



The Effect of Customer Experience on Brand Image Through Customer Satisfaction: An individual-based Perspective of the Egyptian healthcare industry

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to empirically investigate the influence of customer experience on the brand image with mediation of customer satisfaction in Egyptian private hospitals. The objectives of this research are: to investigate the relationship between customer experience and brand image, to test the relationship between customer experience and customer satisfaction, to investigate the relationship between customer satisfaction and brand image, and to examine the mediation role of customer satisfaction between customer experience and brand image. The methodology used is focused on a quantitative approach utilizing an online survey tool to collect the necessary data and AMOS software for structural equation model analyses (SEM). The study's main findings are that: there is a statistically significant direct effect between customer experience and brand image, as well as a statistically significant direct effect between customer experience and customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction has a statistically significant direct effect on brand image. Finally, the study found that there is a partial mediation effect of customer satisfaction between customer experience and brand image in Egyptian private hospitals.

Keywords: Customer Experience, Customer Satisfaction, Brand Image, Egyptian Private Hospitals.

Introduction

The goal of health care is to ensure high-quality medical resources to everyone who needs them, confirming a high quality of life, curing diseases where feasible, and extending life expectancy. The healthcare industry often offers services that necessitate face-to-face contact with patients. This means that managers of health care organizations should implement a plan to guarantee that their employees are appropriately motivated to provide exceptional service to their consumers (the patients). Patients' satisfaction with their care has been associated to factors such as the quality of services provided, treatment response, availability of medical equipment, and interaction with medical workers during hospital visits (Khairunnisa and Nadjib, 2019). To guarantee high quality care, there must be direction, alignment, and commitment to a shared, complete vision of care, including a commitment to strengthening relationships with other providers and achieving organisational goals such as continuity of care. This, in turn, requires alignment across various segments of businesses, providers, and other entities.

In recent years, the importance of patient evaluations in healthcare services has grown. While the World Health Organisation (WHO) emphasizes the need for increased patient participation in healthcare services (Buccoliero et al., 2015), it also requires healthcare organisations to provide more patient-centered care (WHO, 2016). People-centered service designs are one method to provide individualised care. When redesigning an existing service or designing a new service, customer participation in service delivery processes, customer suggestions, and experiences are increasingly considered as a result of the multiple interactions that occur between the patient, family, and physician in healthcare services. Through interactions, comprehensive data about patient experiences can be gathered, guiding the design of healthcare services (Lee, 2019).

The perspectives of patients are one of the most important sources of data for improving health services, identifying problems, and developing effective plans for healthcare administrators. There is a need for patient healthcare experiences in addition to financial performance indicators for healthcare organisations to compete in the market. (Buccoliero et al., 2015) The realised relationship between healthcare experiences and satisfaction is a crucial aspect of quality control. Obtaining feedback from patients is regarded as the most accurate method for measuring their healthcare experience.

However, rather than asking patients to rate their satisfaction through general evaluations, it is preferable to ask them to describe in detail what is occurring in a specific care department (Wong et al., 2015). The specific evaluations afford the opportunity to identify areas in need of improvement. In order to ensure transparency in healthcare services or to guide payment policies, it is essential to collect patient experiences (Greaves et al., 2012).

The conceptual basis of the concept of patient experience is Schmitt's (1999) concept of experiential marketing. Experiential marketing is a topic with different content that generates unique experiences in various industries. Kücüksarac and Saymer (2016) define experiential marketing as "the consumer having an individual experience in terms of spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical aspects before, during or after purchasing the product or service" (Küçüksarac and Saymer, 2016). Kotler emphasized the importance of adding excitement and entertainment to cumbersome products and services by saying "all companies offer products or services, but ensuring that their customers are accompanied by an experience that cannot be removed from their memories is the main challenge" (Çiçek, 2015).

Different marketing strategies are employed by healthcare organisations (Ho et al., 2006). Additionally, the experiential marketing strategies that each healthcare organisation requires and employs may vary. The mission, vision, financial situation, and characteristics of the population the healthcare organisation serves are just a few examples of the variables that may affect these strategies. Creating an exceptional customer experience is challenging in every industry. Nevertheless, certain characteristics of healthcare services increase the difficulty (Klaus, 2018). (Hunter-Jones et al., 2020) To comprehend the customer experience in healthcare services, it is necessary to comprehend the unique characteristics of healthcare services.

