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A STUDY OF SERVICE MARKETING MIX IN PRIVATE HOSPITALS

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ABSTRACT

Indians are spending more than ever before on their healthcare. Noticeably increasing number of Indians are spending money on services of private hospitals for their well-being. From 1980's onward, and especially after the liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalization (LPG) policy of the Indian Government in the 1990's the growth of the Private Hospitals, which include nursing homes, small, medium and large private hospitals, has been rapid. According to the NSSO Survey (April 2016) people in India rely more on private hospitals, with 72% in rural areas and 79% in urban areas, being treated in the private sector. They dominate the healthcare industry in India, and is the largest health sector in the world. However there is a lack of national legislation or mechanism for registration of health establishments, and this aspect to implement laws on hospitals is left to the states. Private hospitals are run on a commercial basis. This means the hospitals should use the seven P's of marketing to give quality services to the patient. This paper studies the marketing of hospitals from the point of view of hospital owners and/or managers. The area chosen for study is the area of Sangli-Miraj-Kupwad Municipal Corporation and includes the study of Private hospitals listed under the District Industries Centre (DIC), Sangli. This area has a concentration of hospitals that treat patients from not only the local communities but also from neighbouring states and even foreign lands.

KEYWORDS

hospital marketing, 7P's of service marketing, marketing mix.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing involves understanding and meeting customer needs. The main aim of marketing is satisfaction of needs and wants through exchange of values. In present times every organization in any sector (agricultural, industrial, or service), whether profit or non-profit, government or private, require marketing to make this exchange possible. Marketing has proven beneficial not only for the organization providing goods/services, but it is also beneficial to the receiver of the goods/service, as well as to the community or society as a whole. Healthcare has been transformed into a vital service sector industry. This means the seven P's of service marketing—Product, Price, Place, Promotion, Physical evidence, Processes and People have to be considered to make a marketing offer. The Product in this context is the services rendered by the hospital. The marketing offer consist of these hospital services in combination with the rest of the P's. The combination of these P's is the hospitals service offer to the patients seeking the hospitals services. Hospital Marketing Promotion (HMP) is done in various ways. However, it is true that marketing of hospital services is a recent phenomenon. In the past healthcare industry did not acknowledge the importance of marketing. Marketing was regarded as unprofessional and unethical and so its need was ignored. The increasing number of hospitals, the demand for expertise and quality services by patients, the changing technology, the improved standards of living and many such factors underline the need to have an open mind towards the use of a marketing approach for selling hospital services. The importance of hospital marketing is grudgingly being accepted by all stakeholders—the hospital owners/managers, employees, patients, the government, the community or the public at large. The marketing concept itself has evolved over time and is not restricted to exchange of values anymore. The concept of relationship marketing, societal marketing, holistic marketing, and ethical marketing have been adopted by some hospitals that not only increases the well-being of needy patients, but will simultaneously boost the ROI of the hospitals giving them a competitive edge. Regarding the marketing of hospital services, the three aspects of marketing that is its Availability, Accessibility and Affordability of the hospitals services is necessary, and the fourth "A" that is Awareness of these has to be created in the community seeking these services. The marketing orientation includes, drawing up a marketing plan, this also includes the vision of the founders, the mission statement, drawing up of marketing strategies with reference to the seven P's of marketing. The seven P's of services marketing or the services marketing mix consists of:

