6.1 Introduction

Brand is a name, symbol or any other element utilized by an organization to distinguish itself from its competitors and rivals. Branding has become an important aspect in today’s competitive world as the companies are exploring all possible ways for making them stand out among the hoard of other organizations. There are a lot of factors which impact the branding of a product or service and companies are going all out for building their brand image. Branding not only improves the product or service outlook for the customer but also it gives competitive edge to the organization. Further the companies exploit their brand image for extracting premium from the customers. As such brand building has become an important part of the marketing activities of the organizations.

Hospital sector is one such area which has been the latest to be impacted by the brand concept. Furthermore India has the second largest population in the world and as such there is a huge demand and scope for the hospitals. During the last few years, Indian hospital segment has been witnessing tremendous changes. One of the most important events has been the entrance of corporates in the hospital sector. Corporatization of hospitals is taking place in a major way and a number of big names have made their mark in the sector. These hospitals are more than just a place of getting the treatment for sick people, they are a place which offers wellness and healthy lifestyle and corporatization has transformed the hospitals in a big way. These hospitals are making concentrated efforts in building brands.

One of the most important factors affecting brand building is how the customers perceive the brand to be. Brand perception is the image that the brand has for the customer. As such customer’s brand perception is influenced by various elements. In case of service industry the concept of brand building and perception has greater significance as there is no tangible product which the company can use for distinguishing itself from others.

Indian hospital sector is experiencing branding in a major way. Being one of the sectors which has the biggest potential for growth and has a huge customer base, brand building is seen as a vital tool by the hospitals. Therefore it makes all the sense
to understand how customers perceive the brand of these corporate hospitals. As such
the researcher selected this area for carrying out the study. Further Delhi and the
National Capital Region has been witness to some of the biggest corporate in the
hospital sector and therefore researcher has selected the area of NCR for carrying out
the study.

6.2 Research Objectives

Researcher has selected the area of brand strategies based on perception in the
hospital sector due to various factors as cited above. Further there is not much of
previous study on the subject and hospital sector is quite dynamic today with more
and more corporates entering the segment. Researcher carried out a detailed study of
the existing literature on the subject of branding and the other factors associated with
it such as brand positioning, brand identity, brand personality etc. Review of already
existing works of previous researchers provided a detailed understanding for the
current study in terms of the concept of branding.

Further researcher attempted to study the factors contributing to brand building in
corporate hospitals in the National Capital Region. Also the researcher aimed to study
the brand perception of corporate hospital in National Capital Region.

In order to accomplish these objectives researcher identified two of the well known
corporate hospitals in the sector for gathering the customer perspective. The hospitals
selected by the researcher for study were Fortis and Max Healthcare. Although the
management, doctors and the para- medical staff of both the hospitals Fortis and Max
Healthcare were not open about discussing the brand strategies of their hospitals due
to constraints of corporate secrecy and medical ethics the researcher made certain
observations and also conducted research about their brand strategies. In order to get
customer response on the subject researcher initiated a survey in the two hospitals.
Total of 200 patients, with 100 from each of the two hospitals were requested to
provide their responses through the survey questionnaire.

The respondents selected for the survey came from different age groups with a large
chunk, about 40%, coming from the 18 to 24 years age category and the others
distributed in all age groups up to 60 years and above. Further, more than two thirds
of the participants in the survey were male patients and the balance were female. As the age group was varying for the respondents, so was their occupation. Among all the participants in the survey some were self employed, some were in service, few of them in business, there were even housewives and students too. The respondents were suitably qualified with almost 80% of the respondents being either graduate or postgraduate. In addition the survey also pointed out that a large number of people visiting these two hospitals were mainly from middle or upper middle class with their annual incomes in the range of 6 to 12 lacs.

Another finding as pointed out in the survey was that majority of the participants preferred to visit the hospital which was known to them. This implies that the repeat customers form a major chunk for the hospitals. Further the participants also went for regular checkups with a large number of them going for the same in about six months.

The respondents were further enquired on their perception about the hospital. On the question of service, the respondents from both the hospitals agreed that they are being provided the best service by the hospital. This implies that on the service front the two hospitals were at par. Further technology has come to play an important role in every part of the life and the medical care is no different to the same. Use of technology is being done to assist the doctors in finding newer and easier methods of medication and treatment. Fortis as well as Max utilize the latest technology in treating the patients, as pointed out by the responses of the participants in the survey for both the hospitals.