Healthcare services are emotive services of the highest order. Patients can experience a variety of emotions, and these emotions can have a significant impact on health outcomes. Emotional healthcare service interactions can differ from a straightforward illness to a life-threatening condition (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2017). In this situation, patients typically experience feelings of weakness and lack of control over care and treatment decisions. Occasionally, family, friends, or service providers can make decisions in place of the patient. There is an information asymmetry between patients and health personnel; the risk and cost of error are high in healthcare services (Berry et al., 2015). Healthcare service providers are motivated by the call for recovery (Hunter-Jones et al., 2020), as they serve individuals during their most vulnerable periods (Klaus, 2018). Patients have unique biological and psychological needs (Hunter-Jones et al., 2020); therefore, they cannot be viewed simply as customers, nor do they choose to be customers (Klaus, 2018).

Patients tend to be satisfied with the healthcare experience when their expectations are fulfilled and they are satisfied with the healthcare service. Patients who are satisfied tend to express loyalty and an intention to visit again. A memorable patient experience gives healthcare providers a stronger competitive edge (Lee, 2019). Given that gaining new customers is significantly more expensive than maintaining a relationship with an existing customer, loyal customers are crucial to an organization's survival in the market. Service providers have started to concentrate their strategy actions more on customer loyalty as competition and costs rise for attracting new customers (Arab et al., 2012). Patients are also more likely to comply with their treatment plans. In turn, this situation will produce superior health results.

2. Literature Review

Customer experience is considered as the independent variable, customer satisfaction is considered as the mediator variable and brand image is considered as the dependent variable. In the following subsections we will discuss:

2.1 Customer Experience Based Healthcare

The literature provides a wide range of definitions for customer experience. Customer experience was once thought of as a factor in overall service quality and customer satisfaction. As a separate concept, its significance has just come to be acknowledged (Lemon, and Verhoef, 2016). Patient evaluations need to be carefully evaluated to meet the objectives attached to patient satisfaction. A healthcare service design that considers the patient's opinions will result in more satisfied patients. An indication of how well the system functions is a positive customer experience in healthcare. As a result, the preference of both policymakers and clinical leaders has shifted towards prioritizing the creation of a positive customer experience in healthcare. Studies in several areas of healthcare have shown that patients who report having negative experiences with those providing such services are less likely to comply with their treatment plans, which in turn slows their recovery.

As a result of the negative experiences of patients on their recovery time or compliance with treatment regimens, patients will use more healthcare services and this situation will increase healthcare costs (Chatterjee et al., 2012). Traditionally, there is a considerable imbalance between healthcare providers and customers. This imbalance is largely due to the inability of customers to comment on the services they experience. In addition to this respect for patients' concerns and needs is a key feature of a high-quality healthcare system. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the aspects of the service that require improvement, and to get feedback from patients about monitoring performance and quality (Wong, et al., 2015).

The concept of customer experience in healthcare services is growing significantly as a result of changes in public policies that emphasise patient experience, the integration of consumer perspective into health services, and the inclusion of patient relatives. The terms "patient experience," "patient perspective," "patient reports," "patient perception," and "patient satisfaction" are frequently used interchangeably, according to Ahmed et al. (2014). However, experience is distinct from concepts such as satisfaction, perception, perspective, and reports. Experience is broader than these concepts, and it begins the first time a customer interacts with a service or product. The patient experience is defined as follows by Klaus (2018): "a service provision in an environment where the goals of the customer can be complex, and where appropriate service to the customer may take the provider beyond the typical customer service approach of striving to provide immediate customer gratification with the outcome of improving the patient's quality-of-life perceptions".

2.3 Customer Satisfaction

An individual's level of satisfaction with their healthcare is highly correlated with their own experiences as a patient. To improve the quality of service in this area, almost all patient questionnaires undertaken globally seek to gauge patient experiences in the health sector. Patient experiences in the health care system are measured by WHO to gauge the accountability of the health care system. The health condition of those who have received the service has generally improved, and equality and efficiency have been assured, while persons have been shielded from unduly high expenditures (WHO, 2009). Patient satisfaction is directly tied to the performance of the healthcare system. Responsiveness refers to the ways and environment in which patients were treated when they needed health care.

