputation, and quality service become compulsory in order to stay competitive in the health care industry (Hibbard, Stockard, & Tusler, 2005).

Reputation is seen as the competitive advantage and assets of the firm (Fombrun 1996; Helm Eggert, & Garnefeld, 2010) and as the global evaluation of a company's conduct and performance throughout the years (Fombrun 1996; Gotsi & Wilson 2001; Helm, *et al.*, 2010). Reputation signalling the superior quality and reliability of products or services (Raithel, Schloderer, Schwaiger 2010), the parameter and reference for patients decision making in choosing the hospital (Elsinga, Otten, Verslujis, Smeets, Kievit, Vree & Mheen, 2010). Moreover, customers were believed to be more loyal with the firms that have good reputation (Morley 2002). This is because an outstanding reputation increased customer trust and influence customer decisions making process (Raithel *et al.*, 2010) satisfaction and loyalty (Loureiro & Kastenzholz, 2010). Reputation also holds the important role in consumer pre and post purchase stages, as well as in the stage of keeping and maintaining the relationships with them (Zeithaml 1988; Stahl, Matzler, & Hinterhuber 2003). In addition, good reputation ignite customer's positive attitude toward a company's service or product (Jeng, 2011).

Remembering the critical impact of reputation on organization continuity, many scholars had put their concerned in conducting more study on the impact of reputation toward customer loyalty (Gul, 2014; Helm and Tolsdorf 2013, Helm, 2009, Gorondutse, Hilman, & Nasidi, 2014), customer retention (Milan, Eberle, & Bebbler, 2015) and hospital selection process (Johnson, 2014). In healthcare industry, hospital reputation becomes one of the most critical criteria for patients' consideration in selecting the hospital (Johnson, 2014). It proved that 87% from 270,000 patients being surveyed by National Research Corporation (2012) agreed that reputation is the most important reason for hospital selection. In spite of the importance of hospital reputation in building patients loyalty, there are still open for discussion on reputation definition and measurement up to this day. There are several definitions and measurements that found in previous researches. Several variations of measurement that have been used to assess reputation are Corporate Character Scale (Davies, Chun, & Roper, 2001), Fortune's Annual Most Admired Companies (AMAC),

Reputation Quotient, Corporate Credibility Scale (Newell & Goldsmith, 2001). However, up to this time, there is hard to find the exact measurement for hospital reputation. Therefore, this research is aimed to review previous research related to hospital reputation and patients' loyalty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer Loyalty

Business success depends on the company's ability in getting, keeping, and growing the customers and maintaining the relationship with customers, especially loyal customers are the reason for all every business that existed in the world (Kotler and Keller, 2012). This situation is without exception applied in health care industry. The reason of healthcare providers' success is not only because of high-quality services that hospital offered to the patients, but also the healthcare provider ability in knowing how to satisfy the customers and make them come back and use medical services again (Rundle & Bennet, 2010). Therefore, In highly competitive condition like these years, customer loyalty has become the most important factor to achieve company's competitive advantage in the market place (Aksoy, 2013).

Scholars had empirically identified that customer loyalty is constructed by behavioural and attitudinal side of the customers (Day, 1969; Lutz and Winn, 1974; Oliver & Rust 1997, 1999; Dick & Basu, 1994; Rauyruen & Miller, 2007). Behavioral loyalty is habitual loyalty happened due to several factors such as; there were not many alternative providers to visit or the customers have low effort on searching other providers (Dick & Basu, 1999; Gounaris and stathakopoulos 2004). While, attitudinal loyalty is the customer favourable level of disposition to some value related with the company (Dick and Basu, 1994; Han and Back, 2008). In health care context, patient behavioural loyalty is indicated by patients' frequency in using hospital services (Kim & Park, 2000). On the other hand, patients' loyalty is the likeliness of the patients to recommend the hospital service to other (Anderson, 1998, Morera & Silva, 2014). According to Peltier & Thomas (1999), Chahal (2008) patient loyalty could be categorized into three criteria such as; the willingness of the patients to use again the same health care service and facility based on their previous service experience, the willingness to use different health services that offered by the same health care provider, patients give recommendation and refer the healthcare service to other.

Oliver (1997, 1999) defined customer loyalty as a deep commitment of a customer to rebuy and revisit the service or a product no matter how intense others marketing effort and situational condition which can provoke the customer to switch. This definition of loyalty, what then he called ultimate loyalty (Oliver, 1999). The first three attitudinal loyalty phases are; cognitive, affective and conative. The four phase of behavioural loyalty is the action loyalty, where intention is performed.