1. **The Product Mix:** The product in this regard are the array of medical services offered by the hospital, and consists of core, supplementary and auxiliary services. A service blueprint that is giving a shape to the service, and includes factors such as service benefit, service offer, service form, service expectation, service elements, service level, and service quality/standard has to be drawn. The tangibles such as the equipment and other infrastructure, and the intangible aspects of the service product such as the skills of the doctors and staff, the attitude etc. form a part of the product offered. Thus it includes the additional services the hospital offers such as blood-bank, laboratory, laundry, and canteen & catering services. Clean linen, sterilised equipment, clean rooms and pleasant premises and all such aspects is a part and parcel of the service offer. The various departments in the hospital is the product line, which may be expanded or reduced over time.
2. **The Price Mix:** The price is the value received by the hospitals for services rendered. The pricing may be on cost basis, competition basis, or it may be demand based pricing. Demand based pricing will depend on patient's perception of value. Prices will be revised with change in technology and other environmental factors. Pricing will depend on the service package and quality of services offered. The pricing for inpatient treatment will depend on whether patient has opted for the general ward, semi-private room, private room or deluxe room as well as the complexity of the treatment rendered.
3. **The Place Mix:** This refers to making the hospital service available to the patients. Place i.e. the location of the hospital where services are provided as well as the medical camps where services are made available and also expertise and skill utilised in other hospitals is the place utility offered, the time involved to give these services, which includes emergency and 7x24 hours services is the time utility offered to patients seeking these services.
4. **The Promotion Mix:** Promotion refers to the various strategies used by the marketer to communicate and inform customers about the service product with the intention to sell them. The various tools of promotion mix are personal selling, advertising, sales promotion, public relations, publicity, packaging, advertising etc. Hospitals for promotion use either advertisement or PR or both after taking into consideration the target customers, media type, budget and the sales promotion. TV, other media of promotion are used innovatively. Unlike the urban area, in rural areas newspapers and magazines do not have the same impact in conveying messages. In villages, hoardings and wall writings near the markets and recreation centers attract the attention of villagers. This group

has large discretionary income. These discerning consumers are very careful in choosing health care services. The health care field has become very competitive. Although around one-fourth of our population stays in urban India, three fourths of the total doctors have engaged themselves in this part. Many of these doctors visit the rural areas, but they reside in the urban area. The patients of upper middle and upper income group have a wide choice to make from a number of clinics and hospitals. A person in need of a health care service does not know for sure where to search for relevant information. He consults his family members, relatives and friends first. The patients who come to a hospital generally have the old patients of that hospital as referrals. Word-of-mouth plays an important role during information acquisition stage of the customers (patients) as there are no objective performance measures to judge the various alternatives available to them. Therefore, satisfied past patients of a hospital can bring more number of patients to that hospital than a number of advertisements. Word-of-mouth plays a very important role in promotion of hospitals. This is the very reason why patients should be rendered excellent services, as they will be the ones telling others about their experiences.

5. **The Physical evidence:** Physical evidence is the “the service-scape” in which the service is delivered and where the firm and the customer interact, and includes any tangible components that facilitate performance or communication of the service. The physical evidence helps reduce the intangibility feature of the service, as the core benefit a customer seeks is proper diagnosis and cure of the problem. For a local small time, dispensary or hospital, physical evidence may not be of much help. In recent days some major super speciality hospitals are using physical evidence for distinguishing itself as something unique. Physical evidence can be in the form of smart buildings, logos, mascots etc. a smart building infrastructure indicates that the hospital can take care of all the needs of the patient.
6. **The Processes:** The actual procedures, mechanisms and flow of activities which are involved in the service delivery all constitute the service processes. Thus it may take the production-line/ standardized approach or the process might be customized. Process generally forms the different tasks that are performed by the hospital. The process factor is mainly dependent on the size of the hospital and kind of service it is offering. Generally, hospitals deal with two types of patients, (1) the in-patients who stay in the hospital for treatment and cure and (2) the out-patients who come for consultation. Processes vary with each of this type. Thus processes for in-patients involve processes related to the arrival of patient, diagnosis, line of treatment advised by doctors, information to be given regarding future action, Patient's Discharge procedures, appointment for post-hospitalization check-up. The out-patient processes involve meeting doctors at appointed time, Diagnosis, line of treatment, medication.
7. **The People:** All those individuals involved in the sale and purchase of the service constitute one the extended P's of marketing. Thus all the actors involved in the service delivery process i.e. the service provider or the contact person (service personnel), the customer, and other customers in the service environment are all influencing the quality of service and the service experience. Under hospital marketing the marketing mix variable people includes all the different people involved in the service providing process (internal customers of the hospitals) which includes doctors, nurses, supporting staff etc. The earliest and the best way of having control on the quality of people will be by approving professionally sound doctors and other staff. Under hospital marketing a right person for the right job has to be appointed and they should be adaptable and possess versatility. The patients in the hospitals are already suffering from trauma, which has to be understood by the caregivers, i.e. doctors and other staff. The people of the hospital should be constantly motivated to give the best of their effort.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The paper attempts to study the marketing of hospital services using the seven P's of marketing, and also understand the viewpoint of the owners of private hospitals regarding the same.