Various studies have identified various determinants of patient experience that impact patient satisfaction. Consequently, a lack of beds, a long waiting time at the reception desk and prolonged administrative processes, a lack of medical staff, a lack of essential medical equipment, and room cleanliness have all been identified as determinants of patient satisfaction (Sajid and Rashid, 2008). Furthermore, emphasis on the patient, which includes staff time assigned to the patient, listening skills of doctors and nurses, and communication style, has been shown to have a positive correlation with patient satisfaction (Karim, 2003). The primary causes of patient dissatisfaction are a lack of autonomy, insufficient communication, and a lack of rapid service (Oliveira, 2012). We may state that patient trust, doctors' communication behaviour, and waiting time are more strongly related and have a positive effect on patient satisfaction with the service received (Chandra, 2018).

2.3 Brand Image

The right to health and healthcare is a basic and global human right. States have a general obligation to protect their citizens and to provide them with adequate healthcare when they need it (Kamcev, 2010). The right to be informed, as well as the right to select and participate in decision-making, is defined by the protection of patients' rights. As a result, patient-centered marketing and branding are becoming more prevalent in the healthcare system (Buckley, 2009). Later, as competition increases, the health-care delivery system becomes considerably more complicated. All health institutions appear to be same in terms of the health standards they provide, establishing a necessity for developing a health institution brand (Sirisha and Kishore, 2014). The brand influences patients' perceptions as well as the general public's perceptions as a tool to support communication with patients. The brand creates a lasting impression, through which it establishes a relationship with patients and creates loyal patients, important for the competitiveness of a healthcare institution.

Branding in the healthcare industry and healthcare institutions is significantly different from other businesses since it is mostly based on patient trust. Establishing a strong brand image improves the frequency of patients visiting the healthcare facility. Branding in healthcare institutions is done to remind patients of the services available to them as well as the service provider through tangible and intangible advantages. For a healthcare institution to succeed in the healthcare business, they must position themselves strongly so as to create respect and influence over others in the sector (Gomes, 2018).

To achieve this goal, healthcare providers need to concentrate on satisfying patients' expectations by giving them access to high-quality services that are unique from those of their rivals and difficult to imitate. Patients develop a psychological connection to brands as a result of the unique meaning that brands can assign to them and their own experiences with those brands. Choosing a healthcare provider is an emotional process since receiving medical care is a personal experience (Kemp, E., 2014). Mainly, branding is a valuable intangible asset of any company that is created by long-term, persistent and hard work. It is a promise that

speaks for the company; therefore, it is necessary to ensure its legal protection and trademark registration (Ackovska et al., 2020).

3. Conceptual Framework and Research Hypotheses

The conceptual framework was established after analyzing existing theories and models and was applied to the data collection and data analysis. The independent variable “Customer Experience” is measured by 4 dimensions: (Peace of mind, Moments of Truth, Outcome focus and Product experience) Klaus and Maklan (2012), The variable “Customer Satisfaction” is measured by 5 items (Ghasemi et al., (2022) and the variable “Brand Image” is measured by 6 items (Chen & Tseng (2010); Bianchi, et. al., (2014); and Cham et al., (2020).