The time taken by the hospital while discharging a patient defines how organized and prompt it is. It is also a very important factor which determines the satisfaction of patients. Another brand strategy which Fortis employs deliberately is its short stay surgery programmes which make the stay in the hospital as short as possible enabling the patient to walk out of surgery in just a couple of days through advances in medical technology and adequate skilled staff. According to the analysis Fortis takes lesser time in discharging a patient whereas in case of Max, the hospital has greater waiting time for out-patients. As the hospitals have corporatized, hence the expectation of patients in terms of quality of accommodation has also gone up. According to the survey majority of the respondents agreed that Fortis provides the
best accommodation. The same was also said about Max by the patients from Max Healthcare. Further nurses are the ones who respond to immediate needs of the patients and are the ones who take the whole care of patients and their medication. As such there should be ample number of nurses in a hospital for taking care of the patients. In case of Max and Fortis the same was found to be true, according to the responses of the participants in the survey.

The charges that a hospital has, plays an important role in the satisfaction of the customers. If the patients feel that they have been overcharged then it damages the brand image of the hospital. According to the survey majority of the patients from Fortis agreed that the charges are in accordance with the treatment and lesser than that of others. When compared to its competition, Fortis maintains a stable price policy and there is a very marginal difference when it comes to the amount charged versus the quality of care provided thus becoming a price-quality leader in the healthcare segment. Analysing the Fortis healthcare services the price for visits for patients is reasonable as compared to other corporate hospitals according to the perception of the respondents. The price of major medical treatments is also subsidized according to the income groups. Fortis also comes up with special healthcare programmes for senior citizens and also discounts for its female patients over forty years of age. Fortis also has many free clinics for the poor and also in the rural areas in the National Capital Region of Delhi. However in case of Max, a large number of patients said that the charges were on the higher side as compared to other hospitals.

The number of doctors in a hospital also impacts how well can a doctor attend to a patient. If there are ample doctors then they would have sufficient time to give to every patient. In the case of Max as well as Fortis, the respondents said that the number of doctors is sufficient. Further the number of rooms in a hospital also has an effect on the patient’s perception of the hospital. A small and crowded hospital would never leave a good image in the mind of the patient. In case of both Fortis and Max the number of rooms for patients are sufficient as per the feedback of the respondents. In addition to rooms the hospital should also have enough medicines in its stock and especially the ones which the doctor in their hospital is recommending, as it would otherwise give a wrong impression to the patient. As per the participants in the
survey, Max has sufficient amount of medicines. The same is also found to be the case for Fortis, as per the respondents.

Waiting time in OPD is another critical factor which impacts the perception of a hospital for the patient. In case of Fortis the waiting time is within limit and as per the expectation of patients. However for Max the same is not true and the waiting time is high. As the patients are already suffering from some ailment, it is always better that the staff be courteous and helpful. Further they should also be well trained for handling the patients. In case of Max and Fortis both, the patients agreed that the staff was well trained, courteous and helpful. In addition the kind and compassionate nature of nurses and empathetic attitude of doctors helps in reducing the suffering of patients. Patients from Fortis accepted that the same was true. Also the respondents from Max also agreed that the nurses were compassionate and helpful and the doctors were understanding. One of the most important factors which is found to be missing in a number of hospitals is the follow up calls. This creates a lot of positive aura regarding the hospital. In case of Fortis the patients agreed that the hospital did follow up with them after discharge. However for Max, the respondents did not feel the same.

Generally speaking, there are five key brand strategies to establish to create a strong brand. These are developing the brand vision, establishing the brand position, communicating the brand position, fulfilling the brand contract and measuring return on brand investment. Analyzing on these lines, Fortis has made huge strides within a decade of its commencement in terms of providing quality services. It has created an image for itself for providing quality at an affordable price. Quality has been their healthcare focus which is a key differentiator for them. Fortis’ brand strategy is to make its brand presence felt through aggressive pursuit for quality accreditation and certifications. Fortis works with the QCI (Quality council of India) to generate quality standards and an accreditation system (NABH) which is practical and affordable.