1. To study the marketing efforts with respect to the seven P's of marketing with respect to the private hospitals under study.
2. To study the relationship between marketing efforts and the inflow of patients to the hospital.

HYPOTHESES

1. There is association between marketing efforts and the inflow of patients to the hospital.
2. There is association between marketing efforts and occupancy of beds.

METHODOLOGY FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Primary and Secondary data was used for this study. Primary data was collected thru the medium of a pretested structured questionnaire. Primary data are collected through discussions, personal interviews of the concerned persons & through questionnaires. The secondary data required for the study was collected from the hospital booklets and information brochures, various books, journals, articles, internet sources, published, unpublished research studies were also used. Primary data has been collected through the medium of structured questionnaire to owners and/or managers. A structured questionnaire was prepared and discussed. A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability and validity of the questions. Primary data was collected, through survey method by administering separate well-structured pre-tested questionnaire to hospital owners/managers. An interval response scale was used for data collection from hospitals owners/managers. The 7 P's of marketing-- Product (hospital service), Price, Place (service availability), Promotion, Process, Physical Evidence, and People was measured on a scale using 1 to 5 bipolar scale i.e. there is a neutral point. The two ends of the scale are at 5 (strongly agree), 4 (agree), 3 (cannot say), 2 (Disagree), 1 (Strongly Disagree). A response scale of 1 to 5 was used.

Additional information is collected from the owners of the hospitals under the study, by conducting informal interviews. In interviews open ended questions were asked to gather more information that was rather difficult to collect with the help of questionnaire. Data from hospitals was collected by drop-off and pick-up, and sometimes remaining with the respondents during the answering of the questionnaire.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Chen Chuan-Biau, Kao-Pi Lien, state that the increasingly complicated doctor-patient relationship; and increasingly serious legal problems hospitals are facing has resulted in hospitals turning to marketing, promotion, and advertisement to ensure their survival. Currently, most hospitals still mainly use their Public Relations department to communicate with consumers and conduct marketing activities (Chang, 2000)¹. Dr. Sreenivas T, Dr. Srinivasrao B., Dr. U. Srinivasa Rao conclude in their paper that good marketing programme will build up more awareness among the public, create loyalty, and establish a kind of tie-up with potential customers. Thus it may be concluded that application of marketing principles in the Indian hospitals cannot be ignored or delayed any longer². Wu Chao-Chan in his research paper states that the current medical service market favours the buyer, rather than the seller (Lee et al., 2010). Hence, the field of medical service is now emphasizing the importance of customer-oriented marketing. Hospitals endeavour to establish marketing strategies which promote brand image among patients for enhancing the satisfaction and loyalty³. Hazrul Nik M., Onn, Lee Kok Onn, Alam, Syed Shah, state a positive effect between market orientation and firm performance. As marketing orientation leads to greater customer satisfaction and force hospitals to focus more on cost control, it is likely that business performance should be enhanced. Since such organizations embrace the notion of service excellence as top priority, they should be better attuned to meet the requirements of customers. A market-oriented hospital is market-driven and therefore, should be able to achieve superior firm performance due to broad understanding of its customers and competitors. Specifically, greater emphasis on market orientation should enable hospitals to engage in superior service quality, which in turn leads to customer retention and profitability⁴. Ali Samar S., in their article write that many private hospitals (in India) already established endeavour to provide quality comparable to leading hospitals of the world. The strategy ensures that customers return to the same hospital for treatment and recommendation; which is made in their social circles. Although the importance of relationship quality as a mediating role between predictors and relationship outcomes is well established in the literature, some central questions concerning the relationship between these constructs have not been fully explored⁵. In their paper Dr. Patil P.L, Dr. Suryavanshi A.G., Prof. Marulkar K.V. (2012), state that patient satisfaction is related to the perspective of hospital management and its employees. A better understanding of the employee's perspectives will result in successful service encounters that result in better service to the patient⁶. In their paper Jager and Plooy⁷ (2011) Marketing

was regarded as unprofessional and unethical and so its need was ignored. However, with growing complexities of the modern world such as increasing competition, increasing costs, demanding customers (patients), changing technology, and globalization of the healthcare service to name a few, make it all the more necessary to undertake marketing efforts⁷. In their article Dr. S. Dhinesh Babu, Mrs. K. Rajalakshmi (2009) have discussed the 7 P's of marketing regarding hospital services⁸.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data given below are the responses of the owners of the private hospitals under study.