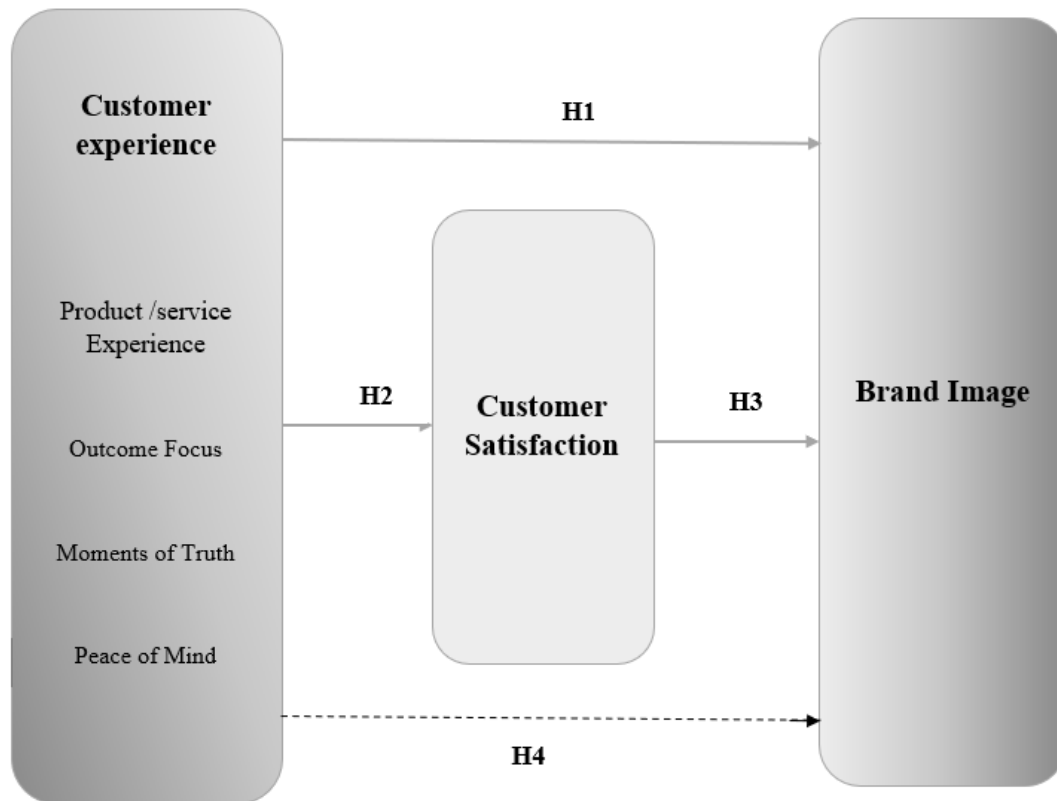


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Based on the conceptual framework, the hypothesized model, and reviewing of the related studies and theories, the study hypotheses were formulated as below:

H₁: It is expected that customer experience in healthcare has an impact on brand image in Egyptian private hospitals.

H₂: It is expected that customer experience in healthcare has an impact on customer satisfaction in Egyptian private hospitals.

H₃: It is expected that customer satisfaction has an impact on brand image in the Egyptian private hospitals.

H₄: It is expected that customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between customer experience and brand image in Egyptian private hospitals.

Research questions could be stated as follows:

- 1- What is the impact of customer experience on brand image in Egyptian private hospitals?
- 2- What is the impact of customer experience on customer satisfaction in Egyptian private hospitals?
- 3- What is the impact of customer satisfaction on brand image in Egyptian private hospitals?
- 4- Does customer satisfaction mediate the relationship between customer experience and brand image in Egyptian private hospitals?

4. Research Methodology

Patients of the Egyptian private hospitals. are referred to be the research population in this study. The questionnaire was divided into two broad categories. The first category is made up of general information and the second category is the body of the questionnaire that includes three sections: first: customer experience. second: customer satisfaction and third section: brand image. A Likert scale was used to measure opinions.

The research questionnaire was given to 700 Customers, and 474 questionnaires representing 67.7% were returned, 58 questionnaires representing 8.3% were incomplete or ineligible or refusals, and 247 (35.3%) were not reached. There were 416 acceptable responses, a response rate of 56.4%, which is very good given the nature of the study. The structural equation modeling (SEM) software package was utilized in this Research Paper to investigate the interrelationships between the constructs of the hypothesized model. Testing Hypotheses After completing a confirmatory factor analysis, the structural model is valued by evaluating the hypotheses that underpin the research model.

5. Results and Findings

The reliability of a construct in the measurement model is possibly calculated using Composite Reliability (CR). CR determines the consistency of the construct itself and is a more presenting method of overall reliability (Hair et al., 2019). The research result shows the CR of

(Peace of mind = 0.911, Moments of Truth = 0.840, Outcome focus = 0.835, Product experience = 0.845, Customer Satisfaction = 0.936 and Brand Image= 0.930). As a result, it is evident that all of the constructs in the measurement model are reliable.