In healthcare context, Patient's loyalty give benefits to the healthcare provider in several ways, loyal patients without hesitation promote the healthcare institution to others and have small reaction toward negative issues related to the healthcare provider (Chang, Tseng, & Woodside 2013). Due to the positive impact of patients' loyalty on hospital performance, patient's loyalty become the big concern for health care provider to consider for. From various antecedent factors of loyalty, reputation is included as one of the antecedent. Zaidin, Zakuan, & Baharun (2015), highlighted that patients loyalty determine by reputation. Further, many previous researchers found that corporate reputation had strong relationship consumer loyalty (Gul, 2014; Helm, & Tolsdorf 2013; Helm, 2009; Gorondutse Hilman, Nasidi, 2014) and retention

(Milan, Eberle, & Bebber, 2015) and hospital selection process (Johnson, 2014), as well as in the stage of keeping and maintaining the relationship with the customer (Zeithaml 1988; Stahl, Matzler and Hinterhuber 2003).

Reputation

Reputation is the abstract asset (Hall, 1993) and a competitive advantage of an organization (Fombrun 1996; Balmer and Greyser 2003), Corporate reputation shape customers' perception of a company's product or service (Devine and Halpern, 2001; Pfarrer *et al.*, 2010). It is widely believe that customers tend to be more loyal to the firms that have a good reputation (Morley 2002). As an external source of information, reputation hold the crucial role in shaping consumer future behaviour (Jin & Kim, 2008) and loyalty (Jeng, 2011) The crucial part of reputation is that good reputation indicates the superior quality and reliability of products or services (Raithel., Schloderer, Schwaiger 2010).

In reputation concept, reliability is included as one of the factors of customer judgment of whether a company has delivered reliable service to the customer. This means that customers realized that they can depend on the service provider to solve their problems and inquiries. Delivering reliable service means that the company deliver the service as it was promised and the customers are more likely doing the business with the company that can perform the promised service (Zeithaml *et al.* 2009). In that manner, reliability build customer trust and confidence which is crucial for service especially when customer perceived the service as a high risk service with uncertainty outcome such as the service that provided by medical, banking, legal service, and insurance (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2009).

Reliability and trustworthiness that composed reputation are included in six criteria of good perceived quality (Gronroos, 1988). Those six criteria are: attitude and behaviour, professionalism and skill, reliability and trustworthiness, reputation and credibility, as well as service recovery. In the health care context, most of the time patients relate hospital reputation with the physician skills in handling medical problem. Patients put more trust on the hospital that has good reputation, in that sense, trust is embedded with reputation (Young, 1997). Therefore, hospital reputation becomes the important factor to be included in patient's loyalty construct (Zaidin *et al.*, 2015). In retaliation, Caruana (2002) also advised to include reputation in satisfaction and loyalty construct.

Corporate reputation itself is developed by series of long process of company's conduct and performance from past to the present that shapes the stakeholders' judgment. Hence reputation is as company's positioned that distinguishes one company to another in the eyes of its internal and external stakeholders (Herbig & Milewicz, 1993; Bromley 2002). High corporate reputation indicates the outstanding reliability and quality of products or services (Raithel., Schloderer,& Schwaiger 2010). However, reputation is not easy to define and has various definitions based on the scholars' school of thought. The view of reputation are varies based on the approach of several theoretical perspective (Chun, 2005). Therefore, in reputation paradigm, there has never been one single theoretical approach that captures for whole reputation concepts. Fombrun & van Riel (1997) identified that there are six approaches of corporate reputation concept such as in the approaches of economics, accountancy, strategy, sociology and marketing. Even though reputation conceptualizes in various ways, but there are several similar characteristics that build reputation definition referring to Fombrun(1996), Fombrun and Van Riel (1997), Rindova, Williamson, and Petkova (2005), Walker (2010). According to those scholars, reputation composed by internal and external

stakeholders' evaluation of the firm's past action. Reputation is also built based on negative and positive stakeholder's perception. Therefore, in health care industry, most of the time patients refer to hospital reputation as the parameter in selecting and continuing hospital service (Elsinga, Otten, Verslujis, Smeets, Kievit, Vree, & Mheen, 2010).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this research proposes the direct effect of hospital reputation on patient's loyalty. Figure 1 below, shows the direction relationship among the two variables. In this study, the independent variable is hospital reputation and patient's loyalty is treated as dependent variable.



Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework developed based on previous studies in regard with reputation and customer loyalty. Fombrun (1996) confirmed that reputation as the cause of loyalty. In the same vein, Gray (1986), Nguyen & Leblanc (2001), Helm (2006) Gul (2014), Helm, & Tolsdorf (2013), Gorondutse, Hilman, & Nasidi (2014), Zaidin *et al.*, (2015) were strongly suggested to include reputation in loyalty construct.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Conceptual Paper

This article is a conceptual paper that conceptually describes the relationship between hospital reputation and patients' loyalty. In supporting this study, the data gathered from various valuable previous articles and empirical researches that related with corporate reputation and customer loyalty and its application in healthcare context.

Measurement

Patient's Loyalty Measurement

In this study, Patient's loyalty is conceptually composed by behavior and attitude. The behavioral loyalty indicated by the patients' patronage behavior. While attitudinal loyalty represented by the attitude of the consumer in their willingness to recommend and giving the willingness to spread positive word of mouth to others. Accordingly in measuring patients loyalty, this study suggest to adapt loyalty measurement by Zeithmal (1996) such as saying positive things about the hospital service to other people, recommending the hospital service to others, strongly advice family and others to utilize the hospital service, give priority consideration to choose the hospital service, and will do more hospital patronage within the next couple years.

Reputation measurement

In this study, reputation is treated as one of the factors of patients' judgment of whether a hospital has delivered a reliable service to the patients. Healthcare service is highly involved with human interaction, it

is necessary to measure the reputation based on patient's perceptions (Satir, 2006) as the result of accumulate stakeholders subjective evaluation over time (Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997). Reputation represents corporate position and identity in its stakeholders' eyes. The critical part about reputation is that reputation as subjective evaluation of the stakeholders in regard with their expectations (Fombrun and Van Riel, 1997) and developed based on the negative or positive perception of external and internal stakeholders toward the organization (Walker, 2010). The construction of reputation itself involving the overall customers' evaluation that needed long process and time. (Herbig and Milewicz, 1993). In line with how the reputation is operationalized, in this study, the hospital reputation measurement is adapted from Petrick (2002). The hospital reputation is measured in the way of how respected is the hospital in stakeholders' eyes, how well thought is the hospital in patients mind, the status of hospital itself, and whether the hospital is reputable enough in consumers' mind.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

After reviewing past literatures related to reputation and customer loyalty, in general or in healthcare context, many past studies found that there were solid relationship between corporate reputation and consumer loyalty (Helm *et al.*, 2010). Every organizations, including health care providers should consider reputation as the important factor that might bring to the up or down healthcare provider performance through patients preferences to choose, re visit, and refer and recommendation health care service (Hibbard, Stockard & Tusler 2005). Jeng (2008) pointed that company's high market share in the market impacted by positive corporate reputation. Company reputation, is an external source of information and has the role as a strong antecedent of consumer responses as well as consumers future behaviors (Jin and Kim, 2008).

Corporate reputation is represented the company's creation of trust through the ability of the company in performing the promised service to its stakeholders, therefore; reputation is developed by the accumulate stakeholders subjective evaluation over time (Fombrun & VanRiel, 1997) from the company's present and past behaviour (Jeng, 2011). Especially in healthcare service that highly involved with human interaction, it is necessary to measure the reputation based on patient's perceptions (Satir, 2006). In general, Nguyen and Leblanc (2001) stated that the consumer loyalty level is strongly connected with how strong is customer perception on corporate reputation.

Reputation is seen as the competitive advantage and assets of the firm (Fombrun 1996; Helm Eggert,& Garnefeld, 2010) and as the global evaluation of a company's conduct and performance throughout the years (Fombrun 1996; Gotsi & Wilson 2001; Helm *et al.*, 2010). The crucial part of reputation is that good reputation can indicate the superior quality and reliability of products or services (Raithel, Schloderer, Schwaiger 2010), as the parameter and reference for patients in their decision making to choose the hospital (Elsinga, Otten, Versluis, Smeets, Kievit, Vree, & Mheen, 2010).

An outstanding reputation can increase customer trust and influence customer decisions making process (Raithel *et al.*, 2010) satisfaction and loyalty Loureiro & Kastenholz (2010). Reputation is critical factor that occur in consumer pre and post purchase, as well as in the stage of keeping and maintaining the relationships with the customers (Zeithaml 1988; Stahl, Matzler & Hinterhuber 2003). In addition, good reputation shapes customer's positive attitude toward a company's service or product (Jeng, 2011). Every organization, including health care providers should consider reputation as important factor that might bring to the up or down healthcare performance through patients preferences to choose, re visit, and refer and recommend health care service (Hibbard *et al.*, 2005).

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