TABLE NO. 1

Variables	Average response score	S.D.	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower limit	Upper limit
Product	4.24	0.41	4.24	4.25
Price	4.33	0.47	4.32	4.33
Place	4.13	0.49	4.12	4.13
Promotion	2.94	0.91	2.93	2.95
Process	3.76	0.45	3.76	3.77
Physical evidence	3.88	0.35	3.87	3.88
People	4.31	0.27	4.30	4.31

Various variables of marketing, along with 7P's were studied during the study (n = 11 hospitals). Each of these aspects was evaluated with average score reported for series of close-ended questions for that typical variable by respondent (for details – see questionnaire). Thus, average response score for each variable is average of mean score of all 11 hospitals for that specific variable.

Product (4.24 ± 0.41), Price (4.33 ± 0.47), Place (4.13 ± 0.49) and People (4.31 ± 0.27) were marketing attributes which have been given more emphasis (mean score greater than 4). While Promotion (2.94 ± 0.91), Process (3.76 ± 0.45) and physical evidence (3.88 ± 0.35) were observed with mean response score below 4.

TABLE NO. 2: STATISTICAL VALUES OF CORRELATION OF PATIENTS INFLOW AND BED OCCUPANCY WITH MARKETING EFFORTS

variables	Correlation 'r'	t-value	d.f.	P-value
Marketing efforts and patients Inflow	0.437	1.458	9	0.179
Marketing efforts and bed occupancy	0.682	2.794	9	0.021*

*: significant

The Pearson correlation coefficient 'r' of marketing efforts scores and patients inflow was observed to be 0.437 which suggests though there is positive correlation between marketing efforts and patients inflow, it is not significantly higher ($t = 1.458$, $P\text{-value} = 0.179$).

The positive correlation ($r = 0.682$) was observed between marketing efforts score and bed occupancy. Correlation was significantly higher ($t\text{-value} = 2.794$, $P\text{-value} = 0.021$) at 5% level of significance. Thus bed occupancy can be associated with marketing efforts.

Scatter plot of marketing effort vs. patient inflow suggest moderate positive correlation. Scatter plot of marketing efforts vs. bed occupancy shows strong positive relation between them compared to that between marketing efforts and bed patient inflow.

DISCUSSION

The data given below are the responses of the owners of the private hospitals under study.

PRODUCT ANALYSIS

The hospitals under study responded very positively regarding the awareness of the name and location of the hospital. The average response score was 4.24 indicating hospitals are giving emphasis on all the attributes of service offering. The S.D. is 0.41, this means the responses of hospitals do not vary greatly. All these hospitals have built a reputation over the past years and hence patients know about the hospital and the services they offer. These hospitals offer expert and specialty services and hence are able to satisfy the needs of the surrounding community. Affordable services are offered by these hospitals and hence local patients as well as people from nearby towns and states flock these hospitals. The surgery services offered by hospitals helps enhance hospital image, however some hospitals have more consulting and counselling services than giving surgical services. The hospitals claim to have a systematic housekeeping department, one of the hospitals lack the organizational structure to have a full-fledged housekeeping department. All the hospitals positively agree that they provide good patient care. The responses of hospitals were varied regarding satisfactory emergency transportation services. This is because some hospitals have own emergency vehicles such as ambulances, some hospitals rent them while some have neither of the arrangements. The hospitals are offering good reception services, with satisfactory seating arrangements. The Hospitals indicated they had the potential to develop and launch new services, indicating that all have similar responses regarding their future plans of further development. This means the hospitals have planned a good service offering.

PRICE ANALYSIS

Hospitals are social organizations and hence serving the society is also one their major goals. This means they want to provide services to all of members of the community. Thus hospitals offer different service packages and pricing is done accordingly. The average response score was 4.33 indicating hospitals are giving emphasis on all the attributes of service offering. The S.D. is 0.47 this means the responses of hospitals do not vary greatly. The hospitals answered positively as to whether they provided services at affordable prices. Regarding if hospitals had varied price packages for different customers all the hospitals gave positive responses. The hospitals under study responded that their pricing policy is indeed stable. Ten of the eleven hospitals under study said that they charge reasonable rates for laboratory tests that are available in their laboratories, while one of the hospitals replied in the negative as they did not have a laboratory. All hospitals tend to give discounts to needy patients, and charge lower price to poor patients. Some of these hospitals are already charging low prices to patients and hence do not offer free services in special cases. One of the hospitals under study do not have tie-ups with banks or insurance companies as they find it a cumbersome procedure.