The Average Variances Extracted AVE should always be above 0.50. (Hair et al., 2019). Overall, the (AVE) of the constructs (Peace of mind = 0.637, Moments of Truth = 0.568, Outcome focus = 0.571, Product experience = 0.582, Customer Satisfaction = 0.747 and Brand Image= 0.690) are more than 0.500. Overall, the measurement results are satisfactory, indicating that the structural model may be evaluated.

Measurement model result: The 6 factor was subjected to CFA using the AMOS software. DF was 365 (it should be more than 0), χ^2/DF has a value of 2.906, that is less than 3.0 (it should be less than or equal 3.0). The RMSEA was .063 (it should be less than 0.08). The TLI index was 0.928 which is very close to 1.0 (a value of 1.0 indicates perfect fit). The CFI was 0.935. All indices are close to a value of 1.0 in CFA, indicating that the measurement models provide good support for the factor structure determined through the CFA.

Structural Model

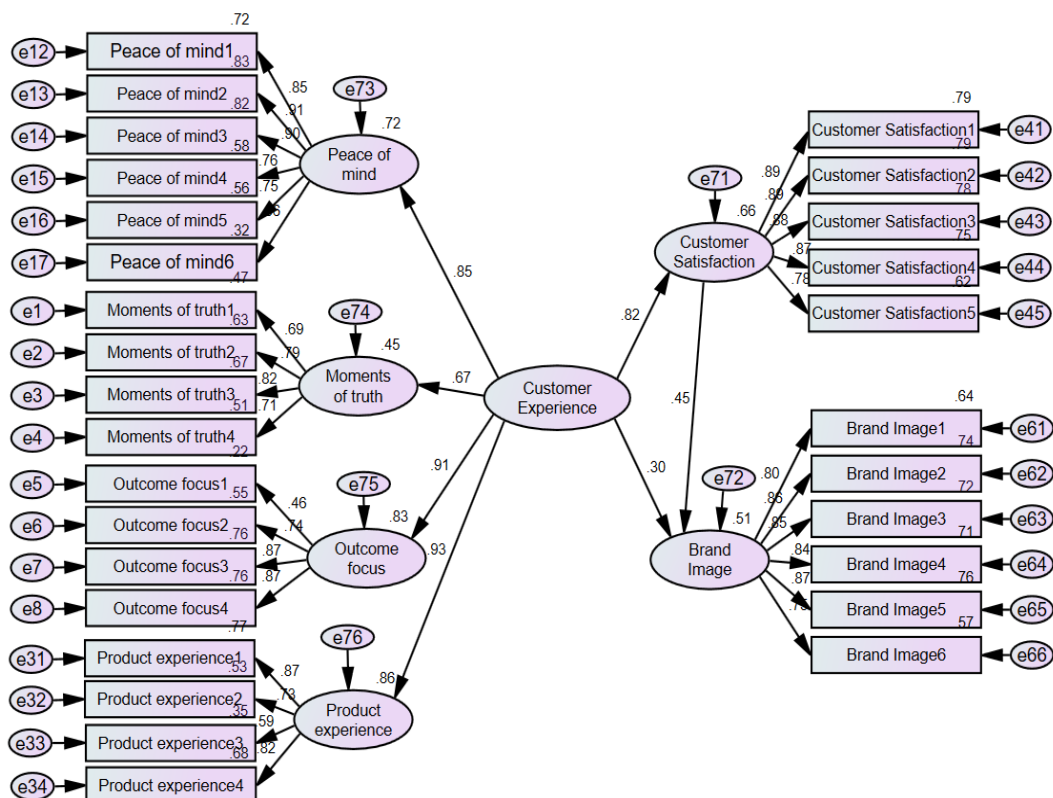


Figure (2) Structural Model

Table 1: Structural model - final Result

Goodness of Fit Measures	Name of index	Level of acceptance	Model Result	Remark
Chi-Square	χ^2	> 0.05	1097.676	Accepted
Degrees of Freedom	DF	≥ 0	373	Accepted
Chi-Square/ Degrees of Freedom	χ^2 / DF	≤ 3	2.943	Accepted
Comparative Fit' Index	CFI	≥ 0.90	0.932	Accepted
Tucker Lewis Index	TLI	≥ 0.90	0.926	Accepted
Root Mean' Square Error of Approximation	RMSEA	< 0.08	0.064	Accepted