Fortis, with its brand image and a large network, is also focusing on academics and on partnering with educational institutes and research centres to tap into its pool of talent. Fortis actively explores the opportunities in medical education facilities to ensure the availability of qualified and trained manpower for all prevailing and future needs.
Fortis brand strategy is to rightly offer unbeatable medical value propositions already catering to international patients providing quality healthcare services at attractive value propositions.

Healthy employees add health and happiness to a business. The healthcare delivery services at Fortis are catered to employee needs. All patient records are accessible at all its hospitals across the country so that its employees have the convenience of choosing the centre most convenient to them for accessing their healthcare records.

Fortis healthcare has built a tele-medical network, which connects its facilities providing continuous expert healthcare. Fortis has also tied up with both public and private partners in the Indian healthcare industry to provide specialty and quality healthcare facilities. The Fortis group is empanelled with many top corporates, public sector undertakings, multinational companies and insurance companies. The employees of these empanelled companies are given special offers on health check up programmes and medical management services.

Fortis has created a physical evidence of its expert and specialized services by advertising and communicating their achievements in medical care thus reposing the customer confidence in their services. Fortis healthcare is committed to providing the healthcare services backed by state-of-the-art technology and trained technicians.

Another brand strategy Fortis employs is tying up with many companies and offices and providing them with the health cards to its employees to be treated on No cash basis. By this strategy Fortis made a huge amount of customer base and in the process retained many a customer.

Fortis has opened many free health camps and free health check-up days in their hospitals to increase the customer base. They celebrate special days as World Cancer day and World Osteoporosis day in order to bring awareness among their patients. During these days they give discounts on the services provided and thus adding on their already existing promotions.
Fortis also sets up blood donation camps in different colleges and NGO’s and through this, they are able to get into the eyes of the general public and the young blood of India. They also organize road shows to create awareness and put in some very attractive hoardings sending messages.

Fortis brand strategy is to adopt best corporate governance practices. They have a strong board of independent directors advising and guiding policies and proposals made by their operating management.

Max healthcare consists of eight hospitals that have advanced facilities and each hospital concentrates on several specializations which address the patient’s needs. Max Healthcare is the choice for medical tourism in India because it houses world renowned specialized doctors. Max Healthcare hospitals have become the first in North India to receive the prestigious National Accreditation from the NABH. The hospital provides the highest level of professional expertise and world class care in all major medical disciplines and support specialties. The hospital has a team of well trained and highly experienced consultants, surgeons in various specialties providing the highest standards of medical and patient care with a focus on service excellence. The hospital uses the state-of-art-technology to provide excellence in delivery of its services.

6.3 Conclusion

On the whole the research provided a lot of significant results in the field of branding of hospitals. The brand strategies based on perception of customers are impacted by various aspects, the notable ones as pointed out by the research include the waiting time for out-patients, the charges and fees for the treatment, the waiting time a patient has to spend in OPD and whether the hospital makes any follow up calls after discharge to the patients or not. Further the study of two corporate hospitals i.e. Max and Fortis, pointed out that Fortis has a better brand perception as compared with Max Healthcare due to the positive factors as pointed out by research. Fortis however seems to be concentrating more on building an international brand worldwide as is borne out by its recent acquisition of a hospital in Singapore.
6.4 Limitations of Research

Researcher had made all the best possible attempts for creating a comprehensive study. However certain limiting factors have restricted the study. One of these factors is that the study is limited to only two hospitals and it is difficult to generalize the brand strategies concept to the complete healthcare sector. Further the study is carried out in the National Capital Region of Delhi only. People from different cultures and regions have different perceptions in terms of branding. As such the study cannot be generalized to even the country. Moreover the responses of the medical staff have not been captured extensively in the study which means that the patient perspective has been the main focus.

6.5 Future Study

Researcher has provided a detailed study on the branding of hospitals. The study lays down path for future researches as there has been not much of prior study in the subject. One of the areas which can be addressed in the future studies is that the research should be carried out in different parts of the country and world so that the study can be generalized across the whole world. Furthermore the number of hospitals should be more as the study is limited to only two hospitals. A greater number of hospitals would help in making the study more strong. One more aspect which needs to be taken care of in the further researches is that the responses of the patients should be captured through interviews as it allows the respondent to provide a detailed and comprehensive reply to the questions. Further it allows them more freedom to talk about the subject of brand image.