PLACE ANALYSIS

Hospitals services give place utility to patients, by making its services available and accessible to the patients who are in need of these services. The average response score was 4.13 indicating hospitals are giving emphasis on all the attributes of service offering. The S.D. is 0.49 this means the responses of hospitals do not vary greatly. These hospitals are located on main roads and hence very noticeable to passers-by, and all kind of transport facilities including bus, Rickshaw, taxi, 'shared rickshaw' (an affordable, convenient alternative) are easily available. Also, Miraj railway station is a junction where trains from far and near stop and leave, this makes the hospitals in SMK Corporation area very accessible. The hospitals responded positively to the question as to whether they are able to attract patients from nearby areas. Since the area of SMK Corporation is an area where there is a dense network of hospitals and hospital related services, patients from neighbouring villages, cities and states come for treatment. The response as to whether hospitals have extended their services to other areas, response in this respect is varied as only some and not all the hospitals under study extend their services to other areas due to limited human resources. The responses of the hospitals are positive as to whether the hospital has established a reputation for other hospitals to refer their patients for better and/or advanced treatment. The responses of the hospitals are diverse regarding sharing their expertise with other hospitals as each of the hospitals under study have their own policy regarding this matter.

PROMOTION ANALYSIS

The aims of promotion activity are manifold, to name a few, giving information, creating awareness, persuasion etc. The average response score was 2.94 indicating hospitals are not giving much emphasis on all the attributes of service offering. The S.D. is 0.91 this means the responses hospitals regarding using promotional tools to market hospital services is varied. Public awareness camps are useful to educate the public regarding health related issues. It is observed that big hospitals which have more resources at their disposal conduct various programs including Public awareness camps, the same goes for health check-up camps. Response are again varied regarding the distribution of brochures and pamphlets to create awareness regarding hospital and its services, as it was learned that some hospitals are averse to conducting such activities. The response of hospitals regarding the use of mass coverage to cover hospital related events was diverse, the main reason is that bigger hospitals tend to get more media attention, also in big hospitals a specific person is authorized for the liaison between the hospital and the press and other media. Response to the question as to whether the hospitals used media channels to advertise hospital services, the response was a mixed one, the reason being some hospitals believe that using media channels to advertise services helps in better communication with patients, however the rest of the hospitals shied away from media advertisement as a promotion tool. The response of hospitals regarding giving interviews on Radio and/or T.V., indicates this question too has diverse responses as even in this respect big hospitals, with established liaison with media, give interviews, expert advice on T.V. and Radio. The response of hospitals as to having website is diverse response and in line with responses of other related questions on 'promotion'. Three of the hospitals do not have a website. Regarding weather hospitals keep their websites updated, in context of the earlier question, among the eight hospitals that have a website only 1 hospital has not updated it. When asked if hospitals give news releases and have articles featured in magazines and journals, again indicates a diverse response, which falls in the same pattern of other responses on promotion, for the same reasons. When asked if hospitals use various media sources to give advertisements to promote their services, hospitals indicated a diverse response the reason is that only 2 hospitals have budgets that include outlays on advertisement. Regarding if hospitals are partnering in events to promote their services, hospitals gave a diverse response, which again reflects that only the big hospitals have resources for undertaking such promotional activities.