Structural model validity: The findings of the structural model using the AMOS software shows that DF was 373 (it should be more than 0), χ^2 / DF has a value of 2.943, that is less than 3.0 (it should be less than or equal 3.0). The RMSEA was .064 (it should be less than 0.08). The TLI index was .926 which is very close to 1.0 (a value of 1.0 indicates perfect fit). The CFI was .932. All indices are close to a value of 1.0 in CFA, indicating that the measurement models provide good support for the factor structure determined through the CFA.

6. Discussion

The first objective is to investigate the relationship between customer experience and brand image (**H₁**: It is expected that customer experience in healthcare has an impact on brand image in Egyptian private hospitals). The findings reveal that customer Experience has a substantial direct association with Brand Image. ($\beta = 0.295$ CR (Critical Ratio) = 3.944, $CR > 1.96$, $p = 0.000$, $p < 0.05$). This is consistent with Obinna et al. (2018); El-Menyar et al. (2018); and bdel-Aziz and Hassan (2020) who stated that customer experience had a direct and positive effect on brand trust, brand loyalty, and word-of-mouth recommendations in the Egyptian healthcare context. Further, the conducted study of Gohary and Eid (2021) in Egypt revealed that patients who had positive experiences with healthcare providers were more likely to have a favorable perception of the brand.

The second objective is to test the relationship between customer experience and customer satisfaction (**H₂**: It is expected that customer experience in healthcare has an impact on customer satisfaction in Egyptian private hospitals). The findings reveal that customer experience has a significantly positive effect on customer satisfaction. ($\beta = 0.815$, CR (Critical Ratio) = 17.806, $CR > 1.96$, $p = 0.000$, $p < 0.05$). This result is in the same vein with Elhoseny et al., (2021) and Abdel Hamid et al., (2017) who examined the impact of service quality and patient experience on overall patient satisfaction and loyalty in the Egyptian healthcare sector. The study found that service quality and patient experience had a significant influence on patient satisfaction and brand loyalty. Higher levels of service quality and patient experience led to more satisfied patients and increased brand loyalty. Moreover, Abdel-Hamid and El-Sherbiny (2018) examined the relationship between customer experience and customer satisfaction in the Egyptian healthcare industry. The study found that there was a significant positive relationship between customer experience and customer satisfaction. The study also found that the dimensions of customer experience that were most strongly associated with customer satisfaction were: the quality of care, the timeliness of care, the communication with patients, the overall satisfaction with the healthcare provider.

The third objective is to examine the relationship between customer satisfaction and brand image (**H₃**: It is expected that customer satisfaction has an impact on brand image in the Egyptian private hospitals). The findings show that customer satisfaction has a significant direct relationship with brand image. ($\beta = 0.452$, CR (Critical Ratio) = 6.068, $CR > 1.96$, $p = 0.000$, $p < 0.05$). This finding is consistent with El-Kerdany et al., (2019); and Ahmed et al. (2020) whom investigated the impact of customer satisfaction on brand image in the Egyptian hospital industry. The study used a sample of 350 patients who had recent experience with Egyptian private hospitals. The results showed that customer satisfaction has a significant positive impact on building a strong brand image in private hospitals. Similarly, Abdel Hamid and Elbeltagi (2017) investigated the impact of service quality, patient experience, and brand image on customer satisfaction and brand loyalty in the Egyptian healthcare sector. The study used a sample of 400 patients who had recent experience with Egyptian private hospitals. The results showed that both service quality and patient experience have a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction, which in turn has a significant positive impact on brand loyalty.