PROCESS ANALYSIS

Service processes refers to all those activities including the steps, procedures and mechanisms that are involved in delivering services. The factors involved in the process of service delivery is the service provider, the intermediaries, the service receiver and the technology used. In the analysis of the hospitals service processes data, The S.D. is 0.45, indicating similarity in responses but the average response score is 3.76 indicating more attention has to be paid to this attribute by all the hospitals. All except one of the hospitals responded positively saying that they have sufficient service counters with helpful employees. 1 of the hospitals responded as that during peak times there is rush of patients resulting in overcrowding that is a challenge to the hospital. Regarding whether the waiting time for patients is considerably less, 2 of the hospitals indicated a negative response as during busy days especially on Mondays, hospitals tend to get overcrowded and patients have to wait for long hours. When asked if bill settlement process is easy, all of the hospitals said their bill settlement process is easy. This is essential as patients and their families come from far-off places and want to settle bills as quickly as possible so they can go to their native towns Thus 91% of the hospital respondents said that the discharge process is simple. The discharge procedure of all these hospitals is simple. However, there is a varied response regarding emergency discharge procedure, 45% hospitals responded positively, while 55% of the hospitals replied in the negative. The main reason for this difference is that emergency patients many a times have been admitted without completing all the formalities, like necessary paper work, etc. which a regular patient completes and that explains the complexities involved for emergency patient discharge procedure, also in case of emergency patients who are involved in accident and similar occurrences, report to the police station may be necessary, this makes the discharge process more complicated.

PHYSICAL EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

In hospital complexes a pleasant and soothing atmosphere definitely helps to elevate the mood of patients and people accompanying them. This begins with a well maintained hospital building and its premises. The average response score is 3.88, indicating this attribute has to be given more emphasis, the S.D. is 0.35, indicating there is less diversity in the responses given, regarding this "P" of marketing. When asked as to whether hospitals had a well maintained hospital building, all of the hospitals under study gave a positive response. As to whether comfortable waiting and seating room is available there was not much variation in the responses of the hospitals under study. There is a positive response from the hospitals regarding making available clean drinking water facilities, and maintenance of sanitation and hygiene. There was varied response from hospitals regarding provision of canteen facilities, add to patient's convenience. Four of these hospitals do not have a canteen, and hence have responded negatively. Similarly, seven of the hospitals do not have mortuary facilities and hence gave a negative response. Except three all the other hospitals have a suggestion box that is visible and accessible. When the hospitals under study were questioned whether they have a satisfactory provision of fire extinguisher, all the hospitals responded positively. Fire extinguisher is made compulsory by law for all such organizations, and hence all of them have this facility.

PEOPLE ANALYSIS

In a service organization the people giving services are of utmost importance as they come in direct contact with service receivers. In a hospital, the service quality is judged on the way the doctors & nurses, and other hospital staff and employees behave and treat its patients and their relatives. The average response score was 4.31 indicating hospitals are giving emphasis on all the attributes of service offering. The S.D. is 0.27, this means the responses of hospitals do not vary greatly. All the hospitals have positively responded regarding having skilled and well qualified doctors. All the doctors in these hospitals regularly attend CME's and SME's. All the hospitals responded positively towards organization of Seminars, literature series. Out of the hospitals under study, one hospital is faced with the problem of getting qualified and supporting nursing staff. This hospital finds it difficult to meet the salary and other demands of the qualified staff, the same hospital does not give much training to its hospital staff, as it does not have the resources and inclination to do this. All of the hospitals responded positively as to whether patients were treated alike and sympathetically. When asked if honorary doctor's visit the hospitals, all hospitals responded positively. Three of the hospitals do not arrange for patient awareness program.

The responses of hospitals indicate that 'people's' 'P' has been of prime importance to all the hospitals.

SUGGESTIONS

The marketing activities help to improve the awareness of the hospital in the community and establish a good image and reputation. All this helps in increased inflow of patients resulting in generating more revenue. However, caution needs to be taken regarding Indian sensibilities, and to avoid aggressive advertisement.

CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE SEVEN P'S OF MARKETING OF HOSPITALS UNDER STUDY

From the research study the researcher concludes that the importance of marketing and its need cannot be ignored all of the private hospitals are using the seven P's of marketing, the hypothesis testing shows that:

1. There is a positive co-relation between patient in-flow with marketing efforts.
2. There is a positive co-relation between occupancy of bed with marketing efforts.

CONCLUSIONS

The services offered by hospitals under study is its 'product' in marketing terms. All the hospitals are offering services to patients near and far. The Kripamayee Institute of Mental Health, is well known for its psychiatric treatment in the whole of Asia. The Price offered is reasonable and that is why people from neighbouring states get their treatment from these hospitals. Compared to hospitals in cities like Pune or Mumbai the price of medical services are not exorbitant. Varied price packages are available. Also hospitals are offering government of India's schemes like 'The Rajeev Gandhi Jeevan Dayi Aarogya Yojana' to patients. Pricing strategies could be cost oriented, demand oriented, competition oriented, or maximum reimbursement oriented. The hospitals in the study have very good accessibility. The geographical location itself is such that patients from neighbouring cities and states can approach these hospitals. Patients from Sangli, Satara, and Solapur districts and Karnataka come in huge numbers. The railway routes and bus routes are well connected. The services offered by these hospitals are truly fulfilling the needs of the community. Hospital Marketing Promotion (i.e. HMP) as it is now a days acknowledged is an important tool for informing and educating patients, and

seeking hospital services, building up good image of the hospital. Hospitals promote their services through Health check-up camps, Public awareness camps, and such other methods. Majority of times a patient seeking hospital services does not have any idea where to seek relevant and reliable information. Guidance is taken from family members, friends and acquaintances as well as old patient's referrals are considered. Thus presently word-of mouth is the most potent tool in the promotion of the hospital. From the moment the patient seeks the services of the hospitals till the patient is discharged, a lot many processes are involved. Efficient systems will ensure patient satisfaction. Timely and accurate service provision is a must. The Physical environment includes all those tangible factors in which the service is delivered. Patients, their relatives and friends and all other visitors perceive the quality of services based on these 'atmospherics'. Thus the structure of the hospital, its architectural plan, the lighting and the free flow of air, the colour of walls, paintings and motifs, the garden and surrounding greenery and many such tangibles are necessary as each and everything counts. Dedicated employees is the need of every organization, this is more so with regards to hospitals. Hospitals can add value to their services thru their employees. The patients coming to the hospital for its medical services are generally stressed out because of their medical problems. They require a helping hand and a sympathetic ear. The hospital staff needs to assure them through their interaction with these patients and their relatives and put their fears to rest. Also the hospital (its doctors and staff) need to be alert all times to attend to patients at all hours. They need to be on their toes to attend to patients at odd hours and in emergencies. People (employees) are the greatest asset of every hospital. These employees need to be qualified to do their assigned jobs. Also the doctors and other staff have to bilingual to be able to communicate with the patients. They need to be educated and sensitized to the needs of the patient. This is possible if all these service providers are motivated enough to go the extra mile with regards to patient's needs. There are multiple Medical colleges, nursing colleges in the area of Sangli, Miraj, and Kupwad Corporation, which are the sources of skilled and well qualified people.