The fourth objective is to investigate the mediation role of customer satisfaction between customer experience and brand image (**H₄**: It is expected that customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between customer experience and brand image in Egyptian private hospitals). The results indicate that partial mediation effect of customer satisfaction exists between the relationship of customer experience and brand image in the Egyptian private hospitals. ($P = 0.001$, $P < 0.05$). This finding is consistent with Cruz and Mendes, (2017); and El-Din et al. (2019) who examined the impact of customer experience on customer satisfaction and loyalty in private hospitals in Egypt. It used a questionnaire survey of 400 patients who visited private hospitals in Cairo. It applied multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses. It found that

customer experience had a positive impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty, and that customer satisfaction mediated the relationship between customer experience and loyalty.

7. Conclusion

The focus of this paper is to investigate into the relationship between customer experience and brand image in the Egyptian private hospitals, with the role of customer satisfaction as a mediating variable. The study used a quantitative correlational methodology to obtain primary sample data from 416 patients from Egyptian private hospitals. The regression analysis reveals that:

- 1-The direct effect between Customer Experience and Brand Image is statistically significant,
- 2-The direct effect between Customer Experience and Customer Satisfaction is statistically significant.
- 3-The direct effect between Customer Satisfaction and Brand Image is statistically significant.
- 4- The mediation effect indicates that there is partial mediation effect of the Customer Satisfaction between the relationship of Customer Experience and Brand Image.

Authors contribution

This paper has significance both academically and practically. Academically, the current research fills the gap and supplements the existing literature. The research developed a model that contributes knowledge to other models that have recommended expanding the scope of the investigation using the structural equation modeling technique. According to the analysis, At the 5% significance threshold, all are considered significant. The estimated structural model corroborated the four hypotheses, as customer experience construct explained 66.5 % of customer satisfaction variance ($R^2 = 0.665$), Besides, customer experience through customer satisfaction explained 50.9 % of brand image variance ($R^2 = 0.509$).

Practically, the implications of this paper's findings for the growth of Egyptian private hospitals are multifaceted. First, it emphasises the significance of online customer experience within the context of patient satisfaction and brand image. In order to produce a positive experience, the hospital has to recognize the significance of each patient touchpoint, such as transactions and services received during the customer journey. Second, the findings offer guidance to policymakers and practitioners in private hospitals in emerging markets who seek to improve their businesses. The healthcare service providers should be aware of the factors that lead consumers (patients) to choose them over competitors. Understanding what is most important to patients. These factors will influence their experience and encourage continued visits and prestigious brand image.

8. Research limitations

The degree to which the conclusions may be extrapolated to a larger population, cases, or situations is referred to as external validity (Saunders et al., 2019). As a result, the researcher cannot presume that the findings apply to other situations, so the study excludes:

First, Because the participants in this study come from just one nation (Egypt) and are all Egyptian Private hospitals, the findings should be taken with a grain of salt. In spite of the fact that the research was conducted in a very specialised context, it is believed that the findings can be applied to a variety of other sectors, industries, and countries.

Second, cross-sectional data were used in this study to examine the relationship between Customer Experience and Brand Image, as well as the mediating role of Customer Satisfaction in the Egyptian Private hospitals. As a consequence of this, the study only offers a picture of a single instant in time. This suggests that the findings of the research are only useful under certain conditions, including when external factors such as governmental regulations, economic activity, the competitive climate, and so on are unaffected.

Third, Data gathering from respondents over a set period of time utilising a convenience sample approach had its limitations. The scope of potential responders was constrained by the short time span for data gathering. Because responses are collected based on the accessibility of respondents, this method may not produce a representative sample and may also lead to potential limitations in the range of respondents who would participate.

9. Future research Suggestions

The following areas for further investigation are suggested based on the findings of this study: First, a study should be undertaken utilizing a qualitative technique or a mixed strategy using both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to acquire customer experience on brand image views and expectations. Second, a longitudinal study should be done to examine the long-term relationship between customer experience and brand image in the Egyptian private hospitals, with the mediating role of customer satisfaction. Third, because the sample was limited to only Egyptian private hospitals, a sample derived from other sectors, industries would improve the generalizability of the findings in the future. This would also aid in comparing the relationship between customer experience and brand Image, as well as the role of customer

satisfaction in mediating the relationship between customer experience and brand image, in other sectors and industries.

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