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ANNEXURE

DIAGRAM NO. 1: AVERAGE RESPONSE SCORES

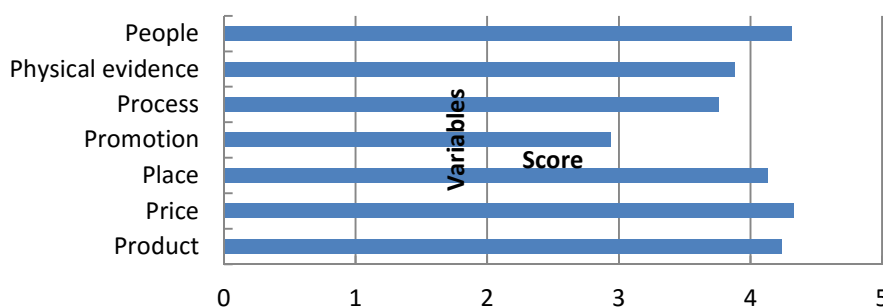


DIAGRAM 2: SCATTER PLOT - MARKETING EFFORTS VS. PATIENT INFLOW

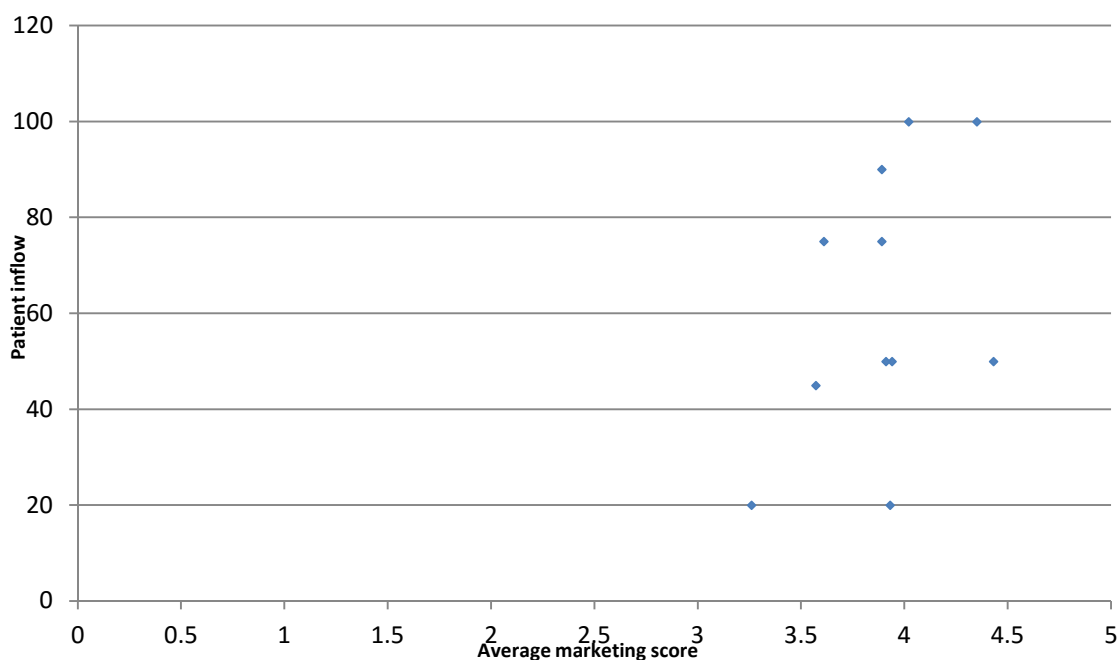
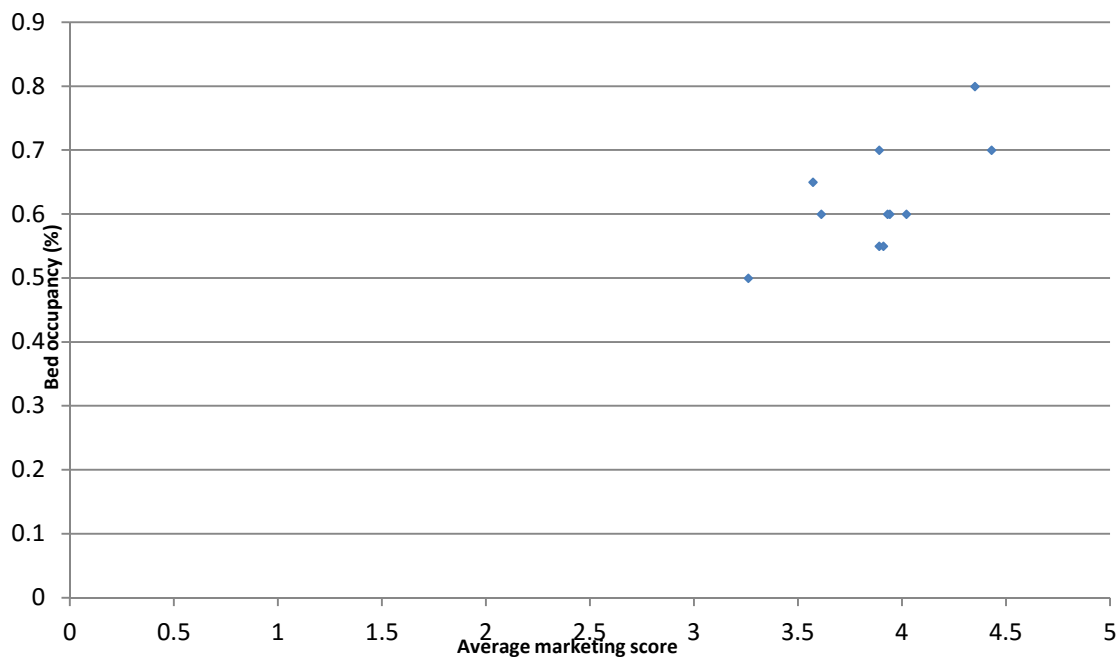


DIAGRAM 3: SCATTER PLOT - MARKETING EFFORTS VS. BED OCCUPANCY



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